

LIVING IN AN UNREAL WORLD: FAKE NEWS, SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY, AND  
MEDIA LITERACY

by

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## ABSTRACT

This study examined fake news under the theoretical framework of Social Identification Theory, and whether media literacy could act as an inoculant against the undesirable effects of social identification as it relates to the perceived credibility of fake news stories.

A survey was conducted in which respondents were asked to read four stories. Two of the stories were real and two were from a fake news publisher. One fake story was about Barack Obama, one fake story was about Donald Trump, one real story was about Barack Obama, and one real story was about Donald Trump. Respondents were then asked a battery of questions measuring their perceived credibility of each story. They were then tested for political and social identification. Respondents' media literacy was measured and also tested.

Perceived credibility for both real and fake stories was highly correlated with social identification. Media literacy was most effective against social identification with the real news stories, but overall did not affect perceived credibility of the fake ones. However, when respondents were split along ideological lines, it was found that media literacy was an effective inoculant against fake stories for conservatives, and less so for liberals.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

$\beta, B$	Standardized coefficients beta
B	Unstandardized beta
$N$	Number of participants
$p$	Probability associated with the occurrence under the null hypothesis of a value as extreme as or more extreme than the observed value
SE	Standard error
SD	Standard deviation
<	Less than
>	More than
=	Equal to

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The rise of the Internet has facilitated many things, but rational discussion of the news and politics does not seem to be among them. Beyond traditional media, the Internet is rife with news and political blogs that eschew the notion of journalistic objectivity in favor of supporting a particular point of view. People, it seems, gravitate to the “news source” that underscores political beliefs they already have (Hsu, 2009). Largely, discussion is not what is happening on the Internet. Instead, many bloggers and political writers use the news as a kind of pulpit. People are being preached to about things they already hold as true, and there seems to be less participation in the market place of ideas.

This becomes more complicated with the rise of fake news. Satirical takes on the news and parodies of public figures are not new (Soll, 2016). The most famous propagator of satirical news is *the Onion*, which has delighted readers and skewered politicians for many years. The stories published in *the Onion* are generally so over-the-top in terms of their tone and content that only the most dubious would ever mistake them for actual news.

However, over the past few years, other satirical news sites have appeared. Unlike *the Onion*, sites like *the Daily Currant* and *the National Report* do not so much create outlandish and funny “news stories” but straight written stories that only the most savvy media consumer may be aware is satirical. Examples of such stories include a report that President Obama planned to self-fund a Muslim museum during the 2013 government shutdown. This report fooled many the hosts of the cable news show *Fox and Friends*. Anna Koomian, one of the show’s hosts, took the

president to task for funding the museum. Of course, the report she was referencing was not an actual news story, but one of *the National Report's* satirical offerings (Burns, 2013).

It isn't only those on the right of the American political spectrum who are duped by these sorts of stories, but also members of the left. Suzi Parker, of *the Washington Post*, was famously called to task for writing a column critical of Sarah Palin after reading a story from *the Daily Curreant*. In the story, the organization claimed that Palin had been hired by Al Jazeera (Smith, 2013). In the years since these stories were spread, the problem has only worsened. Melissa Zimdars, an assistant professor of communications and media at Merrimack College began a list in 2016 of fake, biased, and misleading news sites. At most recent count the number of sites she had identified was more than 1,000 (Zimdars, 2016).

The issue with sites like *the Daily Curreant*, unlike *the Onion*, is that they are “not a news source but a ‘satire’ site whose output is largely limited to semi-believable political wish-fulfillment articles distinguished by a commitment to a complete absence of what most people would recognize as ‘jokes’ (Read, 2013).

Another distinguishing feature of these sites is that they have very little direct traffic. In other words, people do not seek these sites out as a source like they may with *the Onion*. Instead, these sites' content is usually arrived at through social media links (Dzelea, 2014). Indeed, a 2016 survey found that 75% of Americans cannot distinguish between legitimate news headlines and intentionally falsified ones (Silverman & Singer-Vine, 2016).

The purpose of this study is to understand, using Social Identity Theory as a framework, whether strong political affiliation affects a person's ability to see the difference between real and fake news, and if media literacy may mitigate this effect.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### a. Fake News

Since the 2016 election of Donald Trump the term fake news has exploded upon the zeitgeist. Since his inauguration, Trump has used the term “fake” more than 400 times, mostly to address stories critical of him in the news media (Stetler, 2017). According to a Knight Foundation study, four in 10 Republicans say that all stories that portray an individual politician or political group in a negative light should be considered fake news (Knight Foundation, 2018).

On October 5, 2013, viewers of Fox News’ *Fox and Friends* were met with a troubling report. Due to the then recent shutdown of the federal government, many national parks were being closed. In their report, the Fox hosts showed images of a bus full of World War II veterans who had been denied access to the country’s World War II museum. The veterans were angry that the memorial was closed. In the story the anchors reported that the Republican National Committee had offered to pay to keep the park open. During the same segment, Anna Kooiman, one of the show’s hosts, also reported that President Obama was more focused on a museum of Muslim culture, going so far as to pay out of his own pocket to keep it open. To those who were watching the show at the time, the implication of the report seemed clear. To them, the Republicans cared about America’s veterans whereas President Obama did not. Not only did he not care, the president preferred to federally fund a Muslim culture center rather than a memorial to those who fought in World War II (Burns, 2013).

The problem, however, is the story about Obama personally funding a Muslim cultural center during the government shutdown was absolutely false. In fact, there was no federally

funded Islamic cultural center in the United States in 2013. Kooiman had parroted a story she found on the Internet from the satirical news site *The National Report*. As a newsperson working for a nationally broadcast cable news channel, it is hard to excuse the mistake, and Kooiman did apologize shortly after it was revealed the story was a hoax (Snopes, 2013). While the original story has since been taken down from *The National Report's* website, an excerpt remains on the fact-checking website, snopes.com:

“While up to 800,000 federal workers faced life without a paycheck as Day One of the government shutdown kicked in, President Barack Obama held a press conference to announce that he is using his own money to open the federally funded International Museum of Muslim Cultures.

‘During this shutdown, people will have to deal with some of their favorite parks and museums being closed,’ Obama told reporters. “Just keep in mind, they will always be there. The Grand Canyon and the Smithsonian are not going anywhere.” Obama continued, ‘The International Museum of Muslim Cultures is sacred. That is why I have taken it upon myself to use my own personal funds to re-open this historic piece of American culture.’

The International Museum of Muslim Cultures closed its doors as parts of the federal government shut down after Congress failed to reach an agreement on spending. The fiscal standoff stems in large part from Republican attempts to block President Obama's healthcare initiative (Snopes, 2018).”

Humor is subjective. What might be funny for some will not be so to others.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to “find the funny” in the above selection. In fact, it seems as if the piece was crafted to intentionally rile those who saw Obama as an un-American Muslim in sheep’s clothing.

A 2018 study found that while the amount of fake news produced was on the rise, its ability to set the agenda for the rest of the news media was on the decline (Vargo, Guo, & Amazeen, 2018). While this is heartening, other studies show that, especially when social media is used as an individual’s platform for news consumption, individuals rely primarily upon their own judgment and first impressions, and only look to an outside authenticator if they feel

unsatisfied with a first impression of a story (Tandoc, Ling, Westlund, Duffy, Goh, & Wei, 2018).

### **b. Fake News Versus Satire**

The Harvard University project, First Draft News, an organization dedicated to fighting misinformation, has identified seven types of fake news. They are: False Connection, in which a headline or other textual signifier does not reflect what is contained in the headlined information; False Context, in which real events are presented but their overall context is intentionally falsified; Manipulated Content in which real events or images are deliberately altered to fool a consumer; Satire or Parody, in which the intent is to draw humorous comparison to real events with a presumed expectation a consumer will “get the joke,” however, people can still be misled by this content; Misleading Content, in which real information is used in a misleading way in order to manipulate the opinion of a consumer toward a particular figure or policy or event; Imposter Content, in which real people are attributed to false quotes or entirely made up scenarios; and finally Fabricated Content, in which things are made up out of whole cloth with the intent to deceive those who consume it (Becket, 2017).

Fake news thrives because people can now consume and share stories that are designed not to appeal to their rational faculties, but to their emotional connection regarding a specific issue or figure (Albright, 2017). Furthermore, true objective display of facts does not necessarily halt the spread of fake news if the message of the content resonates emotionally with a consumer. (Entman, 2007).

After Koomian’s mistake, *The National Report*, released a story that claimed five people in a small Texas town had been quarantined after Ebola was discovered there. This story was

also made up, but it accrued hundreds of thousands of likes and shares on Facebook. The story terrified people, and was not, in-and-of-itself, funny at all (Dezieza, 2014).

The Internet has made it easier for people to consume what they want without being forced to endure ideas that are contrary to their own. Indeed, newspaper readership has plummeted over the last several years (Barthel, 2017), while social media use has skyrocketed (Smith, 2018). The creators of fake news sites take advantage of this phenomenon to great effect. Sites like *The National Report*, unlike *The Onion*, receive very little traffic from any source other than social media clicks. People are not responding to the brand of the site, but to the content that they mistake for real news (Dezieza, 2014).

*The National Report* has also proven to be highly lucrative. Caitlin Dewey of the *Washington Post* describes the *National Report* thusly, “Their business model is both simple and devastatingly effective: Employ a couple unscrupulous freelancers to write fake news that’s surprising or enraging or weird enough to go viral on Facebook; run display ads against the traffic; gleefully cash in (Dewey, 2015).” In fact, according to Dewey, sites that purport satirical content while actively working to create stories that are intended to fool others can make as much as \$10,000 a day if a particular story goes viral (Dewey, 2015). Thus distinguishing between *intentionally* funny material versus material designed to rile individuals is the latter “is intentionally deceptive and destructive information that is produced to go viral” and satirical programming like *The Daily Show* or *Saturday Night Live’s Weekend Update* are not (Brummette, DiStaso, Vafeiadis, & Messner, 2018).

Very little scholarly research has been written about these types of malicious fake news sites, but research has been conducted on satirical programming and how it affects attitudes toward political efficacy, which is a descriptor of how one feels about his or her own ability to

comprehend and participate politically (Niemi, Craig & Mattel, 1991). In a 2014 study, Balmas (2014) found that a person's perceived realism of fake news was directly linked to a person's consumption of real news. In other words, the less real news a person consumed, the greater their belief that fake news was an accurate reflection of the happenings of the day. Taking this into account along with the massive decline in daily newspaper readership can offer some explanation as to why people might be willing to believe in false stories. Other studies have looked at parody versus non-parody and whether parodist sites affected political cynicism (Warnick, 1998); and others have looked at user-generated satire to determine whether that affected political efficacy and knowledge (Lee, 2013), but none have looked at these particular click-bait sites to determine why some people find them credible.

Balmas (2014) also concluded that high exposure to fake news increased feelings of political inefficacy. The attitude a person has about the belief or falsehood of a story may be more important in this regard than whether the story is true or not. Social identity theory sheds some light on this issue of political perception and perceived credibility of news.

### **c. Social Identity Theory and Confirmation Bias**

Social identity Theory (SIT) is a psychological theory created by the late Henri Tajfel in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Esler, 2000 p. 327). Through a series of experiments, Tajfel discovered that people who are put into groups will tend to favor the groups of which they are members and discriminate against groups of which they are not. In one study, he separated a group of male students into two arbitrary groups and asked them to rank two students -- one from the student's own group and one from the outgroup. He found that despite the arbitrary and meaningless nature of the groups into which he had assigned the boys, the students nearly always favored the members of their own group (Tajfel, 1971). During the experiment, the boys

involved did very little but sit at tables, yet “in a situation in which the [students] own interests were not involved in their decisions, in which alternative strategies were available that would maximize the total benefits to a group of boys who knew each other well, they acted in a way determined by an *ad hoc* intergroup categorization” (Tajfel, 1971, p. 173). Tajfel also noted that social identity is increased when variables are introduced that are outside a particular in-group’s norm. In his work *Intergroup Relations* he noted that “[o]ne woman in a group of men or one black in a group of whites leaves a relatively ‘stronger impression’; the evaluations of that person are polarized as compared with the evaluations of the same person identified as belonging to the majority in the group, in the sense that both positive and negative evaluations become more extreme in the solo condition” (Tajfel, 1982, p. 5). This implies that ingroup behavior can be strengthened by the introduction of an outgroup. Outgroups are critical for definition and function of an ingroup, as the ingroup needs some sort of classification to define itself against.

These groups can manifest as nearly anything. They could be political factions, professions, religious organizations, or even groups that form from sports team allegiances or brand loyalty. Central to SIT is that people within one certain group will attack an outside group in order to enhance the positive association they have for the group to which they belong (Lam, Ahearne, Hu & Schillewaert, 2010).

The rational reasons for which one group might be “better” or “worse” or in the right or in the wrong are irrelevant. Social identities are “that part of the individual’s self concept which derives from his or her knowledge of membership to a social group (or groups) together with the value and the emotional significance attached to it.” What is important is that the individual finds satisfaction from his or her choice in joining the group to which he or she belongs. This seems to be because individuals want to justify the salience of their choices, which are naturally in conflict

with those who have not made the same choice. People join or in some cases create these ingroups in order to define who they are, and obviously each individual desires that definition of self to be a positive thing for the person experiencing it (Lam, Ahearne, Hu & Schillewaert, 2010). Social Identity Theory postulates that association within groups is of prime importance, above and beyond any evidence that might suggest a particular ingroup is less than desirable. In extreme cases, the groups themselves can be defined by the fact that they are not the adversarial group. Football team allegiance is a useful example for explaining this idea. At some point, every person who is a fan of a particular football team made a decision to become a fan of that particular team. The reason for this might be the team is located in the area in which the individual lives or the team may represent a university from which the individual obtained a degree or the individual might simply like a particular team's mascot. There are any number of reasons why a person might dedicate him or herself to a particular football team; in social identity theory, this is unimportant. What is important is the fact that a fan of a football team will exhibit behaviors that support his or her team while in some way denigrating the rival team. This means that part of being a member of one group means that one is not a member of another group. In this sense, part of the group identity is the fact that the negative association with the outgroup (especially the rival group) is a part of the definition of what it means to be a member of the ingroup. An Alabama fan is *not* an Auburn fan. The intensity of the rivalry between factions informs to what degree this bias-based definition occurs. An Alabama fan is not an Auburn fan, by definition, but an Alabama fan is also unlikely to be a fan of Texas Christian University but not by definition. An evident difference is in the satisfaction members of one group take in the failures of another group. In some instances, the success of the ingroup is not as important as the failure of the outgroup in terms of what makes an individual feel as though his

or her worth is in line with the ingroup. And, as in the case of football, when the ingroup is threatened, the ingroup will resort to behavior not necessarily prized by society in order to defend itself (Sanderson, 2013).

This is not to say that all behaviors can be explained via a system of social interaction: "...[S]ocial identity theorists do not suggest that group membership comprises the totality of one's sense of self, only a part of it" (Esler, 2000 p. 327). Most people do not generally consign themselves to one particular group in absence of all others. An Alabama fan might either be a Democrat or a Republican, for example. The fan's politics could be considered to have very little to do with his or her allegiance to the team's football program so long as the ingroup (Alabama football) does not associate itself politically. However, according to social identity theory, should Alabama football align itself with a political position, then it is more likely a person vested within the framework of Alabama football would embrace the football team's political ideology whether it was rational for that individual to embrace it or not. An Auburn fan and an Alabama fan might have everything in common other than football allegiance but will find fault with one another based upon their status within their particular ingroups.

Politically, in terms of partisanship, the same thing happens: "Following from the group-differentiation aspect of social identity theory, the group nature of partisanship should naturally create a bipolar partisanship where individuals characterize the political parties into *us* and *them* and exaggerate perceived differences to favor their own group" (Greene, 2004 p. 138).

Therefore, when people engage politically or in support of a particular ingroup, they are not acting entirely for individual reasons or for individual change (as in the case of voting) but are acting as parts of the collective ingroup. Satisfaction comes not from the change they individually brought about, but from the positive feelings received as members of the social

construct (Fowler & Kam, 2007).

In a study examining SIT and political party preference, Greene (2004) found that the more a person's social identity was caught up within the framework of a particular political party, the more biased against another party the individual would be (Greene, 2004). Greene randomly surveyed 302 people concerning their political leanings and opinions about the issues in relationship to the political parties to which they identified. He found that a person's political social identity, and the degree to which they identified it as a self-definition, was a strong predictor for an individual's political opinions and interpretations of information.

SIT can also explain hostile media effect. In essence, the hostile media effect offers a way to explain how and why members of particular groups find bias in media that are categorically unbiased. If exposed to the same message, a liberal and a conservative, depending upon their level of social identity with the causes to which they subscribe, will find hostility against the news related to their respective ingroups. In other words, "[w]hen partisans compare their polarized worldview with balanced media reports, the contra-information is perceived as highly discrepant from their position, and the reports are thus perceived as biased" (Reid, 2012 p. 381). Another aspect of HME is that people will readily accept information that supports a particular point of view that they favor while ignoring evidence that contradicts that point of view (Reid, p. 382). The objective "truth" of a news item is not as compelling, HME argues, as whether or not the information disseminated is supportive or unsupportive.

Social identity theory can shed light on overarching potential reasons for deeply entrenched partisanship, but it cannot explain all. Individuals are notoriously complicated in the way they interact within a society, and social identity effects may be themselves shaped by cultural context. Societies that place more value on the nuanced and unpredictable behavior of

individual action might be less vulnerable to the collective mentality that social identity theory attempts to explain. In defiance of expectations, it has been noted that cultures from the United States, Northern Europe, and the United Kingdom, which historically place great value on notions of individualism, have a greater tendency toward group identification than do cultures from other parts of the world that place less value on individualism (Eisler, 2000 p. 328).

For a person who is strongly shaped by group identity, it is irrelevant whether or not ideological differences make sense from the perspective of the individual's best interest. It matters most that within the group dynamic of the social construct, e.g., political affiliation, that the individual be accepted as a member of the group and thus reinforce his or her identity associated with the message or agenda of the ingroup. A consequence of this theory is that reasoned debate is not necessarily what motivates people – group identity can supersede rationality as a prime motivator. Cable news organizations have discovered the market this phenomenon produces, and have developed organizations that encourage this phenomenon in a systemic way. As research suggests, ingroup members will posit that news programming that reflects their group's positions is more trustworthy than others (Stroud & Lee, 2007).

It would seem that people who are more highly educated would be less susceptible to influence from various ingroups and outgroups than people with less education. However, this might not be the case. While not explicitly stated as research into social identity theory, a 2013 study explored the concept of “motivated numeracy” and showed how people's critical thinking skills and reason dissolve in the face of group identity crises. Whether someone is highly educated or not, association with ingroups still has an effect upon the interpretation of information (Kahan, Peters, Dawson & Slovic, 2013).

Other researchers have recently shown that when people read news items that show their

individual's ingroup in a positive light, it may help those same individuals better remember what they read (Treppe & Schmitt, 2018).

Social identities may also strongly affect moral choices. According to Carter, social identification within a group, regardless of how arbitrary it might be, will affect not only the rational thinking of a person, but also how that person behaves morally, regardless of moral self-identification (Carter, 2013).

Ingroup identification is not wholly negative. Most people's associations with their ingroup membership lead to a general sense of wellbeing. But there is a tradeoff, in that the sense of wellbeing gained from group membership comes at the cost of having a greater positive bias toward the ingroup and therefore a greater bias against those who are not a part of the group (Yampolsky & Amiot, 2013). Yampolsky and Amiot (2013) found that, "[w]hen individuals identify with their group for status, benefits, or externally contingent comparative reasons (e.g., prestige, competition for resources), they will be more likely to engage in bias" (Yampolosky and Amiot, 2013, p. 147).

As has been stated, however, social identity theory does not explain all human behavior. Rather, group identification may be a question of degree. Nearly all people have groups with which they are associated, but not all are disposed to abandon independent thought and consideration entirely for the sake of the group (Carter, 2013). Nevertheless, behavior within ingroups and in conflict with outgroups can create powerful effects, regardless of what a person may or may not claim to be his or her individual value structure. If social identification is a question of degree, then it may be said that the effects that have been catalogued that result from group identification are dependent on the degree to which a person identifies with a group.

The rise of politically partisan media speaks to this effect. Instead of presenting objective

and unspun versions of news events, partisan media outlets filter information through the values and morés of ingroup biases. By claiming objectivity, i.e., an idea that the public values, these news agents help the members of the ingroup rationalize the media they are consuming. By believing the news they “like” or the news that does not contradict their already held beliefs and political positions is the only objective source, a phenomenon occurs in which all other news agents become non-objective to an in-group consumer. Recent studies have shown that conservative individuals who identify as Republican prefer stories that are conservative where as individuals who identify as democrat prefer stories that are liberal (Knobloch & Lavis, 2017).

In 1948 a trio of researchers, Bernardt Berelson, Hazel Gaudet, and Paul Lazarsfeld published a landmark study that examined how media exposure influenced individuals’ voting habits. They found that media exposure did very little in changing the minds or patterns of the vast majority of voters, rather, the majority of voters avoided information that contradicted their already held views and embraced information that supported those same views (Lacy & Stamm, 2016). This concept first described by the trio would later be called confirmation bias (International Communication Association, 2011).

Shahram Heshmat of *Psychology Today* describes confirmation bias thusly, “Confirmation bias suggests that we don’t perceive circumstances objectively. We pick out those bits of data that make us feel good because they confirm our prejudices. Thus, we may become prisoners of our assumptions” (Heshmat, 2015). In other words, people are prone to embrace ideas that support ones they already have while rejecting views that are contrary to their own assumed ideas. Regardless of the mechanism in play, it is clear that people will choose messages to consume that support their views rather than challenging them (Johnson, Westerwick, Knobloch-Westerwick, 2017).

#### **d. Media Literacy**

While intellectual capacity may not inoculate against social identification, it is possible that training in media – i.e., media literacy -- may reduce the influence of social identification on media consumers. The idea of media literacy, however, is anything but a concrete notion. A commonly recognized characteristic of the field is that it is notoriously difficult to nail down any one definition or theoretical framework. Conceptually, media literacy can be traced back to the early-middle of the twentieth century when educators took an interest in showing students the value differences between popular culture and high culture (Leavis & Thompson, 1933). The concept of media literacy has evolved, and through that evolution it has become increasingly confused. Media literacy has been defined as “the ability to create personal meaning from the visual and verbal symbols we take in every day from television, advertising, and film” (Adams & Hamm, 2001, p. 33), a “skill that enables audiences to decipher the information that they receive through the channels of mass communications” (Silverblatt & Eliceriri, 1997, p. 48), “the ability to assess, analyze, evaluate, and communicate messages in a variety of forms” (Aufderheide & Firestone, 1993), a field of study that proposes to “foster crucial thinking about media through education and empowerment” (Ashley, Poepsel, & Willis, 2010, p. 3), “a set of perspectives we actively use to expose ourselves to the media to interpret the meaning of the messages we encounter” (Potter, 2008, p. 19), and a host of others. James Potter (2010), who is the author of several textbooks about media literacy, lists no less than 23 different definitions of the term from a diverse selection of academics, think tanks, and governmental institutions in a seminal paper he wrote about this very issue. He went so far as to say, “Part of the reason for this is that it is studied across disciplines, and when invoking the term media literacy, no two scholars or organizations can agree as to what it means or why it is important” (Potter, 2010, pp. 676-679).

According to Potter, media literacy scholars all agree that media literacy is important, but none can come to an agreement as to why this is the case, or indeed, what media literacy actually is” (pp. 680). Rene Hobbs, James Potter’s intellectual foil in the field of media literacy, objects to Potter’s view, saying that media literacy is not a cure for the ills of the media, but a method by which the media can be better understood, and thus, appreciated (Hobbs, 1999).

Defined for the purposes of the current study, media literacy, as a field, is the study of the effects that result from an individual’s education about the practices, procedures and production of mass media. Just as one has varying levels of textual literacy, so one also has varying degrees of media literacy (Kean, Prividera, Boyce & Curry, 2012).

The trouble comes in when scholars from different areas of expertise begin using the term and when those scholars start talking about how and why media literacy is important and whether it is desirable (Koltay, 2011). Most educators see media literacy as an important aspect of educating their students but are unclear as to how to implement media literacy into their respective programs (Schmidt, 2013). Often media literacy is used as a catchall for different areas of study: “Media literacy is highly interdisciplinary, using the tools and methods of sociology, psychology, political theory, gender and race studies, as well as cultural studies, art, and aesthetics” (Koltay, 2011, p. 212). For example, a scholar will submit a paper ostensibly about media literacy when it is really about news literacy or digital literacy. Those two areas may fall within the scope of media literacy, but that fact is not often distinguished within the literature. Other scholars have invented terms that are essentially interchangeable for media literacy (McNair, 2012).

There are two basic approaches to media literacy, and how assessment and criticism of media literacy are focused depends on which view one adopts. These approaches can be called

the interventionist approach and the empowerment approach. The interventionist approach to media literacy takes as fact that the media is an essentially corruptive enterprise, which actively works to manipulate consumers with a barrage of messages and ideas that are designed to modify their behavior (Dyson, 1998, Potter, 2010). To those who fall with the interventionists, media literacy serves as an inoculation. Indeed, James Potter finds this to be a critical component of media literacy in that “[media literacy] needs to build from a deep understanding about how people use the media in their everyday lives, how people come to believe that their media usage is functional to achieving their goals, and how unwanted effects accumulate as byproducts of exposure” (Potter, 2004, p. 266).

The second approach can be called the empowerment approach. Within this approach, media is not perceived as necessarily corrupting, nor does it view consumption of media as necessarily negative. Rather, media literacy is valued as a method by which enjoyment of media can be enhanced in the same way art appreciation can enhance a person’s enjoyment of a great work of art (Hobbs & Frost, 2003, Kubey, 2003).

Most media literacy scholars do not subscribe to a one-size-fits-all approach, but many seem to have preferences. In work done in the United States on media literacy, the interventionist approach is dominant (Kubey, 2003). Most scholars worry about the influence of the media upon impressionable minds. Potter (2010) himself takes this danger as a given, when he says that “the purpose of media literacy interventions is to target a potential negative media effect and to either inoculate people against such an effect occurring or to counter such an effect” (Potter, 2010, p. 684). The sheer number of messages and ideas delivered to the public on a daily basis means that people can never be completely aware of each and every instance that one of those messages is being delivered (Potter 2010). However, those in the intervention school say that simply by being

educated about the dangerous effects media can have, and the processes and strategies used by media producers to create those messages, the public can be inoculated against certain negative effects.

Potter expresses his view that the field includes a range of different definitions and specialized categories that share only two common denominators: that the media can produce negative effects on the public and that educational intervention is an inoculant against these bad effects. He describes two types of intervention: Natural Intervention and Constructed Intervention. Natural Intervention is conducted by non-experts. Examples of this could be a child viewing a television show with his or her parents and then discussing that television show. Constructed intervention, by contrast, is education conducted by experts with particular aims in mind. The most prevalent work in this field has been done in the study of media violence and the methods used to counteract potential harm it might cause (Potter, 2011). This is not to say that all academics hold that media literacy is the only bulwark against malicious media influence. Other scholars, who also hold the view that the media are predatory and untrustworthy by nature, worry that too much emphasis is given to studying media literacy in audiences rather than studying audiences themselves (Livingstone, 2008).

In contrast, Hobbs (2011) says the purpose of media literacy is not to inoculate but to empower. To Hobbs, media literacy is an opportunity to refine the tastes and opinions of media consumers so they not only better appreciate the content they are already consuming, but so they can also understand it within the framework of its creation. As she says, “Media literacy educators reject one of Potter’s main formulations: that the teaching and learning of media literacy is based on a constructed intervention designed by researchers to increase knowledge about media violence, sexuality, health, or stereotypes in an inoculation or transmission oriented

model of education” (Hobbs, 2011, p. 424). To Hobbs, media literacy is about moving people from beyond static literacy and into participatory literacy – less mass inoculation than cultural refinement. Unlike the innocent and ignorant media consumers she says Potter perceives, many youth take a cynical view of the news media, and the empowerment approach can help temper some of this cynicism (Dahl & Newkirk, 2010). According to an article addressing this very issue, Dahl and Newkirk (2010) show methods by which educators are encouraging students to question the news media while recognizing the value of the institution. Instead of flat-out rejecting anything that comes from the media, students are encouraged to think critically about the products they are consuming and also think critically about their own biases and presuppositions (Dahl & Newkirk, 2010).

Potter responded to Hobbs’ response, and claimed that her fundamental misunderstanding of his assessment of the state of media literacy came from her writing about what media literacy *ought to be* versus his understanding of *what it is*. To Potter, then media literacy is a confused discipline, and it should be essentially concerned with the interventionist approach (Potter, 2011).

One’s tendency toward either the interventionist approach or the empowerment approach appears to have a cultural component as well. In the United States, media literacy classes (if they are offered to students at all) tend to be focused on the goal of inoculation, whereas, in other English-speaking countries, the focus is on media appreciation and understanding (Kubey 2003). Kubey paints a picture of media education in the U.S. as insufficient and myopic. Kubey says that in the United States, “The situation is the hue and cry over media effects – on aggression and crime, on sexuality, on alcohol and drug abuse, in promoting materialistic values, and on an ever more shallow political discourse” (Kubey, 2003, p. 363). And according to Kubey, while other

countries are concerned with media effects, they are secondary to supporting and celebrating the cultural creations of each individual nation. This, it seems, is an ironic byproduct of the mass exporting of American media across the globe (Kubey, 2003). It should also be noted, that where Kubey finds the European model preferable, other researchers do not think other countries are doing a good enough job supplying their citizens with a broader media literacy (Sourbati, 2009).

#### **e. Effects of Media Literacy on Perceptions of Media Bias**

Research suggests that media literacy can have a mitigating effect on strength of perceptions of bias and can, as Potter suggested, inoculate against particular propagandized messages within the media. Babad and Hobbs (2011) tested the effect of media literacy training on perceived bias within the news media. Two groups of students were exposed to an Israeli interview with two political subjects. One of the subjects was treated in a friendly manner by the interviewer, whereas the interviewer was more confrontational toward the second subject. The students could not understand the language of the interviews and could rely only upon visual cues and the general attitudes of the interviewer and interviewees. Students who had no training in media literacy were significantly more likely to prefer the politician who was treated kindly by the interviewer, whereas the students who had media literacy training did not prefer either of the candidates to the other. This implies that media literacy training can have a mitigating effect on cues that can lead to media bias (Babad, Eyal & Hobbs, 2011).

In another study, media literacy was shown to be a mitigating factor against the hostile media effect – i.e., “the tendency for partisans on opposing sides of an issue to see identical news coverage of that issue as biased in favor of the other side” (Feldman, 2011, p. 410). Vraga, Tully, Akin, and Rojas (2009) studied whether media literacy training could help mitigate HME within an audience. The authors selected a group based on its views of a controversial subject, in this

case biofuels. One group was shown a news story about biofuels, and another group was shown the same video. In the second group, however, the group was exposed to a media literacy training video before engaging with the news story. The researchers found that even a small amount of media literacy training could counteract HME and encourage trust and credibility within the audience with the news (Vraga, Tully, Akin & Rojas, 2009).

In another study conducted by the same researchers, two groups were asked to watch a news report on the Iraq War. The first group was exposed to a presentation about media literacy, and the second was not. Each participant also answered questions regarding their political affiliation from very liberal to very conservative. There were significantly more liberals participating than conservatives. The researchers found that exposure to media literacy training only reduced HME in liberals. Conservatives showed no significant difference between the control and experimental group in terms of their opinion of media bias in the news report they watched. This was likely a result of researchers using footage from Fox News in their experiment, typically seen by conservatives as highly credible. It seems doubtful that only those who identify as liberal are receptive to media literacy training (Vraga, Tully, Akin & Rojas, 2012).

Not all studies have been as decidedly in favor of the effects of media literacy. Ashley, Poepsel and Willis (2013) attempted to test whether the introduction of a specific piece of media literacy--in this case, knowledge of ownership and interests of those who own media outlets--would increase the skepticism of those engaging with media. To study this, a group of eighty students was split into two groups. One read a story concerning media control and manipulation and then read some recent articles from various newspapers and magazines. The second group read some poetry selections and then the articles from the newspapers. The researchers hoped to

find that those exposed to the media education materials would be significantly more likely to respond to the news pieces critically. While their results did support this hypothesis, it was barely statistically significant. The recommended further study in this area (Ashley, Poepsel & Willis, 2013).

Not only can media literacy help in terms of generally understanding and responding to messages within the media, but it can also carry some direct effects on behavior. The authors of one study, Kean, Prividera, Boyce, and Curry (2012) wanted to see if there was a link between level of media literacy and the consumption of unhealthy foods in the female African-American population. Recognizing that the obesity epidemic in the United States is particularly rampant among this group, the researchers hypothesized that African-American women who had a higher level of media literacy would display better choices in food consumption. Using a questionnaire aimed at African-American women across a broad spectrum of age and experience, the researchers found evidence to support their hypothesis. High levels of television consumption were linked with high levels of unhealthy food intake, whereas high levels of TV news consumption, newspaper reading, and magazine reading were linked with lower levels of unhealthy food consumption. The researchers were surprised to find that magazine reading correlated negatively with unhealthy food consumption because a content analysis they conducted showed that magazines targeting African-American women were much more likely to carry advertisements for unhealthy foods. They concluded that this suggests literacy, in any form, can help sway the behaviors of consumers (Kean, Prividera, Boyce & Curry, 2012).

Ignoring for a moment the difficulty academics have had in tying the term to a definition, if media literacy can be thought of as simply a method by which media training can occur, then it seems it can be a valuable tool to maintain a democratic society. An educated, well-informed

public must be aware of the methods and purposes by which its media is delivered if the media are to continue to be the fourth-estate of American democracy. The evidence supports the idea that more media-literate people are better bulwarked against the negative effects of propaganda, marketing, and behavioral modification than their less media literate peers (Potter, 2010, Hobbs, 2009, Vraga, et al, 2009). At least one study has shown that high school students who engage in media literacy as a part of their regular English curriculum have higher achievement levels than those who undertake no formal media literacy training. Hobbs and Frost studied one of the few public high schools in the United States, Concord High School, which has incorporated media literacy into the regular English track. Students at Concord are required to spend their junior year studying media. The study compared students at Concord and students at a control school 50 miles away from Concord. The researchers tested students' comprehension and message analysis skills as well as the students' writing skills. They had them look at several non-fiction news articles. They assessed reading comprehension, listening comprehension, viewing comprehension, and writing skills. Students in the media literacy group had higher reading comprehension skills, higher viewing comprehension skills, and better writing skills (Hobbs & Frost, 2003).

The discipline is still in search of a direct, agreed-upon definition of media literacy, partly because media literacy umbrellas other types of literacy and partly because the concept of media literacy overlaps the more general concept of literacy itself. Regardless, there is evidence that media literacy plays a role in mitigating some negative effects of the media *and* in increasing participation and enjoyment of the media. While the assessment method created by Lin, et al, is a promising start, more empirical work needs to be done in this field if scholars are to agree upon the conceptual and operational nature of media literacy. Regardless, much prior literature has

shown that media literacy has an effect on perception of bias (Vraga, Tully, Akin & Rojas, 2009). These findings suggest media literacy may have an effect on the perceived credibility of fake news and social identification.

Much of this work has focused on school-aged children, but little has been done regarding how broader media literacy programs could affect the adult population (Lee, 2018). A 2017 study that did look at media literacy outside the classroom found that a public service announcement that promoted media literacy had a positive effect on those subjected to it, but it was most effective when that PSA was presented in a partisan manner, which is antithetical to the standard journalistic ethic of non-partisanship (Tully & Vraga, 2017). A similar study, conducted by the same researchers, found that media literacy intervention (in the form of another PSA) was effective, but only if the individual exposed had received media literacy education prior to exposure to the PSA (Vraga & Tully, 2016).

For the purposes of this study, media literacy is defined using the Aulfderheide & Firestone model: i.e. “media literacy is defined as the ability to assess, analyze, evaluate, and communicate messages in a variety of forms” (Aulfderheide & Firestone, p. 14). In similar terms, the definition for news media literacy that was crafted by Craft, Maskl, & Ashley will also inform this study. For these scholars, news media literate individuals are defined as individuals who engage with the media in mindful thought processing, believe themselves to be in control of media’s effects on them, and have some knowledge of how the media system works and how it operates (Craft, Maskl, & Ashley, 2015). A few efforts are already underway to use media literacy as a weapon against fake news. During 2017 elections in Indonesia, extreme partisanship along with greater access to the Internet caused a massive uptick in the spread of fake news. The situation was so bad that two organizations appeared, Mafindo and Nahdlatul Ulama, to

cooperate and educate the largely media illiterate public. Their efforts have only recently begun, so no data yet exists as to the efficacy of their efforts (Adzkie, 2017).

These definitional ideas about the concept of media literacy provide three operational areas: understanding of content, effects, and production. These areas are also grounded in the Potter literature. Potter devised a model in which he devised five basic model structures: “knowledge about media content, media industries, media effects, the real world and the self” (Craft, Maksl & Ashley, 2015, p. 9). The first three of these are especially consistent with definitions in prior literature, and so these three concepts will be assessed in the current study. As noted earlier, Potter also suggests people who are strongly literate in these areas ought to be protected against negative effects from consuming media.

#### **f. Conceptualizing and Measuring Media Literacy**

In empirical studies, media literacy has been conceptually and operationally defined in a variety of ways. A study of Russian media consumers found a gulf in standard ideas and understandings of mass media between the United States and Russia. (Toepfl, 2014).

Koltay (2011) lists several distinct literacies: visual literacy, multicultural literacy, multimodal literacy, emerging technology literacy, and reproductive literacy. Aspects of each of these literacies, including textual literacy (the ability to read) are important to media literacy, but they are not the whole of the thing. For example, digital literacy involves understanding navigation, contextual, and production abilities which can be said to fall under the auspice of media literacy; however, other aspects of digital literacy do not necessarily entail communication or audience engagement and are, therefore, not associated with media literacy. This is an important distinction, because while these terms tend to get thrown around haphazardly, it is the nature of the scholar’s interest that ultimately determines their use and thus their definition. A

computer scientist would have a very different understanding of what it means to be digitally literate than would a communications researcher (Koltay, 2011).

There has also been much work done to determine effective means for assessing media literacy skills. This is complex work, as “people are not just media literate or illiterate but they are more or less so” (Kean, Prividera, Boyce & Curry, T., 2012, p. 205). One such attempt by Ashley, Maksi, and Craft (2013) targeted news media literacy. The authors created a scale to assess news media literacy. The goal was to predict news interpretation based on several factors. Factors include Assessing Author and Audiences, which relates to the understanding of how authors of messages target specific audiences; Messages and Meanings, which relates to the fact that messages may be interpreted differently by different consumers based on each consumers’ cultural norms and the methods by which those messages are created; and Representation and Reality, which focus on an understanding of the editorial control practiced by media organizations in order to augment the reality of the message. The results of the author’s predictability scale showed that it was effective in some areas but not in others. The sample size was broad, but the scale’s predictability changed from geographic location to geographic location. The authors describe their scale as “somewhat accurate” (Ashley, Maksi & Craft, 2013).

Lin, Li, Deng and Lee (2013) created a multimodal scale to empirically assess an individual’s level of media literacy, with a focus on “new media” or digital media literacy. The study emphasizes media literacy through the lens of Web 2.0, which makes it easier for individuals to produce media online (Simsek & Simsek, 2013). The authors talk about two factors traditionally understood by those wanting to measure new media literacy. Consuming literacy is the ability to access a media message and utilize said media. The study also introduces

the term “prosuming literacy,” or the ability to produce media content. In other words, “ ‘consuming’ literacy was defined as the ability to access media messages and to consume media at different levels, while ‘prosuming’ literacy is the ability to produce media contents” (Lin, Li, Deng & Lee, 2013, p. 162). They note that their work builds on a similar scale by Chen, Wu and Wang (2011), who devised an assessment based on a four-tiered model of media literacy: functional consuming media literacy, functional prosuming media literacy, critical consuming media literacy and critical prosuming media literacy.

Lee and So (2014) elaborated on this model by offering ten new criteria for evaluating media literacy. The first criterion is the Consumption Skill, which refers to the technical ability of an audience member to access media content. For example, a person must know how to use a computer before engaging with online media. The second is Understanding, or the individual’s ability to grasp the message being delivered. Next is Analysis, or the ability of an individual to deconstruct messages. Fourth is Synthesis, or the ability to mix different messages and integrate them within the consumer’s understanding of a particular message. Fifth is the Evaluation skill, or the ability of an individual to question, criticize, and challenge the credibility of media content. The next five aspects deal with the production side of media literacy. First in this category is the Prosuming skill, or the technical skills, necessary to create a message. Next is the Distribution, or the ability to disseminate a message. Third is the Production skill, or the ability to duplicate and mix media contents. Fourth, the Participation skill, refers to the ability of an individual to engage with an audience. The last criterion is the Creation skill, or the sum of an individual’s various abilities to create media contents, “especially with a critical understanding embedded in the socio-cultural values and ideology issues” (Lin, Li, Deng & Lee, 2013, p. 164). For example, the Creation skill might refer to an individual’s ability to create an online

engagement thread without relying upon another individual to do so (Lin, Li, Deng & Lee, 2013). This model, while significantly more complicated than the one devised by Chen, et al, is more comprehensive and has the distinction of recognizing all forms of media literacy as opposed to a focus on only one or two.

### 3. HYPOTHESES

The previous literature and existing theory on fake news, social identity and media literacy suggest possibilities for a number of hypotheses. These follow, along with their rationales.

**H1: For conservative individuals reading news critical of liberals, the stronger the group identity, the higher the perceived credibility.**

It is expected that a person exhibiting higher than average conservative social identity will believe, based on social identity theory assumptions about the ingroup/outgroup model, that a story showing a liberal figure in a poor light will have a high degree of credibility. The realness or fakeness of the story would be less relevant. What would be more important is that the story validates ideas that correspond with the ingroup to which he or she belongs.

**H2: For liberal individuals reading news critical of conservatives, the stronger the group identity, the higher the perceived credibility.**

Likewise, it is expected that a person exhibiting a high level of liberal social identification will find stories that are critical of conservative figures to be more credible. Again, for this group, it is expected that the realness or fakeness of the news story will be less of a factor.

**H3: For conservative individuals reading news critical of conservatives, the stronger the group identity, the lower the perceived credibility.**

If it is true that a conservative exhibiting high social identity with that political identity will find stories critical of liberal figures to have high-perceived credibility, then likewise it is

true that those same individuals will find stories critical of conservative figures to have lower credibility.

**H4: For liberal individuals reading news critical of liberals, the stronger the group identity, the lower the perceived credibility.**

The same expectation of H3 is also relevant for H4's proposition about liberal counterparts.

**H5: The higher the media literacy, the less credible people will perceive fake news stories to be.**

If a person has a high level of media literacy, then it is expected that this will have a mitigating effect upon a person's social identity. A person with high media literacy is expected to notice the differences between a fake news story and a real one, and will therefore, find accuracy to be more important to credibility than simply regurgitating particular biases. Such a person will be better able and more likely to weigh the story's content and its correspondence with reality in a meaningful, substantive way. Therefore, these individuals are expected to be more likely to report lower credibility in fake news stories.

**H6: The higher the media literacy, the more credible people will find real news stories to be.**

Likewise, a person with a high level of media literacy will find a real news story to be more credible than a fake one. The logic for H5 applies for H6.

**H7. For conservative individuals, perceived credibility will be less strongly associated with group identity when media literacy is high than when media literacy is low.**

**H8. For liberal individuals, perceived credibility will be less strongly associated with group identity when media literacy is high than when media literacy is low.**

Using Potter as a framework, media literacy ought to serve as a panacea for media-induced social identity effects. It is expected that higher media literacy will mitigate the impact of social identity with one's group on perceived credibility of the news stories. No difference is anticipated between liberals and conservatives.

#### 4. METHOD

Following approval by the university's Institutional Review Board, respondents were recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk (mTurk). 459 started the survey, and 289 completed the survey. Through the platform, respondents were led to an online questionnaire (See Appendix for questionnaire). The first section of the instrument presented four readings to each respondent. Two of the stories were about former President Barack Obama and two of the stories were about President Donald Trump. Each story presented its subject in a less-than-favorable light, but two were from a news source generally thought to be legitimate (the *New York Times*) and two were from a fake news source (*The National Report*). From the *New York Times*, (the real stories) readers were presented with "Killing of Americans Deepens Debate Over Use of Drone Strikes" (Mazzetti, 2013) and "Nebraska Senator Raises Issue of Donald Trump's Sexual Affairs" (Burns, 2016). From *the National Report* (the fake stories) survey responders were presented with "Obama to Pardon Hillary Clinton for Benghazi, Emailgate, Sources Say" (National Report, 2015) and "Nancy Reagan's Last Words: Do Not Vote for Donald Trump" (National Report, 2016). These subjects were chosen because it is unlikely that many have little to no feeling about the two individuals and it is highly unlikely that there are those who are utterly unfamiliar with either. They are also chosen because they both represent to their opposing sides the extreme versions of the ingroups and outgroups. In other words, those who are strongly conservative have generally great distaste for Obama and those who are strongly liberal generally have great distaste for Trump.

The photographs that accompanied each story were included in what the respondents saw. The stories were edited to remove indication of authorship and source. The order the stories were presented in was randomized. All respondents were asked to read all four stories. After reading each story the respondents were first given three comprehension questions about each story in order to ensure they read and understood it. If respondents incorrectly answered any of the comprehension questions they were not allowed to continue with the survey and had to either reread the reading and respond again, or quit the survey. Respondents were then asked to answer a battery of items on a seven point Likert scale to test for credibility (0 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree). The items were as follows (See Appendix for all survey questions).

1. The story is fair.
2. The story is unbiased.
3. The story is accurate.
4. The story respects people's privacy.
5. The story watches after the readers' interests.
6. The story separates fact from opinion.
7. This story can be trusted.
8. The story is more concerned about the public interest than creating profits.
9. The story is factual.
10. The story is opinionated (reverse coded).
11. The story was written by a well-trained reporter.

The next part of the survey tested for political affiliation, with the range being from very conservative to very liberal as well as political identification (Campbell, A., Converse, P.E., Miller, W.E., & Stokes, D.E., 1960). The third part tested for strength of group identity (Greene,

2004). The fourth tested for media literacy, using the definition provided above and measuring the areas of effects, production, and content (see Appendix).

Finally, respondents were asked to respond to a battery of demographic questions. They asked for biological sex, age range, race, education, and experience working directly within the media. Age was measured on a 14-point scale. See Appendix for all questions on the survey instrument. Each respondent was paid \$.25 for finishing the survey.

Before the official survey was published, a pretest was distributed on Facebook. The pretest was completed by 93 people, and the demographics and distribution of their political orientation recorded were similar to the results of the survey used in this study.

## 5. FINDINGS

In total, 289 people completed the survey. 55 percent of respondents reported their biological sex as female and 45 percent reported their sex as male. The range of ages of respondents was from 18 to more than 80, with the average age of the responders being between 41 and 45 years old. 81 percent of respondents identified their race as white. In terms of education, 89 percent said they had some college or better. Respondents who identified as conservative made up 60 percent of the group and those who identified as liberal made up the additional 40 percent. The mean for social group identification for both liberals and conservatives was 3.11 on a 1 to 7 scale.

<b>Table 1: Means and Standard Deviations for All Variables</b>		
Variables	Mean	SD
<i>Perceived Credibility for Fake News Stories</i> (Range = 0-7)		
Fake Obama Story	4.23	1.19
Fake Trump Story	3.17	1.53
Fake Stories Combined	3.07	1.26
<i>Perceived Credibility for Real News Stories</i> (Range = 0-7)		
Real Obama Story	2.96	1.49
Real Trump Story	3.49	1.31
Real Stories Combined	3.86	1.08
<i>Perceived Credibility for All Stories Combined</i> (Range = 0-7)		
	3.45	1.03
<i>Political Identification, Social Identification, and Media Literacy</i>		
Social Group Identification (Range = 0-7)	3.11	1.64
Media Literacy (Range = 0-7)	4.82	.94
<i>Demographics</i>		
Biological Sex (Male=1, Female=2)	1.56	.50
Age ( See Appendix for Scale )	5.50	2.69
Race ( See Appendix for Scale )	2.90	.83
Political Identification ( See Appendix for Scale )	6.15	1.02

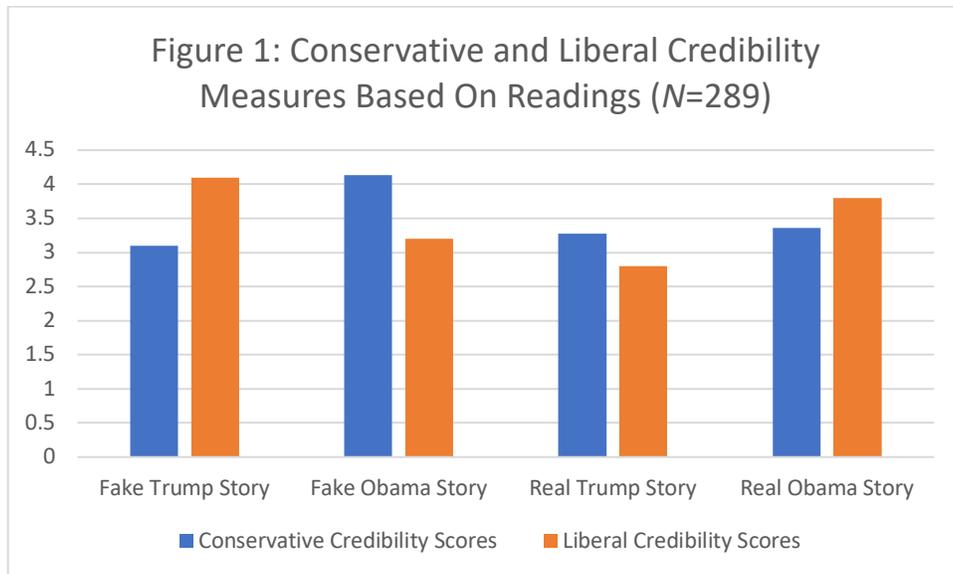
Education ( See Appendix for Scale )	4.33	1.63
Journalism Experience ( See Appendix for Scale )	2.07	1.37

Skewness for all variables was found to be in the generally accepted range of +/-2. The data were tested for skewness in order to ensure that distribution of the data is normal. Skewness was found to be in the accepted range of +/-2 (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2014). A bivariate correlation analysis was conducted before regression analyses were used in order to test for multicollinearity within the independent variables. This analysis is necessary in order to ensure that the independent variables are not highly correlated with one another and allow sufficient variance to explain the dependent variable (Allison, 1999). Multicollinearity was not found to be an issue.

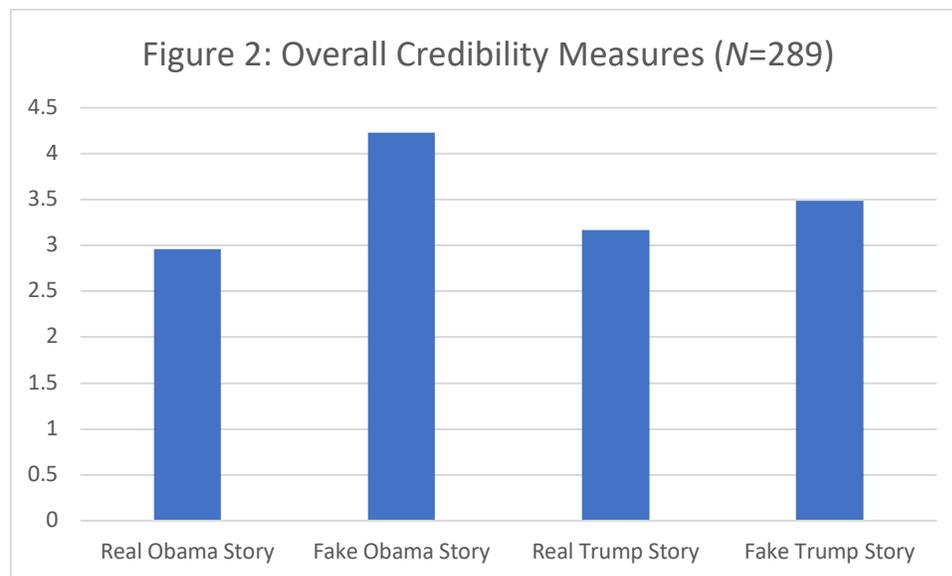
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. All Stories	-	.90**	.86**	.86**	.89**	.34**	.062	.015	-	-.03	-.20	.90	.03
2. All Fake Stories		-	.54**	.80**	.78**	.33**	-.04	-.15*	-	.01	-.07	-.14*	.10
3. All Real Stories			-	.70**	.79**	.28**	.16**	.20**	-	-.06	.05	-.01	-.06
4. All Obama Stories				-	.53**	.32**	.10	-	-.20**	-.03	.05	-.11	.06
5. All Trump Stories					-	.28**	.01	.19**	-	-.02	-.07	-.05	.52
6. Social Identification						-	.16**	-.10	-	.05	.02	-.09	.07
7. Media Literacy							-	-.05	.06	.14*	.27**	-.01	-.31**
8. Political Identification								-	-	-.06	-.05	.07	-.07
9. Race									-	.14*	.01	-.01	-.07
10. Biological Sex										-	.10	-	-.13*
11. Age											-	.02	-.20**
12. Education												-	.09
13. Journalism Experience													-

Note: \*\*<.01, \*p<.05

Before testing the hypotheses, some general descriptive findings will be provided on perceived credibility and political leaning (these statistics are univariate findings, and no control variables were used, unlike the later regression analyses). Conservatives showed the highest perceived credibility for the fake Obama story, the second highest for the real Obama story, the third highest for the real Trump story, and the lowest for the fake Trump story. Liberals showed the highest perceived credibility for the fake Trump story, the second highest with the real Obama story, the third highest with the fake Obama story, and the lowest with the real Trump story (See Figure 1).

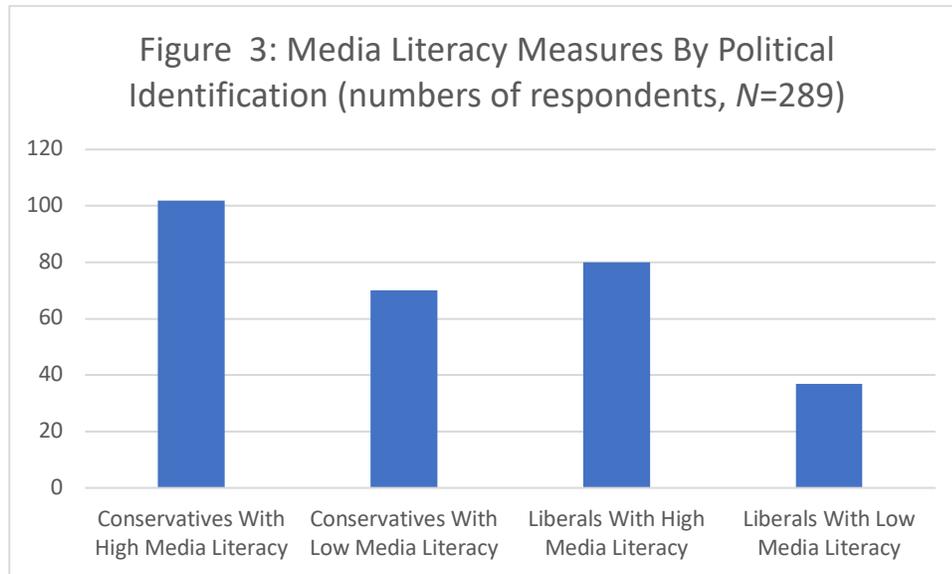


Of all four readings, the fake story about Obama had the highest overall credibility score at 4.23. The second highest credibility score was the fake Trump story with 3.49. The real story about Trump had the third highest score at 3.17, and the real Obama story scored lowest for credibility at 2.96 (See Figure 2).



The mean media literacy score of all participants was 4.82. Respondents were split into two groups based upon that mean. Those above the mean were put into the High Media Literacy group and those below it were put into the Low Media Literacy group. Sixty percent of

conservatives were placed into the High Media Literacy group and 68 percent of liberals were placed in the High Media Literacy group (See Figure 3).



<b>Table 3: H1 –Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Perceived Credibility for Conservatives Reading News Critical of Liberals (Real and Fake News)</b>									
<i>N=172</i>									
	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	SE	$\beta$	B	SE	$\beta$	B	SE	$\beta$
Constant	3.80	.45		2.80	.56		2.56	.52	
Sex	.11	.17	.05	.06	.16	.30	.10	.15	.05
Age	.01	.03	.03	-.01	.03	-.03	.01	.03	.02
Race	-.26	.23	-.03	-.25	.23	-.09	-.09	.21	-.03
Journalism Experience	-.02	.06	-.03	.02	.06	.03	-.04	.04	-.05
Education	-.05	.05	-.08	-.06	.05	-.10	-.03	.05	-.06
Media Literacy				.24	.08	.24**	.16	.08	.11
Social Group Identification							.22	.05	.37***

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

H1 proposed that for conservative individuals reading news critical of liberals, the stronger the group identity, the higher the perceived credibility. A regression analysis was conducted with the group of respondents who identified as more conservative (see Table 3).

Respondents were split into conservative and liberal groups. The mean for the combined scores for partisan identification and political identification was 6.15. Respondents above the mean were put into the liberal category and those below the mean were put into the conservative category (in survey item scales, strongly conservative and Republican = 1, and strongly liberal and Democrat = 7). H1 tests the conservative group only. This analysis controlled for sex, age, race, journalism experience, education, and media literacy. All demographic variables were entered in block (model) 1. Media literacy was entered in block 2. Social group identity was entered in block 3 (The sample was split in an alternative way. Respondents who selected neutral were removed from the sample, so that the split compared those who exhibited more extreme social group identification. This allowed for a cleaner division. With this group, the effect of social group identification was slightly stronger, but generally the differences were negligible).

Standardized skewness scores were within +/-2 for all dependent variables. There was no multicollinearity. The dependent variable for the regression was the combined 11 credibility measures (the mean) of the stories presented about Barack Obama (critical of Obama). A significant relationship is shown with social identification,  $B=.37, p<.001$ , thus supporting the hypothesis. However, the *R-square* score of .19 suggests there are potentially other explanatory factors that were not addressed in the model.

**Table 4: H2 –Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Perceived Credibility for Liberals Reading News Critical of Conservatives (Real and Fake News)**  
*N=117*

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	SE	$\beta$	B	SE	$\beta$	B	SE	$\beta$
Constant	3.48	.61		3.48	.98		2.55	.94	
Sex	-.10	.24	-.04	-.10	.24	-.04	-.21	.23	-.09
Age	.03	.05	.07	.03	.05	.07	-.01	.04	-.01
Race	.40	.29	.14	.40	.29	.14	.25	.27	.09
Journalism Experience	-.003	.09	-.003	-.002	.09	-.003	-.01	.09	-.01
Education	-.02	.08	-.02	-.02	.08	-.02	.02	.07	.03
Media Literacy				.002	.16	.001	.05	.15	.03
Social Group Identification							.31	.07	.39***

Note: \* $p<.05$ , \*\* $p<.01$ , \*\*\* $p<.001$

H2 proposed that for liberal individuals reading news critical of conservatives, the stronger the group identity, the higher the perceived credibility. A similar regression analysis was conducted that controlled for the same variables as in the test with H1 (see Table 4), this time however, only the more liberal individuals were analyzed in terms of their responses to the two stories about Donald Trump. This hypothesis is also supported,  $B=.39, p<.001$ , for social identification. The relatively low *R-square* score of .16 implies that other factors beyond SIT may need to be taken into account.

**Table 5: H3 –Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Perceived Credibility for Conservatives Reading News Critical of Conservatives**

*N=172*

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	SE	$\beta$	B	SE	$\beta$	B	SE	$\beta$
Constant	3.64	.54		3.27	.69		3.10	.68	
Sex	.008	.20	.003	-.01	.20	-.004	.02	.20	.006
Age	-.05	.04	-.12	-.06	.04	-.13	-.05	.04	-.11
Race	.03	.28	.009	.03	.28	.009	.15	.28	.04
Journalism Experience	.05	.07	.06	.07	.08	.08	.03	.08	.03
Education	-.07	.06	-.09	-.07	.06	-.10	-.05	.06	-.07
Media Literacy				.10	.10	.07	.00	.11	.00
Social Group Identification							.16	.06	.21*

*Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$*

H3 proposed that for conservative individuals reading news critical of conservatives, the stronger the group identity, the lower the perceived credibility. A regression analysis was conducted for only more conservative individuals that controlled for the same variables as H1 and H2 (see Table 5). The dependent variable was the combined credibility scores (the mean) for all stories about Donald Trump (which were critical of Trump). The hypothesis was not supported. Instead, the findings show that higher social group identification led to greater perceived credibility from the conservative group,  $B=.21$ ,  $p<.05$ . The *R square*, however, is .07, which suggests there are other variables that were not accounted for in this model.

**Table 6: H4 – Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Perceived Credibility for Liberals Reading News Critical of Liberals**

*N=117*

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	SE	$\beta$	B	SE	$\beta$	B	SE	$\beta$
Constant	4.28	.54		4.69	.87		4.16	.87	
Sex	-.49	.21	-.21*	-.48	.21	-.21*	-.54	.21	-.24*
Age	.04	.04	.10	.05	.04	.11	.03	.04	.06
Race	.01	.26	.005	.01	.26	.004	-.07	.25	-.03
Journalism Experience	.09	.08	.11	.08	.08	.09	.07	.08	.09
Education	-.12	.07	-.17	-.13	.07	-.17	-.10	.07	-.14
Media Literacy				-.08	.14	-.06	-.06	.14	-.04
Social Group Identification							.18	.07	.24*

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

H4 proposed that for liberal individuals reading news critical of liberals, the stronger the group identity, the lower the perceived credibility. The same regression analysis was performed as was for H3, this time however the independent variable was the combined credibility scores of all stories about Obama (which were critical of Obama) and only the more liberal respondents were included in the analysis (see Table 6). The results from the analysis were similar to H3 except that sex was a significant factor through all three models (Model 1:  $B = -.21$ ,  $p < .05$ ; Model 2:  $B = -.21$ ,  $p < .05$ ; Model 3:  $B = -.238$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The hypothesis was not supported. Instead, higher group identification led to greater perceived credibility from the liberal group,  $B = .24$ ,  $p < .05$ . The *R square* is also low, .08, which suggests there are again other variables that were not accounted for in this model.

**Table 7: H5 –Perceived Credibility of Fake News Stories Regressed on Media Literacy and control variables.**

*N*=289

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	SE	$\beta$	B	SE	$\beta$	B	SE	$\beta$
Constant	3.88	.45		3.13	.46		3.48	.58	
Sex	-.001	.15	-.04	-.03	.15	-.01	-.01	.15	-.006
Age	-.02	.03	-.04	-.03	.03	-.06	-.02	.03	-.04
Race	.13	.20	.04	.17	.19	.05	.17	.19	.05
Journalism Experience	.08	.06	.09	.06	.05	.06	.04	.06	.04
Education	-.10	.05	-.13*	-.08	.04	-.11	-.08	.04	-.10
Political Identification	-.08	.03	-.13*	-.06	.03	-.11*	-.07	.03	-.12*
Social Group Identification				.23	.04	.30***	.24	.04	.31***
Media Literacy							-.081	.082	-.061

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

H5 proposed that the higher the media literacy, the less credible people will perceive fake news stories to be. A regression analysis was conducted that controlled for sex, age, race, journalism experience, education, political identification, and social identification (see Table 7). The dependent variable in the regression was the combined 22 credibility measures of both fake news stories. Media literacy was not a significant predictor, therefore, the findings do not support the hypothesis. The strongest predictor was social identification,  $B = .31$ ,  $p < .001$ , thus indicating that social group identification has a greater effect on the perceived credibility of a fake news story than does media literacy. However the *R square* was low, .13, indicating other factors may be at play.

**Table 8: H6 - Perceived Credibility of Real News Stories Regressed on Media Literacy and other predictors.**

*N*=289

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	SE	$\beta$	B	SE	$\beta$	B	SE	$\beta$
Constant	3.51	.31		2.86	.39		2.26	.49	
Sex	-.15	.13	-.07	-.17	.13	-.08	-.20	.13	-.09
Age	.02	.02	.05	.02	.02	.05	.01	.02	.02
Race	-.08	.17	-.03	-.05	.16	-.02	-.06	.16	-.02
Journalism Experience	-.02	.05	-.03	-.05	.05	-.06	-.02	.05	-.03
Education	-.02	.04	-.03	-.003	.04	-.01	-.01	.04	-.01
Political Identification	.10	.03	.20**	.19	.03	.22***	.11	.03	.23***
Social Group Identification				.20	.04	.30***	.19	.04	.28***
Media Literacy							.14	.07	.12*

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

H6 proposes that the higher the media literacy, the more credible people will find real news stories to be. A regression analysis was conducted that controlled for the same factors as the test for H5 (see Table 8). The dependent variable in the regression was the combined credibility measure of both real news stories. The findings somewhat support the hypothesis. Media literacy had an effect on the credibility ascribed to the real news stories,  $B = .12$ ,  $p < .05$ , thus supporting the hypothesis. Political identification and social group identification were stronger predictors than media literacy. However the *R square* was low, .15, indicating other factors may be at play.

**Table 9: H7 - Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Perceived Credibility of Real and Fake News Stories for Conservative Individuals with Low Media Literacy**

*N=70*

	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	SE	$\beta$	B	SE	$\beta$
Constant	4.30	.66		2.71	.73	
Sex	-.02	.27	-.16	.05	.25	.02
Age	-.08	.06	-.10	-.03	.06	-.06
Race	-.27	.33	-.10	-.04	.31	-.02
Journalism Experience	-.01	.10	-.01	-.09	.10	-.11
Education	-.12	.07	-.20	-.09	.10	-.11
Social Group Identification				.35	.09	.48***

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

**Table 10: H7 - Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Perceived Credibility of Real and Fake News Stories for Conservative Individuals with High Media Literacy**

*N=102*

	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	SE	$\beta$	B	SE	$\beta$
Constant	3.26	.61		2.91	.62	
Sex	.12	.21	.06	.12	.20	.06
Age	-.009	.04	-.03	-.01	.04	-.01
Race	.14	.31	.05	.22	.30	.07
Journalism Experience	.08	.07	.11	.04	.07	.06
Education	-.01	.06	-.01	-.02	.06	-.03
Social Group Identification				.13	.05	.02*

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

H7 proposes that for conservative individuals, perceived credibility will be less strongly associated with group identity when media literacy is high than when media literacy is low. To investigate this hypothesis, all conservative respondents were split into two categories. Those above the media literacy mean were put into the high media literacy category and those below the mean were put into the low media literacy category. Then, regression analyses were conducted for each group with the overall credibility measures (the mean of all 44 credibility measures for all four stories) for all news stories being the dependent variable. Sex, age,

education, race, and journalism experience were used as controls (see Tables 9 and 10). The findings show strong support for the hypothesis. The low media literacy group of conservatives showed a much greater reliance upon social identification with their group,  $B=.48, p<.001$ , than did their more media literate counterparts,  $B=.02, p<.05$ . Social Identification is the strongest variable in both group. The *R square* for the High Media Literacy group was very low, at .07 in comparison with the Low Media Literacy group, which was much higher at .24.

**Table 11: H8 - Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Perceived Credibility of Real and Fake News Stories for Liberal Individuals with Low Media Literacy**

*N=37*

	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	SE	$\beta$	B	SE	$\beta$
Constant	3.80	.72		2.50	.81	
Sex	-.58	.33	-.34	-.44	.30	-.26
Age	.06	.06	.19	.05	.05	.17
Race	-.15	.39	-.07	.05	.36	.03
Journalism Experience	.19	.11	.33	.13	.10	.22
Education	-.01	.09	-.02	.03	.08	.06
Social Identification				.32	.12	.44*

*Note: \* $p<.05$ , \*\* $p<.01$ , \*\*\* $p<.001$*

**Table 12: H8 - Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Perceived Credibility of Real and Fake News Stories for Liberal Individuals with High Media Literacy**

*N=80*

	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	SE	$\beta$	B	SE	B
Constant	4.45	.75		4.07	.74	
Sex	-.36	.28	-.16	-.47	.27	-.20
Age	.03	.05	.06	-.01	.05	-.02
Race	.42	.33	.15	.25	.32	.09
Journalism Experience	-.08	.11	-.09	-.07	.11	-.07
Education	-.13	.09	-.17	-.07	.11	-.07
Social Identification				.22	.08	.32**

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

H8 states that for liberal individuals with higher media literacy social group identity will have less effect on perceived credibility than for those who exhibit lower media literacy. In similar fashion to the regression analysis conducted for H7, liberal respondents were split into High Media Literacy and Low Media Literacy groups. Regression analysis was conducted on each, using the same control variables as the prior hypothesis (see Tables 11 and 12). The findings support the hypothesis, but the difference is substantially smaller than for conservatives. Social identification for the Low Media Literacy group of liberal individuals was  $B = .44$ ,  $p < .05$ , and for the High Media Literacy group it was  $B = .32$ ,  $p < .01$ . The *R square* for this group was .15, which indicates other variables might be at play. The *R square* for the Low Media Literacy group was .32.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The fundamental ethics of journalism require that reporters present objective, measured reports, designed to appeal to the rational core of an audience (Society of Professional Journalists, 2014). This study shows that this goal, regardless of how noble, has difficulty standing up to the power of social group identification. Perhaps the most troubling finding is that people expressed the greatest credibility for the fake news stories (see Figure 2), and that the primary motivator for this seems to be group identification, which is not entirely surprising. Whether they are aware of the psychological mechanisms or not, the authors of such fake news pieces are actively working to appeal to the social group identity of an audience. For the authors, it does not matter whether a person is delighted or incensed by their work. Their sole motivation is that people click on, and perhaps share, the fake story. The more clicks, the more money lines the pockets of the authors (Dewey, 2015).

Clearly, social identification and partisan leanings are deeply and inextricably linked. The data showing liberal and conservative perceived credibility of the fake news stories are almost directly transposed (see Figure 1). Liberals found much higher credibility in the fake story about Donald Trump than did their conservative counterparts, and conservatives found higher credibility in the fake Obama story than did liberals. The perceptions of the real stories, however, were flipped. Conservatives found more credibility with the real story about Trump than did liberals, and liberals found greater credibility with the real story about Barack Obama than did the conservatives. This indicates that people are more wary of real news stories than fake ones, which is a curious finding that deserves further study.

The first two hypotheses were supported by the data, while H3 and H4 were not. Interestingly, social group identification was a stronger factor when the ingroups read news critical of the outgroups than when ingroups read stories critical of their ingroups. The beta measures for H1 and H2 (see Tables 3 and 4) were very close to one another (H1:  $B=.37$ ,  $p<.001$ ; H2:  $B=.39$ ,  $p<.001$ ), supporting the idea that group identity explains the fact that a liberal was more likely to find credibility with a story hostile to conservatives, and the fact that conservatives are more likely to find greater credibility with stories hostile to liberals. Yet, when members of one ingroup read stories critical of other members of the same ingroup, the effects of social identification were not only less strong, but also *increased* the perceived credibility of the readings. H3 and H4 were not supported (See Tables 5 and 6), but the strength of social identification's effect was observed at lower levels (H3:  $B=.21$ ,  $p<.05$ ; H4:  $B=.24$ ,  $p<.05$ ). For the liberal group, biological sex showed as much significance as social group identification. Liberal males were more likely to exhibit greater perceived credibility than females ( $B=-.24$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Biological sex did not factor in at all in H2, which was made up of the same group.

A tenet of social identification theory is that ingroups are often defined by not being the opposing outgroup (Lam, Ahearne, Hu & Schillewaert, 2010). The findings from this study seem to indicate that the effects of social group identification are stronger when an outgroup is the focus of criticism than when that focus is on the ingroup. Overall, while hypotheses 1 to 4 suggest mixed support of Social Identification Theory, this study supports the aspect of the theory that suggests criticism of the out-group is especially important to group identity, showing that ingroup versus outgroup self-identification is one of the strongest factors of social identification in general.

Another possible explanation for these findings is that social group identification allows people to rationalize things about their ingroups that outgroups or the non-affiliated would generally consider to be negative. A liberal person reading the fake story about Obama pardoning Hillary Clinton might very well applaud such an action taken by Obama. Likewise, a conservative reading the false story about Nancy Reagan condemning Trump might conclude that it is a good thing that Trump was disavowed by the former first lady. To other members of the ingroup, a person who is within or representing the ingroup is inherently good. Ingroup members may rationalize or even embrace behavior that seems toxic simply because for the benefit of the ingroup. Therefore, credibility of a story displaying negative criticism about an ingroup member may be high, but that does not necessarily mean that the reader's group identity is offended. It may be that it is, in fact, enhanced, because it creates another differentiation from the outgroup.

Yet another explanation could be that those who show greater social group identification may be less likely to think critically about things in general, and therefore may be less likely to question the authority of the news itself.

Across the entire sample (H5 and H6), media literacy had some inoculating effect, but it was not strong, and was only for the test of the real news stories. In these tests, social identification again rears its head. This was far and away the strongest individual factor (H5 Social Identification:  $B=.31, p<.001$ ) in the perceived credibility of fake news. Contrarily, when testing for the perceived credibility of real news stories, media literacy did have an effect, but still not as much as social identification (H6 Media Literacy:  $B=.12, p<.05$ ; H6 Social Identification:  $B=.28, p<.001$ ; H6 Political Identification:  $B=.23, p<.001$ ).

When the groups were split along ideological lines, the effects of media literacy were shown to be much stronger. The conservatives with high media literacy showed much less effect from social identification than did conservatives with low media literacy, and the difference was dramatic. For the low media literacy conservative group, credibility was highly related to social identification ( $B=.48, p<.001$ ); however, social identification was a much weaker factor for the highly media literate group of conservatives ( $B=.02, p<.05$ ). This finding shows that, for conservatives, media literacy does have the desired inoculating power espoused by Potter (2010).

Liberals showed a similar drop in reliance on social identification when split into high and low media literate groups, but the difference was not as strong as it was for conservatives. Credibility was related to social identification among liberals at a similar strength when compared to the conservative low media-literate group ( $B=.44, p<.05$ ), but the high media-literate group of liberals was not as strongly inoculated against the effects of social identification as their conservative counterparts ( $B=.32, p<.01$ ). Both hypotheses were supported, but this finding seems to indicate that conservatives are much more strongly affected by media literacy than are liberals. This is another finding that deserves further study.

These findings seem to show that media literacy can help people extend their rational faculties to real news items, but not fake ones. As has been stated, social identification is a powerful factor, and one that cannot be easily ignored, but another explanation might be the way in which media literacy is generally taught. In its current incarnation, fake news is a new phenomenon. The stories are written and designed to look like real news stories. Media literacy has focused heavily on knowledge of the methods and practices of media creation, tactics media producers use to sway the opinions of the public, and the standards and values of objective reporting (Potter, 2010). This approach is a worthy one, and as the data shows, has an effect on

the perceived credibility of real news items. The fundamental assumptions of this approach, however, are that media organizations are generally themselves coherent organizations, and that while media can be deceptive, it does not often produce content that is wholly false.

Media literate people have supposedly been trained to recognize objective, fact-based reporting over blatant editorialization, but so have the people who are producing fake news. It is arguable that to create an effective fake news story and fool a large part of the population, a person creating fake news must be highly media literate. His or her goal, after all, is to convince readers that the lies he or she has produced are real news items. What better way to accomplish this than to make a story fit an objective mold as much as possible? For media literacy to be an effective combatant against fake news, the curriculum must shift so that students learn that an individual in his or her basement can have as much reach and influence as a traditional media outlet. The curriculum must also expose students to fake news, such as the stories used in this study, in order to help them better understand the subtle indicants for what is useful, objective information versus what is appealing to their less rational instincts.

These findings also suggest that the most effective way of combatting fake news is not relying upon self-described neutral sources, but from members of particular ingroups. An ethical conservative disavowing a fake news story to other conservatives might be much more effective at convincing his or her fellow conservatives than would a liberal or neutral group, simply because the conservative is speaking to members of his or her own ingroup. In other words, it seems that in cases where outgroups can be excluded, social identification is not as powerful a factor. This can be illustrated with a sports metaphor. If a State U football fan writes an article critical of a State Tech football player, then it is expected that Tech fans will find little credibility in the State U fan's writings, regardless of their objective validity. However, if a Tech fan writes

a story critical of a Tech football player, the ingroup / outgroup dynamic ceases to exist at the same magnitude it did when clear ingroup / outgroup delineations are drawn, thus more group credibility might be found with the Tech fan. Of course the possibility remains that even excluding the clear outgroups, ingroup/outgroup dynamics can manifest within a particular ingroup, but that is much more subtle than when dealing with monolithic organizations such as Republicans and Democrats. A Democrat in 2008 might have supported Hillary Clinton over Barack Obama. He or she might have argued with his or her fellow Democrats about the potential nominee. He or she might have even had a feeling of sadness when Clinton lost the primary, but the person would still likely remain in the Democrat ingroup. To explain it another way, if a member of Group A criticizes a member of Group B, then the criticism will be less effective at convincing members of Group B, regardless of the efficacy of Group A's member's criticism. However, if Group B is criticized by Group B, then it is possible the members of Group B will listen to the criticism.

There were limitations to this study. Firstly, only four articles were tested. This study ought to be replicated with other kinds of stories and subjects. Secondly, the R-squares for all findings were low, which indicates that other independent variables should be tested in later replications. Economic status, for example, was not taken into account, nor were measures of the manners in which and the regularity of which respondents engaged with news media.

Since this survey was conducted, fake news has been a topic of much discussion (Stetlter, 2017). Huge entities like Facebook and Twitter have appeared before Congress to address the problem (Barrabi, 2018). Yet as long as the production of fake news remains either lucrative or polarizing, then the problem will remain. Media literacy can have an effect, it is clear, but perhaps more important is that individuals recognize within themselves the strength of group

identification. Emotional attachment and rationality are mutually exclusive concepts. All people are subject to group identities, and the desire to be included in one group while dismissing another is arguably the default position for humanity. Yet, rationality is about recognizing and controlling baser instincts. By recognizing the capacity to be irrational in favor of an ingroup and by working to become more media savvy within that context, individuals can overcome these effects and the Republic may yet survive them.

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## APPENDIX I: SURVEY INSTRUMENT

# Social Identity, Fake News and Media Literacy

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### Start of Block: Introduction Block

Intro You are being asked to take part in a research study. The study is being done by Wade Leonard, a graduate student at the University of Alabama. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to read four different items, respond to those items, and complete a short survey. This survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. To compensate you for your participation, you will receive payment of .25 after successfully completing the survey. This research is non-sensitive in nature, and thus we do not anticipate any risk to you as a result of your participation. You are free to discontinue your participation at any point. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. It is your free choice. You can refuse to be in it at all. If you start the study, you can stop at any time. The individual data you provide here will not be shared with any other person or persons. No identifying information will be collected; as such, the researchers will not be able to associate your name with any of the information you provide. If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact Wade Leonard at [wleonard@crimson.ua.edu](mailto:wleonard@crimson.ua.edu). If you have questions about your rights as a person in a research study, call Ms. Tanta Myles, the Research Compliance Officer of the University, at 205-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066. By clicking the below “continue” button, you agree to the conditions described above. Upon completion of the survey you will be provided with a code. In order to be paid for your time you must enter the code in the mTurk HIT box after the survey’s completion. Thank you again for your time.

### End of Block: Introduction Block

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### Start of Block: Lib 1 Reading

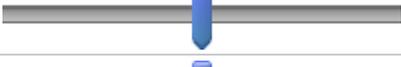
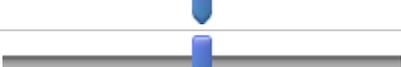
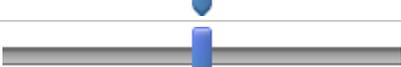
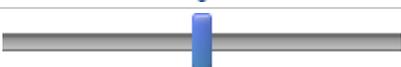
#### Reading 1 **Obama To Pardon Hillary Clinton for Benghazi, Emailgate, Sources Say**

WASHINGTON – In what some say is the most over-reaching exercise of presidential power and authority in history, sources reveal that Barack Obama has arranged to grant an executive pardon to former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton for “actions surrounding the ‘Benghazi Incident’; including but not limited to possible and/or future legal and/or prosecutorial actions and potential harm implied or contained therein.” The executive action also extends to “activities, events and outcomes related to what is commonly known as, and/or referred to as

‘email-gate.’ To exonerate Clinton, Obama will be required to invoke Article II, Section 2, Clause 1 of the US Constitution. The president was reportedly “livid with rage” when informed of the Clinton pardon news leak, which grants “full and complete absolution” to Hillary Clinton, according to a White House insider who wished to remain anonymous. “The cool exterior the president projects for the public to see all but disappeared,” said the staffer. “We’re all walking around on eggshells. I’ve never witnessed anything like this in my entire time in Washington. That open door to the Oval Office was closed. Highly confidential and potentially damaging national security information is said to have been put at risk, suppressed, or deleted.”

Historically, US presidents grant “a flurry of pardons” in the weeks before they leave the White House; however, Barack Obama’s standard operating procedure differs from that of previous chief executives, evidenced by the high number and quick executions of his well-publicized executive orders. To date, Barack Obama has received tens of thousands of pardon requests – arguably the highest number recorded in history. The news of Obama’s executive pardon will undoubtedly add fuel to the Republican party’s arsenal of Benghazi criticism already stockpiled against both Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton. In recent days, Republican candidate and former Hewlett-Packard CEO Carly Fiorina stepped up her anti-Hillary attacks. Fiorina’s recent appearance on MSNBC’s Morning Joe directly confronted Clinton’s own account of the Benghazi tragedy, and its alleged cover-up by the president and his former secretary of state. The MSNBC interview made as many headlines for the liberal ambush engineered against Fiorina by show hostess Mika Brzezinski, as it did for Florin’s campaign strategy to defeat Clinton. There remains no doubt that renewed attacks against Hillary Clinton will increase, keeping pace with the mounting and negative reaction against Obama for what appears to be his complicity with the criminal Clinton – collusion which may extend far into her future and into ours – a future in which Hillary Rodham Clinton plans to assume the office of the President, with absolutely no fear of legal reprisal or calls for accountability standing in her way. Despite her clear guilt and complicity with the charges of which she is accused. For his part, President Obama will likely add this to his growing list of questionably legal behavior during his time in the White House. **Please respond to the story you just read. Please answer the questions by moving the slider to the appropriate number.**

	Strongly		Neutral		Strongly Agree			
	Disagree							
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

This story is fair. ()	
This story is unbiased. ()	
This story is accurate. ()	
This story respects people's privacy. ()	
This story watches after the readers' interests. ()	
This story separates fact from opinion. ()	
This story can be trusted. ()	
This story is more concerned about the public interest than creating profits. ()	
This story is factual. ()	
This story is opinionated. ()	
This story was written by a well-trained reporter. ()	

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Page Break

Clinton Comp 1 According to the story, president Obama was described as being which of these?

- Happy with Clinton (1)
  - Livid with rage (2)
  - Quietly deferential (3)
  - Hot tempered (4)
- 

Clinton Comp 2 According to this story, Fiorina appeared on which show?

- Morning Joe (1)
  - Crossfire (2)
  - The Daily Show (3)
  - Sports Center (4)
- 

Clinton Comp 3 According to this story, Presidents typically do what in their final days of office?

- Nap (1)
- Grant a flurry of pardons (2)
- Invest in the stock market (3)
- Spend time with old friends (4)

End of Block: Lib 1 Reading

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Start of Block: Lib 2 Reading

Reading 2

*Please read the following story carefully and answer the questions that follow:*

**Killing of Americans Deepens Debate Over Use of Drone Strikes**

WASHINGTON — The Obama administration said Thursday that two American Qaeda operatives killed in Pakistan in January had not been “specifically targeted,” and officials added that the Central Intelligence Agency had no idea the two men were hiding in compounds under surveillance by armed drones when orders were given to carry out the strikes.

It is an issue of great legal significance because the deliberate killing, without due process, of Americans working for Al Qaeda has been one of the most disputed aspects of Mr. Obama’s clandestine drone war, and has been a subject of heated debate among the president’s aides.

Officials said Thursday that the two men, Adam Gadahn and Ahmed Farouq, had ascended to senior ranks inside Al Qaeda but that there had never been a Justice Department determination that they could be marked for death. The killing of Mr. Farouq and Mr. Gadahn, by C.I.A. drones, along with the accidental killing of Warren Weinstein, an American aid worker, brings to seven the total number of Americans killed by drone strikes during the Obama administration.

Two years ago, the administration announced that four American citizens had been killed in drone strikes in Yemen and Pakistan during Mr. Obama’s presidency, but that only one had been deliberately targeted.

The deliberate target was Anwar al-Awlaki, an American-born radical cleric who had fled to Yemen and joined Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. Mr. Awlaki was put on a so-called kill list after the administration deemed Mr. Awlaki to be a senior operational terrorist who was plotting attacks against Americans and whose capture in a remote part of Yemen was unfeasible. A legal review by the Justice Department determined that it was lawful to kill him.

A C.I.A. drone launched from a secret base in Saudi Arabia killed Mr. Awlaki in a remote part of Yemen in September 2011. Also killed in that strike was Samir Khan, an American of Pakistani descent who was the publisher of Inspire, Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula’s Internet magazine.

Two weeks later, another drone strike in Yemen killed Abdulrahman al-Awlaki, Mr. Awlaki’s 16-year old son. American officials have said the teenager was killed by mistake.

More recently, senior Obama administration officials debated whether to kill another suspected American Qaeda operative, Mohanad Mahmoud Al Farekh, who had been hiding in Pakistan’s tribal areas. Senior officials at both the C.I.A. and the Pentagon urged that Mr. Farekh be killed in a drone strike, arguing that he had become a senior operational leader in the organization and was responsible for developing roadside bombs that were killing American troops in Afghanistan.

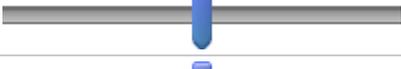
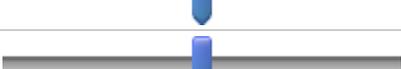
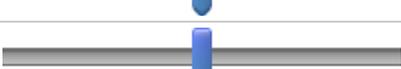
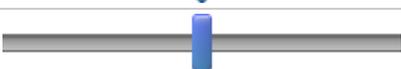
But some administration lawyers pushed back, questioning whether Mr. Farekh posed an imminent threat to the United States and whether he was as significant an operative inside Al Qaeda as the C.I.A. and Pentagon made him out to be.

Mr. Farekh was ultimately arrested by Pakistani security forces last year, based on intelligence provided by the C.I.A.

He was turned over to the United States, and now faces trial in Brooklyn.

**Please respond to the story you just read. Please answer the questions by moving the sliders to the appropriate numbers.**

	Strongly Disagree		Neutral		Strongly Agree		
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

This story is fair. ()	
This story is unbiased. ()	
This story is accurate. ()	
This story respects people's privacy. ()	
This story watches after the readers' interests. ()	
This story separates fact from opinion. ()	
This story can be trusted. ()	
This story is more concerned about the public interest than creating profits. ()	
This story is factual. ()	
This story is opinionated. ()	
This story was written by a well-trained reporter. ()	

Page Break

Obama Comp 1 The secret base mentioned in the story above is located in:

- Saudi Arabia (1)
  - Benghazi (2)
  - Utah (3)
  - Iraq (4)
- 

Obama Comp 2 According to this story, who was deliberately targeted by the drone strike?

- Osama Bin Ladin (1)
  - Anwar Al-Awlaki (2)
  - Samyung Kim (3)
  - Felipe Lopez (4)
- 

Obama Comp 3 According to this story, Mohanad Mahmoud Al Farekh faces trial where?

- Chicago (1)
- Yemen (2)
- Brooklyn (3)
- New Orleans (4)

End of Block: Lib 2 Reading

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Start of Block: Con 1 Reading

### Reading 3

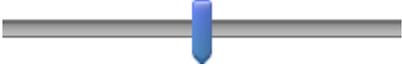
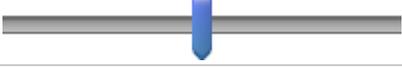
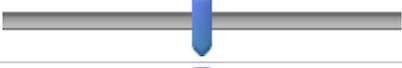
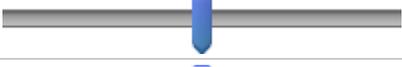
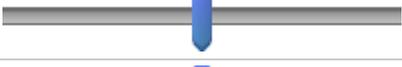
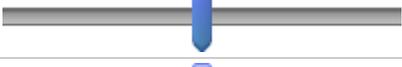
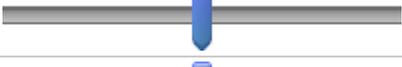
Please read the following story carefully and answer the questions that follow:

**Nebraska Senator Raises Issue of Donald Trump's Sexual Affairs** Senator Ben Sasse of Nebraska reeled off a stream of Twitter messages going after Donald J. Trump on Monday night,

questioning the candidate’s flip-flopping on gun rights and health care policy, his expansive view of presidential power – and his well-publicized history of bedroom exploits. Mr. Sasse, a first-term lawmaker with close ties to the elite conservative intelligentsia, delivered a 19-tweet critique of Mr. Trump, framed as a series of questions to the Republican about his inconstant views on issues of substance. His fourth question, however, raised Mr. Trump’s “many affairs w/ married women.” “Have you repented?” Mr. Sasse asked. “To harmed children & spouses? Do you think it matters?” Mr. Trump has described himself often in the past as a man of Don Juan-like romantic charisma, and has detailed his sexual adventures in some detail in media interviews. He has not emphasized that part of his life experience in running for president, stressing instead his love for his wife and children, and his reverence for the Bible. By questioning Mr. Trump’s view of marriage and the family, Mr. Sasse, whose state neighbors Iowa, is injecting an issue into the race that has gone almost unmentioned by activists and party leaders. Iowa’s Republican voters have typically gravitated toward candidates who emphasize their religious identities and support for traditional family values. So far, leading Christian activists, including leaders in Iowa, have largely avoided raising Mr. Trump’s personal life in the campaign. And Jerry Falwell Jr., the president of Liberty University, an evangelical bastion, praised Mr. Trump in lavish terms at an event there on Martin Luther King’s Birthday when the candidate gave the convocation. In his Twitter spree, Mr. Sasse acknowledged that Mr. Trump has dominated the presidential race on the Republican side. Mr. Trump, he said, was “very talented” and the “likely next POTUS.”

**Please respond to the story you just read. Please answer the questions by moving the sliders to the appropriate numbers.**

	Strongly Disagree		Neutral		Strongly Agree		
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

This story is fair. ()	
This story is unbiased. ()	
This story is accurate. ()	
This story respects people's privacy. ()	
This story watches after the readers' interests. ()	
This story separates fact from opinion. ()	
This story can be trusted. ()	
This story is more concerned about the public interest than creating profits. ()	
This story is factual. ()	
This story is opinionated. ()	
This story was written by a well-trained reporter. ()	

---

Page Break

Sasse Comp 1 How many tweets did Senator Sasse send out according to the story above?

- 1 (1)
  - 22 (2)
  - 19 (3)
  - 8 (4)
- 

Sasse Comp 2 According to the story, how many terms has Sasse served?

- He is a first term Senator. (1)
  - 2 (2)
  - 3 (3)
  - 4 (4)
- 

Sasse Comp 3 According to the story, Trump was "praised in lavish terms" by whom?

- Dick Van Dyke (1)
- Bob Dole (2)
- Jerry Falwell, Jr. (3)
- George W. Bush (4)

End of Block: Con 1 Reading

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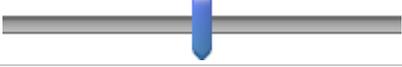
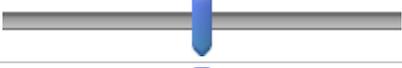
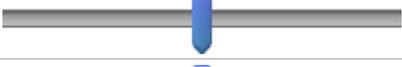
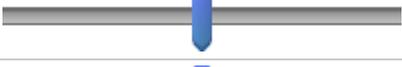
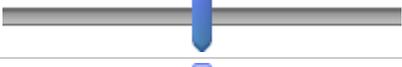
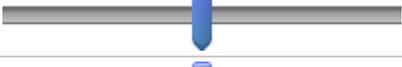
Start of Block: Con 2 Reading

Reading 4 *Please read the following story carefully and answer the questions that follow:*

**Nancy Reagan's Last Words: 'Do Not Vote for Donald Trump'** LOS ANGELES, Calif. – Former first lady Nancy Reagan, who died on March 6 at the age of 94, remained mentally alert “until the very end,” according to a private nurse, who told reporters Mrs. Reagan’s last words to

her were, “Do not vote for Donald Trump.” “She watched all the [GOP] debates,” said the nurse, identified as Althea Thoone. “She was very alert and kept up with all the news and current events, especially about the election. She said no true Republican would cast a vote for Donald Trump.” “She was not happy at all because I don’t believe she thought Donald Trump was a real Republican. She took a turn for the worse after the [11th] debate when he started talking about his private parts, and all that other nonsense about Mitt Romney getting down on his knees.” During the debate held on March 4, Trump responded to Romney’s public attack against him by saying, “He was begging for my endorsement. I could have said, ‘Mitt, drop to your knees.’ He would have dropped to his knees.” Trump also alluded to the size of his penis during the debate, responding to a joke about the size of his hands told by Florida Sen. Marco Rubio. The so-called 11th Commandment, Thou Shalt Not Speak Ill of Another Republican, once espoused by Ronald Reagan, now seems to be a relic from the past, when a kinder, gentler political sensibility existed in Washington, at least between members of the same party. “He broke that commandment, and a few others too, as far as I’m concerned,” said Thoone, who became somewhat of a confidant to Mrs. Reagan in her last years. “She remembered that crack he made about her not being ‘very beautiful’ too.” “I wouldn’t say Donald Trump caused her to pass, because that’s up to the Lord, but he certainly didn’t help any. She couldn’t believe what she was seeing and hearing up there. She would just look over to me and shake her head.” Thoone reports that Mrs. Reagan hoped to attend at least one of the GOP debates, but the strain of travel and her advanced age prevented such a trip. She was happy to see George H.W. Bush and former first lady Barbara at the Feb. 25 debate, says Thoone. Mrs. Reagan’s last public appearance was on July 6, 2015, at her 94th birthday celebration. **Please respond to the story you just read. Please answer the questions by moving the sliders to the appropriate numbers.**

	Strongly Disagree		Neutral		Strongly Agree		
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

This story is fair. ()	
This story is unbiased. ()	
This story is accurate. ()	
This story respects people's privacy. ()	
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This story is factual. ()	
This story is opinionated. ()	
This story was written by a well-trained reporter. ()	

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Page Break

Nancy Comp 1 The 11th Commandment as described above, refers to what?

- Republicans should not talk poorly of the poor (1)
  - Republicans should always attack democrats (2)
  - Republicans should not steal (3)
  - Republicans should not speak poorly of other republicans (4)
- 

Nancy Comp 2 According to the story, the nurse who was quoted is named:

- Sally Sitwell (1)
  - Althea Thoone (2)
  - Dorothy Gale (3)
  - Melvin Thompson (4)
- 

Nancy Comp 3 According to the story, Nancy Reagan gave her last public appearance at what age?

- 110 (1)
  - 87 (2)
  - 53 (3)
  - 94 (4)
- 

Page Break

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End of Block: Con 2 Reading

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Start of Block: Political Alignment

AlignmentIntro This section will ask you questions about your political preferences. Please select the choice that best fits you.

---

Q11 How much do you care about politics?

Not At All          Somewhat          A great deal  
0   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

I care about politics: ()



Q12 Politically, I identify most as being:

- Very Conservative (1)
  - Somewhat Conservative (2)
  - Moderate (3)
  - Somewhat Liberal (4)
  - Very Liberal (5)
-

Q13 In terms of political party, I identify MOST as being:

- Strongly Republican (1)
  - Somewhat Republican (2)
  - Independent (3)
  - Somewhat Democrat (4)
  - Strongly Democrat (5)
  - Other Political Party (Please Write In) (6)
- 

-----

Q31 ONLY ANSWER IF YOU SELECTED "OTHER" ABOVE.

- I strongly identify with my party. (1)
- I somewhat identify with my party. (2)

**End of Block: Political Alignment**

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**Start of Block: Political Social Identification**

Q14 This section will also ask questions as they pertain to your political party. Please respond by moving the sliders to the appropriate number.

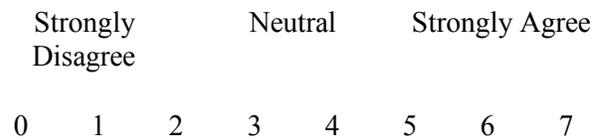
				Strongly Disagree		Neutral		Strongly Agree				
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7					

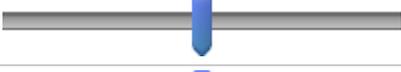
When someone criticizes my political party, it feels like a personal insult. ()	
When i talk about my party, I usually say "we" rather than "they." ()	
If a story in the media praised my party, I would feel proud. ()	
My party's successes are my successes: ()	
If a story in the media criticized my party, I would be upset. ()	
I act like a member of my party to a great extent. ()	
When someone praises my party, it feels like a personal compliment: ()	

End of Block: Political Social Identification

Start of Block: Media Literacy

Q15 This section will ask about your opinions regarding news stories. Please respond by moving the sliders to the appropriate numbers.



It is better when news stories don't include the opinion of the journalist who produced the story. ()	
It is better when quotes in a news story are attributed to specific people. ()	
News stories are better when they are written in a way that intends to influence audiences' perceptions. ()	
News stories are better when they are written in a way that makes the news more exciting. ()	
Audiences can be manipulated by the news media. ()	
Audiences will pay more attention to news that is exciting than to news that is not. ()	
Audiences tend to pay more attention to news that fits with their beliefs than news that does not. ()	
News companies choose stories based on what will attract the biggest audience. ()	
News companies design news so that it will make the news more exciting. ()	
News production techniques can be used to influence audiences' attitudes. ()	

End of Block: Media Literacy

Start of Block: Demographic Questions

DemoIntro Finally, please answer these questions about your personal background. Please select the options that best describe you.

Q1 What is your biological sex?

Male (1)

Female (2)

Q2 What is your age?

▼ 18-20 (1) ... 80+ (14)

Q3 To the best of your ability, indicate your race/ethnicity.

- Black or African-American (1)
- Asian or Asian American (2)
- White or Caucasian (3)
- American Indian/Alaska Native (4)
- Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (5)
- Other (6)

Q6 If you marked "Other" above, please specify your race/ethnicity:

\_\_\_\_\_

Q7 Are you Hispanic or Latino/a?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q8 What is the highest level of formal education you have attained?

- No high school diploma (1)
- High School diploma (2)
- Some college (3)
- Associate's degree (4)
- Bachelor's degree (5)
- Some graduate school (6)
- Master's degree (7)
- Doctoral or terminal degree (8)

---

Q9 Please list the degrees (if any) that you hold.

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---

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Q10 I presently work or have worked a full-time or part-time job in journalism/media OR I have worked/am working in an internship in journalism/media. Please check all that apply (this includes student publications):

- Full time (at least 40 hours a week) (1)
- Part time (less than 40 hours a week) (2)
- Internship (3)
- I do not/have not worked in journalism or media (4)

---

Page Break

#### Ending Message

The survey you just completed was designed to measure how political identification affects the perceived credibility of real and fake news stories. Two of the stories you just read were taken from satirical news sites and are not true ("Obama To Pardon Hillary Clinton for Benghazi; Emailgate, Sources Say" and "Nancy Reagan's Last Words: Do Not Vote for Donald Trump"). Two of the news stories were taken from legitimate newspapers and are about true events ("Killing of Americans Deepens Debate Over Use of Drone Strikes" and "Nebraska Senator Raises Issues of Donald Trump's Sexual Affairs").

This survey also tested participants for media literacy in an effort to determine whether expected political biases toward the stories presented could be mitigated by higher levels of media understanding.

Thank you again for your participation in this survey. Be sure you enter this code into the mTurk box in order to be compensated for your time. If you have questions about this research you may contact Wade Leonard at [whleonard@crimson.ua.edu](mailto:whleonard@crimson.ua.edu).

**Your Code: `{e//Field/mTurkCode}`**

## APPENDIX II: IRB APPROVAL



December 1, 2016

Wade Leonard  
Journalism  
CCIS  
Box 870172

Re: IRB#: 16-OR-403 "Social Identity, Fake News, & Media Literacy"

Dear Mr. Leonard:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research.

Your application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. You have also been granted the requested waiver of informed consent for the use of concealment and for written documentation of informed consent. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies

Your application will expire on November 28, 2017. If your research will continue beyond this date, complete the relevant portions of the IRB Renewal Application. If you wish to modify the application, complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol Form. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. When the study closes, complete the appropriate portions of the IRB Request for Study Closure Form.

Please use reproductions of the IRB approved stamped consent forms to obtain consent from your participants.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

  
Stuart Usdan, PhD  
Chair, Non-Medical Institutional Review Board

358 Rose Administration Building | Box 870127 | Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0127  
205-348-8461 | Fax 205-348-7189 | Toll Free 1-877-820-3066

IRB Project #: 16-02-403

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS  
REQUEST FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

I. Identifying Information

Principal Investigator      Second Investigator      Third Investigator  
Names: Wade Leonard  
Department: Journalism and Creative Media  
College: Communication and Information Sciences  
University: The University of Alabama  
Address: 818 4th Ave. S Columbus, MS 39701  
Telephone: 662-425-7377  
FAX:  
E-mail: whleonard@crimson.ua.edu

Title of Research Project: Social Identity, Fake News & Media Literacy

Date Submitted: 8-19-2016  
Funding Source:

Type of Proposal  New     Revision     Renewal     Completed     Exempt  
Please attach a renewal application  
Please attach a continuing review of studies form  
Please enter the original IRB # at the top of the page

UA faculty or staff member signature: \_\_\_\_\_

II. NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION (to be completed by IRB)

Type of Review: \_\_\_\_\_ Full board     Expedited

IRB Action:

\_\_\_\_ Rejected      Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_ Tabled Pending Revisions      Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_ Approved Pending Revisions      Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Approved-this proposal complies with University and federal regulations for the protection of human subjects.

Approval is effective until the following date:  
Items approved:  Research protocol (dated \_\_\_\_\_)  
 Informed consent (dated \_\_\_\_\_)  
\_\_\_\_ Recruitment materials (dated \_\_\_\_\_)  
 Other: *UNAVOID FOR* (dated \_\_\_\_\_)  
*circulation & written doc*

Approval signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: 12-1-16

You are being asked to take part in a research study. The study is being conducted by Wade Leonard, a graduate student at the University of Alabama. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to read four different items, respond to those items, and complete a short survey. This survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. To compensate you for your participation, you will receive payment of 25 cents (\$.25) after successfully completing the survey. This research is non-sensitive in nature, and thus we do not anticipate any risk to you as a result of your participation. You are free to discontinue your participation at any point. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. It is your free choice, and you can refuse to be in it at all. The individual data you provide here will not be shared with any other person or persons. No identifying information will be collected; as such, the researchers will not be able to associate your name with any of the information you provide.

If you have questions at any time, please feel free to ask. You may contact the researcher, the researcher's faculty advisor, the Institutional Review Board (the "IRB") or the research compliance officer at the information below. The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board protects the rights of people in research studies. The IRB may review study records from time to time to be sure people in research studies are being treated fairly and that the study is being carried out as planned.

Wade Leonard – student researcher  
Graduate student  
Department of Journalism & Creative Media  
The University of Alabama  
Tuscaloosa, AL 35487  
E-mail: [whleonard@crimson.ua.edu](mailto:whleonard@crimson.ua.edu)

Dr. Wilson Lowrey – faculty advisor  
Professor  
Department of Journalism  
The University of Alabama  
Tuscaloosa, AL 35487  
Email: [wlowrey@bama.ua.edu](mailto:wlowrey@bama.ua.edu)  
Phone: (205) 348-8608

If you have questions about your rights as a person in a research study, call Ms. Tanta Myles, the Research Compliance Officer of the University, at 205-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066.

You may also ask questions, make suggestions, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach website at [http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO\\_Welcome.html](http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html) or email the Research Compliance office at [participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu](mailto:participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu). After you participate, you are encouraged to complete the survey for research participants that is online at the outreach website or you may ask the investigator for a copy of it and mail it to the University Office for Research

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IRB  
CONSENT FORM APPROVED: 11/29/14  
EXPIRATION DATE: 11/28/2017

**Compliance, Box 870127, 358 Rose Administration Building, Tuscaloosa, AL  
35487-0127.**

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IRB  
CONSENT FORM APPROVED: 11/29/14  
EXPIRATION DATE: 11/28/2017