



SOCIAL MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY RESEARCH GROUP

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM & MASS COMMUNICATION

“TALKING ABOUT THE MEDIA:
INFLUENCES OF POLITICAL BLOGS ON
SENSE-MAKING PROCESSES”

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AEJMC '08 - BLOGGING POLITICS

Experimental studies

- The scene: fictitious news story embedded in a blog
- Research design
 - Manipulated blogger’s civility, partisan stance, and text structure
 - N=877 (students); N=379 (adult blog readers)
 - Topic: Global climate change policy

Experiments: Key research areas

- Effects of blog commentary on evaluations of embedded news stories
- Effects of blog structure on information processing
- Effects of incivility on emotional responses and democratic attitudes

Effects on news credibility

- Impact of blog commentary on credibility ratings of the news story
 - News story appears more credible when embedded in uncivil blogger commentary
 - Judgments of news credibility related to judgments of blog credibility when blogger is uncivil and unlikeminded
- (Thorson, Vraga, & Ekdale, 2008)

Structure and processing

- Effects of structure based on motivation to process
 - Ideological incongruence and need for cognition
 - When structure is interspersed, people with low motivation to process unable to correctly identify source of information
- (Vraga, Edgerly, Wang, & Shah, 2008)

Incivility and democratic attitudes

- Effects of uncivil blog commentary on attitudes toward the “other side”
 - Uncivil blog commentary produced negative emotions among attacked readers
 - Negative emotions mediated effect of manipulations on open-mindedness, attitude certainty and willingness to talk to the other side
- (Hwang, Borah, Namkoong, & Veenstra, 2008)

Group identification and polarization

- Building on previous...
 - uncivil messages provoke negative emotional responses among partisans
- Investigate links to group identification and polarization
 - being attacked produced polarization
 - attackers less likely to avoid identification with outgroup (decreasing polarization)
- (Thorson, Fung, & Vraga, 2008)