



Media use and political learning: Comparing Trump supporters to celebrity candidate voters

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ABSTRACT

This study examines whether political media use behaviors of voters who supported Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election align with those of “celebrity candidate voters” portrayed in the literature. The study used a national online survey ($N = 1,608$) conducted during the 2016 primary, and findings reveal that Trump supporters, more than other voters, are driven by entertainment motivations and follow campaign news using entertainment media: specifically, the video-sharing site YouTube. Although Trump voters are interested in the campaign, their level of political knowledge is lower than other voters, and no one media outlet made a significant contribution to their learning. A comparison group of other voters showed significant knowledge gains from news websites and Twitter. Results for Trump voters are consistent with scholars’ characterization of the celebrity candidate audience, particularly in studies suggesting that celebrity politicians may increase citizens’ engagement through entertainment gratifications rather than by a desire to become informed.

Celebrity politicians have been a part of the U.S. political landscape since the mid-20th century, when television accentuated the importance of personality and media presence for those seeking public office (Lawrence & Boydston, 2017; Ribke, 2015; Wheeler, 2013). But in 2016, the candidacy of political novice Donald Trump, a reality television star and billionaire businessman running for president, captured a degree of support for a presidential celebrity contender not seen since the candidacy of Ronald Reagan, a former Hollywood actor but also a two-term governor of California.

Scholars who study the phenomenon of the celebrity candidate and its influence on voters point to several factors that explain a celebrity’s success: familiarity, authenticity, and the capacity to attract the politically disaffected: those citizens who may not ordinarily pay attention to campaigns, learn about issues, or feel confident in their ability to participate (Hall, Goldstein, & Ingram, 2016; McKernan, 2011; Van Zoonen, 2004; Wheeler, 2013). Although essays and case studies in the literature explore the function of “celebrity politics” in democratic society, few projects have empirically examined those who vote for celebrities in actual elections and the way in which these voters use the media. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to employ concepts from communication theory to explore whether the media use behaviors of Trump voters align with the portrayal of celebrity candidate voters in the literature. Do Trump supporters behave like other celebrity candidate voters? Are they less interested in the campaign than other voters, as some celebrity politics scholars would posit? What are the motivations that underlie their media use, and which outlets do they choose? This study also examines communication outcomes related to motivations and media use, such as thinking about political news, learning about the campaign, and feeling confident in one’s political knowledge.

By examining these questions, this study aims to expand our understanding of the concept of the celebrity candidate voter. In addition, by using concepts that intersect the celebrity politics and communication literatures, we can explore whether Trump voters' media behaviors follow established theoretical lines and can be understood within those frameworks, or whether the 2016 election presents an alternative context in which to consider media engagement. Taken together, the larger purpose of this study is to answer the call of scholars (e.g., Becker, 2013; Lawrence & Boydston, 2017; Wheeler, 2013) for more research that investigates the social impact of celebrity involvement in the political process and specifically helps us to understand how celebrity presence might affect the ideal of an informed electorate in a participatory democracy.

Literature review

Celebrity politicians and their audiences

A celebrity is a famous individual who has “glamour or notorious status” (Rojek, 2001, p. 10) and a personality created by the media (Louw, 2005; McKernan, 2011). The key characteristic is not a specific achievement or skill, but fame itself: a celebrity is “a person who is known for his well-knownness” (Boorstin, 1961, p. 57), and who orchestrates and receives media attention to build and maintain that level of fame (Hall et al., 2016; Ribke, 2015; Turner, 2004). To achieve popularity and legitimacy, celebrities must “master a performance” that makes them seem ordinary and unique at the same time (McKernan, 2011, p. 197; Van Zoonen, 2004)—ordinary enough to be perceived, and trusted, like a friend; unique enough to be elevated to star status. Celebrities in politics can be either “celebrity politicians” or “political celebrities” (Street, 2004). Celebrity politicians are entertainers first (e.g., Arnold Schwarzenegger, Al Franken, Jesse Ventura, Clint Eastwood), whereas political celebrities attain their fame through their political status. This latter category includes political legacies (Jeb and George W. Bush) and elected officials (Barack Obama and Sarah Palin), who are especially adept at using media tools to construct a celebrity persona (Wheeler, 2013).

Scholars have expanded upon Street's (2004) definition of “celebrity politician” to more fully describe elected officials who retain their entertainment personas. These politicians use their star status to enter the political world but continue “to operate by the rules of entertainment more than those of politics” (Lawrence & Boydston, 2017, p. 50). Examples include Jesse Ventura (Schultz, 2001) and Donald Trump (Hall et al., 2016), who, after winning their elections, behaved more as entertainers than as conventional politicians, such as Ronald Reagan or Al Franken, who “rebranded themselves” once they ran for office (Lawrence & Boydston, 2017). Schultz (2001) called a politician in this subcategory a “politainer,” a public figure who regularly delivers a compelling media sideshow and, at the same time, is held to a different standard of behavior—not of public servant but of comic actor or professional wrestler, as was the case for Ventura. “The public allows a politainer to ‘get away with’ behavior that falls within expected parameters of that particular politainer's persona” (Schultz, 2001, p. 368) precisely because the official is entertaining and well known for that behavior (Hall et al., 2016). When a professional wrestler is vulgar, he is authentic, and the public trusts that performance and that candidate (Schultz, 2001). And because the performance is entertaining, the public is compelled to watch.

As part of the explication of celebrity politicians, scholars have described the voters who help make these candidacies possible. Whereas news accounts offer demographic profiles of these voters (Thompson, 2016), there are few empirical academic studies that have examined relationships that incorporate their communication behaviors, such as political interest and media use. Three such studies, based on probability samples of voters in the Philippines, show celebrity candidate voters to have significantly less education and political interest and to follow news media significantly less than voters for noncelebrity candidates (David & Atun, 2015; David & Legara, 2015; David & San Pascual, 2016). Several scholars using cultural analyses have presented arguments that align with these findings: They consider celebrity candidate audiences to be generally lower in political interest,

sophistication and participation (Gabler, 2000; Turner, 2004; West & Orman, 2003). Celebrity presence in an election campaign is troubling to these scholars: They have asserted that the main draw of the celebrity politician is spectacle and hype rather than civic discourse (Kellner, 2010) and that the main provider of these candidates is not the sphere of public policy or service but the entertainment media industry, particularly television, film, and popular music (Ribke, 2015).

Other theorists, however, see celebrities as a positive force that can generate political interest (Nisbett & DeWalt, 2016), invigorate campaigns with new ideas, recruit the disaffected, and promote political efficacy (Street, 2004; Wheeler, 2013). Celebrity candidates appeal to voters' "affective intelligence" by creating an emotional attachment to politics for citizens via entertainment (McKernan, 2011; Van Zoonen, 2004). Still others have suggested that celebrities can engage voters by positioning themselves as "outsider" candidates, providing an "authentic" alternative to the political, and the politically correct, establishment (Becker, 2018; Marsh, 'T Hart, & Tindall, 2010; Schultz, 2001; Wells et al., 2016).

Research also shows that the familiarity of a celebrity can function as shorthand information for busy citizens, much like the heuristic of a political party. Zwarun and Torrey (2011) found politically interested voters to be just as likely to support a celebrity candidate as those who are less interested and suggested that voters use common knowledge of the celebrity's personal background to help form a deliberative judgment about the celebrity as a candidate. Ribke (2015) extended this analysis beyond the individual celebrity and suggested the performance *genre* from which a celebrity acquires fame can also function as a "cognitive device" for interested voters. In a case study of a reality television star elected to the legislature in Brazil, Ribke pointed to this politician's authenticity, and the "genuine" nature of reality TV, as the reason for his electoral success. When voters see a celebrity interact in the "reality" genre, they learn information about the candidate beyond either simple name recognition or personal tidbits about the celebrity: They observe the celebrity's behavior in seemingly "real" situations.

In sum, most scholars believe that people who vote for celebrity candidates are not particularly interested in politics, and if they are, the interest is driven by an emotional or entertainment need. At the same time, some of these theorists assert that the familiarity of the celebrities themselves, and the genres in which they perform, can provide candidate character information to interested citizens. Others add that celebrity candidates can boost voters' interest and sense of efficacy in the political process. Several researchers (David & Atun, 2015; David & Legara, 2015; McKernan, 2011) have called for more empirical investigation of this audience.

It is important to note that celebrity politicians represent a range of ideological viewpoints and personal characteristics, and any one study about a celebrity candidate cannot make a general claim about these politicians or their voters. Rather, researchers in this area analyze a particular celebrity election and compare it to studies across different contexts (see Ribke, 2015). This study follows suit and proposes a series of research questions that specifically focus on Trump voters as they compare to other voters in 2016; findings are then compared to the portrayal of celebrity candidate voters found in the extant literature. This study's first research question examines campaign interest; prior research reveals mixed findings regarding the level of political interest held by supporters of celebrity candidates. To examine Trump voters in 2016, this study asks the following:

RQ1: How interested in the 2016 presidential campaign are Trump voters? How does this compare with other voters' political interest during the campaign?

Media use motivations and political engagement outcomes

Next, this study considers how established concepts from the mass communication literature, such as media use and political knowledge, might apply to a celebrity candidate audience. In particular, we

examine media use motivations, political media use, news elaboration, political information efficacy, and learning about the campaign from the media.

Motivations and political media use

The uses-and-gratifications approach offers a framework to classify motivations that drive political media use (Blumler & Katz, 1974; Katz, Gurevitch, & Haas, 1973; Rubin, 1984). Scholars have divided these motivations into two categories based on the extent to which they are “instrumental” in solving problems and reducing voters’ uncertainty regarding public affairs (Atkin, 1973). Instrumental uses include surveillance of the political environment, vote guidance, reinforcement of decisions, and anticipated use in social situations. Noninstrumental motivations include diversion and entertainment, and during a campaign refer to enjoying the excitement of the election race (McLeod & Becker, 1981) and following news because it’s fun or humorous (Baym, 2010; Hmielowski, Holbert, & Lee, 2011).

Applied to the celebrity politics literature, there is a clear connection between noninstrumental motivations and the entertainment interests ascribed to the celebrity candidate audience. At the same time, these voters may also be interested in politics and use “low-information rationality” (Popkin, 1994) and cognitive shortcuts found in entertainment news (Baum, 2003) to evaluate personal characteristics of candidates, which could be considered surveillance or vote guidance. Although most uses-and-gratifications researchers assume political news audiences are actively involved news seekers, others (Kanihan & Kinsey, 1997; Ruggiero, 2000) suggest that news audiences can be more passive yet still interested. This lower level of involvement may fit with either the “low-information” instrumental uses or the entertainment motivations of the celebrity candidate supporter.

Citizens can get political information in a variety of ways, and this study focuses on the sources people use most frequently to acquire current campaign news. Using the Pew Research Center State of the News Media (2015) report, along with recent literature (Johnson & Kaye, 2015; Muralidharan & Sung, 2016), the top sources were identified as television news, print newspapers, radio, news websites (such as USA Today.com, CNN.com, and Huffington Post), television advertising, online advertising, and social media (Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube). Lee (2013) categorized these sources by the audience motivations to which they correspond and found that information motivations were strong predictors of use for television news, newspapers, and news websites and that entertainment motivations were strong predictors of using social media, such as Twitter and Facebook. Integrating these findings with the celebrity politics literature, which emphasizes that audiences of celebrity politicians are accustomed to following these stars on television and film, this study’s next questions explore whether Trump voters follow these motivational and media patterns and use the more entertainment-oriented sources, such as television and visual social media, to acquire political news.

RQ2: What motivations drive media use for Trump voters? Do they follow the campaign more for entertainment purposes than other voters do in 2016?

RQ3: Where do Trump voters get their political news, compared with other voters in 2016? Are they more likely to use entertainment-oriented visual media than other voters?

Political campaign knowledge, elaboration, and political information efficacy

The connection between political media use and acquisition of factual knowledge is well documented in the literature, both for traditional news media (Chaffee & Kanihan, 1997; Drew & Weaver, 1998; Prior, 2003), and online news (Groshek & Dimitrova, 2011; Shehata & Stromback, 2018; Xenos & Moy, 2007). Other studies have indicated that campaign advertisements, which often run alongside news content, can be a predictor of knowledge (Muralidharan & Sung, 2016; Zhao & Chaffee, 1995),

particularly for those who are the least politically aware (Patterson & McClure, 1976; Valentino, Hutchings, & Williams, 2004).

More recently, in studies investigating whether citizens learn about politics from social media, results have been mixed. Bode (2016) reports modest but significant political knowledge effects for Twitter users but not for those using Facebook. Other scholars report social media use has no effect on political learning (Edgerly, Thorson, & Wells, 2018; Shehata & Stromback, 2018), but it does influence offline political participation (Dimitrova, Shehata, Stromback, & Nord, 2014) and online political engagement (Gil De Zuñiga & Liu, 2017; Oeldorf-Hirsch, 2018). Other studies indicate that social media, including video-sharing sites such as YouTube, are used more for entertainment purposes (Towner & Dulio, 2011), which could account for the limited knowledge effects reported by these studies. Given the literature suggesting celebrity candidate voters' propensity to use entertainment media to follow politics, and equivocal findings on whether entertainment media influence political learning (see also Baum, 2003; Oeldorf-Hirsch, 2018; Prior, 2003), this study investigates how much Trump voters, compared to others, are learning about the campaign.

Scholars who have examined the relationship between media motivation, campaign news use, and public affairs knowledge have located a mediating variable called elaboration, defined as the "process of connecting new information to other information stored in memory" (Eveland, 2001, p. 572). During a campaign, this may include thinking about election news and relating that coverage to past experiences. Studies that use this framework, known as the cognitive mediation model, indicate that surveillance and vote guidance motivations are most likely to be associated with elaboration, and elaboration is a predictor of learning (Eveland, 2001; Eveland, Shah, & Kwak, 2003). Although our purpose is not to test the cognitive mediation model with the celebrity candidate audience, we do want to examine the extent to which celebrity candidate voters think about, or elaborate upon, election campaign news. The literature suggests they are more likely to have entertainment motivations, yet this has not been empirically examined, and if their interest in campaign news is heightened by the presence of a celebrity, and we are investigating learning, we do want to consider whether this group is thinking about the media they may be consuming.

Political information efficacy is a concept used to examine the degree of confidence citizens have in their political knowledge (Kaid, McKinney, & Tedesco, 2007) and is used in political socialization studies to gauge the sufficiency that newcomers, such as young voters, have to engage the political process, particularly to vote. It has been linked to exposure of political news and advertising, both traditional and online (Geers, Bos, & De Vreese, 2017; Kaid et al., 2007; Muralidharan & Sung, 2016). Researchers have also found positive relationships between social media use and political information efficacy, when people simultaneously use social media while watching campaign news on TV (Chadwick, O'Loughlin, & Vaccari, 2017; Nee & Dozier, 2015). The celebrity politics literature has suggested that this efficacy-building process may be at work for disaffected citizens who are brought into politics because of a celebrity candidate (Wheeler, 2013). That is, the presence of a celebrity candidate may increase the confidence a supporter has in the political process and in the knowledge he or she has acquired. Considering these political knowledge concepts alongside the celebrity candidate literature, within the context of the 2016 presidential campaign, this study proposes these next research questions:

RQ4: How do Trump voters compare with other voters when it comes to political knowledge? To what extent are Trump voters thinking about, or elaborating upon, campaign news? Do they know more, or less, than other voters about campaign issues?

RQ5: How confident are Trump voters in their political knowledge? Is their level of political information efficacy different than non-Trump voters?

RQ6: From which news sources do Trump voters learn about politics? Do these sources differ from those that contribute to knowledge for other voters?

Although there are many theoretical accounts of campaigns that include celebrity politicians, larger scale social science investigations are few. Taken together, the answers to the preceding research questions should provide an empirically based communication depiction of a sizable group of citizens during the 2016 presidential primary campaign: those who support Donald Trump. To better understand the media behaviors of this group, we compare it to a group of non-Trump supporters and then put these findings into context within the celebrity politics literature. Democratic theorists concerned with the ideal of an informed electorate have called for additional research to answer the question “Who is using what type of news and why?” (Lee, 2013, p. 313). The “who” in our study is the Trump voter, and the “why” is their purpose, or motivation. To this question we would add, “And with what political learning effect?”

Method

To gather data for this investigation, a national survey of U.S. citizens ($N = 1,608$) was conducted during the 2016 presidential primary campaign, in which Donald Trump was one of several candidates. Cross-sectional data were gathered in three waves during a 10-week period before the Super Tuesday election on March 1, 2016: December 16–17 ($n = 546$), January 28–29 ($n = 529$), and February 27–29 ($n = 533$). Collecting data at multiple time points provides a more comprehensive view of campaign communication behavior than a single survey (Tewksbury, 2006), and the run-up to Super Tuesday offers a high-profile election context: “the most consequential and dramatic of the [primary] period” (Tewksbury, 2006, p. 326). Respondents were recruited using Amazon Mechanical Turk (Mturk), an online labor market of several thousand individuals shown to be comparable in demographic, geographic, and occupational characteristics to national samples used by professional survey research firms (Huff & Tingley, 2015). Although not fully representative of the U.S. population, Mturk samples have greater diversity than student subject pools (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011; Chandler & Shapiro, 2016; Paolacci, Chandler, & Ipeirotis, 2010) and produce data that meet or exceed “the psychometric standards associated with published research” (Buhrmester et al., 2011, p. 5).

During our three data collection periods, a notification and Qualtrics survey link were posted on Mturk and the “qualification requirements” were set to make the survey available to U.S. participants with a “task” approval rate of 95% or greater. For the January and February waves, a qualification was set to prevent those who had taken the survey previously from taking it again. Respondents took on average 12 min to complete the questionnaire and received \$0.50 for their participation. Completion rate for this web-based survey ($N = 1,608$) is 48.4%, which is the number of respondents who provided usable data divided by the total number who opened the survey link. To maintain consistency in question wording about the primary campaign over the three waves of data collection, all respondents were from states with an election not yet held; therefore, during Wave 3 (late February) participants were filtered out if they lived in Iowa, New Hampshire, Nevada, and South Carolina.

Description of sample

Mturk samples often have a higher percentage of men (57%–59%) and are younger in age ($M = 33$ –35 years) than the U.S. population (Chandler & Shapiro, 2016). To improve age and gender representation, quota sampling was used within Qualtrics based on U.S. Census categories, and age and gender filter questions were placed at the beginning of the questionnaire. The quotas yielded a more representative sample: Respondents were 48% male, and their median age category was 35 to 39 years, comparable to U.S. Census figures ($Mdn = 49\%$ male and 37 years). Demographic and political characteristics did not significantly differ for respondents across the three waves of data collection; therefore, responses were combined into one data set for analysis. Comparing the three waves, no significant differences were found with regard to gender, $\chi^2(2, N = 1,608) = .46, p = .80$;

age category, $\chi^2(16, N = 1,608) = 23.89, p = .09$; education level, $\chi^2(12, N = 1,604) = 11.65, p = .47$; political party identification, $F(2, 1600) = 1.44, p = .24$; or political ideology, $F(2, 1600) = .24, p = .79$.

Measures

Campaign news motivations

Information-driven news motivations were measured with six questions adapted from political uses and gratifications studies (Eveland, 2001; Eveland et al., 2003). Entertainment-driven news motivations were measured with three questions adapted from hedonic and entertainment scales (McLeod & Becker, 1981; Oliver & Raney, 2011). Each began with “I follow news about the presidential campaign” and had a 7-point response scale from *not at all* to *very much*. The nine items are shown in Table 1, along with results of a factor analysis, which yielded two motivations along theoretical lines for following campaign news and explained 66.13% of the variance. Items were averaged into an information motivation index ($M = 5.42, SD = 1.21, \alpha = .85$) and an entertainment motivation index ($M = 3.74, SD = 1.74, \alpha = .87$). Principle component analysis indicated that the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was .85 and the chi-square value for the Bartlett’s test of sphericity was 6526.25 ($df = 36, p < .001$), confirming the appropriate relationships between items for conducting factor analysis.

Political media use

Media use was measured by asking respondents about the amount of attention they were paying to coverage of the presidential campaign, following Chaffee and Schleuder (1986) and Eveland, Hutchens, and Shen (2009), who argue that attention captures motivated, focused news use across a variety of sources. Nine media attention questions were developed based on a list of campaign information sources drawn from recent literature and Pew Research Center (2015) reports. The list of sources is shown in Table 3 and covers traditional news media, online news, advertising, and social media. Participants indicated their responses along a 7-point scale from *no attention* to *a lot of attention*.

Political campaign knowledge

Campaign knowledge was measured with a six-item index of party-issue and candidate items specific to the 2016 primary, modeled after questions from a yearlong study of the 1992 presidential campaign (Chaffee, Zhao, & Leshner, 1994). These party-issue questions were asked during each of the three waves: “Which party is more in favor of stronger gun control

Table 1. Summary of exploratory factor analysis for campaign news motivations.

Items	Factor Loadings	
	Information Motivation ($\alpha = .85$)	Entertainment Motivation ($\alpha = .87$)
<i>I follow news about the presidential campaign ...</i>		
To see how candidates stand on the issues	.83	
To see what a candidate would do if elected	.81	
To see if a candidate can relate to the concerns of regular people	.78	
To help decide how to vote in the primary election	.73	
To get new information to support my position	.72	
To prepare me for future discussions about politics	.61	
To have fun		.89
To enjoy the excitement of the election race		.87
To enjoy the entertaining personalities of the candidates		.87
Eigenvalues	4.13	1.83
% of variance explained	45.85	20.27

Note. $N = 1,552$.

laws,” “of getting rid of the nuclear deal with Iran,” and “addressing the climate change problem immediately.” A five-category response scale was used, in which 1 (*strongly Democratic*) or 2 (*somewhat Democratic*) would count as correct if “Democratic” was the answer, and 4 (*somewhat Republican*) or 5 (*strongly Republican*) would be correct for “Republican” answers. A 3 indicated no difference, and a “don’t know” option was included. One point for each question was earned only if the respondent selected a correct (Republican or Democratic) answer. Following Dimitrova et al. (2014), three of the six items were changed in January and in February to reflect current campaign news. An example of a January item is “Which candidate has been criticized for giving speeches that were paid for by Wall Street financial companies?” and a February item is “Which candidate did Gov. Chris Christie recently endorse?” These candidate items had a response scale with candidate names and a “don’t know” option. Responses from the six questions were added; knowledge scores could range from 0 to 6.

Elaboration

This concept was measured with three items adapted from Eveland (2001) and Eveland et al. (2003). Using a 7-point response scale from *definitely disagree* to *definitely agree*, items were “I often find myself thinking about election stories I’ve come across in the news,” “When I come across election news, I often think about how it relates to other things I know,” and “I often try to relate election stories to my own personal experiences.” Items were averaged to create an elaboration index ($M = 4.46$, $SD = 1.45$, $\alpha = .84$).

Political information efficacy

The Kaid et al. (2007) Political Information Efficacy scale was used to measure this concept. Participants responded to four items asking them to assess how qualified they were to participate in politics and how informed they were about the election. They answered along a 7-point scale from *definitely disagree* to *definitely agree*. Items were averaged to create a political information efficacy index ($M = 5.04$, $SD = 1.40$, $\alpha = .90$).

Campaign interest

This question was designed to tap situational political involvement, or interest in the current campaign (Atkin, Galloway, & Nayman, 1976; Verba & Nie, 1972) to measure participants’ engagement with the election timeframe under study. Respondents were asked to indicate, on a scale from 1 to 7, how interested they were in following the current presidential campaign.

Vote intention

Intention to vote for Trump was measured by asking, “In the upcoming primary election, which candidate are you most likely to vote for?” Following a prior celebrity candidate election study (David & Atun, 2015), during analysis Trump supporters were classified into one category ($n = 257$), and supporters of other candidates still in the race as of March 1, 2016, were put into a second category ($n = 1,154$). Those candidates were Ben Carson, Hillary Clinton, Ted Cruz, John Kasich, Marco Rubio, Bernie Sanders, and those who indicated “other.”

Demographic items

Respondents were asked their age, gender, and education level, as well as their political party identification. These items were used as controls during regression analyses. Education was measured with a seven-category scale from Some high school or less to Graduate degree. To measure political party identification, respondents were asked if they were Republican, Democrat, independent, or something else. Subsequently, they were asked if they were strong or weak Republicans or Democrats, and if independent, whether they leaned toward a particular party. Following ANES (2014), a 7-point scale was constructed from these items ranging from 1 (*strong Democrat*) to 7 (*strong Republican*).

Results

Research questions were investigated by analyzing survey data using logistic regression and hierarchical multiple regression models.

Campaign interest and news motivations

RQ1 asked about the level of political interest that Trump voters had in the 2016 presidential primary campaign, compared with the interest of other voters during this election. A logistic regression model was fit, in which vote intention was the dependent variable (0 = voters for other candidates, 1 = voters for Trump); campaign interest was the independent variable; and age, gender, education, and party identification were the covariates. Results, shown in Table 2, indicate that voters who are more interested in the campaign are more likely to be Trump supporters ($\beta = .27$, Wald $\chi^2 = 8.83$, $p < .001$). The Wald statistic indicates whether a specific predictor, such as campaign interest, is making a significant contribution toward the prediction of an outcome under investigation—in this case, being a Trump supporter (Field, 2005, p. 224).

RQ2 examined the motivations that drive media use for Trump voters, and in particular investigated whether they were more likely to be motivated by entertainment purposes than other voters. Results, also shown in Table 2, indicate that following campaign news for entertainment purposes, such as having fun and enjoying the excitement of the race, is a significant predictor of voting for Trump ($\beta = .26$, Wald $\chi^2 = 23.09$, $p < .001$). Moreover, following campaign news for information purposes, such as learning issue positions or deciding how to vote, is a significant predictor of supporting a candidate other than Trump ($\beta = -.22$, Wald $\chi^2 = 4.85$, $p < .05$).

Campaign media use

RQ3 asks where Trump voters, compared with others, get their political information. To investigate, a logistic regression model was fit to assess news media, advertising, and social media and to control for demographics, party affiliation, and political interest of respondents. Results, shown in Table 3, indicate that two social media outlets are significant predictors of being either a Trump voter or a supporter of another candidate: Those who use the video-sharing site YouTube are more likely to be Trump supporters ($\beta = .11$, $p < .05$), and those who use the social networking site Facebook are more likely to support other candidates ($\beta = -.10$, $p < .05$). Results in Table 3 also show that voters in this study were not differentiated by their attention to campaign news channels, such as television, websites, or radio, or to the different platforms of campaign advertising. Rather, they were distinguished by their attention to social media, and Trump voters were more likely to use the more visual, entertainment-oriented YouTube.

Table 2. Predictors of Trump voters: Campaign interest and motivations.

Variables	Coefficient	SE	Wald χ^2	<i>p</i>
Age	.08	.04	4.51	.03
Gender ^a	-.12	.17	.54	.46
Education	-.24	.06	18.98	.00
Party identification	.62	.05	191.93	.00
Campaign interest	.27	.09	8.83	.00
Motivations				
Information motivation	-.22	.10	4.85	.03
Entertainment motivation	.26	.05	23.09	.00

Note. $N = 1,372$. Dependent variable coded as 0 = vote for other candidates ($n = 1,122$), 1 = vote for Trump ($n = 250$).

^a1 = female.

Table 3. Predictors of Trump voters: Media use and political learning.

Variables	Coefficient	SE	Wald χ^2	<i>p</i>
Age	.08	.04	3.53	.06
Gender ^a	-.13	.18	.48	.49
Education	-.21	.06	11.73	.00
Party identification	.64	.05	171.03	.00
Campaign interest	.40	.11	14.40	.00
Campaign media use				
News media				
Television	-.10	.07	2.20	.14
Newspaper	-.00	.05	.00	.98
Radio	-.07	.05	2.15	.14
News websites	-.05	.06	.78	.38
Advertising				
TV ads	.10	.06	2.40	.12
Online ads	.04	.06	.49	.48
Social media				
Facebook	-.10	.04	5.08	.02
Twitter	.01	.04	.02	.89
YouTube	.11	.05	4.74	.03
Elaboration	-.03	.08	.10	.75
Campaign knowledge	-.24	.07	11.69	.00
Political information efficacy	.08	.10	.69	.41

Note. *N* = 1,310. Dependent variable coded as 0 = vote for other candidates (*n* = 1,075), 1 = vote for Trump (*n* = 235).

^a1 = female.

Campaign news elaboration, knowledge, and political information efficacy

The study's next questions (RQ4 and RQ5) examine the extent to which voters think about, or elaborate upon, political news, their political knowledge levels, and their confidence in this knowledge. Results in Table 3 indicate that voters who have high levels of campaign knowledge are significantly more likely to support candidates other than Trump ($\beta = -.24$, $p < .01$). Neither group of voters, however, is differentiated by elaboration or political information efficacy. That is to say, Trump voters, although less likely to be knowledgeable, are just as likely to think about campaign news, and to have confidence in their political knowledge, as other voters. These knowledge-related results control for differences in voters' demographics, political interest, and affiliation, as well as their media use.

Media use predictors of campaign knowledge

Although logistic regression results just presented indicate that voters can be distinguished by differences in use of social media, this study's next question (RQ6) examines the extent to which citizens are learning from the media to which they attend. What news sources do Trump voters use to learn about politics, and do these sources differ from those that contribute to knowledge for other voters? To examine this, separate hierarchical regressions for the two groups were performed in which campaign knowledge was the dependent variable. Demographics (age, gender, education), as well as party identification and campaign interest, were used as control variables, and then nine media variables were entered. There was no multicollinearity, as variance inflation factors ranged from .640 to .968 for the Trump voters' group and .616 to .932 for the non-Trump voters' group.

Results, shown in Table 4, indicate that attention to news websites ($\beta = .18$, $p < .001$) and attention to Twitter ($\beta = .09$, $p < .01$) positively contributed to knowledge for citizens who did not vote for Trump. For Trump supporters, no media outlet contributed significantly to knowledge. Results do show, however, that news websites and radio are approaching significance in predicting Trump voters' campaign knowledge. For non-Trump voters, we found negative associations regarding campaign knowledge for print newspapers, campaign advertising, and YouTube.

Table 4. Predictors of campaign knowledge: Trump voters versus non-Trump voters.

Variables	Trump Voters ^a			Non-Trump Voters ^b		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β
Block 1						
Age	.141	.04	.23***	.12	.02	.21***
Gender ^c	-.39	.18	-.13*	-.42	.08	-.15***
Education	.14	.06	.14*	.14	.03	.15***
Party identification	.04	.06	.03	-.02	.02	-.03
Campaign interest	.41	.09	.29***	.24	.03	.22***
<i>R</i> ²	.20			.16		
Block 2						
Campaign media use						
News media						
Television	.04	.07	.04	.04	.03	.05
Newspaper	-.08	.05	-.10	-.06	.02	-.08**
Radio	.09	.05	.12 [†]	-.04	.02	-.05
News websites	.10	.06	.12 [†]	.16	.03	.18***
Advertising						
TV ads	-.11	.07	-.14	-.10	.03	-.13***
Online ads	-.10	.06	-.13	-.08	.03	-.10**
Social media						
Facebook	-.03	.04	-.05	-.01	.02	-.01
Twitter	.03	.05	.04	.06	.02	.09**
YouTube	.01	.05	.02	-.06	.02	-.08*
<i>R</i> ²	.26			.24		
ΔR^2	.06			.08		
Model fit (<i>F</i>)		<i>F</i> (14, 216) = 5.54***			<i>F</i> (14, 1047) = 23.36***	

Note^a*n* = 234. ^a*n* = 1,075. ^c0 = male, 1 = female.[†]*p* < .10. **p* < .05. ***p* < .01. ****p* < .001.**Discussion**

This study examines concepts that intersect the literature of celebrity politics and mass communication. It provides an empirically based depiction of voters who support Donald Trump during the 2016 U.S. presidential primary campaign and specifically analyzes voters' political interest, motivations, and media use, as well as their accompanying elaboration, knowledge, and confidence about that knowledge. Although findings about Trump supporters cannot be generalized to other celebrity candidate voters, these results do align with the celebrity candidate audience portrayed in several previous studies.

First, Trump voters are interested in the campaign under study, even more so than other voters. This aligns with the work of theorists who contend that celebrity candidate voters are not necessarily uninvolved when it comes to politics. McKernan (2011) and Van Zoonen (2004) posited that the presence of a celebrity candidate can bolster citizens' interest in an election, and Zwarun and Torrey (2011) and Ribke (2015) suggested that the "celebrity heuristic" can function as a "cognitive device," providing shorthand information for interested voters.

Second, like celebrity candidate voters in the literature, Trump voters follow the campaign to be entertained. They attend to election news to have fun and to enjoy the excitement of the race and the personalities of the candidates. This corresponds to the portrayal of celebrity candidate voters described by Kellner (2010), who maintained that these citizens are drawn to the entertainment spectacle of celebrity politics, and to McKernan (2011) and Van Zoonen (2004), who suggested that such voters follow celebrity politicians precisely because they are entertaining and the resulting enjoyment creates an emotional attachment to the campaign. In contrast, results of this study show that non-Trump voters, overall, follow campaign news for traditional instrumental reasons: to help with making a vote decision, to learn about the candidates, or to support

their point of view. This result was found while controlling for voters' party affiliation and political interest.

Like celebrity candidate voters in prior research, Trump supporters in this study are more likely to use entertainment-style visual media when following the campaign. The one media platform that distinguishes Trump voters from others in this study is their attention to YouTube, an outlet especially used for entertainment and diversion gratifications (Towner & Dulio, 2011; Whiting & Williams, 2013) and whose video modality may cue an enjoyable "realism heuristic" (Sundar & Limperos, 2013) and gratification of authenticity akin to reality television. Many YouTube compilations of Trump's rallies and speeches contain the features of the "comedic entertainment" form (Hall et al., 2016), and as such would gratify the entertainment needs of those seeking this political content. Other voters in this study, meanwhile, are distinguished by their use of Facebook to follow campaign news, a finding consistent with reports that indicate a majority of Americans who sought news to learn about the 2016 presidential election went to social media, and the most popular platform was Facebook (Pew, 2016).

Looking at the learning outcomes related to media attention, Trump voters in this study are less likely to be knowledgeable about the campaign than other voters. Yet Trump supporters and other voters are not differentiated by political information efficacy: the confidence in the campaign knowledge they have. These results align with prior studies that suggest celebrity candidate voters may be less informed than other citizens (David & Atun, 2015; Kellner, 2010; West & Orman, 2003) but may also experience a sense of political efficacy because of their affective engagement with the celebrity candidate (McKernan, 2011; Van Zoonen, 2004).

When media use that contributes to knowledge was examined, no specific outlet was found to make a significant difference for Trump supporters. For other voters, however, the use of news websites and Twitter contributed significantly to learning, a finding consistent with previous research that connects political knowledge with the use of information-rich channels (Groshek & Dimitrova, 2011), with Twitter (Bode, 2016), and with multiple media outlets (Shehata & Stromback, 2018). Although not significant, Trump voters' attention to news websites and radio did result in a marginal contribution to their campaign knowledge. These weaker predictors of knowledge for Trump voters could be due to the strong entertainment motivations of this group: When they're tuned in to campaign media, they're enjoying the candidates' personalities, the excitement of the race, or just having fun rather than seeking news to become informed.

Based on this analysis, the following attributes are characteristic of Trump voters during the 2016 primary: They're interested in the campaign, they follow election news to be entertained, and they're particularly attentive to the video-sharing site YouTube. They don't learn as much about politics as do other voters, who are motivated by information needs, and no channel of communication was found to make a clear contribution to their political knowledge. In short, they're interested, they want to be entertained, and they don't learn as much as others from the news. Future studies will reveal whether this pattern, suggested by prior research, is apparent in other celebrity election contexts or is limited to Trump voters in the 2016 primary.

Although our findings suggest similarities between Trump supporters and celebrity candidate voters in the literature, the Trump election may present an atypical situation even within the context of celebrity politics. Unlike most entertainers who become politicians, Trump exemplifies the "politainer" (Schultz, 2001), an elected official who eschews the role of conventional politician and instead retains his or her show business persona. The key is that Trump stayed in character throughout the campaign: As a presidential candidate, he was the same "tough-love boardroom businessman" the public had come to know over several seasons of *The Apprentice* (Hall et al., 2016, p. 76). Trump didn't retire from this image; on the contrary, he embraced it and used it to increase his credibility as "authentic, experienced and well-informed" (Becker, 2018, p. 1749). And like politainer Jesse Ventura before him, Trump maximized his media coverage using public relations tactics, such as calling in to radio and TV shows to make shocking, "newsworthy" comments. But unlike 20th-century Ventura, Trump had Twitter, millions of followers, and a steady stream of

tweets that not only connected him directly to the public but also drove substantial coverage in news and entertainment political media (Becker, 2018; Wells et al., 2016). On Twitter, he remained in character: His content was “political promotion, distraction, score-settling and attack” (Wells et al., 2016, p. 670).

It is not surprising, then, that our findings indicate that Twitter did not make a significant contribution to the political knowledge of Trump followers, as Twitter did for other voters. Trump voters used Twitter as much as others (as shown in Table 3), but as partisans already supporting their candidate, they were probably less inclined to seek information (i.e., follow links to news stories), to learn about other candidates, and more apt to view Trump’s tweets for decision reinforcement, and of course for entertainment.

Future research that examines political knowledge during a celebrity candidate election could more closely consider the connection between motivations, media use, and learning. In terms of “elaboration,” results indicate that Trump voters think about campaign news as much as others, and regarding efficacy, they are confident about the knowledge they have. Future studies, such as those employing the cognitive mediation model, could trace the line from involvement to motivations to media use and consider learning and information efficacy as outcomes. Researchers, then, could examine whether voters whose involvement is activated by the celebrity, and motivated by information needs, go to news sources to learn about the campaign. If this were to be the case, it would represent a positive contribution of celebrity presence for deliberative democracy.

A limitation of this study is its use of Mturk participants, a convenience sample, to gather data. Although much research has been conducted supporting the quality of the Mturk pool (Chandler & Shapiro, 2016), future studies on this topic could employ a probability sample and thus strengthen the generalizability of these findings. This would be especially helpful in consideration of certain media and political learning variables: This study’s finding that print newspaper attention was a negative predictor of campaign knowledge is discrepant with decades of research that shows just the opposite. Although indicating that newspaper use on a survey could be a social desirability effect, a study that does not employ online participants could examine whether this result may be an artifact of the respondent group or whether the role of print newspapers as a key political information source may be further changing, at least for some audiences.

In conclusion, this study shows how voters who support Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential primary use media about the election and how they are, or are not, affected by that media, specifically in terms of learning about campaign issues. Through a national survey of 1,608 participants, this research found that Trump voters during the 2016 primary are driven by entertainment motivations, and use entertainment visual media, when following the campaign, a finding consistent with the portrayal of celebrity candidate voters in the literature. Although they are less motivated to seek information-rich news, Trump voters in 2016 cannot be characterized as passive or uninvolved. They are engaged in the campaign, confident about their political knowledge, and somewhat attentive to news media when it comes to learning issues, a depiction similar to previous research on citizens interested in entertainment news (Baum, 2003). These voters are the lesser informed electorate but participants nonetheless. Our findings, thus, extend the literature on entertainment gratifications of political news during an election: Coverage that is “fun” and “exciting” may be particularly sought by interested citizens when a star they support, especially one that retains his or her entertainment persona, is running for office. Celebrities in politics is a growing phenomenon (Lawrence & Boydston, 2017; Ribke, 2015), one that necessitates ongoing research to “more fully understand the true net effect of celebrity involvement” (Becker, 2013, p. 15). This study adds to the repository that documents its impact on media behaviors during the political process of 2016.

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