

## Political Media Narratives and Mormon Perspectives of Mitt Romney

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**Abstract:** Recently, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has experienced unprecedented public attention in what has been termed “The Mormon Moment.” While there has been an increased media focus on the religion, research into how Mormons perceive that attention is lacking, especially regarding the attention directed toward recent political candidate Mitt Romney. The purpose of this research is to fill the gap by analyzing the Mormon community’s perspectives of Mitt Romney. The current study uses Q-methodology and personal interviews to access Mormon’s perceptions of the media and politics. Results indicate that Mormons fall into four perceptual categories, indicating greater diversity within the Mormon community previously recognized.

Scholars have long argued that our perceptual world is comprised of the stories we tell ourselves (Fisher, 1984; Schutz, 1970; Berger & Luckman, 1966; Mead, 1934; Hickman & Kuhn, 1956). These stories create our perceptual horizons or *Lebenswelt* (Husserl, 1913 Ger./1983 Eng.), are a manifestation of identity (Nietzsche, 1887 Ger./1974 Eng.; Wollen, 1997), and form meaning through cultural expressions (Gebser, 1949/1985). Additionally, social narratives shape and reshape the motives for cultural action. According to Kramer, Callahan, and Zuckerman (2013), “human behavior is best understood by an exploration of motive, rather than cause” (p. 7).

The narrative itself becomes even more important when cultural groups have little or no control over the form and transmission of the message. Traditionally, scholars have focused on the one-way downloading of cultural homogeneity (see Friedman, 2005/2007); however, with newer forms of media and media narratives, some research has focused on the co-constitutionality of media and culture. In other words, media shape culture and culture shapes media (Kramer, 2012).

This research seeks to extend this approach by focusing on the relationship between larger social narratives and minority group perceptions. Specifically, this investigation involves analyzing how members of the Mormon (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) church perceive mediated messages about one of their own, Mitt Romney, and how these perceptions differ among the group.

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## Literature Review

### Media and Minority Cultural Identity

While there has been a long history of media effects research, more recent efforts into newer forms of media have made significant contributions with implications for minority cultures. New media have the ability extend cultural perspectives, including perspectives of minority cultures that have historically been marginalized by geographical disadvantages. [The term “minority” is used here describe a subordinate group whose members have less control (either physical or psychological) over their lives than members of a dominant group (Hacker, 1951; Meyers, 1984; Kramer, 2004; Schaefer, 2004)]. Since new media are creating cyber-environments that in many ways replicate other types of cognitive environments, there are now a variety of new, available cultural perceptual responses to larger mediated narratives. Valenzuela and McCombs (2009), for example, have argued that individuals within a particular culture have a psychological need for orienting themselves to cognitive environments. This is because newer forms of media are reshaping the communication landscape (Shuter, 2012). The impact of these newer forms of media is evident in cultural scholarship that investigates social media and identity (Chen & Dai, 2012; Croucher & Cronn-Mills, 2011; Oh, 2012; Croucher, 2011), social media’s impact on cultural processes (Chen, 2010; Croucher, 2011; Chun, 2011), and how newer media forms can magnify cultural influence (Johnson & Callahan, 2013; 2015). Such research highlights the impact of new media on traditional approaches to narrative-type research.

### Mormons and the Media

There has been an increase in media attention for the Mormon religion. What is lacking, however, is research detailing how Mormons have felt about this increase in coverage. Over the last 10 years, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has experienced unprecedented public and media attention in what has been termed, “The Mormon Moment” (Fry, 2012). While Governor Romney’s participation in the 2008 and 2012 election cycles is unquestionably responsible for much of this awareness, other members of the church have brought increased attention to the religion as well. Some examples include author Stephanie Meyer, whose series *Twilight* topped USA Today’s best-selling booklist in 2008 and 2009; singer David Archuleta, an American Idol finalist; political commentator Glenn Beck, whom the Harris Public Opinion Poll found to be America’s second most popular television personality in 2010; and BYU basketball player Jimmer Fredette, who unanimously won nearly every significant NCAA player of the year award in 2011 (Best-selling books, 2011; MacNicol, 2010). The church also garnered media attention from its political stances, including its involvement in California’s Proposition 8 vote (McKinley, 2008).

The impetus for such of attention was the result of natural developments within the church and in the lives of its members. “The Mormon Moment,” however, includes the phenomenon in which the church not only attracts attention but also is targeted for it from outside sources. Such instances include the television series, “Big Love,” a Golden Globe award-winning drama about a polygamist family in Utah; and the 2011 comedic Broadway musical *The Book of Mormon*, about Mormon missionaries in Uganda.

Both examples included misrepresentation of the LDS church and exhibited mixed reactions from church members.<sup>1</sup>

In response to these endeavors, the Mormon church launched a series of narratives designed to control its public identity. An example of this effort is the the “I’m a Mormon” campaign, an extensive, nationally recognized attempt to identify common ground between members of the church and the general public through film and user-generated internet content. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2011). The church also rapidly restructured its existing websites, created several new online resources and mobile applications, established a growing YouTube channel, and launched a 24-hour Internet radio stream in an effort to improve public relations.

The Mormon perceptual response to this increased media attention is at the heart of this study. The perceptions of, and the meanings assigned to, mediated narratives concerning one of the most well-known Mormons help researchers understand the cultural responses to mediated narratives. Individual responses to these narratives should be primarily (theoretically) rooted in individual interpretation, rather than group affiliation (Mead, 1934; Kramer, Callahan, & Zuckerman, 2013). This approach is in line with Fox’s (2006) assertion that the Mormon population is more diverse than people think. This is especially interesting as, in this case, each Mormon participant is interpreting media narratives about Mitt Romney and Mormonism through their own particular lens (see Blumer, 1969; Schutz, 1970; Mead, 1934). Using the narrative approach as a foundation, this research investigates groupings of individual interpretations through the context of media.

The increasing media attention given to the Mormon religion and its members offers an significant opportunity to investigate internal perspectives of perhaps the church’s most well known mediated personality, Mitt Romney. Most of the literature surrounding Mormons, however, provides blanket statements and generalizations for the religion (Fox, 2006), without noting the perceptual differences within the religion. Also, there is little information on if, how, and why Mormon voters support a Mormon candidate such as Mitt Romney. The above discussion leads to the following two research questions which drive the current research:

*RQ1: What are the categories of Mormon perceptions of Mitt Romney within the Mormon community?*

*RQ2: What are the different views of Mitt Romney within these categories?*

## **Method**

Previous research has studied Mormon responses to political and media narratives; however, no investigators have identified perceptual categories of a particular Mormon candidate, especially in regards to his/her mediated persona. The current study uses Q-methodology and personal interviews to categorize the perceptions of 18- to 64 year-old Mormons toward Presidential candidate Mitt Romney.

Q-methodology was first introduced by William Stephenson in 1935, and later explained in his book *The Study of Behaviour* (1953). Q-methodology is a form of factor analysis that correlates participant perception based on similar responses to stimuli (Endres, 1997; see also Brown, 1980; Schlinger, 1969; Stephenson, 1953). The focal point

<sup>1</sup> For a more comprehensive view of Mormon uses of media up until 2007, see Baker, 2008.

of this methodology is a research tool called the Q sort, which provides a method by which participants can rank items—either statements, or stimuli, such as symbols or pictures—that represent a particular domain of subjectivity. This domain of subjectivity, which Stephenson called a *concourse*, provides the raw material from which Q sort items are ranked to represent the various views that may be evident in a *concourse* (Stephenson, 1968). The participant's sorts are forced into a normal distribution along a “most like my experience—least like my experience” continuum. The statistical analysis clusters respondents based on similar response profiles (Endres, 1997), thereby identifying, in this case, perceptual typologies of Mormons toward Mitt Romney.

Stephen (1985) argued that “Q-methodology may be especially relevant for communication scientists whose research assesses the perceptual world of individuals or the outcomes of interactions between them” (p. 204). In fact, Q-methodology has been used in a number of political communication studies, such as patriotism perspectives (Sullivan, Fried, & Dietz, 1992), political beliefs (Conover & Feldman, 1984), group identity patterns (Davis, 1997), and perspectives of political spectacles (Thomas, McCoy, & McBride, 1993). Q-methodology has also been used to illuminate perceptions in a variety of contexts, including body image (Dennis & Goldberg, 1996), perceptions of national identity (Schroder, 2004), and Native American tribal perspectives (Lamsam & Sanders, 2004). Still, although Q-methodology is becoming more widely used in the communication field, few studies have used Q-methodology to investigate contextual perceptions of intergroup political perspectives of a single candidate.

Because the purpose of this research is to identify categories of perceptions of Mormons toward Mitt Romney, it was first necessary to gather a representative sample of statements (Q-set) that addressed both positive and negative attitudes toward Romney. An initial set of statements about Mitt Romney was gathered from online Mormon message boards. These initial statements indicated every perception that self-identified Mormons were making regarding Mitt Romney's media persona. The goal in this first step of Q method application is to find the complete *concourse* of perceptions surrounding the domain of subjectivity. This study identified over 100 of these initial statements.

Next, the statements were categorized and collapsed into general topic areas using constant comparative analysis, which is useful in establishing categories from qualitative data (Dey, 1993; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Patton, 1990). Six general perceptual content areas were identified using this technique. These statements were then presented to a focus group which consisted of seven self-identified, religiously active, Mormon subjects. The focus group was presented with each statement and asked if (1) the statement was understandable, (2) if the statement represented (to the best of their knowledge) a perception that could be found in the Mormon population, and (3) that each item made a contribution to the Q-set. Using the focus group responses, the *concourse* of statements was trimmed down to 48 statements, creating a Q-set that addressed perceptual coverage and statement balance (Watts & Stenner, 2012). This final set of statements provided a broad view of Mormon opinions of Mitt Romney (see Appendix 1 for a list of statements). The cohort of statements represented Mormon perspectives within six categories: Mormon faith, Mormon candidacy, church and state, Romney's personality, church publicity, Mormon diversity. Each perception topic received an equal number of statements (8), half of which were negative in nature and half of which were positive. Stephenson (1988) indicates the work of ranking statements

based on a set of criteria that constitutes a psychological event for each participant—an event (in this research group, perceptions), that can be measured systematically.

There were 47 participants in this study. The number of participants coincides with the general tendency to use fewer subjects in Q-methodology.

All that is required are enough subjects to establish the existence of a 5 factor for purposes of comparing one factor with another [...] P sets, as in the case of Q samples, provide breath and comprehensiveness so as to maximize confidence that the major factors at issue have been manifested using a particular set of persons and a particular set of Q statements. (Brown, 1980, p. 194)

Thus the P set usually is smaller than the Q set (Brouwer, 1999). While the selection of the participants was a snowball sample beginning with students at a major Western university, Q-methodology does not rely on random selection of participants. Rather, adequate participant selection relies on the inclusion of all participants with all possible perspectives of the problem under consideration. Brown (1980) argued that the P set for Q-methodology is “more nearly theoretical or dimensional than random or accidental” (p. 192). Participants in this study were selected based on their diverse Mormon perspectives. The following criteria were used in participant selection. First, participants must self-identify as “Mormon.” We purposefully made no further religious distinction, as Q method does not correlate the degree of religious observance with perception. Second, potential participants needed to know who Mitt Romney was. Third, participants should have seen media coverage of Mitt Romney. Last, participants must have been politically active. The 47 participants used in this study represent varying levels of LDS involvement and political identification. Many of the participants were from differing parts of the United States, but several were also from Utah. Additional participant demographics include mean age (28), party affiliation (Republican=33, Democrat=3, Independent=5, Other=6), and gender (male=22, female=25). These demographics are only informative in the sense that care was taken to get a wide variety of Mormon perspectives. McKeown & Thomas (2013) argued that “no special effort is made to ensure complete representativeness across respondent characteristics (age, party identification, religion, etc.) since the purpose is to explore the attitudes in a population” (p. 32). However, Brown (1980) posited that a conscious effort should be made to ensure as much variability in the composition of the P-set as is practical under the circumstances (see also McKeown & Thomas, 2013). In most Q-methodology studies, the P set is one less than the number of attitudinal statements within the cohort. This research followed that convention.

Participants were given a “condition of instruction” and asked to sort the 48 statements about Mitt Romney by ranking them on an 11-point scale ranging from “Most Agree” (+5) to “Least Agree” (-5). After the sorts were completed, the investigators conducted individual interviews with participants to allow them to elaborate on their selections, to probe further into their decision making process, and to express their thoughts and feelings about Mitt Romney. The researchers tabulated the frequencies of the most common answers to the interview questions and those answers considered pertinent to each factor discussion were included in that portion of the

resulting discussion. The average time for each person to complete each Q sort and interview was approximately 35 minutes.

The interviews were structured with the use of a questionnaire that asked the following questions:

1. Why did you select (those) two statements as being most like you believe?
2. Why did you select (those) two statements as being the least like you believe?
3. Overall, what do you think of Mitt Romney's Mormonism as a Presidential candidate?

After the interviews, investigators tabulated the results of the Q sorts using the PQMethod computer software program. An analysis was conducted to determine the number of factors that best represented the patterns of subjectivity. Researchers began by looking for at least two significant participant factor loadings on each factor in the unrotated factor matrix provided by PQMethod at the .01 significance level. Factor loadings were considered significant if they exceeded a correlation larger than  $\pm .372$ . This significant correlation was calculated from a formula for the standard error of a zero-order correlation ( $2.58 \times 1/\text{Square Root of } 48$ ), which is explained by Brown (1980, p. 284).

Once the factors were determined, investigators compared the significant positive and negative z-scores for the statements that accompanied each factor. Statements for each factor with a z-score greater than  $\pm 1.0$  were considered to be significantly "MOST AGREE" and "LEAST AGREE."

To determine which statements were significantly different in each factor, the investigators used factor Q sort values. A factor Q sort value is the average of the rank scores participants provide for a particular statement on a particular factor. Factor Q sort values ranged from  $\pm 1$  to  $\pm 4$  for each statement on each factor. Factor Q sort values that differed by  $\pm 3$  for each statement on each factor were considered to be significantly different.

Labels and interpretations determined by the investigators for the following Q sort factors were predicated on the z-scores calculated and the factor Q sort values provided by the participants in the study. They were also supplemented by the responses recorded from the interviews conducted with the participants.

## Results

As mentioned above, the advantage of Q-methodology is the ability to identify perceptual groupings. The factor analysis yielded four significant factors that represented participant perceptions of Mitt Romney's media persona. These four factors characterize general typologies of perception and not necessarily the demographic identifiers of these individuals. The unique value of Q-methodology, as it is used in this study, is that it sidesteps the traditional obstacle of operationalizing the social group, in order to probe how individuals think about their experiences. This expands the discussion of results past general demographic representations and moves the discussion into how individuals think.

This study found four significant factor loadings (or perceptions) of Mitt Romney by Mormons. These four factors answer RQ1: *What are the categories Mormon perceptions of Mitt Romney?* These four factors are identified below.

### Factor 1—Primary Mormons

We labeled this first factor “Primary Mormons.” The following characteristics of the “Primary Mormons” group was derived from the significant factor statements. Factor loadings for this group indicate that these subjects viewed Mitt Romney as one of their own. This perspective appears to be associated with religious identity and the will to act accordingly. Primary Mormons view media attention given to Mitt Romney as good for the Mormon church.

According to the factor loadings, Primary Mormons try to appear open-minded; however, they are closely attached to the church. To most Primary Mormons the church is their main concern. They look out for the reputation and the standing of the church, as noted by the most significant negative statements for this group, “If Romney loses it will hurt the church ( $z=-1.359$ ),” and “It would be better for the church if Mitt Romney lost the election ( $z=-1.392$ ).” They believe that faith should not be in the media because they are almost afraid of how the church is going to be portrayed. However, they do believe that faith defines a candidacy as noted by the most significant positive statement, “A politician can’t ignore his or her faith ( $z=1.636$ ).” They want Romney to be a good example of the church but they do not want the church criticized or looked down upon. One respondent highlighted this feeling by stating, “I haven’t seen him [Mitt Romney]

Table 1: *Factor 1 Significant Positive and Negative Romney Statement z-Scores*

No.	Statement	z-Score
22	A politician can’t ignore his or her faith	1.636
43	Romney’s Mormonism is just one aspect of his background and personality	1.549
17	A candidate’s faith should not be news in an election	1.467
21	Mormons should vote with their head, not their religion.	1.435
33	Having a Mormon presidential candidate is good for the church.	1.319
38	Having Mitt Romney as president would be great for the church.	1.177
23	There should be a rule about bringing someone’s faith into a political election	1.072
32	Mitt Romney is a good man; exactly what our country needs.	1.029
37	The church should stay out of politics.	0.996
42	I don’t care for Romney’s political ideology. It doesn’t matter to me that he’s a Mormon	-1.064
5	Mitt Romney is conservative, as all Mormons should be.	-1.123
34	The church is being harmed by all the attention Mitt Romney is getting	-1.297
35	It would be better for the church if Mitt Romney lost the election	-1.329
39	If Romney loses it will hurt the church	-1.359

do anything against what the church believes, so any publicity is good publicity for the church.” They likely feel that they are personally being harassed when their religion is criticized, especially by the media. They feel threatened when the church is portrayed erroneously, almost feeling as though they themselves have been portrayed wrongly. Primary Mormons also feel that Romney represents the church well. Perhaps most importantly, they do not feel as though the church is being harmed by all the attention Mitt Romney is currently getting. Although they feel that Romney’s failed campaign did not hurt the church, they would have felt better about him had he won.

Based on both the significant factors and the interviews, Primary Mormons seem to be religiously active. The church not only defines their religious beliefs but it acts as a primary locus of identity. They believe that a politician cannot ignore his or her faith and they feel connected to Romney because of that. Another respondent noted that, “I feel like his faith is a part of who he is and where his values come from, so he shouldn’t down play it.” They believe that their standards should fit in line with the president’s standards so they could feel more comfortable with a Mormon president. Table 1 consists of the significant positive and negative factor loadings for Factor 1.

### **Factor Two—Sovereign Mormons**

We have labeled factor two as “Sovereign Mormons.” The factor loadings indicate that they are almost exclusively non-Republicans who do not support Mitt Romney and are perhaps a little discontented with the support mainstream Mormonism seems to afford him. They are most strikingly defined by statement seven, “I think it’s okay to be a Democrat and a Mormon” (z-score: 2.054), followed by statement 48, “Not all Mormons are conservative” (z-score: 1.695). This coincides with the top negative statement (five), “Mitt Romney is conservative, as all Mormons should be” (z-score: -2.169). “As the statements would seem to suggest, 37.5 percent of respondents in this factor were Democrats, matched equally by those identifying themselves as “Other.” Around 25 percent of the remaining respondents in this factor were Independents (12.5%) and Republicans (12.5%). For reference, factors one, three, and four were composed entirely of Republicans or Independents.

The researchers labeled this group “Sovereign Mormons” because of their propensity to operate independently from the larger majority cultural view. Though Sovereign Mormons may find professed ideological allies among their peers in the church, they feel a separateness that no other factor identifies with. This phenomenon likely stems, in part, from the church’s official statements declaring its political neutrality in regard to candidates and parties – espousing responsibility and informed discretion in voting behavior. Those who find themselves supporting a candidate other than the majority’s preference, however, might possibly feel frustration with their peers, whom they may perceive as blind followers – despite overtures of independence.

This frustration appears to accompany a crusade-like advocacy of objectivity – independent of the church’s influence as evidenced by statements such as, “I’m not going to vote for him simply because he’s a member of my faith” (z-score: 1.615), “Mormons should vote with their head, not their religion” (z-score: 1.527), “I would be just as willing to vote for a Muslim, Hindu, or Jew as I would a Mormon” (z-score: 1.368), and “I don’t care for Romney’s political ideology. It doesn’t matter to me that he’s Mormon” (z-score: 1.367). While each of these statements is also supported in other groups, these four, which each expressly separate voting behavior from faith, sequentially occupy the



strongest places of agreement in the factor profile after the top two statements, which in essence are simple declarations that Mormons do not have to be Republicans.

This pattern is visible in the negative spectrum as well. The most disagreeable statement (“Mitt Romney is conservative, as all Mormons should be”) faults the link between many mainstream Mormons and the Republican party. Nearly all of the following negative statements unapologetically serve to eliminate the influence of “Mormonism” from their voting behavior: “The church should help promote Romney’s candidacy” (z-score: -1.907), “Romney’s a Mormon, and that’s all I need to know to vote for him” (-1.607), “I think that every Mormon should vote for Mitt Romney” (-1.543), and “I’m more likely to vote for Mitt Romney because he’s a Mormon” (-1.277).

Regardless, what emerges, again, is a separateness of Sovereign Mormons from the main body of the church, either because of possible negative experiences with a few who are considered mainstream Mormons, or even because they feel that the whole of mainstream Mormonism does not correctly understand and represent the church’s ideal nature, especially when translating principles of faith into identity. One respondent, for example, wrote, “I am liberal *because* I follow the example of Jesus Christ. If we really studied the life of Christ, we’d all be more liberal.”

The overriding sentiment of Sovereign Mormons, then, is the need to voice independence. This independence is centered in Political ideology, not faith. Unlike other factors, this fact, rather than mere principle, is the likely motive behind the statement, “The church should stay out of all politics” (z-score: 1.013). Sovereign

Table 2: Factor 2 Significant Positive and Negative Romney Statement z-Scores

No.	Statement	z-Score
7	I think it’s okay to be a Democrat and a Mormon.	2.054
48	Not all Mormons are conservative.	1.695
1	I’m not going to vote for him simply because he’s a member of my faith.	1.615
21	Mormons should vote with their head, not their religion.	1.527
18	I would be just as willing to vote for a Muslim, Hindu, or Jew as I would a Mormon.	1.368
42	I don’t care for Romney’s political ideology. It doesn’t matter to me that he’s a Mormon.	1.367
47	I am ok with my Mormon friends not voting for Mitt Romney.	1.252
6	I get tired of all my Mormon friends pushing Romney on me.	1.179
43	Romney’s Mormonism is just one aspect of his background and personality.	1.177
37	The church should stay out of all politics.	1.013
5	Mitt Romney is conservative, as all Mormons should be.	-2.169
36	The church should help promote Romney's candidacy.	-1.907
46	Romney's a Mormon, and that's all I need to know to vote for him.	-1.607
12	I think that every Mormon should vote for Mitt Romney.	-1.543
2	I'm more likely to vote for Mitt Romney because he's a Mormon.	-1.277
40	Romney's candidacy will make Mormonism mainstream.	-1.104

Mormons believe they cannot rely on the majority of church members to represent their views. This research suggests that they feel isolated within their religion.

### **Factor 3—Aesthetic Mormons**

Aesthetic Mormons are a relatively objective group of Republicans whose primary concern is not Mitt Romney at all, but rather the implications that Romney's media narratives may have for the public perception and visibility of the LDS church. Unlike Primary Mormons, this group does not immediately associate a Mormon candidate with increased liking. They want to see how the Romney narratives represent the church before they throw in their support. Above all, they seem to be concerned with media portrayals of the church and Mitt Romney.

In terms of the points of agreement, Aesthetic Mormons, surprisingly, identify most closely with Sovereign Mormons in their display of objectivity and open-mindedness. In fact, the statement of strongest agreement in the Aesthetic Mormon worldview is the same as the top statement in factor two: "I think it's okay to be a Democrat and a Mormon" (z-score: 1.783). The value they place on such free-thinking is supported in other statements, including, "Mormons should vote with their head, not their religion" (z-score: 1.652), "Not all Mormons are conservative," (z-score: 1.266), and "I'm not going to vote for him simply because he's a member of my faith" (z-score: 1.135). This sentiment is echoed in the statements with which Aesthetic Mormons strongly disagree, including "Romney's a Mormon, and that's all I need to know to vote for him" (z-score: -1.178), and "Mitt Romney is conservative, as all Mormons should be" (z-score: -1.227).

While these statements may be explained away as mere lip service to the publically held political stance of the church (as previously explained), the statement, "I think Romney is a people pleaser" (z-score: 1.175) is unique among the four factors and suggests an ability of Aesthetic Mormons to truly consider some of the realities of campaigning that other groups may ignore in the name of a particular ideology. Furthermore, though the z-score is slightly less than 1.00, the statement "I'm more likely to vote for Mitt Romney because he's Mormon" (z-score: 0.907) suggests that Aesthetic Mormons are aware of and content with some personal biases that may interfere with total objectivity. In other words, unlike Sovereign Mormons (factor 2), in which open mindedness appears to be an end as much as a means, objectivity for Aesthetic Mormons allows for making an informed political decision.

Additional criteria for reaching such decisions are alluded to by the second strongest statement in the affirmative: "A politician can't ignore his or her faith" (z-score: 1.731). This statement is supported by Aesthetic Mormon's disagreement with the statements, "Romney should downplay his faith in the election" (z-score: -1.034) and "There should be a rule against bringing someone's faith into a political election" (z-score: -1.122). In sharp contrast with Sovereign Mormons, Aesthetic Mormons believe faith to be a defining feature of individual character – an indicator not to be overlooked in political decisions. This is not to say that faith alone determines the quality of a person. That is determined by his or her merits, as previous statements have suggested. Nevertheless, faith inescapably influences these other aspects of character, and likely for this reason, Aesthetic Mormons disagree that "A candidate's faith should not be news in an election" (z-score: -1.214), but that people, rather, should be aware of a candidate's religious persuasion.

Institutionally, they believe in the right of the church to assert a measure of political authority, as confirmed by their disagreement with the statement, “The church should stay out of politics” (z-score: -1.556). In fact, the strongest point of disagreement for Aesthetic Mormons is, “All churches should stay out of politics” (z-score: -2.082). Yet, the statement of second strongest disagreement is, “The church should help promote Romney’s candidacy” (z-score: -2.046), suggesting that, although churches ought to have some political influence, there are clear boundaries as to what is appropriate.

In light of these concerns, it appears that Aesthetic Mormons are far more invested in their faith than in the specifics of politics. They have no strong opinions either in the affirmative or negative that concern Mitt Romney the man, only the implications of his mediated persona and his involvement in the election. The group’s unique statement, for example, “Romney’s elections will make Mormonism mainstream” (z-score: 1.166) reflects a hopeful belief in the possibilities of having a Mormon candidate and its implication on the public’s perception of the church. They seem to believe, as has been stated by church leaders, that media coverage is a benefit to the church, “The church is being harmed by all the attention Romney is getting (z-score: -1.696), and “If Romney loses it will hurt the church” (z-score: -1.429). This seems to suggest the tacit belief that the church, as a body, is a force for good to which the uninformed need only

Table 3: *Factor 3 Significant Positive and Negative Romney Statement z-Scores*

No.	Statement	z-Score
7	I think it's ok to be a democrat and a Mormon.	1.783
22	A politician can't ignore his or her faith	1.731
21	Mormons should vote with their head, not their religion.	1.652
48	Not all Mormons are conservative.	1.266
26	I think Romney is a people pleaser	1.175
40	Romney's election will make Mormonism mainstream	1.166
1	I'm not going to vote for him simply because he's a member of my faith.	1.135
24	All churches should stay out of politics.	-2.082
36	The church should help promote Romney's candidacy.	-2.046
34	The church is being harmed by all the attention Romney is getting.	-1.696
37	The church should stay out of politics.	-1.556
39	If Romney loses it will hurt the church.	-1.429
5	Mitt Romney is conservative, as all Mormons should be	-1.227
17	A candidate's faith should not be news in an election.	-1.214
46	Romney's a Mormon, and that's all I need to know to vote for him.	-1.178
12	I think that every Mormon should vote for Mitt Romney.	-1.131
23	There should be a rule against bringing someone's faith into a political election.	-1.122
3	Mitt Romney should downplay his faith in the election.	-1.034

be exposed. This hope and optimism for the church's future is possibly the most alluring promise of the Romney's media persona for Aesthetic Mormons. It is very possible, in fact, that many have little natural interest in politics at all, except when it may bring media exposure to the Church.

Romney himself, then, seems to be of little import. The reputation and mediated image of the religion is paramount. Politically, though, for Aesthetic Mormons, the basic principles behind selecting someone for public office will always be based on a candid assessment of what is most needed and whether the candidate can fill that need.

#### **Factor 4—Doubty Zealots**

Compared to the other three factors, the Doubty Zealots seem contradictory as they are the only group that favors the possibility of a Mormon candidate while opposing Mitt Romney. Among their stronger points of agreement are "It's about time we Mormons had a candidate for president" (z-score: 1.627) and "I'm more likely to vote for Romney because he's a Mormon" (z-score: 1.404). Simultaneously, however, they assert that they "don't care for Romney's political ideology" (z-score: 1.241), that "Mitt Romney hasn't inspired [them] to get involved this election" (z-score: 1.061), and that they are consequently "OK with [their] Mormon friends not voting for Mitt Romney" (z-score: 1.783). Thus it appears that although they favor the ideals the Church represents, they believe that Mitt Romney does not measure up to their expectations.

This disappointment in Romney is consistent with the statement most strongly disagreed with, that "Mormons make better candidates because they don't have as many skeletons in their closets" (z-score: -1.408). Like the Sovereign and Aesthetic Mormons, they do not expect membership in the church to be a guarantee of adherence to its values; these decisions must be made on a case-by-case basis. It is unsurprising, then, that, like most participants, the Doubty Zealots value rationality and objectivity, as attested to by the two statements most strongly agreed upon: "Mormons should vote with their head, not their religion" (z-score: 1.814) and "Not all Mormons are conservative" (z-score: 2.307).

Though the element of doubt arises in consideration of the media, the Doubty Zealots are yet zealots because even with a candidate they do not trust they will not deemphasize their faith. Like the Aesthetic Mormons, they acknowledge the personal bias that they are more likely to vote for Romney because he is Mormon, but exert their favoritism toward their faith further by agreeing that "Romney should emphasize his faith in the election" (z-score: 0.909). Although this interesting set of assertions may stem from a willingness to embrace him were he to appear more "faithful," their disagreement with his political ideology may also and more strongly suggest a hope to use even a poor candidate to bolster the church's reputation, regardless of his politics. Given, however, their belief that political decisions should be objective, they are uninspired by Romney, disagree with his worldview, and would not mind if their peers were to vote against him; hence, they seem unlikely to have voted for him themselves.

The Doubty Zealots, then, continue to dream, not of a mere Mormon President, but of the right Mormon president. One respondent argued, "Mormons should represent the best of our nation." They desire a candidate they can trust to value their faith "at their level" while leading the country as they see fit. Although this group is mostly comprised of Republicans, this stubbornness serves as a staunch reminder to all of one of their stronger statements, "Not all Mormons will vote for Mitt Romney

because they are more diverse than most people believe” (z-score: 1.586).

Table 4: *Factor 4 Significant Positive and Negative Romney Statement z-Scores*

No.	Statement	z-Scores
48	Not all Mormons are conservative.	2.307
21	Mormons should vote with their head, not their religion.	1.814
47	I am OK with my Mormon friends not voting for Mitt Romney.	1.784
15	I feel that it’s about time we Mormons had a candidate for president.	1.627
41	Not all Mormons will vote for Mitt Romney because they are more diverse than most people believe.	1.586
2	I’m more likely to vote for Mitt Romney because he’s a Mormon.	1.404
42	I don’t care for Romney’s political ideology. It doesn’t matter to me that he’s a Mormon.	1.241
31	Mitt Romney hasn’t inspired me to get involved in this election.	1.061
3	Mitt Romney should emphasize his faith in the election.	0.909
12	I think that every Mormon should vote for Mitt Romney.	-1.098
13	I think that Mormons make better candidates because they don’t have as many skeletons in their closets.	-1.408

## RQ2

The second research question asked about Mormon perceptions of Mitt Romney within the identified factors. To answer this question, the statements were separated into six perceptual categories. The significant z-scores for these statements within all four factors

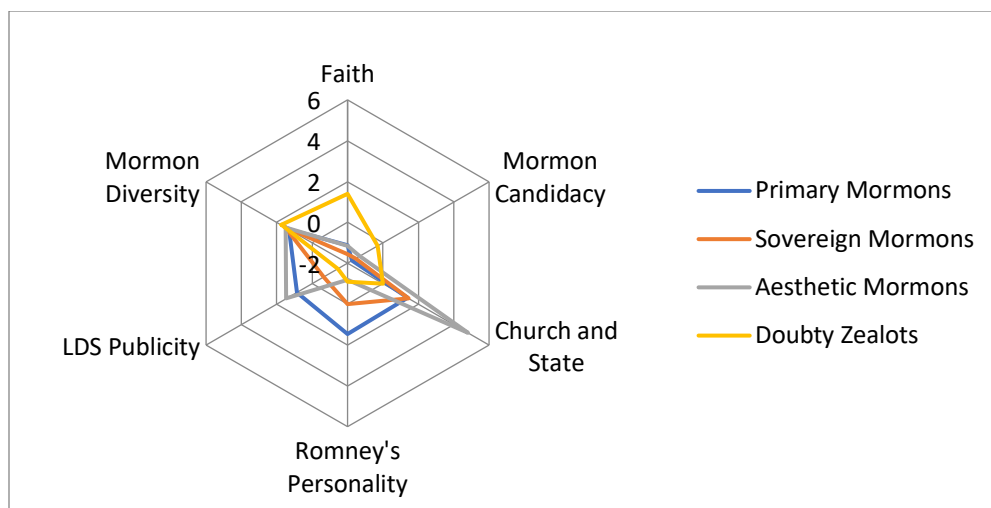


Figure 1 Factor group z-scores for six Romney perception categories

were then added to provide cumulative z-scores for each of the Romney perception categories. Figure 1 provides a visual map of factored participant perceptions along each of these six categories, revealing the variety of Romney perceptions among the four factor groups.

The main finding regarding RQ2 is the variety between the four factors in relation to the six perceptual categories. The cumulative z-scores for each perceptual category highlights areas of perceptual weight for each factor.

## Discussion

There is greater diversity of identity within the LDS population than the averages assume. This research identified four main Mormon perspectives regarding Mitt Romney, his politics, and his mediated persona. The combination of increasing media attention of Mormons, shifting trends in Mormon politics, and a Mormon candidate for the United States Presidency has had a dramatic impact on the way Mormons view themselves. This research has attempted to understand these changes by analyzing perspectives embedded within this combined milieu. These perspectives can now be used to understand types of mediated movements free from the traditional religious or demographic labels. Future studies should look into the fracturing identities of multiple cultures, as well as the cultural consequences of those identities.

The purpose of this research was to understand how Mormons perceive these media and political changes. This research agrees with Stephen's (1985) argument that Q-methodology is uniquely suited for research in communications. Furthermore, this analysis views Q-methodology as even more vital to understanding religious perspectives. Q-methodology offers a new perspective to cultural communications studies, one that is severely needed.

While this study used Q-methodology as outlined, there is always the risk that participants did not represent the entire cohort of Mormon views. Future research could focus on demographics with varied levels of Mormon activity to see if they might differ from the current sample. Perhaps those that are not "active" Mormons perceive this context differently. Additionally, the current study looked only at Mitt Romney. A follow-up study addressing perceptions of a Democratic personality such as Harry Reid could be used to validate the current findings.

Mumford (1970) recognized the dilemma of over-representation of one group over another more than 40 years ago. He argued that there is a never-ending process of contextual perspective, as no one contextual type is "capable of encompassing all the latent potentialities" of human beings (p. 289). Therefore, researchers must break the mold of traditional contextual definitions. This research has provided one way of doing that. In the end, while Mormon perceptions of Mitt Romney within the mediated and political milieu are insightful, perhaps the most important result of this research is that majority views are nearly as dominant as media and popular perception would indicate. This study provides important insights into the little-studied area of religious perception. It has particular weight since Mormon activities and personalities are increasingly in the media spotlight. Understanding opinions and attitudes about the four major types of perceptions of Mitt Romney is a step in right direction of being able to model how religions react to increased media exposure.

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## Appendix 1

### Mormon Faith

1. I'm not going to vote for him simply because he's a member of my faith.
2. I'm more likely to vote for Mitt Romney because he is a Mormon.
3. Mitt Romney should emphasize his faith in the election.
4. Mitt Romney should downplay his Mormon faith in the general election.
5. Mitt Romney is conservative, as all Mormons should be.
6. I get tired of all my Mormon friends pushing Romney on me.
7. I think it's ok to be a democrat and a Mormon.
8. Mitt Romney was called to be a stake president by apostles. He can't be a bad man.

### Mormon Candidacy

9. Mitt Romney is the same person as many of the men in my ward.
10. I think that Mormon candidates have a harder time schmoozing their electorate.
11. Mitt Romney isn't a real politician, but an authentic businessman/church guy.
12. I think that every Mormon should vote for Mitt Romney.
13. I think that Mormons make better candidates because they don't have as many skeletons in their closets.
14. Because Mitt Romney is a Mormon, I think I know what he'll do if he gets in office.
15. I feel that it's about time we Mormons had a candidate for president.
16. Mormon political candidates are just like any other politician.

### Church and State

17. A candidate's faith should not be news in an election.
18. I would be just as willing to vote for a Muslim, Hindu, or Jew as I would a Mormon.
19. A Mormon would probably be a better leader for our country.
20. I think that Mormons make better politicians, regardless of party.
21. Mormons should vote with their head, not their religion.
22. A politician can't ignore his or her faith.
23. There should be a rule against bringing someone's faith into a political election.
24. All churches should stay out of politics.

### Personality

25. To me he's just a rich dork.
26. I think Romney is a people pleaser.
27. If everyone knew Mitt Romney they would probably vote for him.
28. Romney is a liar.
29. I have not developed an opinion about Mitt Romney yet.
30. I cannot stand Mitt Romney.
31. Mitt Romney hasn't inspired me to get involved this election.
32. Mitt Romney is a good man; exactly what our country needs.

### Church Publicity

33. Having a Mormon presidential candidate is good for the church.
34. The church is being harmed by all the attention Mitt Romney is getting.
35. It would be better for the church if Mitt Romney lost the election.
36. The church should help promote Romney's candidacy.
37. The church should stay out of all politics.
38. Having Mitt Romney as president would be great for the church.
39. If Romney loses it will hurt the church.
40. Romney's election will make Mormonism mainstream.

### Mormon Diversity

41. Not all Mormons will vote for Mitt Romney because they are more diverse than most people believe.
42. I don't care for Romney's political ideology. It doesn't matter to me that he's a Mormon.

43. Romney's Mormonism is just one aspect of his background and personality.
44. Because he is a Mormon like me, I have a good idea of Romney's values.
45. I don't know much about Mitt Romney, and I'll need to know more about him if I'm going to vote for him.
46. Romney's a Mormon and that's all I need to know to vote for him.
47. I am ok with my Mormon friends not voting for Mitt Romney.
48. Not all Mormons are conservative.

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