J380 Introduction to Research Methods

Sec. 07837   M 12-3 p.m. CMA 6.146
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Course Description and Objectives

Catalog description: "Research methods and ethics, from design to data analysis and report writing."

Social science research allow scholars to make sense of the social world, to discover why people think and act like they do and how important institutions act. The main purpose of this class is to provide you with a broad introduction to the methodological foundations and tools to study mass communications. But a secondary purpose is to convince you that the process of scientific discovery can be fun. Most of the semester will focus on the fundamentals of quantitative social science and applied research, although we will also explore qualitative research. You will learn how to identify problems to study, develop hypotheses and research questions, specify independent and dependent variables, check for the validity and reliability of studies and design research projects. You will be exposed to the broad range of designs used in communication research from laboratory and field experiments, surveys, content analysis, focus groups and in-depth interviewing. Specifically, at the end of this course, you should be able to:

1. Define research; explain and apply research terms; describe the research process and the principle activities, skills and ethics associated with the research process.
2. Explain the relationship between theory and research.
3. Describe and compare the major quantitative and qualitative research methods in mass communication research.
4. Propose a research study and justify the theory as well as the methodological decisions, including sampling and measurement.
5. Understand the importance of research ethics and integrate research ethics into the research process.
6. Be able to assess and critique a published journal article that uses one of the primary research methods in the field.
7. Be able to construct an effective questionnaire that employs several types of survey questions.

8. Construct an effective research proposal that will serve as the launching point for the study you conduct next semester.

Textbooks

Schutt, R. K. (2012). *Investigating the Social World: The Process and Practice of Research* (7th edition). Los Angeles: Sage.

Recommended: Poindexter, P. M., & McCombs, M. E. (2000). *Research in Mass Communication: A Practical Guide.* Bedford/St. Martin's.

Course Assignments and Grading

Exam: There will be exam just after the midterm of the semester. The exam will be a combination of definitions, multiple choice and short answers. Find a word and connect the dots is also possible, but highly unlikely. The exam is scheduled for **Oct. 28.**

Critiques: You will each critique and from the four kinds of research we will discuss in class: survey research, content analysis, experiments or qualitative analysis. The critique should be 305 pages long. Your critiques should analyze the articles based on our discussions of what are the criteria used to judge good research in that research methodology. The critiques are due the week after we talk about the methodology. More detail about the assignment can be found in assignment #1.

In class exercises: We will have several in-class exercises to help you learn the concepts introduced in class. You need to be in class that day to receive credit for the exercises. The exercises are part of your participation grade.

Questionnaire: Everyone will create a portion of a survey questionnaire that will focus on main independent and dependent variables. A fuller discussion is contained in assignment #2. The questionnaire is due **October 7.**

Research Proposal: This will be a 5-7 page document where you spell out your topic, provide a brief description of the literature review and theoretical framework, and explain your methodology. This will be completed in three parts. The description of the topic will be due **Sept. 23rd**. The rough draft of the proposal is due **Nov. 11** and the final draft is due **Nov. 25th**. During the last class period you will provide a powerpoint presentation of your study you will write the next semester

Grading

Exam	100 points
Research Status Report	100 points
Critique	25 points
Participation	25 points

There will also be a potential to earn up to 15 points extra credit by participating in surveys or experiments by college faculty.

  I have also created a Facebook group for this class: J380 Introduction to Research Methods: Add it Up. This will be used to send messages to the class as well as to post links.

Learning Objectives and Assessment

This is a core course required of all doctorate and theory and research master's students

Learning Objectives. After this course:	*Assessment Techniques.*
Students will be able to select appropriate quantitative methodologies for use in a study to be performed in the spring. These methodologies include, but are not limited to, experimental, survey and content analysis.	Class discussions and instructor lectures Examination
Students will be able to describe basic approaches to qualitative research. These methodologies include, but are not limited to, case studies, in-depth interviews and focus groups.	Class discussions and instructor lectures Examinations
Students will be able to identify and critique articles based on different research methods	Class discussions and instructor lectures Examination
Students will be able to construct a questionnaire relying on several types of questions	Class discussions and instructor lectures
Students will be able to write an effect research proposal that spells out a project they will conduct spring semester	Class discussions and instructor lectures

Important Course Rules and Policies

1. Attendance:

This is a course that deals with some difficult issues, so attendance is essential for good performance. I will allow you three absences. After the third absence, I will deduct half a letter grade for each additional absence. You need to contact me **in advance** if you are going to miss a class. All tests must be taken during their scheduled time unless you have made prior arrangements. Assignments are due at the beginning of class on the date indicated except for the final draft of the Research Status Report, which is due at 4:30. I will deduct 10 percent for every day the assignment is late. I will not accept any papers more than a week late.

2. Religious Holy Days Observance Policy:

The Texas Education Code specifies that an institution of higher education shall excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence. A student who misses classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day should inform the instructor as far in advance of the absence as possible, so arrangements can be made to complete an assignment within a reasonable time after the absence. http://www.utexas.edu/student/registrar/catalogs/gi03-04/ch4/ch4g.html#attendance

Students with Disabilities:

Please notify your instructor of any modification/adaptation you may require to accommodate a disability-related need. You will be requested to provide documentation to the Dean of Student's Office in order that the most appropriate accommodations can be determined. Specialized services are available on campus through Services for Students with Disabilities. http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/

Policy on Scholastic Dishonesty:

The University defines academic dishonesty as cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, falsifying academic records, and any act designed to avoid

participating honestly in the learning process. Scholastic dishonesty also includes, but is not limited to, providing false or misleading information to receive a postponement or an extension on a test, quiz, or other assignment, and submission of essentially the same written assignment for two courses without the prior permission of the instructor. By accepting this syllabus, you have agreed to these guidelines and must adhere to them. Scholastic dishonesty damages both the student's learning experience and readiness for the future demands of a work-career. Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University.
http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint_student.php.

The Honor Code:

The core values of the University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the University is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, fairness, and respect toward peers and community.

Computers and Cell Phones

I will provide powerpoints before class on Blackboard for each of the lectures, so you are encouraged to bring your laptop to take notes. Cellphones need to remain silenced and put away during the class. I had a colleague who required people to sing "I am little teapot" if their cell phone went off. Don't force me to enforce that rule.

Make-up Exams

No make-up exams will be given except in the cases of family emergency, incarceration, official University of Texas business, or serious health issues. You must notify me **no later than the day of the exam or you will not have the opportunity to make it up** and show me an adequate written documentation to qualify for a make-up exam. If the exam schedules conflict with a religious holiday, bring this to my attention by the end of the second week of class. After the second week of class, only those with a formal, written excuse from a doctor will have exams rescheduled.

LECTURE TOPICS AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

Course Outline (Subject to Change)

Weeks	Topics	Readings/Assignments	
Week 1 (Aug. 26)	Semester hasn't started yet		
Week 2 (Sept. 2)	STILL don't meet Happy Labor Day!		
Week 3 (Sept. 9)	We FINALLY meet! Introduction to class What is Social Science and Communication Research?	Schutt, chapt 1	
Week 4 (Sept 16)	The Scientific Method	Schutt, Chapter 2	
Week 5 (Sept 23)	Conceptualization and measurement	Schutt, Chapter 4 **Due: Research Topic Memo**	
Week 6 (Sept. 30)	Sampling and survey Research	Schutt, Chapters 5 & 8 **Recommended**: Poindexter (P) and McCombs (M), chapt. 4 & 5	
Week 7 (Oct. 7)	Research Design & Experiments	Schutt, Chapter 6 & 7 **Due: Survey questionnaire**	
Week 9 (Oct. 14)	Content Analysis	Schutt, Chapter 13 Poindexter & McCombs, chapt. 11 **Survey or experiment critique due**	
Week 10 (Oct. 21)	IRB and Developing Research Proposal; Research Ethics	Schutt, p. 57-58, Chapt 3 "Recommended Ethical Research Guidelines for Members," http://www.aejmc.org/home/2011/03/ethics-rese "Faculty Council Research Policy Committee's Recommended Standards of Ethical Research at Austin," http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/2009- 2010/legislation/ethical_rsch_stnds.html **Content analysis critique due**	
Week 11 (Oct. 28)	**Q&A Exam** Clean up		

Week 12 (Nov. 11)	Qualitative research in mass communication	Schutt, Chapter 9 **Due: Research Proposal Draft**
Week 13 (Nov. 18)	Consultation on Research proposal	
Week 14 (Nov. 25)	Work on your Research Proposals	**Due: Final proposal**
Week 15 (Dec 2)	Present your results	**Due: Powerpoint Presentation**

Assignment #1 Critiques of articles

Everyone will critique an article found in a major mass communication journal. The critiques should be 3-5 pages long and are due the week *after* we talk about the method in class. So critiques based on survey or experimental studies are due on **Oct. 14**. Critiques based on content analysis are due **Oct. 21**. Critiques based on an empirical qualitative method is due **Nov. 18**

Go online and examine the most recent issues of the following journals: *Communication Research, Journal of Communication, Mass Communication & Society, Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* and *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*. Find an article that interests you among the articles and that employs one of the research techniques we will discuss in class: surveys, experiments, content analysis, in-depth interviews, focus groups, case studies or participant observation. It makes sense to choose an article employing the methodology you will use for your study. Copy the article so that you can turn it in with your critique. Your critique should contain the following elements:

1. Provide a complete citation of the article (Title, authors, journal, volume, year and pages).
2. What are the research questions/hypotheses?
3. What are the major theories that it examines (be sure to briefly explain the theory)?
4. What is the research methodology (sample size, independent variables, dependent variables and how were they measured)?
5. Summarize the major results
6. What does the author say is the major contribution of the study?
7. What would you say are the strengths and weaknesses of the study with a focus on its methodology?

Assignment #2
Writing a survey questionnaire

Based on class discussion and your readings on writing good valid survey questions, write a 5-7 page survey questionnaire about a topic in mass communications that interests you. If you are doing a survey for your study in this class it would be logical to do questions you can use in that study. As we indicated in class, you do not need to re-invent the wheel. Indeed, it is better to use existing measures because you can better argue their validity. While I indicate you need at least one question of each of the type listed below, it is better if you can find related ones that you could use to form into a scale. You should label each question for the type of question it is and if you took if from an existing study please give the citation for the study. Labels should appear adjacent to the question.

  a. cover sheet with title that reflects the focus of your questionnaire, name, class and date
  b. At least one dichotomous question
  c. At least one nominal question
  d. At least one ranking question
  e. At least one question using a Likert scale
  f. At least one question using a semantic differential scale
  g. At least one question involving a thermometer scale
  h. 2 pt bonus: At least one question involving a Guttman scale
  i. At least one question involving an interval level scale
  j. At least one question involving a ratio level scale

This assignment is due at the beginning of class **Oct. 7**

Assignment #3
Research Proposal

The research proposal is a detailed plan or the study that you will be conducting next semester. You need to write a 5-7 page research proposal on the topic that you had approved early in the semester (or on a revised topic that you had approved by me). For your research methodology you may select a survey, content analysis, secondary analysis of data or an empirical qualitative method such as focus groups or in-depth interviews.

The research proposal will be submitted in four stages: A topic page, a rough draft of your proposal, a final draft of the proposal, and a powerpoint presentation of your research project

1. **Term paper topic memo (due Sept. 23) 10 points:** You must choose a narrow, specific topic. For instance use of mobile devices is too broad. However, examining motivations for why Korean students use smart phones for political information is more specific. You are going to spend a lot of time with this topic, so it is important to choose one that suits your interests.

Your discussion of your topic needs to include two things:

1. Clearly describe the issue you will investigate. Explain the topic itself as well as who are the subjects you will investigate (e.g. Korean students), what is the method you will use (e.g survey) and ideally what concept or theories you will use to investigate the topic

2. Explain why you think this is an important topic to investigate. That is, what will this add to the existing literature? Therefore, you might want to spend some time researching the topic to see what has been done on the topic and what are other areas that still need to be explored.

Your description of the topic should be typed and should be at least one good size paragraph long.

2.**Rough Draft of the Topic Proposal (Due Nov. 11) 20 points:** For those of you who are doing studies involving human subjects such as surveys, experiments, focus groups or in-depth interviews (content analysis and secondary analysis of data is exempt), you will need to fill out the Required Research Proposal Format

found on the IRB Human subjects page
http://www.utexas.edu/research/rsc/humansubjects/forms.html.   I have attached an example.

For those doing studies not involving humans, you can leave out part VI of the Human Subjects form.

3. **Final Draft of the Topic Proposal (Due Nov. 25) 45 points**: This will be a revised version of the proposal that you turned in Nov. 11. I will be giving detailed instructions on what you need to do to improve the proposal, but you are welcome to make an appointment to talk to me about. The final proposal is due 4:30 on Nov. 25.

4. **Research Study Status Report Powerpoint Presentation (25 points):** On the final day of the course everyone will do a 10-12 powerpoint presentation on their topic.

I.   **Title:** Information Selection and Processing in the New Media Environment

II.   **Investigator:**
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III.   **Goals of the Project**

The purpose of this study is to understand how people select and process information in the environment. More specifically, whether and how people's interest and involvement in a public issue (i.e., issue publics) can affect their information selection and processing. First, the study will examine if issue public members are more likely than nonmembers to select not only attitude-consistent political information, but also counter-attitudinal political information about the issue they are interested in. Second, the study will investigate the consequences of issue public members' information selection, including issue-specific knowledge, opinion on the issues, and issue-specific political participation. In addition to people's intrinsic interest in an issue, their motivated-reasoning goals will also be tested as a moderating factor in the study to understand if different types of goals (i.e., accuracy goals and directional goals) will influence issue public members' and nonmembers' information selection and processing differently. The study will contribute Eto public opinion research by understanding the role of issue publics in the democratic society, and how people select and process information in the new media environment.

IV.   **Background and Significance**:

Scholars have expressed concern that the majority of American citizens are apathetic about politics and lack political knowledge (e.g., Berelson, 1952; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Erskine, 1963; Neuman, 1986). They have worried that most individuals do not have crystallized attitudes about politics and may not make rational political decisions. As a result, individuals are easily influenced by elite cues, and do not hold consistent and stable positions toward most issues across time (Converse, 1964; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Downs, 1957; Zaller, 1992). Despite the less than optimistic facts regarding citizen competence, democratic society sustains. A debate therefore has arisen, questioning whether citizen competence is really essential, or whether we need to more carefully consider how public opinion functions.

In the midst of this debate on how public opinion functions and how citizen competence operates, the concept of issue publics may help with the process of reconsidering the functioning of democracy (e.g., Converse, 1964). The concept provides an alternative view on how public opinion is shaped. The concept of issue publics posits that the citizenry is

made up of issue publics—pluralistic groups of individuals with interest and involvement in specific issues (Converse, 1964; Kim, 2009; Krosnick, 1990; Krosnick & Telhami, 1995; Price, David, Goldthorpe, Roth, & Cappella, 2006). These groups of citizens are specialists. They are attached to certain issues that are personally valued and with which they are deeply concerned, but they do not necessarily do the same for other issues outside of their area of interest (e.g., Converse, 1964; Hutchings, 2003; Iyengar, 1990; Kim, 2009; Krosnick, 1990; Krosnick & Telhami, 1995).

Addressing the role of issue publics in a democratic society is important for several reasons. First, plausibly, citizens are not ill-informed of or apathetic to politics. Rather, they may pay attention and respond to a small number of public issues that trigger their concern and interest. Second, the changing information environment plays an important role in fostering issue publics. Lastly, with strong attitudes toward an issue and deep interest in the issue, issue publics may play an influential role in bridging the gap between deliberative and participatory democracy. Deliberative democracy emphasizes the importance of deliberation, which is exposure to dissimilar views, in encouraging people to take diverse perspectives into consideration. The process of deliberating should lead to reducing biases (e.g., pre-existing stereotypes which are strongly held) and enhance mutual respect for differences of opinion (Fishkin, 1991; Guttmann & Thompson, 1996; Habermas, 1989). Participation is another core element of a healthy democracy because it is citizens' political actions that affect government, policies, and other political outcomes (Brady, 1999; Verba, Nie, & Kim, 1978). However, scholars have documented a deliberative-participatory democracy paradox (Mutz, 2002a, 2002b, 2006). First, citizens tend to eschew conflicting opinions and select likeminded viewpoints, thereby resulting in attitude extremity and political polarization (Festinger, 1957; Stroud, 2010; Sunstein, 2001). Second, even if citizens do expose themselves to different political views, the ambivalence, confusion, and social accountability resulting from exposure to disagreement was found to discourage political turnout (Mutz, 2002a, 2002b, 2006). Although scholars have continuously examined the relationship between deliberative democracy and participatory democracy, the concept of issue publics has never been brought into the discussion.

Issue publics therefore may play a significant role in solving the deliberative-participatory democracy paradox. Previous research has shown that issue public members are more likely to expose themselves to issue-relevant information and perform exhaustive information-gathering activities in specific subject-matter domains (Boninger, et al., 1995; Iyengar, 1990; Kim, 2007, 2009). Yet, it is important to understand whether issue public members contribute to deliberative democracy through their issue-based selectivity. With respect to deliberative democracy and issue publics, the first question that needs to be answered is whether issue public members are more likely than nonmembers to seek out counter-attitudinal political perspectives. The second question is: To what extent does issue-based selectivity increase political knowledge and foster quality opinion? By answering these two questions, the relationship between issue publics and deliberative democracy can be identified.

It is possible that issue public members who are passionately concerned about an issue and personally invested in the issue may be prone to expose themselves to diverse perspectives as they make an effort to understand the issue comprehensively. Their exposure to different political views can contribute to a better quality of public opinion and enhance their issue-specific knowledge.

Second, it is possible that even if issue public members look at diverse opinions, they may contribute to participatory democracy because their involvement with an issue may be combined with strong and stable attitudes that may not deter their participation in political activities, but instead serve as a force to facilitate their participation. Therefore, it is also critical to understand how issue public membership facilitates participatory democracy by sorting out the relationship between issue public membership and participation in issue-related activities.

Given that issue public members may play an influential role in sustaining democracy by solving the deliberative-participatory democracy paradox, it is imperative for this study to examine the relationships among issue public membership (i.e., individuals' involvement and interest in an issue), issue-based selectivity (i.e., exposure to attitude-consistent and counter-attitudinal political views), political knowledge, opinion, and participation.

V.   Research Method, Design, and Proposed Statistical Analysis

Study Design and Participants

An experiment will be carried out to test the effects of issue public membership on information selection and processing, and the moderating effect of motivated-reasoning goals on the relationship. Subjects will participate in the study in a natural online setting and will be randomly assigned to one of the four conditions—(1) no-information search; (2) information search without goals; (3) information search with accuracy goals; and (4) information search with directional goals. The no-information-search group will only go through a pre-survey and post-survey so it can be compared with information-search groups to understand the differences in the potential effects of selective information seeking. The information-search group without goals will not include the manipulation of motivated-reasoning goals before participants start their information search. In the groups of information search with accuracy goals and information search with directional goals, motivated-reasoning goals will be manipulated to understand their moderating role in affecting information selection and processing.

The population of the experiment is the U.S. citizens above the age of 18. Participants will be recruited through Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk (MTurk), a crowd-sourcing system that allows requesters to post Human Intelligence Tasks (HITs) to a large number of people who seek tasks to complete for monetary payment. Compared to other experimental pools, MTurk is less expensive in terms of the cost for recruitment and the time required for implementing studies (Berinsky, Huber, & Lenz, 2012; Bohannon, 2011; Mason & Suri, 2011). Therefore, a growing number of studies across the social sciences have used MTurk for experimental

subject recruitment (Antin & Shaw, 2012; Horton, Rand, & Zeckhauser, 2011). Since this study aims to understand participants' online information seeking, MTurk is a feasible platform to conduct the online experiment.

The study therefore will be posted on MTurk as a task, and invite people to participate in the study. Participants will receive one dollar as a compensation for completing the study. Participants will access an online survey-experiment created through Qualtrics, a survey software system. The participation session will consist of introduction, pre-survey questions, random assignment to one of the four conditions, post-survey questions, debriefing information, and compensation information (see Flow Chart 1).

A pre-survey questionnaire will first ask participants about their attitude toward three different issues, including abortion, gun control, and environment (i.e., personal issue importance, personal issue relevance, attitude intensity, attitude stability, attitude centrality to the issues, issue position). After the pre-survey, Qualtrics will randomly assign participants to one of the four conditions. In the *information search with accuracy goal condition*, participants will be instructed to have an objective view of the issues in order to accurately describe the issues at the end of the study, while in the *information search with directional goal condition*, participants will be asked to find information that they think would be useful to support a strong and convincing justification in order to defend their position on the issues at the end of the study (e.g., Kim, 2007; Taber & Lodge, 2006). Those who assigned to *information-search without goal condition* will be directed to view the website without instructions, and those assigned to *no-search condition* will not be directed to view the website and will not be given any instructions.

Except the no-search condition, participants in the other three conditions will be asked to view a website for at least 5 minutes until they feel they have enough information to express their opinion. A real-time, click-by-click tracking method will be used to record participants' information search behaviors. Participants first will be identified by their IP address and then each page that the participants access will be recorded with time stamp, so the order, hit, and duration of page views can be tracked.

After participants click a "Quit searching" button, a post-survey will appear, where participants will be asked about issue-specific knowledge, intentions to participate in political and issue-related activities, arguments that they generated for their own and oppositional perspectives (i.e., argument repertoire) on the issues, general political knowledge, political predispositions, and demographic information. In addition, the measurement of need for cognition and need for evaluation will be included in the post-survey as a manipulation check of motivated-reasoning goals. Once individuals complete the survey, they will be thanked and provided with debriefing and compensation information.

Instruction for accuracy goals and directional goals conditions (Wording in the experiment)

Information search with accuracy goals condition

To make a valid political decision, such as voting, it is very important to have an **ACCURATE and OBJECTIVE** view of political information about public issues.

Now you will have a chance to select information that will be helpful for building an accurate and objective view of public issues. Please find out information that you think would be useful to have an accurate and objective view of politics for your valid political decision.

After the information selection, you will be asked to **CORRECTLY DESCRIBE** some political issues.

Information search with directional goals condition

Voting is an essential form of political participation in a democratic system. To make a meaningful voting decision, it is very important to have a **STRONG and CONVINCING** justification for your own position and opinion on political issues.

Now you will have a chance to select information that will be helpful for building a strong and convincing justification for your position and opinion on political issues. Please find out information that you think would be useful to have a strong and convincing justification for your position on political issues.

After the information selection, you will be asked to **DEFEND** your position and opinion on political issues.

Stimuli

Several web pages will be built to mimic a website on Qualtrics (e.g., Knobloch-Westerwick, 2012; Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009; Taber & Lodge, 2006). The first web page will be issue overview page. Three different issues that have been discussed in previous election periods, including abortion, same sex marriage, and gun control will be included. The issue overview page will contain four articles featuring opposing perspectives (2 pro and 2 contra) on each of the three issues. Thus, the page will have 12 articles in total (Please see the "Edited articles" file for the 12 articles which will be used in the experiment). Only headlines and news leads will be provided. Participants will have to click on the headline and lead to enter the article page to read the full content (Please see the "Online news example" file for how an online news article will be presented in the experiment).

Proposed Statistical Analysis

By using the statistic software, SPSS, frequencies, means, medians, ANOVA, and regression will be used to analyze the data.

VI. **Human Subject Interactions**

A. The **Sources of Potential Participants.** Approximately 500 participants who have an MTurk account and above the age 18 will be recruited. Participants will not be included or excluded because of any other criteria. The online-survey experiment will take approximately

20 minutes. All questions and articles for selection will only be available in English form.

B. Procedures for the Recruitment of the Participants. This study will be first posted on MTurk website and be listed as a task on a webpage that lists all tasks. People who have MTurk account will be invited to participate in the study. Before signing up for the online-survey experiment, participants can read a short description of the study (an invitation letter) so that they can decide whether to take part in the study.

C. Procedure for Obtaining Informed Consent. A consent document will appear at the beginning of the online-survey experiment. Participants are informed that they are voluntarily participating in the study and their participation is greatly appreciated; therefore, they can click on the "proceed" button at the bottom of the consent form if they agree to participate. If the participants click the button to participate in the online-survey experiment, and proceed to read the articles and complete the questionnaire, the informed consent will be obtained.

D. Research Protocol.

The current study will proceed as follows: introduction, consent, pre-survey questionnaire asking about pre-existing attitude toward three public issues (e.g., personal issue importance, personal issue relevance, attitude intensity, attitude stability, and attitude centrality, and issue position), random assignment to one of the four conditions, post-survey questionnaire (need for cognition, need to evaluate, issue specific knowledge, general knowledge, intention to participate in issue-specific political activities, opinions on the issues, political predispositions, and demographic information), debriefing and compensation information.

Participants can first read description (invitation letter) of the study on webpage that lists the task on MTurk. If they agree to proceed, participants will be directed to Qualtrics. At the beginning of the online-survey experiment, the consent form will explain that the goal of the study is to understand individuals' involvement in different issues, information selection, and information processing. After participants read the consent form on Qualtrics, if they proceed, they will be asked to answer the pre-survey questions first, and then randomly assigned to one of the four conditions.

For the three information search conditions (with accuracy goals, with directional goals, and without goals), they will be given five minutes to select articles they want to read on a mimic website. In the website, they will first see an article menu page that lists 12 different headlines and leads. They can click on a headline or a lead to read the full article. After they finish information selection, they will be asked to answer the post-survey questionnaire. All of the questions are established based on previous literature, and there are no potentially harmful questions. To complete the overall process, it will take approximately 20 minutes.

At the end of the survey, respondents will be asked to generate a random code (5 characteristics in length, such as a9s12 78DC2) that they will also be asked to provide when they submit their task on MTurk. This code will be used to verify respondents' participation in the online-experiment survey by matching the code on the survey and on MTurk so that they can receive their compensation (one dollar) on MTurk. The researcher will verify the

information in five days after respondents complete the survey, and approve the compensation on MTurk. MTurk only shows respondents' working ID (the ID generated by MTurk), so no personal information will be revealed. When respondents create the code, they will also be instructed to avoid using information that would identify them.

E. Privacy and confidentiality of participants. The investigator presents the promise that privacy and confidentiality of participants will be kept in the invitation letter (Your answers will be kept strictly confidential, and will be used only for academic purposes), and the first page of online-survey experiment on Qualtrics (consent form: There are no known risks that could cause you to feel uncomfortable, embarrassed, sad, tired, etc. All information will be kept confidential). No data will be collected that would identify participants such as name, address, or social security number. Only demographics, including gender, age, ethnicity, income, and education will be collected. Although respondents' IP address will be collected, the IP address will only be used to link their browsing history on the mimic website with the pre-survey and post-survey questionnaires. The IP address cannot be used to identify any personal information, and it will be removed once the two data sets are combined. No identifying information will be used in research reports or papers. No one, including the researchers, will be able to trace individual data back to participants. Data will contain no identifying information that could associate participants with it; they will be de-identified if they inadvertently do so.

F. Maintaining of confidentiality of the research data. The investigator will maintain the confidentiality of the data. Data will be kept on the researcher's laptop and will not be shared with others. A security code for the file that only the researcher has is required to access the file on the laptop. Other people would never use the data.

G. Please describe your research resources. This experimental design requires minimal resources. Dr. Natalie Stroud, the dissertation supervisor, may help with my project.

VII.   Potential Risks. The potential risks on the participants who voluntarily participate in the study are believed to be no greater than everyday life. There could be a primary risk which is the loss of the confidentiality of the participants' responses. However, the study will not ask the participants to provide their personal data and identifying information such as name, social security number, driver's license number, and so on.

VIII.   Potential Benefits. The most potential benefit is to the society and the research areas of public opinion and communication. The study will contribute to the understanding of how individuals' involvement in an issue (i.e., issue publics) can make a better democratic society through their issue-relevant information seeking, issue-specific knowledge, issue-specific opinions, and issue-specific participations.

IX. <u>**Sites or agencies involved in the research project.**</u> The are no sites or agencies involved in this study besides the University of Texas at Austin.

X. <u>**Review by Another IRB.**</u> This study has not and will not be reviewed by another IRB.

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