Reputational Costs of Receptiveness:
When and Why Being Receptive to Opposing Political Views Backfires

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Abstract

A fast-growing body of research finds that receptiveness to opposing political views carries reputational benefits. A different body of research finds that opposing political views and the people who hold them are seen as repugnant. How could it be that people receptive to opposing political ideas are viewed positively, when the political opponents they are receptive to are seen negatively? In six main and five supplemental studies, we reconcile this tension by showing that, under conditions typical of political information exposure, receptiveness to opposing political views carries reputational costs, not benefits. When people are receptive to opposing views coming from sources prototypical of the opposing political party—which is commonplace in politics—the reputational benefits of receptiveness reverse and turn into costs. We find these reputational costs across both strong and weak signals of receptiveness, eight different political and social issues, and multiple types of prototypical out-party sources. We argue that these costs arise because members of the opposing party are frequently stereotyped as immoral, and thus receptiveness to their ideas is seen negatively. As a boundary condition, we find that the costs of receptiveness are pronounced for sources who are prototypical of the out-party and reverse for sources who are non-prototypical. These findings resolve a seeming contradiction between two distinct literatures in psychology, contribute to a rapidly expanding literature on the interpersonal consequences of receptiveness, and lay the groundwork for understanding novel barriers to, and ultimately solutions for, the lack of cross-party openness and political polarization.

Keywords: Receptiveness, open-mindedness, partisan identity, political polarization, prototypicality, person perception, morality

Significance Statement

A well-functioning democracy demands from its citizens a willingness to engage with ideas and people they disagree with—but such engagement can come at a personal cost. We find that being open-minded to political ideas coming from members of the opposing political party can hurt one's reputation. Instead of coming across in a positive light (e.g., as more thoughtful or collaborative), the open-minded person comes across negatively. This is because polarization is at an all-time high and people see members of the opposing political party as immoral, and so they dislike those who are open-minded to ideas coming from the opposing political party.

Reputational Costs of Receptiveness: When and Why Being Receptive to Opposing Political Views Backfires

A fast-growing body of research proposes that people admire those who are receptive to opposing political views (Hussein & Tormala, 2021; Heltzel & Laurin, 2021; Minson et al., 2023; Yeomans et al., 2020). Their receptiveness is seen as indicating that they are intelligent, trustworthy, and collaborative (Heltzel & Laurin, 2021; Minson et al., 2023; Yeomans et al., 2020). Yet these findings seem surprising given the divisiveness of politics today. In the United States, political polarization is at an all-time high (Finkel et al., 2020). Democrats and Republicans distrust and dislike members of the opposing party more than ever before (Iyengar et al., 2019). They see political opponents as "unintelligent" and "immoral," and believe their opponents' ideas to be rooted in misinformation, propaganda, and bias (Pew Research Center, 2019; Schwalbe et al., 2020; Tappin & McKay, 2019). How can we reconcile these two literatures: the literature showing that people receptive to opposing political ideas are viewed positively, and the literature showing that opposing political ideas and the people who hold them are viewed negatively?

In the current research, we posit that prior research on receptiveness has overlooked an important factor—source identity—and that including this factor can reverse its conclusions. Although prior research has found that receptiveness to opposing views is evaluated positively, we propose that receptiveness to opposing views from sources prototypical of the opposing party will be evaluated *negatively*. That is, we propose that the general tendency to positively evaluate receptive others is reversed when receptiveness is directed at people who are prototypical of the opposing political party. We predict that, because many view members of the opposing party as immoral, people receptive to sources from the opposing party will suffer reputational costs. These predicted costs are crucial to document because, in politics, it is commonplace for

opposing views to come from sources who belong to the opposing party. Under such conditions, we show that receptiveness to opposing political views carries interpersonal costs, not benefits.

If obtained, these results would nuance our perspective on the interpersonal consequences of signaling receptiveness. Moreover, these results would suggest a novel barrier to cross-party engagement: a *reputational* barrier. People might avoid exposing themselves to ideas and people they disagree with because they are aware of the reputational costs of receptiveness proposed in the current research. If true, this would suggest that reputational mechanisms might partly drive the lack of cross-party contact and increasing levels of polarization. We return to this point, and the new countermeasures to polarization it promises, in the General Discussion section.

Past Research on Receptiveness to Opposing Views

Receptiveness to opposing views is a construct central to interpersonal relations and has been the subject of considerable recent research. It refers to the willingness to seek out, attend to, and engage with ideas and people one disagrees with (Minson et al., 2020; Minson & Chen, 2021). Receptiveness describes both an individual-level difference (Minson et al., 2020) and a situational state (Catapano et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2010; Itzchakov & Reis, 2021; Itzchakov & DeMaree, in press; Minson et al., 2023; Teeny & Petty, 2022; Xu & Petty, 2022; Xu & Petty, in press; Yeomans et al., 2020). Receptive individuals reap myriad interpersonal benefits. They are seen as more intelligent, rational, trustworthy, and collaborative (Heltzel & Laurin, 2021; Hussein & Tormala, 2021; Minson et al., 2023); are more persuasive (Hussein & Tormala, 2021; Minson et al., 2023; Xu & Petty, 2022; Xu & Petty, in press); and elicit greater collaboration intentions and openness in others (Chen et al., 2010; Yeomans et al., 2020). Indeed, to our knowledge, no prior research has documented any interpersonal costs associated with signaling one’s receptiveness.

Importantly, though, research in this area has tended to provide little to no information regarding to *whom* people are receptive (e.g., Chen et al., 2010; Heltzel & Laurin, 2021; Yeomans et al., 2020). Instead, the focus has been on unpacking to *what* people are receptive. For example, Heltzel & Laurin (2021) investigated the reputational consequences of receptiveness (vs. unreceptiveness) to opposing political views. These authors found that receptive targets (those who sought out opposing views on political issues) are evaluated more positively than unreceptive ones (those who avoided opposing views on political issues). Importantly, whereas the information content was specified (i.e., what people were receptive to), the information source (i.e., *whom* people were receptive to) was not.

In political contexts, people frequently observe the political party of the information source, and we argue that the political party of the information source can fundamentally change how receptiveness is evaluated. Specifically, we argue that receptiveness to prototypical members of the opposing party carries reputational costs, not benefits. Because views of political out-party members are more negative than ever before, we hypothesized that receptiveness to such out-party members would be viewed negatively. That is, although prior research has found that those receptive to opposing views are evaluated positively, we propose that those receptive to opposing views from prototypical *out-party sources* will be evaluated *negatively*. Such a finding would not call into question prior receptiveness research, but would reverse our typical understanding of the consequences of receptiveness and provide a more complete picture of the full array of the reputational consequences of receptiveness.

Why would Receptiveness to Out-Party Members Carry Reputational Costs?

Negative Stereotypes about Out-party Members

Over the last few decades, Democrats and Republicans have come to dislike and distrust out-party members more than ever before (Iyengar et al., 2019; Heltzel & Laurin, 2020). Views of out-party members as rated on feeling thermometers (where 0 = cold, 50 = neutral, and 100 = warm) have plummeted from a lukewarm 48 degrees in the 1970s to a chilly 20 degrees in 2020, even though ratings toward one's own party remained constant over the same time period (Finkel et al., 2020). This animosity is directed toward both out-party politicians and everyday members of the out-party (Druckman et al., 2019) and manifests itself in a wide array of interactions. Americans have been shown to avoid voting for (Bartels, 2000), dating (Huber & Malhotra, 2017), marrying (Iyengar et al. 2018), working for (McConnell, 2018), and hiring (Iyengar et al., 2019) out-party members. Hence, both ordinary citizens and party elites are disliked by members of the out-party.

Out-party members are viewed as lacking warmth (e.g., likable, compassionate), competence (e.g., intelligent, informed), and morality (e.g., honest, trustworthy; Hartman et al., 2022; Schwalbe et al., 2020; Tappin & McKay, 2019), the three primary dimensions of social perception (Aaker et al., 2010; Brambilla et al. 2021; Cuddy et al., 2008; Goodwin, 2015; Goodwin et al., 2014). Moreover, nationally representative polls conducted by the Pew Research Center show that the share of partisans describing members of the other party in negative terms has risen dramatically in recent years. For instance, in 2016, 35% of Democrats described Republicans as "immoral." This percent rose to 47% in 2019 and reached 63% in 2022. That is, it almost doubled in less than a decade. Among Republicans, in 2016, 47% described Democrats as "immoral." This percent rose to 55% in 2019 and skyrocketed to 72% in 2022. As another

example, in 2016, 33% of Democrats and 33% of Republicans labeled out-partisans to be "unintelligent." By 2022, this percentage had risen to 51% and 52%, respectively (Pew Research Center, 2022). We predicted that being receptive to out-party members—people viewed as unfriendly, unintelligent, and/or immoral—would lead to negative evaluations. That is, in contrast to prior research showing reputational benefits of receptiveness, we predicted that targets receptive (vs. unreceptive) to political out-party sources would be viewed negatively.

> H1: People who are receptive, compared to unreceptive, to opposing views coming from an out-party source will be evaluated negatively.

In this paper, we examine effects of all three dimensions of person perception (i.e., warmth, competence, and morality), but we focus our investigation primarily on morality for two reasons. First, some research suggests that perceptions of morality most strongly differentiate views of the in-party and out-party. For instance, Tappin and McKay (2019) compared how partisans perceived their own party and the opposing party on a variety of dimensions such as morality, warmth, and competence. The greatest difference between how people perceived their own party and how they perceived the opposing party was on the dimension of morality. Second, past research on person perception provides evidence for the "primacy of morality." Put simply, when forming impressions of others, people weigh morality more heavily than competence and warmth (Brambilla et al. 2021; Goodwin, 2015; Goodwin et al., 2014), even in competence-oriented domains (e.g., hiring a job candidate; Luttrell et al., 2022). Hence,

> H2: Negative views of targets receptive to out-party sources will be driven by perceptions of the out-party as immoral.

Moderation by Group Membership

H1 and H2 suggest that those receptive to out-party members will be viewed negatively because out-party members are seen as immoral. Unidentified or in-party sources are not likely

to be viewed as immoral, however, and so we predicted that those receptive to such sources would be viewed positively. People tend to think favorably of others about whom they have no valenced information (e.g., Cacioppo et al., 1997), and they see members of their own party in a positive light (e.g., as moral, virtuous, fair, and trustworthy; Tappin & McKay, 2019; Schwalbe et al., 2020). As such, we expect targets who are receptive to opposing views coming from a source whose partisan identity is unknown or from a source who belongs to one's *own* party to be evaluated positively.

> H3A: Consistent with prior research, people who are receptive (vs. unreceptive) to opposing views from a source with an unknown partisan identity will be evaluated positively.

> H3B: People who are receptive (vs. unreceptive) to opposing views from an in-party source will be evaluated positively.

Source Prototypicality

Our hypotheses regarding receptiveness to out-party sources are based on perceptions of out-party sources as immoral. Naturally, not all people who happen to belong to the out-party will be stereotyped as immoral. One key determinant of views of out-group members is the member's prototypicality (i.e., the extent to which they reflect the physical appearance, behaviors, and attitudes of their group; Brewer, 1988; Hogg, 1993; Mervis & Rosch, 1981; Rosch, 1978). Prototypical group members are more readily stereotyped compared to their non-prototypical counterparts (Blair et al., 2004; Eberhardt et al., 2006; Goh et al., 2022; Kaiser & Wilkins, 2010; Maddox, 2004; Wilkins et al., 2011). For example, Black men who look prototypically Black (e.g., have a broad nose, thick lips, and dark skin) were found to be more likely to receive the death sentence than Black men who are less prototypical (Eberhardt et al., 2006). The study authors argued that prototypically Black physical traits led jurors to apply the stereotype of criminality to the defendant, leading them to recommend more severe sentences.

Applying these findings to the current research, we predict that prototypical (vs. non-prototypical) out-party members will be more readily stereotyped as immoral and hence, targets who are receptive (vs. unreceptive) to such sources will be evaluated more negatively.

> H4: When the source is a prototypical (vs. non-prototypical) out-party member, receptive (vs. unreceptive) targets will be evaluated more negatively. This is because prototypical (vs. non-prototypical) out-party members will be especially likely to be stereotyped as immoral.

Overview of Studies

Six main and five supplemental experiments test our predictions. Across our experiments, we consistently find that receptiveness to opposing views from out-party sources leads to reputational costs. Indeed, this cost-of-receptiveness effect persists across different manipulations of receptiveness, different types of out-party sources, and different social issues. Our experiments tested both weak signals of receptiveness (e.g., following a social media account or reading an online article) as well as strong signals of receptiveness (e.g., going to a lecture or attending an in-person rally). We found costs of receptiveness regardless of the receptiveness manipulation used. Our experiments also tested different types of out-party sources. The costs-of-receptiveness effect emerged when the source was a stereotypic out-party member, an out-party member judged as representative by members of their own party, an unspecified out-party politician, or a well-known out-party elite (e.g., Nancy Pelosi, Barack Obama, Mitch McConnell, Marco Rubio). We also found the costs-of-receptiveness effect across eight different political and social issues, including abortion, immigration, gun control, climate change, combating terrorism, military spending, boycotting the Winter Olympics in China, and regulating social media companies.

In addition to providing evidence for the robustness of the costs-of-receptiveness effect, our experiments also tested our proposed immorality mechanism. Across multiple experiments,

we measured and manipulated perceptions of immorality, and found that it played an important role in predicting whether receptiveness led to reputational benefits or costs, even after controlling for perceptions of competence and warmth.

Our materials, data, code, and preregistration reports can be found on OSF (https://osf.io/ab2tn/?view_only=bbcba05f973a4f139a8a8c9901250cbc). Experiments 1A-1C were not pre-registered. Experiments 2, 3, and 4, as well as Supplemental Experiments 1, 2, 3, and 4, were pre-registered. All sample sizes were determined before data collection. All our studies aimed to collect at least 125 participants per condition, which provided 80% power to detect an effect size of Cohen's d = 0.29 (GPower; Faul et al., 2007).

Experiment 1A: Receptiveness to a Stereotypic Out-Party Source

Experiment 1A tested the prediction that receptiveness to opposing views will yield reputational costs. To test this, we had participants imagine interacting with a target who belonged to their own party. The target shared that they were recently receptive to or unreceptive to a stereotypic out-party member. Our core prediction was that receptive targets would be evaluated more negatively than the unreceptive ones (H1). Moreover, Experiment 1A tested whether perceptions of source immorality played a role in driving the predicted costs-of-receptiveness effect (H2).

Method

Three hundred Democrats and Republicans were recruited from Prolific Academic (48% female; M_{age} = 41, SD_{age} = 15; 74.67% Democrats; 22.33% Republicans; 2.67% Independents; .33% Other). Participants first reported their demographics, including their partisan identity. Next, participants read about a fictitious target, John, who was described as belonging to the same political party as that of the participant. If the participant was a Democrat (Republican), the target was described as identifying as a Democrat (Republican). Participants were then asked to

imagine that while talking to John, the topic of politics and social media came up. John mentioned that Twitter (a social media platform) recently recommended a new Twitter account for him to follow, and that the recommended account belonged to an out-party member.

Twitter account. Participants then viewed the Twitter account John mentioned. This Twitter account was constructed to signal that the source was a stereotypic member of the out-party (Figure 1). To construct this account, we relied on research identifying stereotypes associated with each party (Ahler & Sood, 2018; Mason, 2018; Mason & Wronski, 2018). For example, past research has found that Democrats tend to be stereotyped as atheists, whereas Republicans tend to be stereotyped as Christian. Thus, we included posts that signaled the source's religion: the Democrat account included a post endorsing an atheist book, whereas the Republican one included a post commending the Bible. To ensure that the Twitter account was indeed seen by participants as typical of the out-party, we measured how prototypical of the out-party the source was perceived to be. Consistent with our goal, the source was seen as highly prototypical of the out-party (on a seven-point scale: M = 6.02, SD = 1.07, t-test against scale-mid point: $t(299) = 32.82$, $p < .001$; See AAE1A in the Supplement).

Target Receptiveness. Next, the target in the vignette shared that he either followed this account because he wanted to listen to the perspective it offered and engage with it (receptive) or blocked this account because he did not want to listen to this perspective nor engage with it (unreceptive). More specifically, the receptive target said: "I started following him. I wanted to listen to and engage with this perspective," whereas the unreceptive target shared: "I blocked him. I did not want to listen to or engage with this perspective." This manipulation explicitly indicates the three defining aspects of receptiveness: the willingness to seek out, attend to, and engage with opposing views (Minson & Chen, 2021).

Attitudes toward Target. After reading the vignette, participants indicated their attitudes toward the target (John) using two seven-point semantic differential scales: "Judging from what he said, what's your overall impression of John?" Unfavorable / Favorable, Very Negative / Very Positive. These two items were averaged into an attitudes index ($r(299) = .97$, $p < .001$).

Source Perceptions. Participants reported their perceptions of the source's immorality, competence, and warmth. The order of these three measures was counterbalanced. To measure immorality, we had participants indicate to the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with two statements describing the source as immoral and virtuous (reverse-coded). Responses were recorded on seven-point scales ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. These two items were averaged into an immorality index ($r(299) = .51$, $p < .001$). Competence (competent, intelligent) and warmth (warm, friendly) were measured using similar scales.

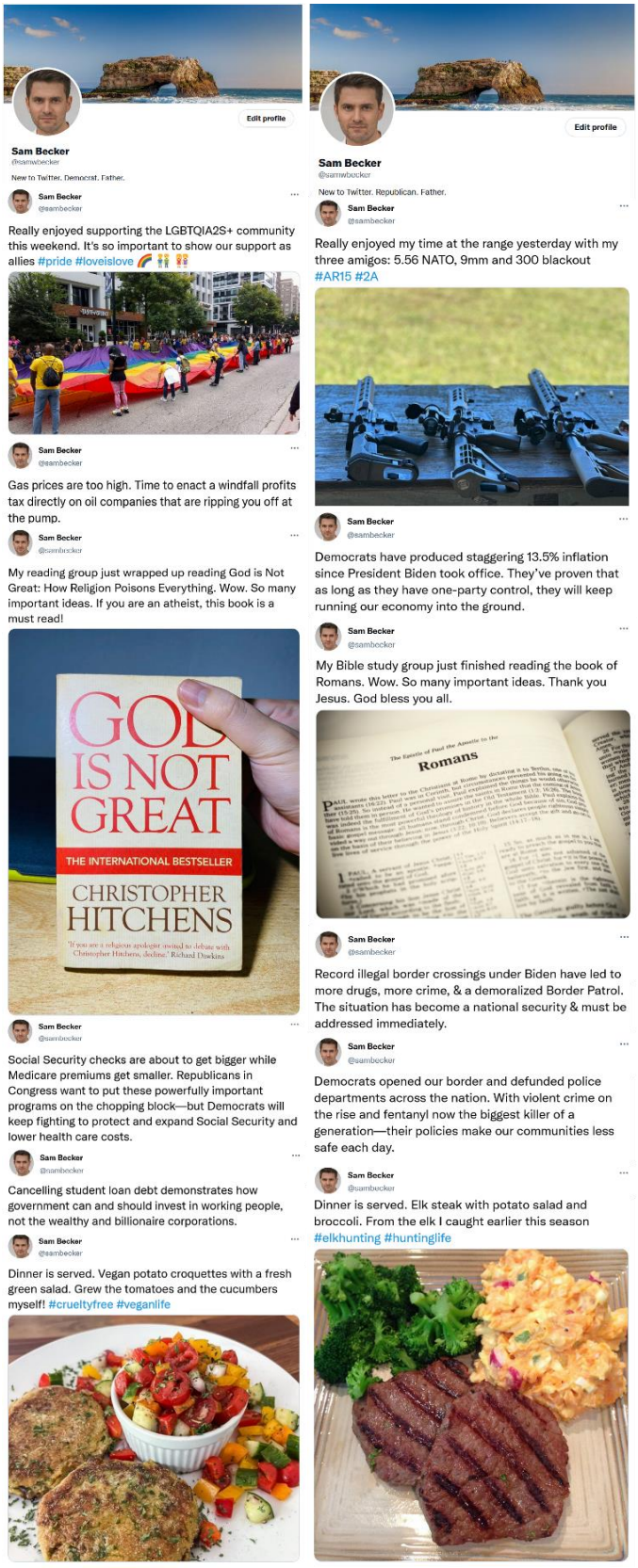


Figure 1. Stimuli used in Experiment 1A.

Results

Attitudes toward Target. We regressed attitudes toward the target on the receptiveness condition and found a main effect of receptiveness. Consistent with our core hypothesis, receptive targets were evaluated more negatively than unreceptive ones ($\beta = -1.41$, $t(298) = -6.81$, $p < .001$, $d = .79$; Figure 2).

Immorality mechanism. Next, we assessed the role perceptions of immorality played in driving these results ($M_{immorality} = 4.56$, $SD_{immorality} = 1.29$; t-test against scale midpoint: $t(299) = 7.52$, $p < .001$). Our theorizing suggests that people tend to see prototypical members of the other party as immoral, and thus evaluate those who are receptive to them negatively. If true, then for a given source, the costs-of-receptiveness effect should emerge among people who perceive the source to be immoral, but not among people who do *not* perceive the source to be immoral.

To test this prediction, we regressed attitudes toward the target on receptiveness, perceptions of immorality, and their interaction. We found main effects for receptiveness ($\beta = -1.47$, $t(297) = -7.09$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .14$) and immorality ($\beta = -.16$, $t(297) = -2.35$, $p = .02$, $\eta_p^2 = .018$). Importantly, we found a significant interaction ($\beta = -.84$, $t(296) = -6.93$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .14$; see Figure 2).

We conducted Johnson-Neyman tests to determine the regions of significance (Spiller et al., 2013). When the source scored 3.3 or higher on immorality (83% of the sample), receptive targets were evaluated more negatively than unreceptive ones ($ps < .019$). When the source scored between 1.8 and 3.2 on immorality (16% of the sample), there was no significant differences between receptive and unreceptive targets. Finally, when the source scored 1.7 or lower on immorality (1% of the sample), receptive targets were evaluated more positively than unreceptive ones ($ps < .036$).

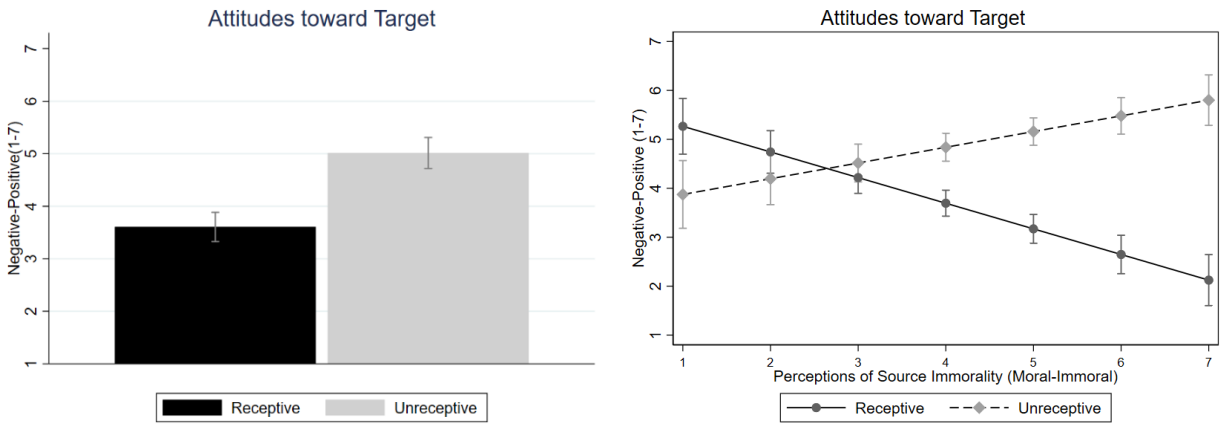


Figure 2. Left: Attitudes toward target as a function of target receptiveness. Right: Attitudes toward target as a function of target receptiveness and perceptions of source immorality. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Do these results hold even after accounting for competence and warmth? To answer this question, we estimated a similar regression, adding four additional covariates: perceptions of competence, perceptions of warmth, and their interactions with receptiveness. Replicating our earlier results, the interaction between receptiveness and immorality remained significant even after accounting for perceptions of competence and warmth ($\beta = -.90$, $t(292) = -4.83$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .074$). These results provide preliminary evidence that perceptions of immorality play a role in driving the costs-of-receptiveness effect, controlling for other source perceptions.

Discussion

Experiment 1A reveals that receptiveness to an ordinary out-party source leads to reputational costs (H1). This result is striking as it diverges from past research on receptiveness, which has found that receptiveness leads to interpersonal benefits. Here, we found that members of one's own party who were open to listening to and engaging with stereotypic out-party sources were evaluated more negatively than those who refused to engage with such sources. Additionally, perceptions of immorality predicted whether receptiveness led to reputational benefits or costs (H2). Most participants in this sample viewed the source as immoral and

evaluated a target receptive to the source negatively. This result held even after controlling for other person perception dimensions, like competence and warmth.

One potential limitation of Experiment 1A is that the Twitter profiles were based on outgroup stereotypes. Reliance on stereotypes risks painting hyperbolic and potentially inaccurate caricatures of out-party sources. This, in turn, could facilitate the perception that out-party sources are immoral, thereby increasing the chances of observing the costs-of-receptiveness effect. A more conservative test of our hypothesis would avoid relying on stereotypes and instead have members of the out-party themselves define what constitutes a typical member of their group. Experiment 1B adopted this more conservative approach.

Experiment 1B: Receptiveness to an Out-Party Source with Prototypic Opinions

Experiment 1B tested whether the costs-of-receptiveness effect would generalize to an out-party source who is judged by those same party members as prototypical. This marks a more conservative test of our hypothesis because it avoids relying on potentially inaccurate out-party stereotypes. To do this, we created new Twitter accounts, pre-tested among members of each political party to be representative of their own group. In addition to employing a more conservative test of our hypothesis, Experiment 1B tested whether the costs-of-receptiveness effect would generalize to a nationally representative sample.

Method

We requested a nationally representative sample of two-hundred and seventy-five participants from Lucid. Lucid is an online survey platform that uses quota sampling to recruit participants that resemble the gender, racial, geographic, and age distribution of the U.S. adult population. Two-hundred and fifty participants passed our attention checks and were included in the analysis (51% female; M_{age} = 46, SD_{age} = 17; Democrats; 27.60% Republicans; 33.60% Independents; 2.00% Others).

Prototypicality Pre-test. To determine what the Twitter accounts should look like, we collected about 60 opinions posted on Twitter by Democrats and Republicans. We then recruited 300 participants from Lucid to rate the extent to which each of these opinions was typical of their own group members. Democrats, N = 105 (Republicans, N = 85), were each shown seven different opinions randomly chosen from the list. For each opinion, participants were asked to rate how typical a person who posts such an opinion would be of their political party using items adapted from prior research (Goh et al., 2021; e.g., "This person is a typical [Democrat/ Republican]"). Responses were provided on a seven-point scale that ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree. We used the five most prototypical Democrat Tweets and the five most prototypical Republican Tweets to construct the Twitter accounts (see Figure 3). We also included manipulation checks of prototypicality in Experiment 1B. The results confirmed that the source was seen as prototypical of the out-party (M = 5.14, SD = 1.65, t-test against scale-mid point: $t(247) = 10.86$, $p < .001$; See AAE1B).

Target receptiveness was manipulated using the same language used in Experiment 1. Attitudes toward the target were measured using the same items in Experiment 1A. Perceptions of immorality were measured using different items. Participants shared their perceptions of immorality of the source and their ideas by indicating the extent to which they found the ideas John would be exposed to if he were to follow this Twitter account to be morally wrong using a seven-point semantic differential scale with four items (e.g., morally wrong/ morally right, unacceptable/acceptable). Because these four items loaded on one factor, we combined them into a perceptions of immorality composite capturing the extent to which participants found the source and their ideas to be morally wrong and reprehensible ($\alpha = .94$). We did not include other source perception measures in this experiment.

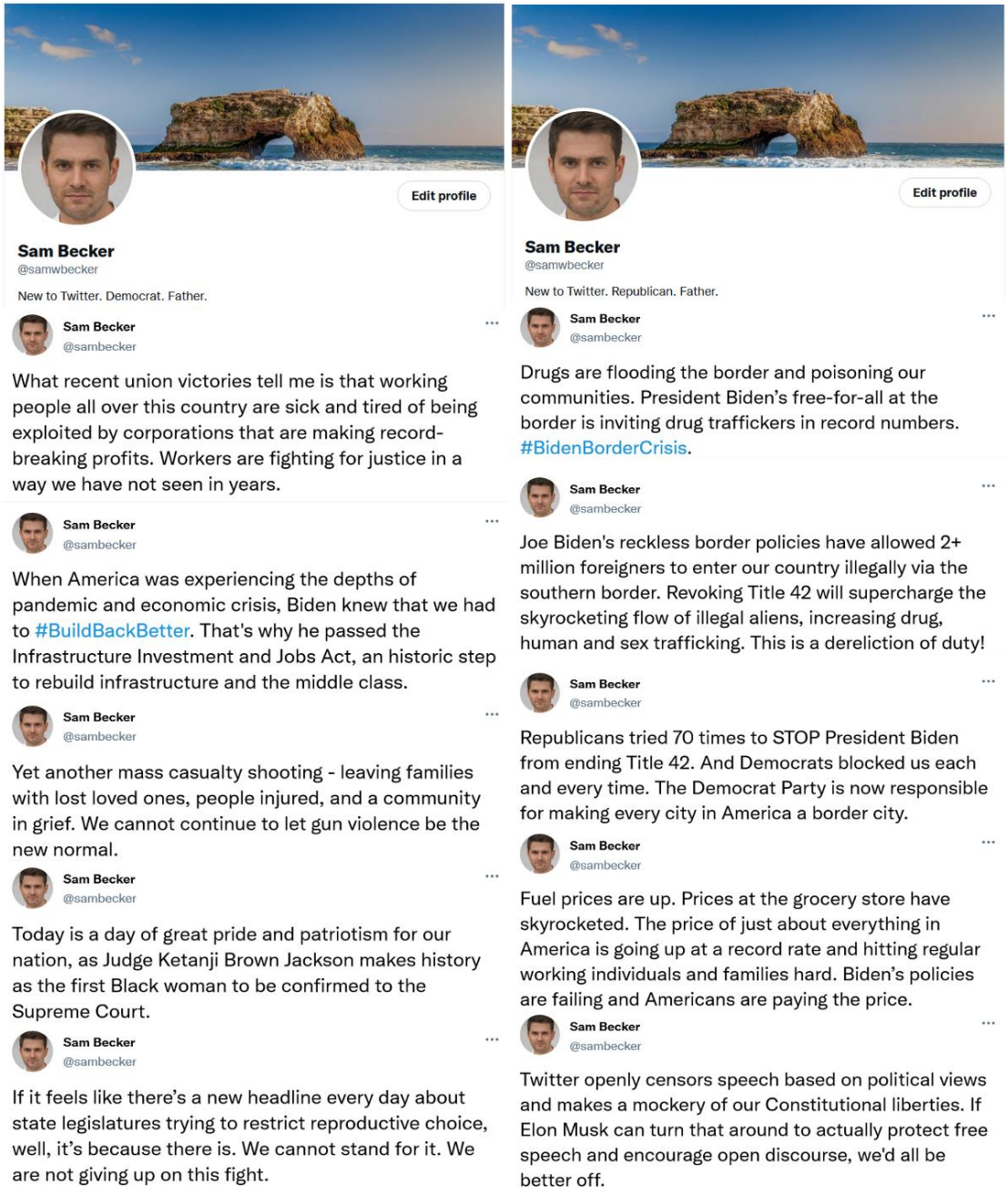


Figure 3. Stimuli used in Experiment 1B.

Results

Attitudes toward Target. We regressed attitudes toward the target on the receptiveness condition and found a main effect of receptiveness. Replicating our results from Experiment 1A,

receptive targets were evaluated more negatively than unreceptive ones ($\beta = -.63$, $t(248) = -2.64$, $p = .009$, $d = .33$; Figure 4).

Immorality mechanism. On average, participants perceived the source to be immoral (M = 4.53, SD = 1.72; t-test against scale midpoint: $t(247) = 4.81$, $p < .001$). To investigate the role perceptions of immorality played in driving the cost-of-receptiveness effect, we employed the same analytic strategy used in Experiment 1A. We regressed attitudes toward the target on receptiveness, perceptions of immorality, and their interaction. Replicating results from Experiment 1A, we found a main effect of receptiveness ($\beta = -.69$, $t(245) = -3.02$, $p = .003$, $\eta_p^2 = .036$) and immorality ($\beta = -.38$, $t(245) = -5.03$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .094$). We also found a significant interaction ($\beta = -1.11$, $t(296) = -7.14$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .16$; see Figure 4).

We conducted Johnson-Neyman tests to determine the regions of significance. When the source scored 4.2 or higher on immorality (60% of the sample), receptive targets were evaluated more negatively than unreceptive ones (*ps* < .044). When the source scored between 2.8 and 4.2 on immorality (23% of the sample), there were no significant differences between receptive and unreceptive targets. Finally, when the source scored 2.9 or lower on immorality (17% of the sample), receptive targets were evaluated more positively than unreceptive ones (*ps* < .049).

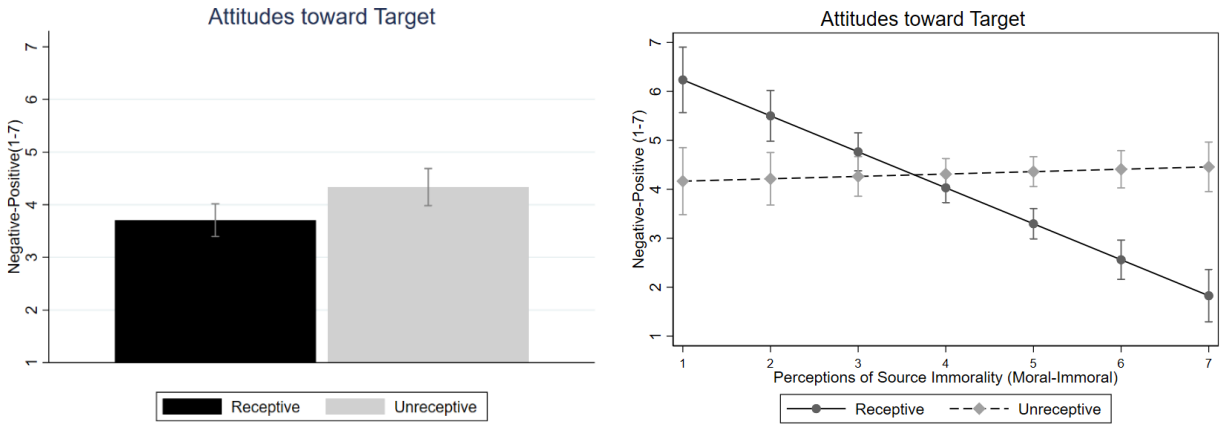


Figure 4. Left: Attitudes toward target as a function of target receptiveness. Right: Attitudes toward target as a function of target receptiveness and perceptions of source immorality. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Discussion

Results from Experiment 1B provide a replication of the costs-of-receptiveness effect (H1). Even when the source was an ordinary out-party member judged by members of their own party to be prototypical, targets that were receptive to this source were evaluated more negatively than targets that were unreceptive. In addition, results from Experiment 1B replicate the moderation pattern documented in Experiment 1A: Perceptions of source immorality predicted whether receptiveness led to costs or benefits (H2). Most participants viewed the source as immoral and evaluated a target who was receptive to the source negatively.

One potential limitation of Experiments 1A and 1B is that the source of the information was an everyday citizen. Would the costs-of-receptiveness effect replicate if the source was a member of the political elite? Understanding how people respond to receptiveness to political elites is important for two reasons. First, decades of research in political science highlight the outsized influence political elites have on members of their political party; elites set the agenda for their party and shape the opinions of rank-and-file party members (Abramowitz, 1978; Broockman & Butler, 2017; Clayton & Willer, 2023; Gabel & Scheve, 2007; Lenz, 2013; Minozzi et al., 2015; Pink et al., 2021; Zaller, 1994). Second, the opinions of elites are highly

salient. Opinions of elites are widely covered by journalists and the media (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1981; Gans, 1979). Because of their salience and ability to shape the opinions of others, it seems imperative to examine whether the costs-of-receptiveness effect would emerge when the source is a member of the political elite rather than an everyday citizen.

A second potential limitation is that the first two studies involved receptiveness to people based on their Twitter posts. It is possible that perceptions of those receptive to arguments made on Twitter differ from those receptive to other forms of communication. Experiment 1C addressed both of these issues.

Experiment 1C: Receptiveness to a Member of the Out-Party's Political Elite

Experiment 1C tested whether the costs-of-receptiveness effect would generalize to situations in which the source was an out-party elite. Participants imagined interacting with a target who belonged to their own party. The target shared that they were recently receptive to or unreceptive to opposing views articulated by an out-party elite (an unspecified Republican or Democratic politician). Our core prediction was that receptive targets would be evaluated more negatively than the unreceptive ones, and that this effect would be moderated by perceptions of source immorality.

Method

Four hundred and three participants were recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (42% female; M_{age} = 41, SD_{age} = 13; 64.76% Democrats; 26.80% Republicans; 8.44% Independents). Participants first reported their demographics, including their partisan identity. Next, participants reported their attitudes on three controversial issues (abortion, gun control, and immigration). Participants were then asked to imagine they met a target who shared their attitudes on one of these three social issues. The target was described as mentioning an event at which opposing views were espoused by an out-party politician. The target then shared whether

he attended this event to listen to and engage with this opposing perspective (receptive) or refused to do so (unreceptive). Below is an example of the vignette participants saw:

> Imagine you and Sam started talking about politics and the topic of abortion came up.
>
> Sam mentioned that he opposes restricting access to abortion.
>
> During your conversation, Sam said to you:
>
> "I heard about an event on abortion nearby. The speaker was a Republican politician. He was demanding we implement strict restrictions on abortion federally. I ended up going to this event. I wanted to listen to this perspective and engage with it."

Target Receptiveness. In the receptive condition, Sam shared: "I ended up going to this event. I wanted to listen to and engage with this perspective." In the unreceptive condition, Sam explained: "I refused to go to this event. I did not want to listen to or engage with this perspective." This phrasing was meant to parallel the phrasing used in Experiments 1A-B, and to capture the defining aspects of the construct of receptiveness (Minson & Chen, 2021).

Topic Assignment. As described above, participants always read about an event at which opposing views were espoused. Those opposing views were supposed to be articulated by a prototypical out-party source. However, the views expressed by a given source can affect their perceived prototypicality. For example, whereas a Democratic politician who is pro-choice likely comes across as prototypical, a Democratic politician who is pro-life probably does not. Hence, instead of randomizing participants into one of three social issues, we assigned them to a social issue, such that when the source articulated opposing views, those views were prototypical of the out-party. Mechanically, this meant that all participants were assigned to an issue on which they held party-consistent attitudes (e.g., a Democrat participant who is pro-choice but anti-immigration and pro-guns would get assigned the topic of abortion because the opposing views on abortion, pro-life, are prototypically Republican views). This assignment rule allowed participants to read about opposing views coming from an out-party source without undermining

the source's perceived prototypicality (Perceived Prototypicality: M = 5.86, SD = 1.19, t-test against scale-mid point: $t(402) = 31.36$, $p < .001$; See AAE1C in the Supplement).

After reading the vignette, participants reported their attitudes toward the target using the same items in Experiments 1A-B. Participants also reported their perceptions of source immorality, competence, and warmth using the same items in Experiment 1A. The order of the source perception measures was counterbalanced.

Results

Attitudes toward Target. We regressed attitudes toward the target on the receptiveness condition and found a main effect of receptiveness. Replicating our results from Experiments 1A and 1B, receptive targets were evaluated more negatively than unreceptive ones ($\beta = -.66$, $t(401) = -4.48$, $p < .001$, $d = .45$). This effect held across all three topics (abortion, immigration, and gun control) tested in this experiment (receptiveness × topic interactions: *p*s > .22).

Immorality mechanism. On average, participants perceived the source to be immoral (M = 4.67, SD = 1.25; t-test against scale midpoint: $t(402) = 10.77$, $p < .001$). To investigate the role perceptions of immorality played in driving the cost-of-receptiveness effect, we employed the same analytic strategy used in Experiments 1A and 1B. We regressed attitudes toward the target on receptiveness, perceptions of immorality, and their interaction. We found a main effect of receptiveness ($\beta = -.66$, $t(400) = -4.48$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .048$) but not immorality ($\beta = -.009$, $t(400) = -.18$, $p = .86$). We also found a significant interaction ($\beta = -.43$, $t(399) = -4.61$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .051$; see Figure 5).

We conducted Johnson-Neyman tests to determine the regions of significance. When the source scored 3.7 or higher on immorality (77% of the sample), receptive targets were evaluated more negatively than unreceptive ones (*p*s < .044). When the source scored between 1.5 and 3.6

on immorality (22% of the sample), there was no significant differences between receptive and unreceptive targets. Finally, when the source scored 1.4 or lower on immorality (1% of the sample), receptive targets were evaluated more positively than unreceptive ones (*ps* <.044). Importantly, even after accounting for perceptions of competence and warmth, the interaction between receptiveness and immorality remained significant ($\beta = -.37$, $t(395) = -2.52$, $p = .012$, $\eta_p^2 = .016$).

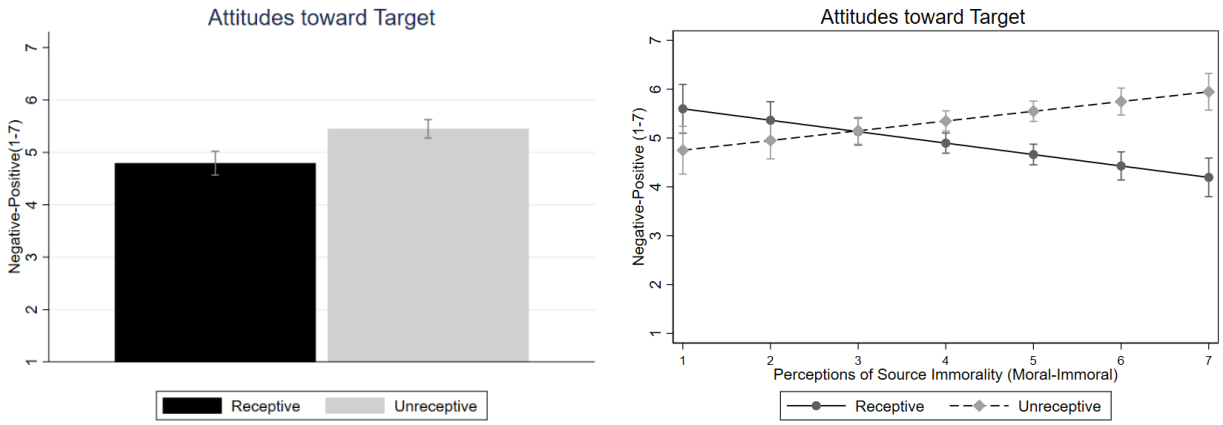


Figure 5. Left: Attitudes toward target as a function of target receptiveness. Right: Attitudes toward target as a function of target receptiveness and perceptions of source immorality. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Discussion

Results from Experiment 1C provide yet another replication of the costs-of-receptiveness effect (H1). Even when the source was an unspecified speaker labelled only as an out-party politician, targets that were receptive to this source were evaluated more negatively than targets that were unreceptive. This result held across three different controversial topics: abortion, gun control, and immigration. In addition, results from Experiment 1C replicate the moderation pattern documented in Experiments 1A and 1B: Perceptions of source immorality predicted whether receptiveness led to costs or benefits (H2). When the source was seen as high on immorality, as was the case for the majority of the sample, receptiveness led to reputational

costs, but when the source was seen as low on immorality, receptiveness led to benefits. These results held even after controlling for perceptions of warmth and competence.

One limitation of this experiment is that the source was an unknown out-party politician. In many circumstances, out-party views are articulated by famous and well-known politicians. Those politicians not only get media attention, but also widely shape the views of their rank-and-file party members. Thus, the next experiment tested whether the costs-of-receptiveness effect would generalize to contexts in which the target is receptive to well-known out-party politicians.

Experiment 2: Conjoint Experiment

Experiment 2 tested whether the costs-of-receptiveness effect would generalize to sources who are well-known and influential members of the political elite. In addition, we wanted to ensure that our results are robust to other features of the vignettes (e.g., the social issue under discussion and the event format). To efficiently test the generalizability of our results, we used a rating-based conjoint task. Conjoint is a study design popular in marketing and political science used to determine how people value different features (e.g., price, memory size, battery life) that make up a product (e.g., an iPhone; Moore, 2004; Bansak et al., 2019; Hainmueller et al., 2014). Participants in a conjoint study are shown a series of trials, each showcasing a different version of the target product. By varying different features of the product (e.g., a battery life of 8 hours vs. 7.5 hours; a memory of 64 GBs vs. 128 GBs) between trials and measuring how consumers respond to different combinations of these features, managers can quantify how much a given feature (e.g., battery life) affects overall attitudes.

Applying this approach, we had participants read multiple vignettes, each describing a target who was either receptive to or unreceptive to opposing views. Across vignettes, we varied multiple aspects of the scenario to ensure that the results we document are robust to a variety of stimuli. This approach allowed us to assess how the ‘feature’ of receptiveness influences overall

attitudes toward the target, on average, across many different combinations of stimuli. This experiment was pre-registered. Our pre-registered hypothesis was that, on average, receptiveness was going to lead to lower attitudes toward the target than unreceptiveness. Due to the complexity of the conjoint set-up, we did not include mechanism measures.

Method

We requested a nationally representative sample of nine-hundred participants from Lucid. Eight hundred twenty-three participants (52% female; M_{age}= 46; 40.3% Democrats; 30.25% Republicans; 25.69% Independents; 3.76% Others) were included in the final analysis, after exclusions specified in our preregistration. Each participant was asked to complete six trials (i.e., read six vignettes) and rate six targets. In total, there were 4,922 observations.

Participants first reported their attitudes toward four individual issues (e.g., immigration). Next, participants were asked to imagine they met a target who shared their attitudes on a social issue. The target always shared the same perspective as the participant. The target was described as mentioning an event at which opposing views were espoused and shared whether he attended this event to listen to and engage with this opposing perspective (receptive) or refused to do so (unreceptive). The vignettes were similar to those used in Experiment 1C. We experimentally varied four aspects of each vignette:

- Target receptiveness (receptive vs. unreceptive; manipulated in the same way as Experiment 1C)
- Event format (a lecture or a rally)
- Source identity (Barack Obama, Marco Rubio, Nancy Pelosi, Donald Trump, or an unnamed speaker, “The speaker”)
- Issue (climate change, immigration, terrorism, and military spending)

Thus, each vignette varied in target receptiveness, event format, source identity, and issue, and there were (2 x 2 x 5 x 4 =) 80 possible combinations of stimuli. Each participant saw

6 of these 80 combinations. Below, we expand on source identity and the views expressed by theses source. All exact materials can be found on OSF.

Source Identity. Participants read that the opposing views came from one of five sources. Four sources were well-known members of the political elite: Nancy Pelosi and Barack Obama for the Democratic party, and Donald Trump and Marco Rubio for the Republican party. We chose these politicians for two reasons: first, they were widely recognized by the public and, second, members of the opposing party had similar attitudes toward them (see section AAE2 in Supplement for pretest data). A fifth level was included in which the name of the speaker was never mentioned ("The speaker").

Views of the Source. To ensure generalizability, we tested four polarizing policy issues (immigration, climate change, military spending, and terrorism). These four policy issues were chosen because they were rated as important (Pew Research Center, 2021a). Within each of these policy areas, we chose a specific policy that was proposed by recent administrations (e.g., increasing the number of refugees admitted to the US to 120,000 per year and ending a ban on Syrian refugees). To bolster the credibility of the stimuli, we only allowed combinations of sources and views that occur in the real-world. Specifically, no source who belongs to the Democratic party (Obama, Pelosi) was described as holding traditionally Republican views (e.g., endorsing increased military spending or opposing electric vehicles). Similarly, no source who belonged to the Republican party (Trump, Rubio) was described as holding traditionally Democratic views. Focusing on combinations of source and views that occur in the real-world allowed us to bolster the external validity of our stimuli.

Results

As pre-registered, we estimated the average marginal component effect (AMCE) of receptiveness on attitudes toward the target with standard errors clustered on the respondent level

(see Hainmueller et al., 2014 for a discussion of AMCE and related concepts). More specifically, we estimated the following regression model:

$$\widehat{\text{Impressions}}_{i,t} = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{ receptiveness}_{i,t} + \beta_2 \text{ event}_{i,t} + \overrightarrow{\beta_3} \text{ issue}_{i,t} + \overrightarrow{\beta_4} \text{ speaker}_{i,t}$$

The AMCE of receptiveness is captured by the coefficient β_1. If this coefficient is found to be negative and significant this would suggest that receptiveness to opposing views lowered attitudes toward the target, on average, across the various event formats, political issues, and sources tested. Indeed, we found that receptiveness to opposing views had a significant and negative AMCE (AMCE = $-.14$, SE = .067, p = .042). This result means that receptive targets were rated more *negatively* than unreceptive targets across the different combinations of events, issues, and speakers. Correcting for potential imbalances across strata yielded consistent results (AMCE = $-.18$, SE = .070, p = .011; see AAE2 in Supplement for more details).

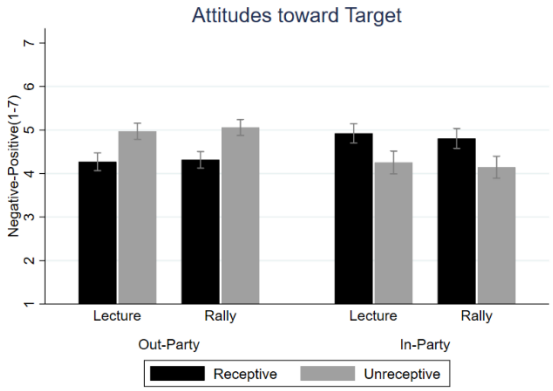
Moderation by Source Group Membership. As described already, all participants in this study were assigned to read about opposing views. For instance, a pro-immigration Democrat participant would read about anti-immigration views. Additionally, we only allowed combinations of views and sources that would occur in the real-world. As such, a pro-immigration Democrat would get assigned to read about anti-immigration views coming from Rubio, Trump, or a source whose partisan identity is unknown (but not from Pelosi or Obama). Because most participants hold party-consistent attitudes, views opposite from their own were expressed by out-party sources. However, some participants were assigned to a source whose partisan identity was unknown or to a source who belonged to their *own* party. For instance, an anti-immigration Democrat would read about pro-immigration views, and those views would come from Pelosi, Obama, or an unknown source (but not Rubio or Trump). Thus, even though all participants read about opposing views, for most, those views came from out-party sources,

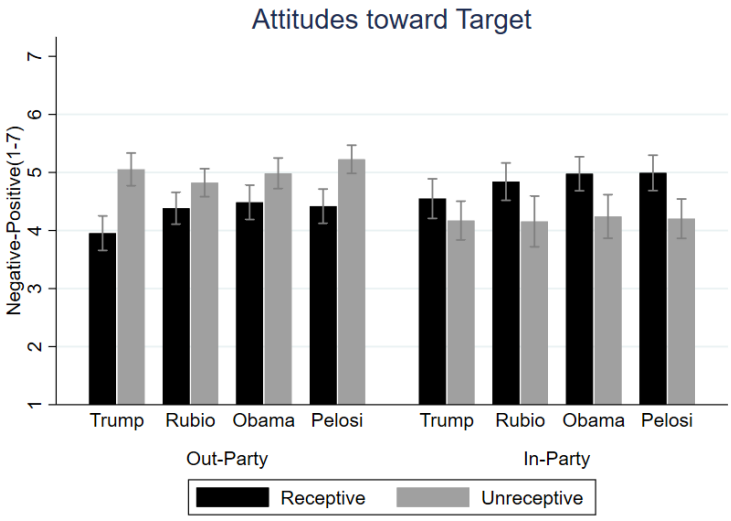
while for some those views came from an in-party or no-party source. This set-up allowed us to test our prediction that the costs of receptiveness are specific to out-party sources. When the source's partisan identity was unknown (H3A) or when they belonged to one's own party (H3B), we expected the costs of receptiveness to reverse.

To test for this moderation, we first coded each trial based on whether participants saw a vignette in which the source was a member of the opposing party, their own party, or no party (when the party of the source was withheld altogether). Next, we estimated a regression model with receptiveness, speaker party (opposing, own, or no party), issue (immigration, climate change, military spending, or terrorism), and their interactions predicting target evaluations. To account for the fact that participants saw multiple trials and thus rated multiple targets, we used standard errors clustered on the participant level. Participants who identified as (Pure) Independents were excluded from this analysis, because classifying whether the source belonged to their party or an opposing party is meaningless. Note that this analysis was not pre-registered.

We found significant two-way interactions between receptiveness and the speaker's party (*ps* < .001), but the three-way interactions with issues were non-significant (*ps* > .36; see ST6 in Supplement), so we collapsed across issues (for results broken down by issue, see ST7). Replicating our core result, participants evaluated targets who were receptive to opposing views more negatively compared to unreceptive targets when the source belonged to the opposing party ($\beta = -.72$, $t(621) = -6.97$, $p < .001$, $d = .40$). However, when the source belonged to participants' own party, this finding reversed ($\beta = .67$, $t(397) = -5.33$, $p < .001$, $d = .41$). Participants evaluated targets who were receptive to opposing views coming from a source who belonged to their party more positively than unreceptive targets, even though participants disagreed with the views expressed by the source. Figure 6 shows the robustness of this effect

across speakers, political issues, and event formats. The robustness of these results across speakers, political issues, and event formats underscores the importance of *whom* participants are receptive to (out-party source vs. in-party source), above and beyond *what* they are receptive to, in driving attitudes toward receptive individuals.





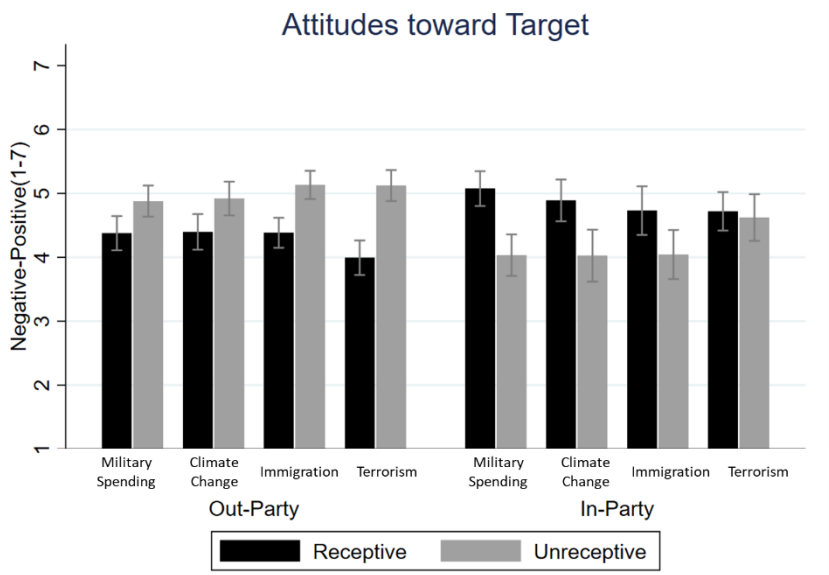


Figure 6 Robustness across event format (upper panel), speakers (middle panel), and issue (lower panel). Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals with standard errors clustered on the participant-level.

Finally, when the party identity of the source was withheld, participants evaluated the unreceptive and receptive targets equally ($\beta = -.060$, $t(660) = -.56$, $p = .57$, $d = .034$). We were surprised by this last result given that prior work has documented a robust preference for receptive targets over unreceptive targets when no partisan identity indicators were present (and we replicate this benefit of receptiveness to unidentified sources in Experiment 3, Supplemental Experiment 1, and Supplemental Experiment 4).

To further explore this null result, we decomposed the results by issue in ST7 in the Supplement. Of note, receptive targets were rated (marginally) more positively than unreceptive ones when the issue was military spending or immigration, but significantly more negatively when the issue was terrorism. There was no significant effect for the issue of climate change (see AAE2 for details). These results suggest that, while the costs of receptiveness were robust to all four issues, the benefits of receptiveness when the partisan identity of the source is unknown might be more sensitive to the exact issue under consideration.

Discussion

Replicating the results obtained in Experiments 1A-C, we found support for the robustness of the reputational costs of receptiveness. Even when the source was a well-known member of the political elite, receptive targets were evaluated more negatively than unreceptive ones. Bolstering its generalizability, this effect held across different combinations of sources, issues, and event formats. Moreover, this experiment provides correlational evidence in support of our predicted moderation by group membership of the source (H3A, H3B). In the next experiment, we provide a casual test of this moderation, and include measures of our proposed mechanism: perceptions of immorality.

Experiment 3: Moderation by Source Group Membership

Experiment 3 builds on the results from Experiment 2 in two important ways. First, it tests whether the moderation pattern observed in Experiment 3 would replicate with random assignment. We randomly assigned participants to read about a target who was receptive to or unreceptive to opposing views coming from a source who was a member of the out-party, in-party, or whose partisan identity was unknown. Our pre-registered prediction was that, compared to unreceptiveness, receptiveness to an out-party source would result in reputational costs, but that receptiveness to in-party sources or to sources whose partisan identity was unknown would confer reputational benefits. Second, Experiment 3 measured perceptions of immorality as the mediating mechanism driving these predicted moderation patterns.

Method

Twelve-hundred and twenty-five participants from Amazon Mechanical Turk took part in our study. Twelve-hundred and seven participants passed two attention checks and were included in the analysis (44% female; $M_{age} = 40$, $SD_{age} = 12$; 53.52% Democrats; 23.12% Republicans; 22.04% Independents; 1.33% Other). Participants were assigned to one of six conditions in this 2

(receptive vs. unreceptive target) × 3 (opposing party vs. unknown party source vs. own party) between-participant design.

The experiment followed a similar procedure to Experiment 2. First, participants reported their demographics (including their partisan identity) and indicated their views on a current political issue: whether the US should impose more regulations on social media companies. Next, participants read one vignette about a fictitious target, John, who shared their views on regulating social media companies but was considering attending an event at which opposing views were espoused. Receptiveness was manipulated using the same language used in Experiment 2. Attitudes toward the target were measured using the same items from Experiments 1A-C. To measure perceptions of immorality, we used the same items used in Experiments 1A and 1C (immoral, virtuous [reverse-coded]). We also included the items used to measure perceived competence and warmth. The order of perceptions of immorality, competence, and warmth was counterbalanced.

Source Identity. The source mentioned in the vignette depended on participants' assigned condition. For participants in the no-party condition, the source was an unknown speaker ("The speaker demanded …"). For participants in out-party condition, the source was a leader of the out-party. Republicans (and Independents who leaned Republican) were assigned to read about Nancy Pelosi, whereas Democrats (and Independents who leaned Democrat) were assigned to read about Donald Trump. For participants in the in-party condition, the source was a leader of their own party: Republicans (and Independents who leaned Republican) were assigned to read about Donald Trump, whereas Democrats (and Independents who leaned Democrat) were assigned to read about Nancy Pelosi. Pure Independents were randomly assigned to read about one of the two leaders.

Results

Attitudes toward Target. As pre-registered, we regressed attitudes toward the target on the receptiveness condition, partisan identity manipulation, and their interactions. We found two significant interactions (receptiveness × in-party = 2.33, $t(1201) = 11.54$, $p < .001$; receptiveness × unknown party = 2.00, $t(1201) = 9.98$, $p < .001$; $\eta_p^2 = .12$). When partisan identity was not evoked or when the source belonged to one's own party, the receptive target was evaluated more favorably than the unreceptive target ($\beta_{unknown} = .63$, $t(397) = 4.58$, $p < .001$, $d = .47$; $\beta_{In-party} = .96$, $t(401) = 7.02$, $p < .001$, $d = .70$). However, when partisan identity was introduced and the source belonged to the opposing party, the opposite pattern emerged: the receptive target was evaluated more *negatively* than the unreceptive one ($\beta = -1.37$, $t(403) = -9.23$, $p < .001$, $d = .90$; see Figure 7).

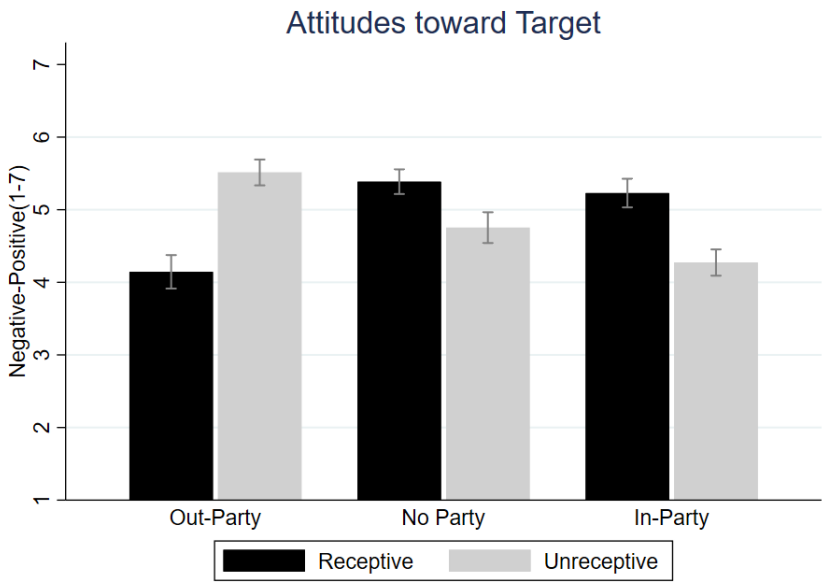


Figure 7. Attitudes toward the target as a function of whether partisan identity of the source was included and target receptiveness. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Mediation Analysis. Next, we assessed the role perceptions of immorality played in driving these results. To do this, we conducted a bootstrapped moderated mediation analysis with

10,000 iterations with source identity as the independent variable, perceptions of immorality as the mediator, target receptiveness as the moderator, and attitudes toward the target as the outcome (Figure 8). Because source identity was a multi-categorical variable, we used dummy coding (Hayes & Preacher, 2014). This analysis was run in SPSS using Model 14. Note that this analysis was not pre-registered. Our theorizing would predict that sources who belonged to the out-party, compared to sources who belonged to the in-party or whose partisan identity was unknown, would be seen as more immoral. As a result, targets who are receptive to those sources would be seen negatively, whereas those who are unreceptive would not.

Consistent with this theorizing, partisan identity of the source (1 = out-party, 0 = in-party/ unknown party) led to greater perceptions of source immorality ($\beta = 1.28$, SE = .040, $p < .001$). Moreover, there was a significant interaction between perceptions of source immorality and target receptiveness ($\beta = -.68$, SE = .054, $p < .001$). There was a negative relationship between perceptions of source's immorality and attitudes toward the target when the target was receptive ($\beta = -.33$, SE = .043, $p < .001$). However, that relationship was positive when the target was unreceptive ($\beta = .35$, SE = .043, $p < .001$).

The indirect effects tracked these results. There was a negative indirect effect through perceptions of source immorality when the target was receptive (indirect effect = −.42, SE = .069, 95% CI [−.56, −.29]). However, there was a positive indirect effect through perceptions of source immorality when the target was unreceptive (indirect effect = .45, SE = .063, 95% CI [.33, .58]). The moderated mediation was significant (index of moderated mediation = −.87, SE = .085, 95% CI [−1.04, −.71]). Importantly, these results persisted, even after including perceptions of warmth and competence as additional mediators (see AAE3 in Supplement).

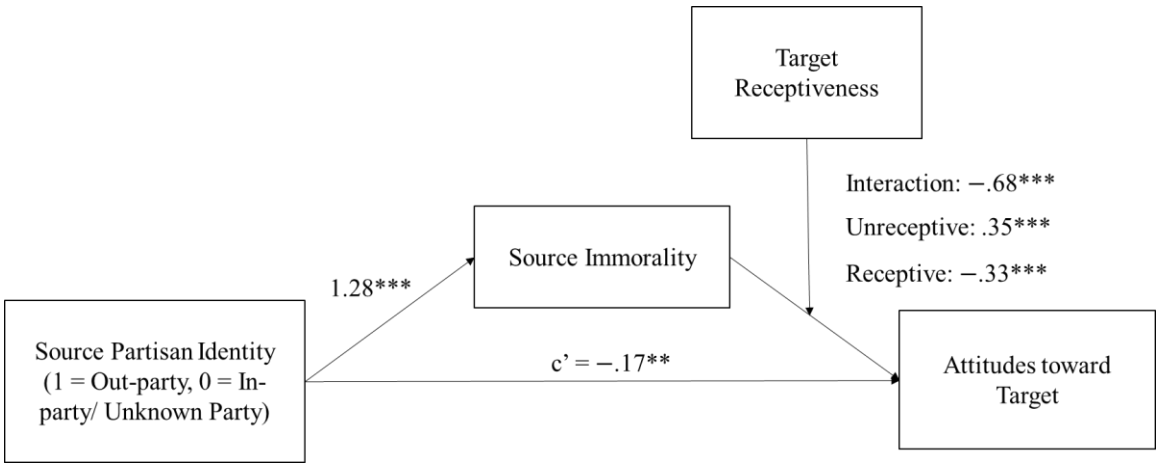


Figure 8. Moderated mediation model. The notation c' indicates the direct effect after controlling for the mediators. Coefficients are standardized linear regression coefficients. ***p <.001, ** p < .05.

Discussion

Experiment 3 provides support for our theorizing in multiple ways: first, we found that although participants evaluated receptive targets more negatively than unreceptive ones the source belonged to the out-party, they evaluated receptive targets more positively than unreceptive ones when the partisan identity of the source was known (H3A). Indeed, we were able to replicate this exact moderation pattern using another issue—whether the US should compete in the Olympics—in Supplemental Experiment 1 (SE1), further bolstering the evidence for this moderation.

Second, we found that receptiveness to in-party sources leads to reputational benefits (H3B). This provides a causal replication of the correlational results from Experiment 2. Further, these results indicate that it is not the identification of the partisan source per se (i.e., knowing their name) that causes the costs-of-receptiveness effect, but rather that the partisan source belongs to the out-party.

Third, echoing results from Experiments 1A-1C, perceptions of immorality mediated the costs-of-receptiveness effect (H2). Out-party sources were seen as more immoral than in-party or unidentified sources. These immorality perceptions led receptive targets to be evaluated more

negatively than unreceptive targets. Importantly, those results held even after controlling for perceptions of warmth and competence.

Thus far, our studies focused on sources who were prototypical of their party, either because they had characteristics typical of the party members or because they were party elites. Our final study tests the role of prototypicality in causing the costs-of-receptiveness effect.

Experiment 4: Moderation by Prototypicality

Not all out-party members are stereotyped to lack virtue and morality. Indeed, research on stereotypes suggests that stereotypes are most readily applied to prototypical group members (Blair et al., 2004; Eberhardt et al., 2006). Thus, prototypical members of the out-party are more likely than non-prototypical members to be stereotyped as immoral. Based on this theorizing, we predicted that perceived prototypicality of the source would act as an important boundary condition. Our pre-registered prediction was that receptiveness would lead to reputational costs when the source was a prototypical member of the out-party, but not when the source was a non-prototypical member of the out-party.

Method

Eight-hundred and five participants from a nationally representative sample recruited through Lucid took party in our study (52% female; $M_{age} = 46$, $SD_{age} = 17$; Democrats; 31.09% Republicans; 34.96% Independents) and randomly assigned to one of four conditions in this 2 (receptive vs. unreceptive) x 2 (low prototypicality vs. high prototypicality) between-subjects design.

Procedure

This study followed the same procedure as Experiment 1B, except that we included a low prototypicality condition and updated the stimuli accordingly (See Figure 9 for sample stimuli; See E4PT for details on the pre-test; all stimuli from the pre-test are reported in a table uploaded

to OSF). All other aspects of the study were identical to Experiment 1B. Participants read about a target who mentions that Twitter recommended an out-party source to them. The target then either followed the Twitter account (receptive) or blocked it (unreceptive). The account either belonged to a prototypical or non-prototypical member of the out-party. To verify that the prototypicality manipulation was successful, we included manipulation checks measuring prototypicality (same items as Experiment 1B). The results confirmed that the source in the high prototypicality conditions was seen as more prototypical than the source in the low prototypicality condition (Among Democrats: $M_{Low} = 4.26$, $SD_{Low} = 1.55$, $M_{High} = 5.34$, $SD_{High} = 1.38$, $t(271) = 6.12$, $p < .001$; Among Republicans: $M_{Low} = 4.08$, $SD_{Low} = 1.67$, $M_{High} = 5.20$, $SD_{High} = 1.66$, $t(248) = 5.29$, $p < .001$). Our pre-registered prediction was that the costs-of-receptiveness effect would emerge for the prototypical, but not the non-prototypical out-party source.

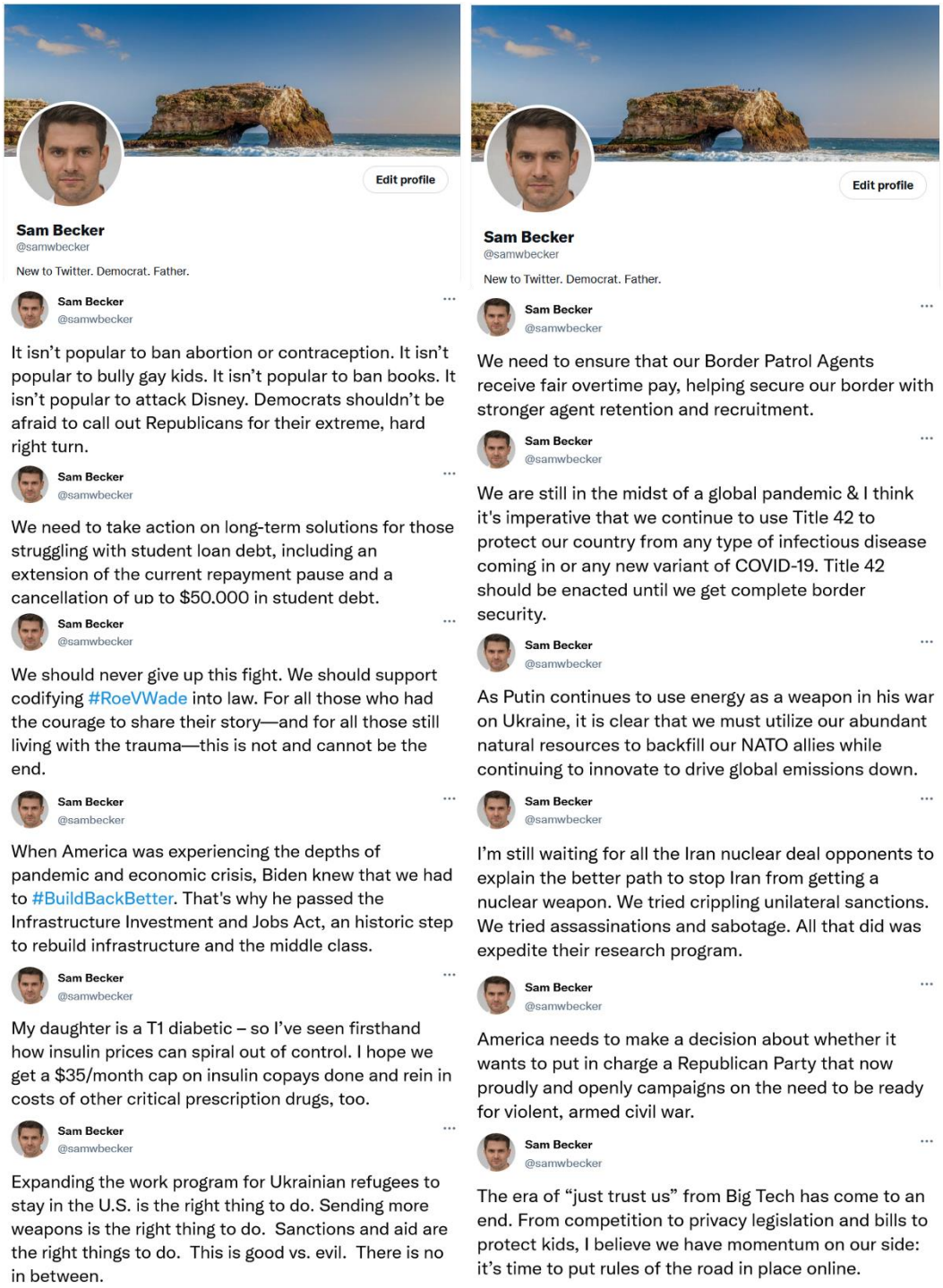


Figure 9. Example Twitter profiles manipulating prototypicality.
Left: high prototypicality Democrat profile. Right: low prototypicality Democrat profile.

Results

Attitudes toward Target. As pre-registered, we regressed attitude toward the target on the receptiveness condition, prototypicality condition, and their interactions. We found no main

effect of receptiveness (β = .029, $t(801) = .24$, $p = .81$, $\eta^2 = .00007$) or prototypicality (β = .057, $t(801) = .47$, $p = .64$, $\eta^2 = .00027$) on attitudes. However, we found a significant interaction between receptiveness and prototypicality (β = −.77, $t(800) = -3.17$, $p = .002$, $\eta^2 = .012$). When source prototypicality was high, receptive targets were evaluated more negatively compared to unreceptive ones (β = −.41, $t(399) = -2.32$, $p = .021$, $d = .23$). However, when source prototypicality was low, receptive targets were evaluated more positively than unreceptive ones (β = .35, $t(401) = 2.17$, $p = .031$, $d = .22$; Figure 10).

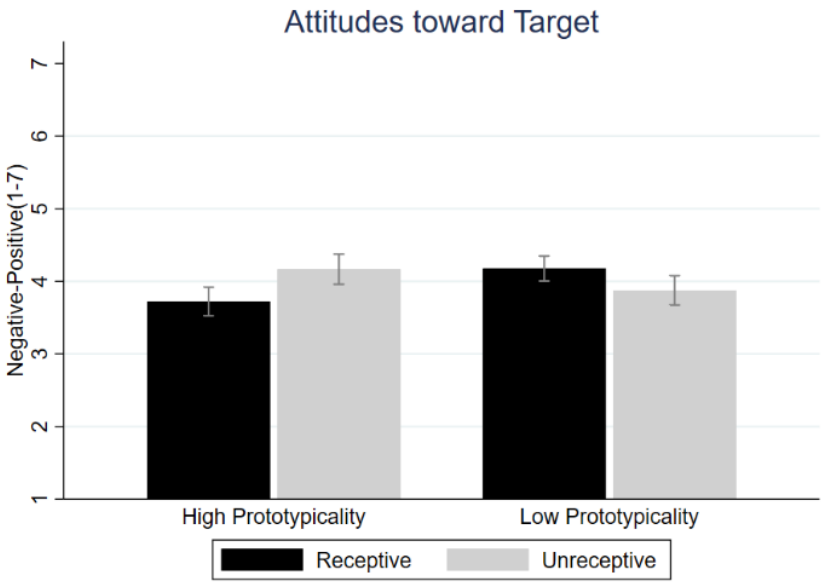


Figure 10. Attitudes toward the target as a function of source prototypicality and target receptiveness. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals

Mediation Analysis. Next, we assessed the role perceptions of immorality played in driving these results. To do this, we used the same analytic strategy from Experiment 3. We predicted that high (vs. low) prototypical sources would be perceived as more immoral, and that receptiveness would moderate the relationship between immorality and attitudes (see Figure 11). Note that this analysis was not pre-registered.

Consistent with these predictions, prototypicality of the source (1 = high, 0 = low) led to greater perceptions of source immorality (β =.33, SE = .070, $p < .001$). Moreover, there was a significant interaction between perceptions of source immorality and target receptiveness (β = −.59, SE = .063, $p < .001$). There was a negative relationship between perceptions of source's immorality and attitudes toward the target when the target was receptive (β = −.69, SE = .046, $p < .001$). This relationship was much weaker when the target was unreceptive (β =−.10, SE = .043, $p = .017$). Importantly, there was a negative indirect effect through perceptions of source immorality when the target was receptive (indirect effect = −.23, SE = .05, 95% CI [−.33, −.13]). However, there was no significant indirect effect when the target was unreceptive (indirect effect = −.034, SE = .023, 95% CI [−.08, .01]). The moderated mediation was significant (index of moderated mediation = −.19, SE = .051, 95% CI [−.30, −.10]).

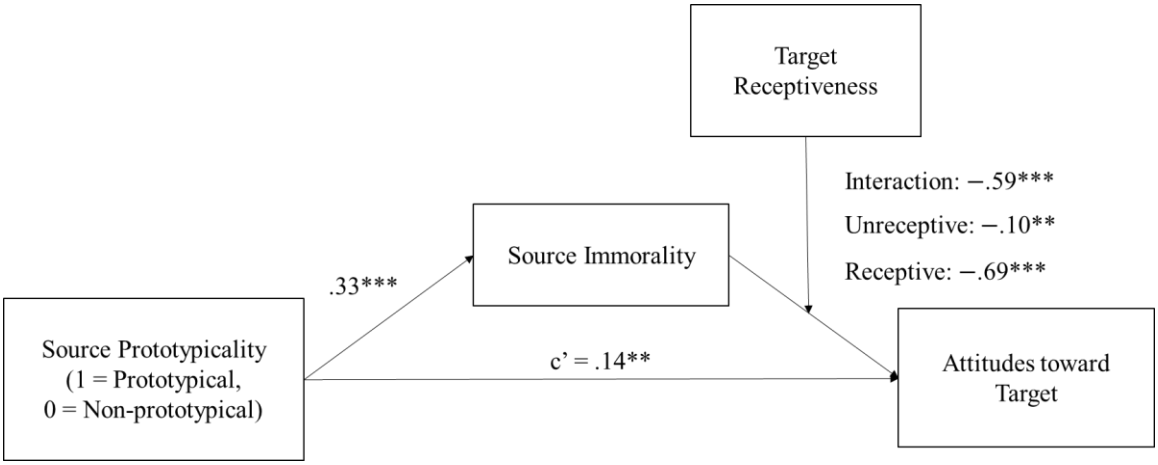


Figure 11. Moderated mediation model. The notation c' indicates the direct effect after controlling for the mediators. Coefficients are standardized linear regression coefficients. ***p <.001, ** $p < .05$.

Discussion

Experiment 4 revealed that the costs of receptiveness were present when the source was highly prototypical (i.e., representative of the out-party), but not when the source was non-prototypical (H4). Apart from highlighting this important boundary condition, these results also provide additional replication of the immorality mechanism. Prototypical sources were perceived

as more immoral than the non-prototypical ones, and that the relationship between source immorality and attitudes toward the target depended on target receptiveness.

General Discussion

A fast-growing body of research finds that receptiveness to opposing political views leads to reputational benefits. Receptive people are seen as trustworthy, collaborative, and intelligent. But these results appear inconsistent with the literature on polarization, showing that political opponents and their ideas are seen in a negative light. In the current research, we reconcile this seeming contradiction by arguing that the identity of the person one is receptive to determines whether receptiveness carries reputational benefits or costs. We found that receptiveness to prototypical out-party sources lead receptive others to be evaluated negatively compared to unreceptive others. This costs-of-receptiveness effect was robust to many procedural variations. First, it emerged across different types of sources, including stereotypic everyday members of the out-party (Experiment 1A), members of the out-party judged by their own party to be prototypical (Experiments 1B, 6), politicians merely labelled as belonging to the out-party (Experiment 1C), and well-known out-party elites (Experiments 2-4).

Second, the costs of receptiveness were robust to both strong and weak signals of receptiveness. The costs of receptiveness emerged when the target underwent costly, time-consuming, and effortful forms of receptiveness, such as going to an in-person rally (Experiments 3-5) or attending a lecture (Experiment 2). They also emerged when targets engaged in relatively effortless forms of receptiveness, such as following a social media account online (Experiments 1A, 1B, 6). In Supplementary Experiment 2 (SE2) we tested yet another weak signal of receptiveness—reading an online article—and replicated our costs-of-receptiveness effect. Regardless of the form of receptiveness, being receptive to prototypical out-party members conferred reputational costs. Third, the costs of receptiveness emerged across

multiple social issues, including abortion, immigration, gun control, climate change, terrorism, military spending, regulating social media companies, and boycotting the Winter Olympics in China. It was present both when the source shared their views on multiple social issues at once (Experiments 1A, 1B, 6) or discussed their views on a single issue (Experiments 1C-3).

In addition to testing the robustness of this effect, we provided evidence for the mechanism underlying it. We found evidence that people viewed prototypical out-party members in a negative light—particularly as immoral, which led the receptive person to incur reputational costs (Experiments 1A, 1B, 1C, 3, 4). These mechanism results held when immorality was measured (Experiments 1A, 1B, 1C) and when it was manipulated (Experiments 3, 4). Perceptions of immorality continued to account for the costs-of-receptiveness effect even after controlling for competence and warmth (Experiments 1A, 1C, 3).

Theoretical Implications

The current research makes several theoretical contributions. First, it helps resolve a seeming contradiction between two distinct literatures in psychology. The literature on receptiveness finds that people view receptive others favorably even when they are receptive to opposing political views. This finding seems at odds with findings from the political polarization literature showing that partisans dislike and distrust out-party members more than ever before. Reconciling this tension, we found that receptiveness to prototypical out-party sources indeed led to reputational costs, a finding consistent with the literature on political polarization.

Second, research on receptiveness has made important headway in understanding the reputational benefits of receptiveness, but what about its costs? To our knowledge, the current research is the first to empirically document interpersonal costs associated with being receptive (see Hussein & Tormala, 2021 for a theoretical exception). Because people frequently know the

partisan identity of information sources in the real world, we see this costs-of-receptiveness effect as providing a critical addition to the literature on receptiveness. Apart from providing a more complete picture of the interpersonal consequences of receptiveness, we also provided clarity on the conditions needed for this effect to emerge. In particular, perceiving the source as immoral (above and beyond perceiving them as incompetent or unwarm) determined whether receptiveness led to costs or benefits. Consistent with research on polarization and with nationally representative polls (e.g., Tappin & McKay, 2019; Pew Research Center, 2019), we found that a majority of participants in our samples found members of the out-party to be immoral, which suggests that the costs of receptiveness documented in the current research are likely to be widespread in society. Apart from their generality, these results open the door for future research to investigate what factors, in addition to the identity of the information source, impact perceptions of immorality and hence can result in costs to receptiveness.

Third, our results suggest a novel barrier to receptiveness to opposing views. People might avoid exposing themselves to ideas and people they disagree with because they are aware of the social costs of receptiveness documented in the current research. If true, this would suggest novel countermeasures to polarization. First, countering people's fears about the social costs of receptiveness could provide a novel intervention to bridge divides and increase receptiveness to opposing views. For example, Experiment 4 shows that being receptive to a non-prototypical out-party members led to no interpersonal costs (in fact, it conferred some benefits). Providing people with information about the lack of social costs of receptiveness could encourage them to expose themselves to ideas and people they disagree with. Second, given that the reputational costs of receptiveness are rooted in viewing the out-party as immoral, correcting this misperception could be a catalyst for change. Helping people view the other side as moral

and virtuous would lead them to no longer punish others who are receptive to opposing views, which in turn could encourage more receptiveness to opposing views, creating a chain reaction. By uncovering costs to receptiveness, our research lays the groundwork to addressing the nefarious problem of rising levels of divisiveness and polarization in today's world.

Fourth, our results contribute to a scant literature on prototypicality and politics (e.g., Ahler & Sood, 2018; Davies et al., 2022; Goldenberg et al. 2022; Mason, 2018). Experiment 4 shows that whether receptiveness led to benefits or costs depended on how prototypical or representative of the out-party the source was. In addition, Experiment 4 suggests that the attitudes a source holds influences their perceived prototypicality. These findings underscore the important role prototypicality can play in influencing interpersonal dynamics and open the door for future research on this construct. How do people form prototypicality judgements in the context of political groups? Beyond attitudes on social issues, what are reliable signals of prototypicality? Do in-party and out-party members differ in the bases they use to assess prototypicality? These are some of the questions that await answers in this area.

Fifth, our findings have the potential to contribute to the literature on elite cues. A substantial literature notes that partisans adopt policy views advanced by their party's political elites (e.g., Pink et al., 2021; Clayton & Willer, 2023). Yet precisely how political elites influence members of their party remains unclear. Our results suggest a novel mechanism: peer pressure. In Experiments 2 and 3, we found that when the source was a political leader of one's own party, people perceived receptive (vs. unreceptive) others more positively. This suggests that elite cues are followed, in part, because party members reward those who are receptive to views expressed by in-party elites and socially sanction those who are not. Examining what role,

if any, this interpersonal dynamic plays in propagating the opinions of elites among rank-and-file party members would be an exciting new direction.

Open Questions and Alternative Accounts

Costs of Receptiveness or Benefits of Unreceptiveness?

One outstanding question relates to whether the observed effects are driven by costs associated with receptiveness, benefits associated with unreceptiveness, or both. To test this, Supplemental Experiment 3 (SE3) added a pure control condition in which participants only learned that the target shared their views on a social issue. We found that receptive targets were evaluated more negatively than targets in both the unreceptive ($\beta = -.88$, $t(569) = -4.72$, $p < .001$, $d = .48$) and control ($\beta = -.97$, $t(569) = -5.66$, $p < .001$, $d = .58$) conditions. Moreover, there was no significant difference in attitudes between the control and the unreceptive conditions ($\beta = .092$, $t(569) = .55$, $p = .58$, $d = .057$). These results suggest that the observed effects are driven by the receptiveness condition leading to reputational costs.

Disclosed vs. Observed Receptiveness

In our experiments, targets disclosed their receptiveness, yet in some past research, targets were *described* as being receptive. To test if the costs-of-receptiveness effect generalizes to situations in which receptiveness is observed rather than disclosed, Supplementary Experiment 4 (SE4) used materials employed in prior research (Heltzel & Laurin, 2021; Study 1a). Half of the participants saw the exact stimuli used in past research (No Identity Condition), while the other half saw similar materials modified to include prototypical out-party sources (Identity Condition; See SE4). Results revealed a significant interaction ($\beta = -1.14$, $t(1002) = -8.34$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .034$), such that participants in the No Identity condition rated the receptive target more positively than the unreceptive target ($\beta = .67$, $t(505) = 7.33$, $p < .001$, $d = .45$). However,

in the Identity condition, we found the reverse: receptive targets were evaluated more *negatively* than unreceptive ones ($\beta = -.47$, $t(497) = -4.61$, $p < .001$, $d = .30$). These results suggest that the costs of receptiveness are robust to whether receptiveness is self-disclosed or described.

Symmetry Across Party Lines

Our results allow us to address whether the costs-of-receptiveness effect is symmetric across parties. Our theoretical account predicts that it would be; after all, out-party hate is displayed equally by members of both parties (Finkle et al., 2020). Indeed, we found the costs-of-receptiveness effect among both Democrats and Republicans in nine of our eleven experiments (see AASPL).

Beyond Prototypical Out-Party Sources

Our theorizing offers predictions as to when the costs-of-receptiveness effect might be reversed, even in situations involving prototypical out-party members. For example, if the source is a close other (e.g., a beloved aunt), the source might be seen as moral and virtuous despite their partisan identity. In such cases, receptiveness would be expected to carry reputational benefits. As another example, if observers are motivated to overcome their prejudice against prototypical out-party members (i.e., engage in bias correction; e.g., Wegener & Petty, 1995), receptiveness could lead to reputational benefits. This underscores the importance of capturing people's perceptions of the source's immorality in order to predict whether receptiveness will lead to costs or benefits.

Our theorizing also allows us to opine on what other types of sources, beyond prototypical out-party sources, might trigger the costs-of-receptiveness effect: So long as the source is seen as immoral, we would expect receptiveness to their ideas to carry reputational

costs. Thus, we would expect a target who is receptive to ideas coming from, say, a pedophile, to be judged negatively, even though such a source is not necessarily an out-party source.

Concerns About Ingroup Loyalty

Next, we turn to addressing some alternative accounts. Our proposed process has focused on outgroup animosity as a driving force behind the reputational costs of receptiveness. Could the observed effects be driven by ingroup loyalty instead? Receptiveness might signal a willingness to abandon opinions espoused by the ingroup and thus could be a sign of disloyalty. If true, then the observed costs of receptiveness could stem from a motivation to punish ingroup disloyalty.

To assess this account, we measured perceived disloyalty of the target in three experiments (SE1, SE2, SE5). Specifically, participants indicated the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with two statements averaged into a disloyalty index ("John is loyal to his political party" (reverse-coded); "John might leave his political party and switch sides"). Next, we ran a mediation analysis with receptiveness as the independent variable, perceived disloyalty as the mediator, and attitudes as the dependent variable. The group disloyalty account would predict a negative indirect effect. Receptive targets would be perceived as more disloyal, and disloyalty would be negatively correlated with attitudes toward the target.

We found mixed empirical support for this account. In SE1, perceived disloyalty had a negative indirect effect (indirect effect: −.25, 95% CI [−.39, −.11]). However, in SE5, this indirect effect was *positive* and *non-significant* (indirect effect: .038, 95%CI [−.080, .16]). In SE2, the effect was negative, but non-significant (indirect effect: −.058, 95%CI [−.13, .013]). In sum, sometimes the indirect effect was positive, and other times it was negative. Sometimes the indirect effect was significant, and other times it was non-significant. Thus, we were unable to

find consistent support for a loyalty account. This is consistent with recent findings highlighting that outgroup animosity now plays a larger role in American political interactions than ingroup loyalty (e.g., Abramowitz & Webster, 2018; Rathje et al., 2021; Dimant, 2022).

Concerns About Attitude Change

A similar alternative account relates to concerns about attitude change. Receptiveness could be seen as a signal that one is willing to change their mind and adopt opposing views, and this could be viewed negatively by partisans. We assessed this account in SE1, SE2, and SE5 by capturing participants' concerns about the target adopting opposing views (e.g., "John might change his mind on the topic of [topic of vignette; e.g., immigration]"; "John's opinions on [topic of vignette] might change"). Next, we ran a mediation analysis with receptiveness as the independent variable, perceived attitude change as the mediator, and overall impressions as the dependent variable. This account predicted a negative indirect effect. Receptive targets would be perceived as more likely to change their mind and changing one's mind on a political issue would lead to negative attitudes toward the target.

We found mixed empirical support for this account as well. In SE1, perceived attitude change had a *positive* and significant indirect effect (indirect effect: .19, 95% CI [.022, .36]). In SE5, the indirect effect was *negative* and significant (indirect effect: −.53, 95%CI [−.88, −.20]), and, in SE2, the effect was negative, but non-significant (indirect effect: −.083, 95%CI [−.20, .023]). In short, we were unable to find consistent support for this account.

Future Directions

Our focus in this research has been on understanding the conditions under which receptiveness to opposing views can carry reputational costs versus benefits, with a particular

focus on the role source identity plays. At the same time, our findings raise a number of questions for future research, which we discuss below.

Cross-Party Contact

The current results demonstrate that exposing oneself to and being open-minded to information from out-party sources is seen as socially unacceptable. This result joins a small but growing literature on the reputational consequences of interacting with out-party sources (e.g., Frimer & Skitka, 2018; Ryan, 2017). For instance, Ryan (2017) finds that politicians who compromise with out-party politicians are seen in a negative light. This growing literature begs the following questions: what forms of social interactions with out-party members are seen as acceptable? What forms are frowned upon? Why? For instance, how do people react to fellow in-party members who marry out-partisans? What about those who have lasting friendships or productive working relationships with out-party members? Answering these questions could mark a substantial advance in our understanding of the current state of cross-party relations and, potentially, how to ameliorate them.

Information Consumption & Impression Formation

Our findings also speak to how people's information consumption habits impact the impressions others form of them more generally. Historically, other people's information consumption was inconspicuous; with the proliferation of social media, however, information consumption is increasingly salient and easy to observe. For instance, on Facebook, people share news articles they read; on Twitter, people can see which accounts others follow; and on Reddit, people can see which subreddits one engages with. In the current research, we investigated how the identity of the source behind the information impacted attitudes toward the person consuming such information. Future work can investigate how other information consumption habits impact impression formation. For instance, might the type of information—data and statistics versus

personal facts (Kubin et al., 2021)—influence the reputational consequences of receptiveness? Relatedly, how do people react to others who consume proattitudinal information that differs on extremity? Examining the reputational consequences of different types of information consumption habits is an area ripe for further research.

The Psychology of Information Policing

Our findings also raise the possibility that group members are motivated to observe and judge the information consumption of other group members. Such "information policing" raises a number of questions: Which groups engage in information policing? American politics is characterized by highly moralized attitudes and zero-sum thinking (Davidai & Ongis, 2019). Are these conditions necessary for information policing, or do all groups engage in some degree of information policing? Relatedly, what motivates such information policing? It could be that groups engage in information policing to ensure moral homogeneity of their ingroup members. Alternatively, it could be that information policing ensures distinctiveness from outgroups. Understanding when and why information policing occurs in situations beyond American politics would be valuable.

Conclusion

Policymakers, pundits, and academics regularly encourage Americans to become more receptive to opposing political views. Indeed, past research highlights the social benefits of receptiveness to opposing views. Findings from past research suggest that everyday individuals stand to benefit socially from sharing their receptiveness efforts with others. Yet, these findings seem at odds with today's polarized world. In the current research, we reconcile this seeming contradiction by examining how the identity of the source to which one is receptive determines whether receptiveness has reputational benefits or costs.

In six main and five supplementary studies, we find that receptiveness to opposing views expressed by a prototypical out-party member leads to reputational costs. We provide evidence that perceptions of the out-party as immoral drives this effect, and we demonstrate its robustness across various factors including identity of the source, the way receptiveness is expressed, and the political issue under consideration. These findings offer a new direction for research on receptiveness, where the focus has been on documenting the benefits of receptiveness. A well-functioning democracy demands from its citizens a willingness to engage with ideas and people they disagree with, but our results indicate such receptiveness might come with reputational costs. These costs may, in part, explain the increasing polarization characteristic of political discourse in modern society. Understanding these reputational costs and their role as barriers to receptiveness is a first but crucial step toward coming up with novel interventions to address the pervasive lack of cross-party openness and political polarization.

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How do Consumers React to Ads that Meddle in Out-Party Primaries?

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Consumer Relevance and Contribution

Spending on political campaigns has reached unprecedented levels. It has skyrocketed from $1.61 billion in 1998 to $8.9 billion in 2022, a 450% increase in two decades. This surge in spending has been accompanied by a flurry of new advertising strategies. In the current research, we investigate how consumers react to a novel and increasingly prominent advertising strategy: "Meddle Ads." Meddle Ads are ads intended to help weak (often extreme) opponents from the opposing party during that party's primaries. By helping weak opponents win the opposing party's primaries, candidates use Meddle Ads to increase their own chances of winning in the general elections. For example, in 2022, Democrats spent $53 million on ads helping far-right candidates win Republican primaries with the goal of improving their chances of winning the general elections. Using natural language processing tools, incentive-compatible donation studies, and conjoint analysis, we find that consumers are *averse* to the use of Meddle Ads. Consumers spoke more negatively about, donated smaller amounts to, and were less likely to choose candidates who used Meddle Ads. We demonstrate that this aversion is driven by two types of risks: outcome-related risks (losing elections) and system-related risks (losing trust in the democratic system). These findings contribute to consumer behavior research in three ways: First, whereas there is substantial marketing research on consumers' reactions to political marketing tactics, to date, none has examined Meddle Ads. Thus, we explore a new and increasingly prominent advertising strategy. Second, we uncover a novel type of risk (system-related risks), thereby contributing to research on risk perceptions. This generative idea has implications for consumer behavior across numerous domains (e.g., product adoption, financial decision-making). Third, we provide practical guidance to marketing managers on how to implement Meddle Ads without incurring the costs documented in the current research.

Abstract

In 2022, Democrats spent $53 million on ads helping far-right candidates win Republican primaries. Paying for ads that support far-right candidates, the reasoning went, could help Democrats win in the general elections because it is easier to beat extreme than moderate candidates. In the current research, we ask: how do consumers react to the use of "Meddle Ads"? Across eight studies (N = 4,237) using a variety of empirical approaches—including incentive-compatible donations studies, conjoint analysis, and analysis of online comments using natural language processing—we find that consumers are averse to the use of Meddle Ads. Consumers spoke more negatively about, donated smaller amounts to, and were less likely to choose candidates who used Meddle Ads. Aversion to Meddle Ads is driven by their perceived riskiness. This riskiness stems from two types of risks: outcome-related risk (losing elections) and system-related risk (losing trust in democracy). We find consistent evidence that system-related risks drive Meddle Ads aversion, and substantial but less consistent evidence that outcome-related risks do, too. These findings contribute to research on political marketing, provide practical guidance for marketers around Meddle Ads, and identify a novel type of risk (system-related risks) with significant implications for consumer behavior research.

Keywords: political marketing, negative advertising, attack ads, system-related risk, political identity, natural language processing

How do Consumers React to Ads that Meddle in Out-Party Primaries?

In 2022, Democrats spent $53 million on ads helping far-right candidates win Republican primaries (Crane 2022). The idea behind this advertising strategy is simple: Paying for ads that help far-right candidates win the Republican primaries can ultimately help Democrats win in the general elections (Brooks 2022). This is because, in the general elections, beating an extreme candidate might be easier than beating a moderate one (Hall 2015; Malzahn and Hall 2022). Ads for extreme Republican candidates were run in at least eleven states—including battleground states, such as Pennsylvania and Michigan (AdImpact 2023)—and in various types of political races, including races for the U.S. Senate, the U.S. House, and Governorships (Tambe and Blake 2022). Political pundits expect the use of these ads, which we refer to as "Meddle Ads," to become a significant and regular component of how Democrats approach elections (Bernstein 2022; Epstein 2023). Consumers increasingly encounter online information about the use of Meddle Ads. For instance, between 2012 and 2022, there was a 2700% increase in the number of news articles about Meddle Ads (see Supplementary Study 1). Given the sharp increase in information about Meddle Ads, we ask: How do consumers react to the use of Meddle Ads? Do consumers reward or penalize candidates who use them? What are the psychological processes involved? These are the questions the current research seeks to answer.

In eight multi-method studies, we examine consumers' responses to the use of Meddle Ads. We consistently find that consumers are *averse* to the use of Meddle Ads. Consumers spoke more negatively about, donated smaller amounts to, were less likely to choose, and reported more negative attitudes toward candidates who used Meddle Ads. We document this aversion using multiple empirical approaches, including analysis of online comments using natural language processing, incentive-compatible donation studies, and conjoint analysis. In addition to

documenting how the use of Meddle Ads affects consumers' word of mouth, donation behavior, candidate choice, and attitudes, our studies also investigate the psychological processes driving this aversion. Our theoretical framework posits two distinct possible risks associated with the use of Meddle Ads: outcome-related risks (e.g., losing elections) and system-related risks (e.g., losing trust in democracy). We devise a series of experiments intended to investigate the role these two types of risks play in Meddle Ads aversion. We find evidence that system-related risks play an important role in driving consumers' aversion to Meddle Ads. In contrast, we find substantial but less consistent evidence that outcome-related risks drive Meddle Ad aversion.

The current research makes three main contributions. First, political campaign spending is at an all-time high. It has skyrocketed from $1.61 billion in 1998 to $8.9 billion in the most recent mid-term elections—a 450% increase in merely two decades (Giorno 2023). This has been accompanied by an influx of new marketing strategies largely unexamined by researchers. Whereas there are substantial literatures in marketing on consumers' reactions to political marketing tactics (Hoegg and Lewis 2011; Jung and Critcher 2018; Klein and Ahluwalia 2005; Newman and Sheth 1985; Phillips, Urbany, and Reynolds 2008), as well as on the role of political identity in marketing more generally (Fernandes et al., 2022; Kyung, Thomas, and Krishna, 2022; Lisjak and Ordabayeva, 2022; Ordabayeva and Fernandes 2018; Ordabayeva, Cakanlar, and Fernandes 2023; Schoenmuelle, Netzer, and Stahl 2023), to date no research exists on Meddle Ads. Thus, the current research contributes to these literatures by examining how consumers react to a novel and increasingly prominent political marketing strategy: Meddle Ads.

Second, the current research introduces a novel type of risk—system-related risks—and explores its implications for consumer behavior. System-related risks refer to potential harms or dangers that could undermine people's trust in a system (e.g., democracy). These risks raise

doubts about a system's ability to function properly and to serve its intended purpose. They raise concerns about the stability of a system and whether it could eventually unravel. Observing these risks, we posit, can motivate individuals to take action in order to protect the system and prevent it from unraveling. We propose that Meddle Ads are seen as posing a risk to an important system (democracy), and thus candidates who use Meddle Ads are penalized. To our knowledge, our research is the first to uncover consumers' sensitivity to risks related to *systems*. We discuss this new generative idea and its implications for a variety of areas within consumer behavior research—from persuasion to financial decision-making—in the General Discussion section.

Third, our findings have important practical implications. Our research suggests that using Meddle Ads is viewed negatively by consumers and that candidates who use them may get penalized. For instance, in our experiments, we find that donations to candidates who use Meddle Ads drop by somewhere between 35.8% and 59.6%. As such, marketers may wish to avoid meddling in out-party primaries. Our research also provides practical recommendations for how marketers who wish to use Meddle Ads can do so while minimizing the penalties their candidates would otherwise incur. Thus, the current findings have far-reaching managerial implications. In the next section, we describe Meddle Ads, provide recent examples of their use, and situate them within the existing marketing literature.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Meddle Ads

Information about the use of Meddle Ads is becoming increasingly available online. For instance, between 2012 and 2022, the number of articles per year mentioning Meddle Ads increased from 4 to 112 (see SS1 in Web Appendix for details; see Figure 1), but what are "Meddle Ads"? Meddle Ads are ads intended to bolster a weak candidate from the opposing party during that party's primaries. Candidates who use Meddle Ads hope to increase the

likelihood of a weak candidate winning the opposing party's primaries with the idea that it is easier to beat a weak candidate in the general elections. Weak candidates can be ideologically extreme or unqualified for office. What constitutes a weak candidate varies from race to race depending on factors, such as voter composition and the backgrounds of the candidates involved.

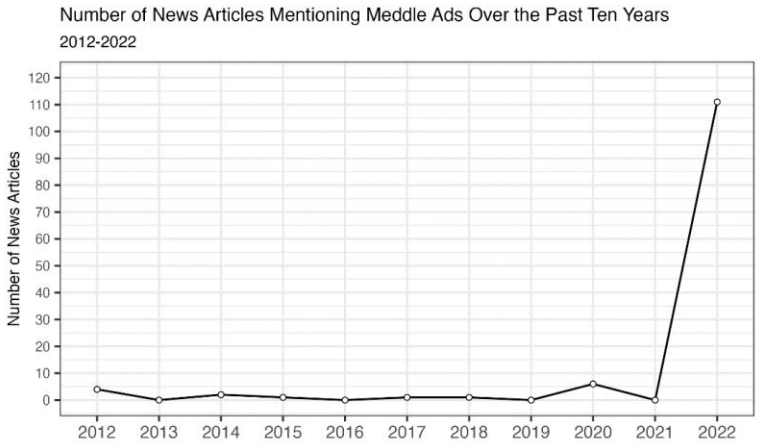


Figure 1. Number of news articles about Meddle Ads over the past ten years (see SS1 in Appendix).

One recent example of the use of Meddle Ads was the 2022 Pennsylvania Governor race. Josh Shapiro, the Democratic candidate, spent an estimated $840,000 bolstering Doug Mastriano, a Trumpist QAnon believer (Benshoff 2022). In total, Shapiro spent 2.3 times more on ads intended to bolster Mastriano than the amount that Mastriano spent on his own campaign, prompting Mastriano to say: "I'm going to have to send him [Shapiro] a thank-you card" (Bumsted 2022). Mastriano successfully won the Republican primary. Shapiro won against Mastriano in the general elections as intended by this strategy (Greene 2022). As another example, Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker spent an estimated $929,000 during the Republican primary to push Darren Bailey, a far-right candidate (Tambe and Blake 2022). Pritzker won against Bailey as intended by this strategy. In both cases, the goal of using Meddle Ads was to help a weak candidate from the opposing party win that party's primaries because it would be easier to beat them in the general elections.

Meddle Ads are different from negative ads. Negative ads criticize a competitor or their products (Ahluwalia, Burnkrant, and Unnava 2000; Jain, Agrawal, and Maheswaran 2006; Jain and Posavac 2004; Jain et al. 2007; Shiv, Edell, and Payne 1997; Wheatley and Oshikawa 1970). In politics, negative ads are called "Attack Ads" and involve direct derogation of a political opponent (Lau and Rovner 2009). Meddle Ads differ from Attack Ads in at least three ways: intentions, target, and timing. Meddle Ads attempt to increase the vote share of weak political opponents during the out-party primaries. In contrast, Attack Ads attempt to reduce the vote share of strong political opponents during the general elections (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995; Brooks 2000; Brooks and Geer 2007). Despite extensive research on negative advertising and on Attack Ads, to date, no research exists on Meddle Ads.

Consumer Reaction to the Use of Meddle Ads

How do consumers react to the use of Meddle Ads? Media coverage of Meddle Ads often emphasizes their riskiness with headlines, such as "Dems make risky bets on Trump Republicans" (Cupp 2022), "Democrats' Risky Bet: Aid G.O.P. Extremists in Spring, Hoping to Beat Them in Fall" (Weisman 2022), and "Democrats' Risky Bet In GOP Primaries" (Lee 2022). Articles that do not use the word "risk" often imply the strategy's riskiness by using phrases such as "dangerous gamble" and "playing with fire" (Huerta 2022; Wolf 2022). Because consumers are generally risk-averse (Allais 1953; Holt and Laury 2002; Kahneman and Tversky 1979; Rabin and Thaler 2001; Tversky and Kahneman 1991), perceived riskiness of Meddle Ads could lead consumers to be averse to their use. But, what exactly does riskiness mean in this context? Below, we outline two distinct types of risks that could be associated with Meddle Ads.[1]

[1] Our use of the word 'risk' is more akin to the colloquial use of that word, as opposed to how this word is used by some classic research to strictly refer to the likelihood that an outcome is realized given a probability distribution (Holt and Laury 2002; Kahneman and Tversky 1979; Rabin and Thaler 2001). When we use the word risk, we are referring to a potential harm or danger that could occur. Our use of the word risk captures the possibility that an event or situation may result in negative consequences or outcomes. This use is consistent with how other

1. Outcome-related Risk

The first type of risk concerns outcomes. Meddle Ads are a novel and unproven technique. They pose a risk to outcomes because the weak opponent bolstered by Meddle Ads could turn out to be formidable and end up winning the general elections. Instead of having one's preferred candidate win, one could end up with an extreme or an unqualified out-party candidate. In fact, this happened during the 2020 presidential elections. Initially, some Democrats favored Donald Trump winning the Republican Primary because they expected Hillary Clinton to have an easier time beating him. Contrary to expectations, Trump won and became president. Applying a similar reasoning, people might perceive Meddle Ads as risky because they could adversely affect political outcomes like the electoral success of their party.

Outcome-related risks might be especially salient because of recent changes in U.S. politics. Partisan identity has become a defining aspect of modern American life (Finkle et al. 2020). Research in marketing finds that Democrats and Republicans (or liberals and conservatives) exhibit substantial differences in their perceptions, preferences, and behaviors (Fernandes et al. 2022; Kyung, Thomas, and Krishna 2022; Lisjak and Ordabayeva 2022; Ordabayeva and Fernandes 2018). Indeed, such "preference polarization" appears to be on the rise. For instance, Using Twitter and Nielsen data, Schoenmueller, Netzer, and Stahl (2023) found an increase in political polarization in brand followership and actual purchase decisions over time. At the same time, there has been a sharp increase in distrust of political opponents (Finkel et al. 2020; Pew Research Center 2019). For instance, merely listening to ideas from members of the opposing party has become a socially punishable offense (Hussein and Wheeler 2023). Such

contemporary research measures and discusses risk (Khan and Kupor 2017; Kim and MicGill 2011; Kupor, Liu, and Amir 2018).

distrust heightens the desire to ensure one's party wins and that political opponents are kept out of power, which could amplify the reluctance to use an unproven strategy like Meddle Ads.

2. System-related Risk

The second type of risk concerns systems. Consumers constantly interact with and rely on various types of social systems. Social systems are organized structures of social relationships that facilitate interactions between people. Prominent systems include political (e.g., democracy), economic (e.g., capitalism), educational, and legal systems. System-related risks are potential harms or dangers that could affect consumers' trust in a system (e.g., democracy). These risks can inspire doubts about a system's ability to achieve its intended function. They raise concerns about the stability of the system and whether the entire system could eventually unravel.

Meddle Ads could be seen as posing a risk to the democratic system for the following reason: In the U.S., there is a strong norm that members of each political party get to decide which candidate they nominate to represent them in the general elections. Having an outside force meddle in this nomination process could be seen as posing a risk to this system. Consumers might lose trust in the system and wonder: Are these election results fair? Do they reflect the will of the people? Is this system serving its intended function? Can I trust it moving forward?

To illustrate why meddling by an outside force in an election could erode trust, consider the following thought experiment. Suppose it was found out that a newly elected American President won mainly because of interference by an outside force, like Russia or China. That is, this president would have lost but for an outside force meddling in the election process. How would consumers react? Consumers would probably have a negative reaction to such meddling. Foreign adversaries have no standing to participate in American elections and thus their attempts at influencing its results would generate an aversive reaction. Applying this logic to Meddle Ads, people may react negatively to learning that an outside force (an out-party candidate) is trying to

meddle in their elections (the primaries). Needless to say, foreign interference in an election is illegal, and Meddle Ads are not; nonetheless, breaking existing norms and playing outside the spirit of the political game, as Meddle Ads do, could have similar effects. In sum, by interfering with the opposing party's right to nominate their own representative, Meddle Ads could pose a perceived risk to the system, introducing doubts about election fairness and eroding trust in the democratic process. Believing that Meddle Ads pose a risk to the system could motivate individuals to try and protect the system, for example, by punishing those who increase such risks. In other words, consumers could withhold support for candidates known to use Meddle Ads because of the risks these ads pose to the system. To our knowledge, our research is the first to posit that consumers are sensitive to system-related risks and to link such risks to Meddle Ads.

To summarize, two types of risks could drive consumers' aversion to the use of Meddle Ads: outcome-related risks (e.g., losing elections) and system-related risks (e.g., losing trust in the democratic process). Both of these types of risks predict that consumers will have a negative reaction to the use of Meddle Ads. Ex ante, we were agnostic as to whether one or both of these two types of risks would drive consumers' aversion to the use of Meddle Ads. More formally:

> H1: Consumers will be averse to the use of Meddle Ads. This aversion manifests in speaking more negatively about, donating less money to, being less likely to choose, and reporting more negative attitudes toward candidates who use Meddle Ads.
>
> H2: Consumers' aversion to the use of Meddle Ads is driven by perceived riskiness of this strategy. This perceived riskiness stems from outcome-related risks, system-related risks, or both.

Risk-Aversion, Not Extremeness-Aversion

So far, we have argued that consumers are averse to the use of Meddle Ads, and that this aversion is driven by perceived riskiness. We have also argued that the perceived riskiness of Meddle Ads (be it outcome-related or system-related) springs from a specific feature of those ads—meddling. In other words, the risks associated with Meddle Ads stem from how they meddle or interfere in the election process of the opposing party. Meddle Ads, however, possess

a second feature that could drive aversion to their use: bolstering extremists' voices. Meddle Ads often involve bolstering or supporting an extreme candidate from the opposing party. Given that people dislike extreme members of the opposing party (e.g., Lelkes and Westwood 2017), it seems plausible that consumers' aversion to the use of Meddle Ads has nothing to do with their perceived riskiness, and more to do with bolstering extreme voices. In other words, it is plausible that the aversion to Meddle Ads is driven by an "extremeness aversion."

An extremeness aversion account would predict that meddling by supporting non-extreme candidates should attenuate any aversion to the use of Meddle Ads. This is because, according to this account, amplifying extreme candidates is what drives consumers' aversion to Meddle Ads, not the act of meddling itself. In contrast, our risk account would predict that regardless of whether Meddle Ads target an extreme or a non-extreme candidate, the act of meddling itself is what drives Meddle Ads aversion. More formally:

> H3: Because the aversion to Meddle Ads is driven by their perceived riskiness (not an aversion to extremeness per se), consumers will be averse to Meddle Ads regardless of whether these ads bolster an extreme or a non-extreme opponent.

Manipulating Election Outcomes

As described above, there are two potential types of risks associated with the use of Meddle Ads: outcome-related risks and system-related risks. Outcome-related risks relate to consumers' concern about the efficacy of Meddle Ads: For instance, Meddle Ads could help one's party win elections or they could cost one's party the elections. Their outcome is uncertain. If outcome-related risks matter in this context, then consumers' aversion to Meddle Ads should be responsive to outcomes. That is, consumers should react negatively to the use of Meddle Ads when the outcome of a political race is unknown or when the candidate who used Meddle Ads loses the race. However, if a candidate who uses Meddle Ads wins their race, then outcome-related risks should be attenuated, reducing consumers' aversion to Meddle Ads.

> H4: If consumers' aversion to Meddle Ads is driven by outcome-related risks, then consumers should react negatively to the use of Meddle Ads when the outcome of the political race is unknown or when the candidate loses the race, but not when the candidate wins the race.

Manipulating System Resilience

In addition to investigating outcome-related risks, we also examine system-related risks. System-related risks relate to consumers' trust in existing systems. Meddle Ads can erode this trust because outside forces attempt to influence the results of elections through them. This outside interference could cast doubts on election fairness and on whether the democratic process is functioning as intended. If system-related risks matter in the context of Meddle Ads, then consumers' aversion to Meddle Ads should be responsive to beliefs about the resilience of the system. That is, if consumers are reminded of the robustness and resilience of the existing system, then Meddle Ads should be perceived as posing a smaller system-related risk. This, in turn, should reduce consumers' aversion to their use.

> H5: If consumers' aversion to Meddle Ads is driven by system-related risks, they should react less negatively to the use of Meddle Ads when they are reminded of how resilient the system is.

Ad Sponsor Identity as a Boundary Condition

In addition to providing empirical tests of our proposed process, we were interested in examining a practical boundary condition: what would happen if Meddle Ads were paid for by an outside group, such as a party-affiliated Political Action Committees (PACs)? In these situations, the candidate would not be seen as responsible for the risks associated with Meddle Ads, which, in turn, should attenuate or even eliminate the penalties associated with the use of Meddle Ads. This boundary condition is important from a practical perspective. It potentially highlights to stakeholders how Meddle Ads could be used without incurring penalties. Hence,

> H6: When the ad sponsor is an outside party (vs. a political candidate), using Meddle Ads (vs. Attack Ads) will lead to less severe penalties for the candidate.

OVERVIEW OF STUDIES

Eight multi-method studies tested our predictions. Across all studies, we consistently found that consumers were averse to the use of Meddle Ads. Consumers spoke negatively about (Study 1A), donated smaller amounts to (Study 1B), were less likely to choose (Study 2), and reported more negative attitudes toward (Studies 3-7) candidates who used Meddle Ads. These results held regardless of whether the ads targeted an extreme or a non-extreme candidate (e.g., moderate, unqualified candidate; Study 3); whether the candidate won or lost (Study 4); and even when consumers were reminded of the consequences of an out-party win (Study 5). Moreover, these results were robust to various controls. These results held when participants received no information about the advertising strategy used by the control candidate (Study 2), when control candidates were described as using neutral ads (i.e., ads focused on issues like the economy; Studies 1A-B), and when control candidates were described as using Attack Ads (Studies 3-7). Moreover, from a practical perspective, we found that when the use of Meddle Ads was attributed to outside groups, such as party-affiliated political action committees (PACs) instead of candidates, the penalties associated with Meddle Ads were attenuated (Study 7).

Our studies also identify psychological processes underlying this aversion. Penalties incurred from Meddle Ads were driven most consistently by *system-related risks* (Studies 3-7). Meddle Ads were seen as spreading doubts about election fairness and distrust in the democratic process, leading consumers to penalize candidates who used them. Hence, when consumers were reminded of the resilience of the system, they saw Meddle Ads as posing smaller system-related risks, which attenuated their aversion to Meddle Ads (Study 6). In contrast, evidence in support of outcome-related risks was less consistent across studies. For instance, regardless of whether candidates who used Meddle Ads won or lost, consumers were averse to their use (Study 4).

Our materials, data, code, and preregistration reports can be found on OSF (https://osf.io/ntdzb/?view_only=8eb2236ce37e4f96804db526a132f8cd). All sample sizes were determined before data collection. Unless otherwise noted, we did not exclude any participants who completed our surveys. Studies 1A, 1B, 6, and 7 were pre-registered.

STUDY 1A: WORD OF MOUTH

Study 1A investigated consumer responses to the use of Meddle Ads. Participants were randomly assigned to read either a news article detailing the use of Meddle Ads by Democrats in the 2022 midterm elections, or an article discussing alternative advertising strategies used by Democrats in the same elections (e.g., focusing on the economy). Next, participants expressed their reactions towards the article they read. We then used natural language processing (NLP) to analyze these reactions and quantify how consumers responded to the use of Meddle Ads. Our pre-registered prediction was that consumers would exhibit a more negative reaction to articles that mention Meddle Ads compared to articles discussing alternative advertising strategies.

Method

We opened the survey to six-hundred Democrats recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk. Five-hundred eighty-five completed our survey (46% female; $M_{age} = 41$, $SD_{age} = 13$). We focused on recruiting Democrats because Meddle Ads are used more often by Democratic candidates. After providing their demographics, participants were randomly assigned to read either an article that described the use of Meddle Ads by Democrats during the 2022 midterms or a control article that detailed an alternative advertising strategy (see Web Appendix for details). To ensure robustness, our stimuli included a treatment and control article from four different news sources (New York Times, FiveThirtyEight, Washington Post, and Wall Street Journal), and participants within each condition were randomly assigned to one of these four sources.

The articles were selected because they satisfied five core criteria: (1) they were news articles (i.e., not op-eds or editorials), (2) they came from a credible news source, (3) they focused on a single advertising strategy (e.g., using Meddle Ads or using ads that focused on a contemporary social issue, like the economy), (4) they were of similar lengths (Control = 1914 words; Meddle Ads = 1864 words), and (5) they were similar in tone (Control Articles: LIWC Negative Affect Score = 1.56; Meddle Ads Articles: LIWC Negative Affect Score = 1.52). In terms of content, the four control articles discussed one of three different advertising strategies: focusing on abortion, climate change, or the economy.

Next, participants were asked to write a comment on the article they read in an open-ended text box. They were required to leave a minimum of forty words, which helped ensure sufficient textual data for NLP analyses. We tokenized their responses into unigrams (words, punctuation markers, and emojis) using an open-source Python-based language analysis infrastructure (DLATK; Schwartz et al. 2017). Next, we extracted the relative frequency of all 73 dictionaries provided by Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC; Pennebaker et al. 2015). LIWC is an automated text analysis tool previously used to analyze a variety of different types of data, including online reviews and blog posts (Tausczik and Pennebaker 2010).

We compared the negativity of the comments left by participants across Meddle and Control conditions. As pre-registered, we used the *Negative Affect* dictionary in LIWC. This dictionary captures words related to negative emotions and feelings. As examples, below are two comments from our dataset: the first (second) received a high (low) *Negative Affect* score.

> High Negative Affect Score (7.84). “This is ridiculous. Politicians every year get more devious and back handed and it makes me sick. As a Democrat, I am appalled that we cannot win an election based on what we believe to be right versus wrong and have to rely on manipulating the system and the American public.”
>
> Low Negative Affect Score (0). “I am glad to see that climate change is a focus of upcoming elections and that people are making the effort to get politicians elected who will work towards protecting the environment for us and for our future generations. This should be everyone's top priority.”

Results

LIWC Negative Affect. As pre-registered, we regressed the LIWC's negative affect scores on advertising strategy. We found a main effect, such that participants expressed more negative affect in their comments after reading about Meddle Ads compared to reading about the control strategies (β = .64, $t(582) = 3.50$, $p < .001$, $d = .29$; Figure 2; see AAS1 for an analysis of which specific words within the *Negative Affect* dictionary are driving these results). Moreover, there were no significant interactions between advertising strategy and news outlets (*ps* > .22).

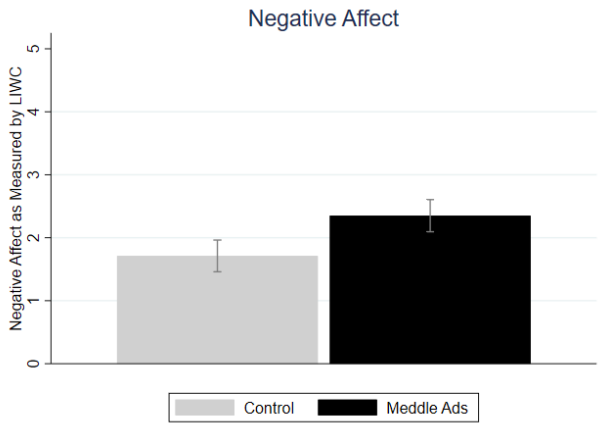


Figure 2. Negative affect as measured by LIWC. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Topic Modeling. In addition to the top-down approach (i.e., a closed-dictionary) used above, we examined whether bottom-up (i.e., data-driven) approaches would arrive at similar conclusions. To do this, we used Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) topic modeling as provided by the MALLET package (McCallum, 2002). LDA produces clusters of words that occur in similar semantic contexts called "topics" (Blei, Ng & Jordan, 2003). We extracted twelve topics and analyzed the frequency with which each participant used each topic. We corrected for multiple comparisons using a Benjamini-Hochberg procedure (1995).

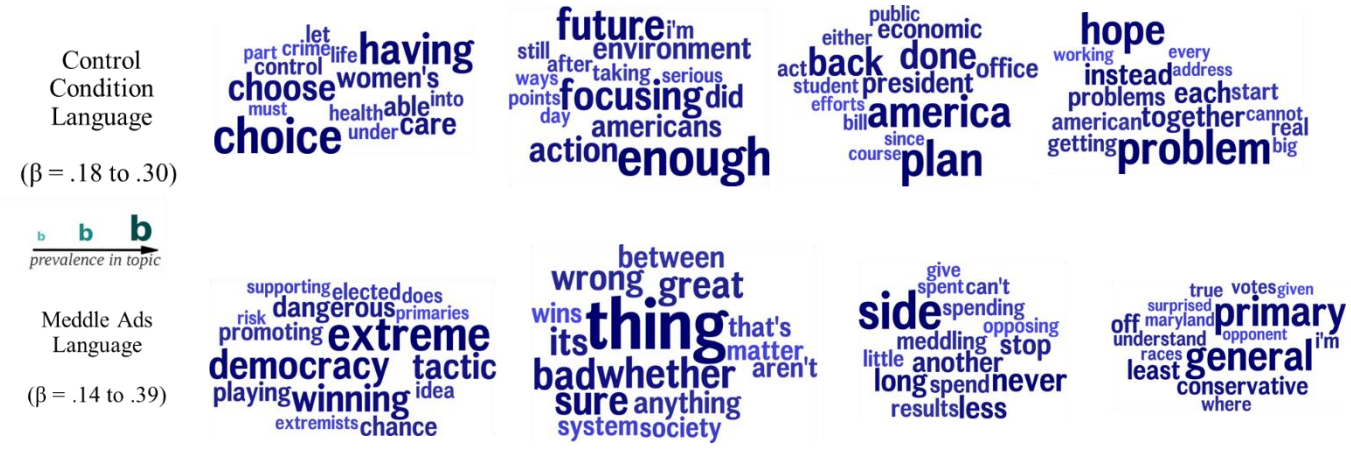


Figure 3. Topics associated with condition. All topics shown are significant at $p < .001$, Benjamini-Hochberg-corrected for multiple comparisons. Size indicates prevalence of words in topic. Color is random for readability.

The eight topics that significantly predicted condition are displayed in Figure 3. First, consider the top four topics that *negatively* predicted the Meddle Ads condition (i.e., words that were indicative of the Control condition). As a reminder, the control articles discussed how Democrats' advertising strategy focused on issue-ads (e.g., abortion, climate change, the economy). As would be expected, topics that predicted the Control condition focused on the contemporary social issues discussed in the control articles. For example, the first topic referenced abortion and women's right to choose (e.g., "women's," "able," "choose," "choice," "health") and the second topic referenced environmental concerns (e.g., "environment," "future," "serious," "enough," "action"). The third focused on the economy (e.g., "president," "economic," "plan," "efforts"). The fourth topic was more general, focusing on addressing problems that are facing Americans ("hope," "American," "problems," "problem," "big," "real").

Second, consider the four topics that *positively* predicted the Meddle Ads condition. Broadly, these topics recapped the strategy and indicated some aversion. For instance, the first topic contained words such as "risky," "dangerous," "playing," "chance," and "democracy." Similarly, the second topic contained words such as "wrong," "bad," "system," and "society." The last two topics were more descriptive of the strategy (e.g., "meddling," "opposing," "side").

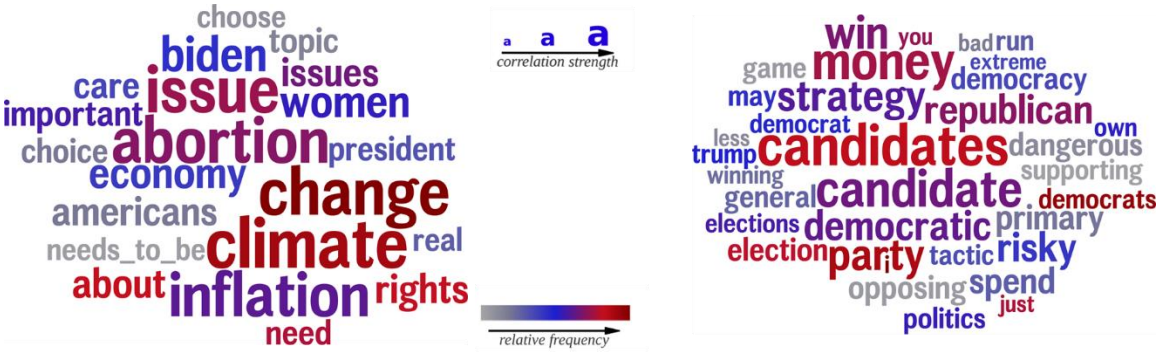
The predictive ability of these four topics, alongside the negative valence of the first two, conceptually replicates results from the aforementioned top-down analysis. The fact that words such as “democracy,” “system,” and “society” naturally occurred in these topics also provides some indirect evidence that learning about this strategy causes people to express concerns about the risks and dangers Meddle Ads pose to the system of democracy.

Differential Language Analysis (DLA). In addition to LDA topic modeling, we examined another bottom-up approach: Differential Language Analysis (Schwartz et al., 2017). We investigated whether there existed words or phrases that were uniquely correlated with reading about Meddle Ads (vs. control articles). To do this, we first extracted 1-, 2-, and 3-grams (words) from our dataset. Next, we focused on grams that occurred in at least 2.5% of our sample. Following that, we correlated the remaining 1-to-3 grams with advertising strategy (1 = Meddle, 0 = Control), corrected for multiple comparisons using a Benjamini-Hochberg correction, and kept words or phrases that were correlated with the advertising strategy condition at $p < .05$.

The results of this analysis are summarized in Figure 4. First, consider words that *negatively* predicted the Meddle Ads condition (i.e., words that were indicative of the Control condition; left panel). Those words captured the social issues discussed in the control articles. Thus, words such as “abortion,” “women,” “climate,” “change,” “inflation,” and “economy” were predictive of being in the Control condition.

Second, consider words that *positively* predicted the Meddle Ads condition (right panel). Broadly speaking, two types of words emerged. The first was general words like “strategy,” “candidate,” “money,” “republican,” “primary,” “general,” and “election.” These words describe the use of Meddle Ads. The second type of words that emerged were similar to the topics discussed above, with words like “risky,” “dangerous,” “game,” “bad,” and “democracy.” These

words conceptually replicate results from the aforementioned LIWC and topic-modeling analyses. Hence, regardless of whether we used top-down or bottom-up approaches, we found preliminary support for the notion that consumers had negative reactions to the use of Meddle Ads, and that those reactions might stem, in part, from concerns about democracy.



Control Condition language (β = −.11 to −.33) Meddle Ads language (β = .11 to .28)

Figure 4. All language features shown are significant at $p < .05$, Benjamini-Hochberg corrected for multiple comparisons. Size indicates correlation strength; color indicates frequency increasing in relative frequency from grey to blue to red.

Discussion

Study 1A showed that people reacted more negatively to the Meddle Ad strategy than to other advertising strategies like focusing on abortion, climate change, or the economy. These results are noteworthy for two reasons. First, they were observed using externally valid stimuli. Participants read real articles from leading news outlets, which mimics how consumers are likely to learn about the use of Meddle Ads in the wild. Second, rather than using artificial scales to capture consumers' negative reactions, we captured this negativity in a more organic way using three different types of natural language processing techniques (LIWC, LDA topics, and DLA).

We opted for an experimental approach, instead of analyzing naturally occurring comments because of self-selection concerns. In the online environment, consumers self-select into the news websites they browse, the articles they read, and the articles they choose to comment on, introducing multiple levels of self-selection and rendering any correlational estimates prone to statistical bias. In order to be able to make causal claims, while also

preserving external validity, we opted for an experimental design that used real unedited news articles. Nevertheless, to further bolster the external validity of our findings, we also collected a dataset of all online comments (N = 1,081) left by consumers on the eight articles used in this study. We performed the same analysis reported in our pre-registration on this new dataset. Replicating our results, readers of these news outlets' websites expressed more negative affect in their online comments after reading about Meddle Ads compared to alternative advertising strategies ($\beta = 1.36$, $t(1079) = 3.45$, $p = .001$, $d = .27$). This result indicates that, even in the wild, consumers voice negative reactions to the use of Meddle Ads.

STUDY 1B: INCENTIVE-COMPATIBLE DONATION BEHAVIOR

Study 1B tested whether the negative reactions towards Meddle Ads documented in Study 1A would influence downstream behaviors such as donating to a campaign. Donation behavior is important because larger campaign donations can translate into greater persuasion and mobilization efforts, thereby increasing electoral success. Moreover, political donating is an important form of political participation, and donations from everyday donors are seen as indicators of voter support. To examine how the use of Meddle Ads influences donation behavior, we had participants read one of two news articles about a real candidate. One article described how the candidate used Meddle Ads, and the other did not mention his use of Meddle Ads. We then measured participants' willingness to donate a bonus amount to this candidate using an incentive-compatible design. Our pre-registered prediction was that learning that the candidate used Meddle Ads would decrease donations to the candidate's re-election campaign.

Method

Four-hundred Democrats were recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (56% female; $M_{age} = 41$, $SD_{age} = 13$). They were randomly assigned to either the Meddle Ads or control condition. In both conditions, participants read an authentic New York Times article about

Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro. In the Meddle Ads condition, the article discussed Shapiro's use of Meddle Ads during his campaign, presenting both arguments against and in favor of this advertising strategy. The control article was a different New York Times article that described Shapiro's focus on voting rights as an advertising strategy (see Web Appendix for details). Participants learned that ten random individuals would receive a $20 bonus and could allocate the bonus across three recipients: Josh Shapiro (the candidate they read about), a moderate opponent of Shapiro, or the researchers conducting the study. Our pre-registered dependent variable was the amount donated to Josh Shapiro.

Results

We regressed donations to Shapiro on advertising strategy. We found a main effect, such that participants donated less money to Shapiro when he was described as using Meddle Ads than when he was described as using a different advertising strategy ($\beta = -5.39$, $t(398) = -6.35$, $p < .001$, $d = .64$; Figure 5). Hence, when participants discovered that a candidate from their own party used Meddle Ads, they penalized him by diverting donations away from his re-election campaign. The magnitude of this penalty was considerable, with donations declining by 59.6%.

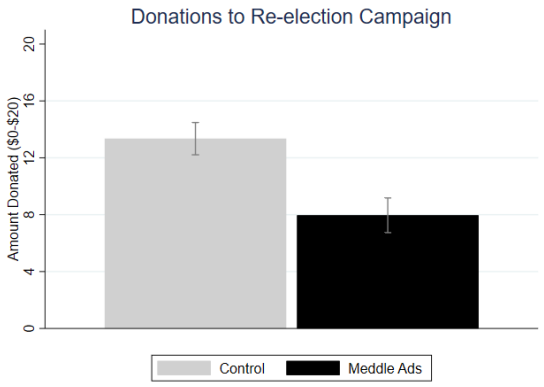


Figure 5. Amount donated to re-election campaign. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Discussion

Study 1B shows that the negative reactions documented in Study 1A can influence real behavior: Consumers penalized candidates from their own party who used Meddle Ads by donating a smaller amount to their re-election campaign. The magnitude of this cost was substantial, with donations falling by approximately 60% when the candidate used Meddle Ads, compared to an alternative advertising strategy. This result is noteworthy because participants' donation decisions were incentive-compatible.

Together, Studies 1A and 1B reveal that consumers are averse to the use of Meddle Ads. First, when consumers read about the use of Meddle Ads, they wrote more negative comments. Indeed, this result was replicated using a dataset of actual online comments posted in the wild. Second, when consumers learned that a candidate from their party used Meddle Ads, they donated less to their campaign. One potential limitation of Studies 1A-B is their stimuli. Using real news articles bolsters the external validity of these studies, but it can introduce confounds. Thus, our subsequent studies tested whether consumers' aversion to the use of Meddle Ads would replicate under highly controlled experimental conditions.

STUDY 2: CONJOINT STUDY

Study 2 tested whether the findings documented in Studies 1A-B would replicate under more controlled experimental conditions. It additionally examined if the aversion to the use of Meddle Ads was robust to a variety of candidate characteristics (e.g., age, gender, race, professional background, etc.) and whether it would determine which candidate was preferred. To test this, we used a study design popular in marketing: choice-based conjoint (Green and Srinivasan 1978; Meißner, Musalem, and Huber 2016). Participants in a choice-based conjoint study are shown a series of trials, each showcasing two different options (in this case, two different candidates). Participants are then asked to choose between the two options. By

randomly varying the values of different features (in our case, the candidate's age, gender, policy positions, partisan identity, and use of Meddle Ads) across trials, researchers can quantify how much a given feature influences choice. Conjoint studies have numerous benefits, such as approximating real-world political behavior, testing robustness across different combinations of stimuli, and mitigating social desirability bias (Horiuchi, Markovich, and Yamamoto 2022).

Method

We requested a nationally representative sample of four-hundred participants from Lucid. Lucid is an online survey platform that uses quota sampling to recruit participants that resemble the gender, racial, geographic, and age distribution of the U.S. adult population. Three-hundred ninety-four participants passed our attention checks and were included in the analysis (48.89% female; M_{age} = 46, SD_{age} = 16; 37.06% Democrats; 33.50% Republicans; 29.45% Independents).

Participants saw two profiles for candidates running for the U.S. House of Representatives. These profiles differed on a variety of features (e.g., age, gender, race; see Figure 6). Participants then indicated which candidate they would prefer, as well as whether they would vote in this election. Each participant completed seven trials (i.e., viewed fourteen candidates, choosing between two at a time). This resulted in 5,516 observations.

We experimentally varied the following candidate characteristics (see Graham and Svolik 2020):

- Age (45, 50, 55, 60)
- Gender (Female, Male)
- Race (White, Black, Hispanic, Asian)
- Background (Teacher, Business executive, Served in the Navy, Small business owner, Lawyer)
- Party (Democrat, Republican)
- Positions (One of four positions on marijuana legalization; one of four positions on local school funding)
- Meddle Ads (whether the candidate was described as using Meddle Ads; see below).

	Candidate 1	Candidate 2
Age	45	55
Gender	Female	Male
Race	Hispanic	Hispanic
Background	Business executive	Teacher
Party	Republican	Republican
Positions	Marijuana should be illegal for everyone. No exceptions.	Marijuana should be legal for recreational use and only sold in state-licensed dispensaries.
	Increase state aid to local school districts and prioritize poor school districts.	Increase state aid across all local school districts.
	Supported a redistricting plan that gives Republicans 2 extra seats despite a decline in the polls.	Paid for ads supporting a far-left candidate because it would be easier for Republicans to beat a far-left candidate in the general elections.

Figure 6. Example Screenshot from Conjoint Task

Meddle Ads Manipulation. To ensure that the results we obtained were robust to small differences in the language used to describe the use of Meddle Ads, we used three different framings. The three framings were: (1) “Paid for ads supporting a far-[right/left] candidate because it would be easier for [Democrats/ Republicans] to beat a far-[right/left] candidate in the general elections,” (2) “Spent millions of dollars helping a far-[right/left] candidate win the [Republican/ Democratic] primary, because it would be easier to beat a far-[right/left] candidate in the general election,” and (3) “Ran dozens of ads supporting a far-[right/left] candidate in the [Republican/ Democratic] primary, because it would be easier to beat a far-[right/left] candidate in the general election.” Consistent with our expectation, these three frames did not significantly differ from one another. Thus, to maximize statistical power, we collapsed across them.

Minimizing Demand Effects. Because using Meddle Ads may seem unusual to some participants, seeing such information about the candidate may give away the purpose of our research, leading to demand effects. We addressed this issue in two ways. First, to avoid alerting participants to the fact that this is the core variable of interest, information about whether the

candidate used Meddle Ads appeared with 15% probability (instead of 50%). Second, we attempted to obfuscate the purpose of the study by introducing decoy negative information. Specifically, in addition to manipulating whether the candidate engaged in this political strategy, we also manipulated whether the candidate engaged in extramarital affairs ("was reported to have had multiple extramarital affairs") or Gerrymandering ("supported a redistricting plan that gives [candidate's party] 2 extra seats despite a decline in the polls"). Providing negative information different from the use of Meddle Ads helps prevent participants from knowing the true purpose of the study. In addition, this allowed us to compare the magnitude of the effect of using Meddle Ads to other types of negative information, like engaging in extramarital affairs.

Results

Meddle Ads. To examine the effect of using Meddle Ads, we estimated the average marginal component effect (AMCE) of this strategy on candidate choice with standard errors clustered on the respondent level (see Hainmueller et al. 2014 for a discussion of AMCE and related concepts). More specifically, we estimated the following regression model:

$$\widehat{\text{Choice}}_{i,t} = \alpha + \overrightarrow{\beta_1}\,\text{meddle ads}_{i,t} + \overrightarrow{\beta_2}\,\text{age}_{i,t} + \overrightarrow{\beta_3}\,\text{gender}_{i,t} + \overrightarrow{\beta_4}\,\text{race}_{i,t} + \overrightarrow{\beta_5}\,\text{background}_{i,t} + \beta_6\,\text{party match}_{i,t} + \overrightarrow{\beta_7}\,\text{policy match}_{i,t}$$

The AMCE of using Meddle Ads is captured by the coefficient β_1. If this coefficient were negative and significant, it would suggest that using Meddle Ads lowered the likelihood that participants chose such candidates. We found that using Meddle Ads had a significant and negative AMCE (AMCE = $-.067$, SE = .018, $p < .001$). This result means that, compared to no information, learning that a candidate used Meddle Ads resulted in a penalty for that candidate.

To place the magnitude of the penalty incurred for using Meddle Ads in context, we compared it to the penalty incurred for belonging to the opposing party (AMCE = $-.15$, SE = .015, $p < .001$). On average, the penalty incurred for using Meddle Ads was 43.59% of the

penalty incurred for belonging to the opposing party. Furthermore, the penalty for using Meddle Ads was comparable in magnitude to engaging in extramarital affairs (AMCE = −.073, SE = .029, p = .012) or gerrymandering (AMCE = −.046, SE = .025, p = .064; see Figure 7).

Moderation by Partisan Identity of the Candidate. Next, we examined whether the penalty for using Meddle Ads is moderated by the candidate's political party. Our previous studies suggest that people object to the use of Meddle Ads even from candidates who belong to their own party—however, this objection could be amplified for political opponents. To assess this possibility, we estimated a similar regression to the one above, but added an interaction between using Meddle Ads and the partisan identity of the candidate (same party = 0, different party = 1). This interaction was non-significant (AMCE = −.011, SE = .036, p = .77). That is, participants penalized candidates who used Meddle Ads by a similar amount regardless of whether the candidate belonged to one's party (AMCE = −.060, SE = .028, p = .036) or the opposing party (AMCE = −.070, SE = .023, p = .003; see Figure 7).

Discussion

Results from Study 2 reveal that, even under controlled experimental conditions and with a nationally representative sample, consumers were averse to the use of Meddle Ads. Consumers were less likely to choose candidates who used Meddle Ads, compared to candidates whose advertising strategy was unknown. These results were found across combinations of candidate race, gender, age, background, and position on social issues and for both in-party and out-party candidates. In the next study, we expanded on these results and tested our proposed mechanism.

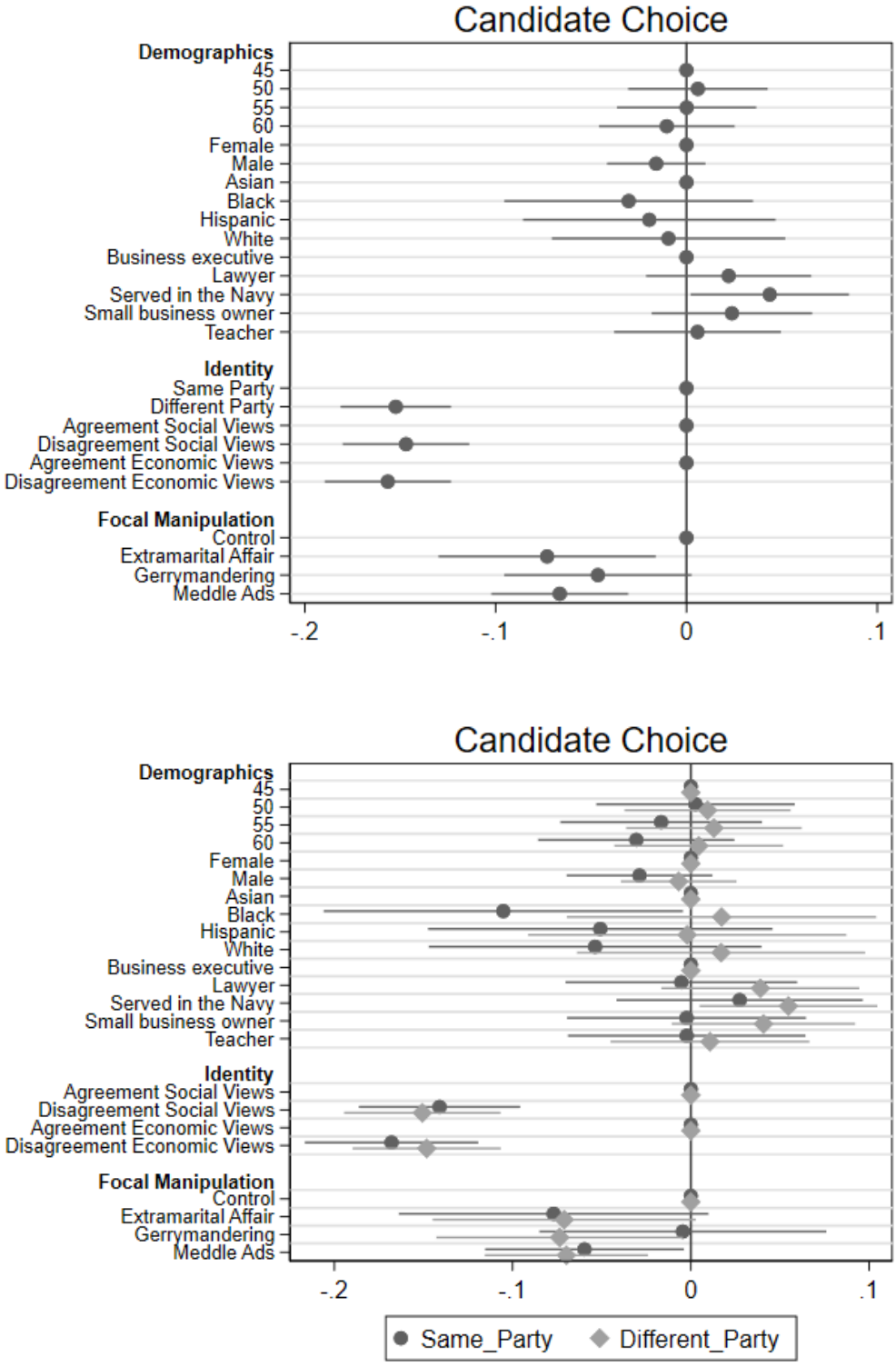


Figure 7. Average marginal component effect (AMCE) of various manipulated features. Standard errors are clustered on the respondent-level. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Reference level for each feature is indicted by a dot. Upper panel shows the results for all participants; Lower panel breaks results by candidate's party affiliation.

STUDY 3: MEDDLE ADS FEATURING NON-EXTREME CANDIDATES

Study 3 used a measurement-of-mediation design to test our proposed mechanisms. As a reminder, our theoretical model identifies two different types of risks associated with the use of Meddle Ads (H2). The first relates to outcomes, such as losing elections or tarnishing the reputation of one's party. The second relates to systems. We were agnostic as to whether only one or both types of risks would drive Meddle Ads aversion. In addition to providing mechanism evidence, Study 3 tested the robustness of consumers' aversion to Meddle Ads to using a new control condition. Rather than providing participants with no information about the advertising strategy (as was the case in Study 2), participants read that the candidate used a common advertising strategy—Attack Ads. We chose this advertising strategy for three reasons. First, attack ads are the most common advertising strategy used in politics. By some estimates, between 69% and 76% of all political ads feature attacks on political opponents (Wesleyan Media Project, 2018). Second, because much of what social scientists know about political advertising has focused on attack ads (Basil, Schooler, and Reeves 1991; Bullock 1994; Jung and Critcher 2018; Roese and Sande 1993), knowing how Meddle Ads compare to Attack Ads is useful. Third, past research suggests that candidates who use Attack Ads are seen in a negative light (Basil et al. 1991; Bullock 1994; Roese and Sande 1993). Thus, Attack Ads acted as a conservative control condition.

Moreover, study 3 tested another prediction made by our theoretical model related to the *target* featured in the Meddle Ads (H3). Our theoretical model predicts that aversion to the use of Meddle Ads is due to interference in the other party's primary, not due to the promotion of extreme candidates per se. Thus, we varied whether Meddle Ads were used to support an *extreme* candidate (as was the case in past studies) or a non-extreme candidate (specifically, a

moderate but unqualified candidate). We predicted that regardless of whether the ads featured an extreme or a non-extreme candidate, consumers would be averse to the use of Meddle Ads.

Method

Four-hundred and forty-nine participants were recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (45% female; $M_{age} = 42$, $SD_{age} = 12$; 49.09% Democrats; 25.06% Republicans; 23.23% Independents; 1.62% Other). This study followed a 2 (Ads: Attack vs. Meddle) x 2 (Target: Extreme vs. Incompetent) between-participant design. Participants first provided their demographic information. They then read an article about an in-party candidate running for Governor in Pennsylvania. Democratic participants read about a Democratic candidate, whereas Republican participants read about a Republican candidate. The article contained biographical information about the candidate, such as their place of birth and their qualifications.

The last paragraph in the article described the advertising strategies used by the candidate. The control condition described candidate's use of Attack Ads. Specifically, the candidate was described as attacking an out-party member. In the Meddle Ads condition, the candidate was described as bolstering and supporting an out-party member to increase his own chances of winning in the general election. We also varied the *target* of the ad (Tom Slotkin). In one condition, the target was described as an extreme out-party candidate. In the other condition, the target of the ad was described as a moderate incompetent and unqualified candidate. As an example, participant who identified as Democrats saw the following (see Web Appendix for details):

	Extreme Target	Incompetent Target
Meddle Ads	Becker's campaign has been receiving some attention because of its TV ads that help Tom Slotkin, a far-right, Trumpist Republican candidate running in the Republican primary. Specifically, Becker spent $840,000 on ads bolstering this candidate. By supporting and elevating a far-right, Trumpist opponent like Slotkin, Becker is increasing his own chances to win the general election, as an extreme candidate might be easier to beat than a moderate candidate.	Becker's campaign has been receiving some attention because of its TV ads that help Tom Slotkin, a moderate unqualified and incompetent Republican candidate running in the Republican primary. Specifically, Becker spent $840,000 on ads bolstering this candidate. By supporting and elevating an unqualified and incompetent opponent like Slotkin, Becker is increasing his own chances to win the general election, as an unqualified candidate might be easier to beat than a strong candidate.
Attack Ads	Becker's campaign has been receiving some attention because of its TV ads that criticize Tom Slotkin, a far-right, Trumpist Republican candidate running in the Republican primary. Specifically, Becker spent $840,000 on ads highlighting this candidate's extreme views. By disparaging a far-right, Trumpist opponent like Slotkin, Becker is increasing his own chances to win the general election.	Becker's campaign has been receiving some attention because of its TV ads that criticize Tom Slotkin, a moderate unqualified and incompetent Republican candidate running in the Republican primary. Specifically, Becker spent $840,000 on ads highlighting this candidate's lack of qualifications for office. By disparaging an unqualified and incompetent opponent like Slotkin, Becker is increasing his own chances to win the general election.

Attitudes toward Candidate. After reading the article, participants indicated their attitudes toward the candidate (Sam Becker) using two seven-point semantic differential scales: "What's your overall impression of Sam Becker?" Unfavorable / Favorable, Very Negative / Very Positive. These two items were averaged into an attitudes index ($r = .94$, $p < .001$).

Donations. Additionally, we included a hypothetical donation variable, akin to the incentive-compatible donation variable used in Study 1B. Participants were asked to imagine receiving a $1.00 bonus at the end of the study, which they could allocate across three options: donate to a re-election campaign of Sam Becker, donate to a new out-party candidate who is planning to challenge Sam Becker, or return the money to the researchers. The amount of money donated to the re-election campaign of the candidate was our outcome of interest.

Perceptions of Strategy. Participants also reported their perceptions of the campaign strategy using two items: "Now, we would like to ask you some questions about Sam Becker's

campaign. (1) How appropriate or inappropriate is Sam Becker's campaigning strategy? 1 – extremely inappropriate, 7 – extremely appropriate; (2) How acceptable or unacceptable do you find Sam Becker's approach in running his campaign? 1 – extremely unacceptable, 7 – extremely acceptable." These two items were averaged into an appropriateness index (r = .93, p <.001). Perceptions of strategy were measured in this and all subsequent studies. Due to space constraints, and because results for this measure were similar to the attitudes results across studies, we report these results in the Web Appendix (see section AAPOS).

System-related Risk. Next, we measured potential mediators, the order of which was counterbalanced. Our two focal mediators were perceptions of system-related risks and outcome-related risks. Perceptions of system-related risks were measured using two items: (1) To what extent do you think Sam Becker's campaign will make Americans trust or distrust democracy? 1 – Campaign will make Americans distrust democracy, 7 – Campaign will make Americans trust democracy; (2) To what extent do you think Sam Becker's campaign will make Americans doubt or trust that the elections were fair? 1 – Campaign will make Americans doubt that the elections were fair, 7 – Campaign will make Americans trust that the elections were fair. These two items were averaged into a composite (r = .81, p < .001) and reverse coded, so that greater values indicated greater system-related risks.

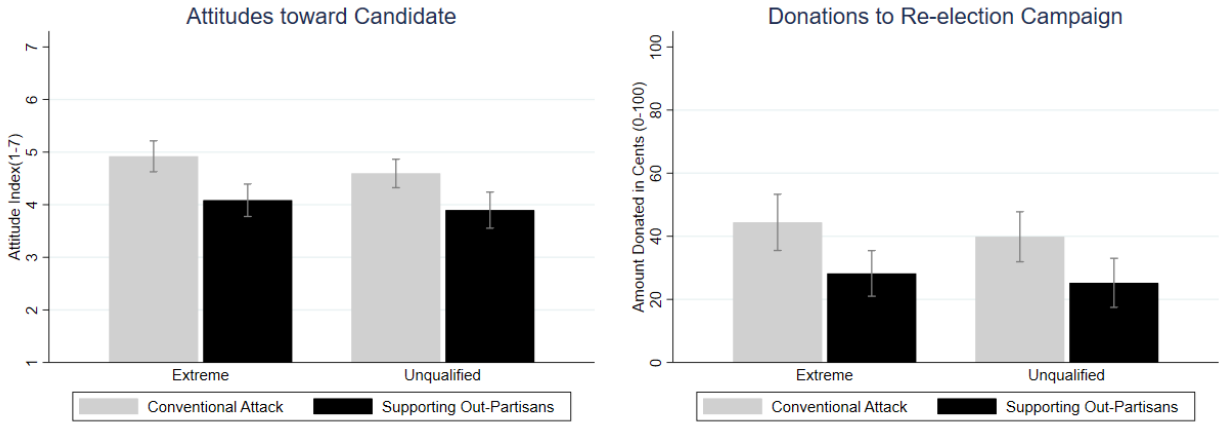
Outcome-related Risk. We measured outcome-related risks using two items: The first is the risk of losing elections because of the use of this strategy (To what extent do you believe Sam Becker's campaign strategy will help or harm [own party: Democrats / Republicans] win elections?). The second was reputational (To what extent do you believe Sam Becker's campaign strategy will help or harm the reputation of [own party: Democrats/ Republicans]?). These two items were averaged into an outcome-related risk index (r(445) = .70, p <.001). In addition to

these two types of risks, we measured general riskiness and person perceptions (see Web Appendix). Due to space constraints, we discuss these additional measures in the General Discussion section and report their results in the Web Appendix.

Results

Attitudes toward Candidate. We regressed attitudes toward the candidate on advertising strategy, ad target, and their interaction. We found a main effect of advertising strategy, such that attitudes toward the candidate were more negative in the Meddle Ads condition than in the Attack Ads condition ($\beta = -.78$, $t(446) = -4.93$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .052$). Consistent with our theorizing, the interaction between advertising strategy and ad target was non-significant ($\beta = -.14$, $t(445) = -.45$, $p = .66$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$; see Figure 8). The lack of a significant interaction suggests that regardless of whether the ads targeted an extreme or an unqualified opponent, participants penalized candidates who used Meddle Ads instead of using Attack Ads.

Donations. We found similar results for donations toward the re-election campaign of the candidate. There was a main effect of advertising strategy, such that participants donated less money to the candidate when the candidate used Meddle Ads than when they used Attack Ads ($\beta = -15.38$, $t(446) = -3.80$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .031$). Here again, there was the interaction was non-significant ($\beta = -1.59$, $t(445) = -.20$, $p = .85$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$; see Figure 8).



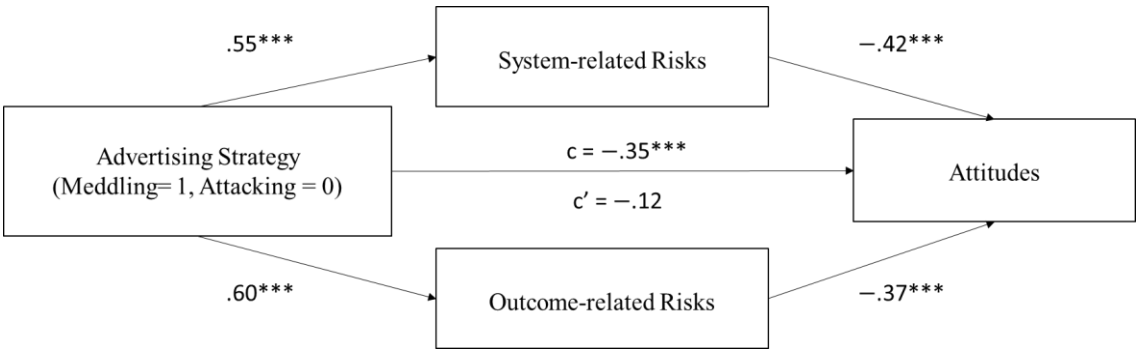


Figure 8. Upper: Attitudes toward candidate and Donations. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Lower: Mediation model. The notation c' indicates the direct effect after controlling for the mediators. Coefficients are standardized linear regression coefficients. ***p <.001, ** p < .05.

Mediation Analysis. Next, we estimated a bootstrapped mediation model with 10,000 iterations using model 4 in SPSS. Given the absence of significant interactions, we collapsed across ad target. Thus, the independent variable was advertising strategy (1 = Meddle Ads, 0 = Attack Ads), the mediators were system-related risks and outcome-related risks, and the dependent variable was attitudes. Use of Meddle Ads increased system-related risks (β = .55, SE = .065, p < .001) and outcome-related risks (β = .60, SE = .09, p < .001). Both types of risks were significantly correlated with attitudes (system = −.64, SE = .038, p < .001; outcome = −.37, SE = .047, p < .001). There were significant and negative indirect effects through both system- (indirect effect = −.36, SE = .062, 95% CI [−.48, −.24]) and outcome-related risks (indirect effect = −.22, SE = .045, 95% CI [−.31, −.14]).[2]

Discussion

Conceptually replicating the results obtained in our previous studies, Study 3 provides further evidence that consumers are averse to candidates who use Meddle Ads (H1). This result is noteworthy because it emerged against a more conservative control condition in which the

[2] To ensure that participants viewed system-related risks and outcome-related risks as distinct constructs, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis (maximum likelihood). We found that a two-factor solution best fits the data, and measures associated with system-related and outcome-related risks loaded on different factors. This suggests that participants treated these two constructs as distinct (see AAS3).

candidate was described as using Attack Ads. Additionally, Study 3 showed that consumers penalized the use of Meddle Ads regardless of whether the ad target was an extreme or a moderate but unqualified out-partisan (H3). This study also supported the notion that both types of risks (system-related and outcome-related) act as mechanisms underlying Meddle Ads aversion. System-related risks and outcome-related risks mediated the effect even after accounting for person perceptions (e.g., immorality). Together, these results provide evidence against the "extremeness account" and provide evidence for our proposed risk account (H2, H3).

STUDY 4: MANIPULATING ELECTION OUTCOMES

Study 4 further tested the outcome-related risk pathway by manipulating the outcome of the election (H4). If consumers' aversion is driven primarily by concerns about outcomes, they should be particularly likely to react negatively to the use of Meddle Ads when the outcome of the political race is *unknown* (as was the case in our studies thus far) or when the candidate loses the race. However, if participants find out that candidates who used Meddle Ads won their race, then outcome-related risks should be attenuated, reducing consumers' aversion to Meddle Ads.

Method

Six-hundred participants were recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (48% female; M_{age} = 41, SD_{age} = 15; 74.67% Democrats; 22.33% Republicans; 2.67% Independents; .33% Other). Participants were randomly assigned to cells of a 2 (Advertising Strategy: Attack Ads vs. Meddle Ads) x 3 (Outcome: Win, Lose, Unknown) design. Advertising strategy was manipulated as in Study 3. Outcome was manipulated by informing participants that Becker won the election ("Becker ended up winning the race for governor against Slotkin"), Becker lost the election ("Becker ended up losing the race for governor against Slotkin"), or by providing no outcome information. To ensure that participants registered our outcome manipulation, we included a manipulation check at the end of the study ("Earlier, you read about Sam Becker's campaign.

According to what you read, did Sam Becker win or lose the political race for governor?" Sam Becker won, Sam Becker lost, Unsure). 89.37% of participants successfully passed this manipulation check. Limiting the results to only participants who passed this manipulation check does not change the direction or statistical significance of the results.

After reading about the advertising strategy and outcome, participants indicated their attitudes toward the candidate, as well as their views on the appropriateness of the campaign strategies used in this political race. Both dependent variables were measured using the same items in Study 3. Finally, participants reported perceptions of system-related risks and outcome-related risks (same items used in Study 3).

Results

Attitudes toward Candidate. We regressed attitudes toward the candidate on advertising strategy, outcome of the political race, and their interactions. We found a main effect of the advertising strategy, such that attitudes toward the candidate were more negative in the Meddle Ads than in the Attack Ads condition ($\beta = -.70$, $t(598) = -5.51$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .048$). There was also a main effect of outcome, such that attitudes were more positive when the candidate won than when they lost ($\beta = .38$, $t(598) = 2.43$, $p = .015$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$) or when the outcome was unknown ($\beta = .30$, $t(598) = 1.96$, $p = .05$; $\eta_p^2 = .0006$). Importantly, the interactions between advertising strategy and outcome were non-significant ($\beta_{\text{strtagey x lost}} = .19$, $t(596) = .61$, $p = .54$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$; $\beta_{\text{strtagey x unknown}} = .0024$, $t(596) = .01$, $p = .99$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$; see Figure 9). Thus, regardless of whether the candidate won, lost, or their fate in this political race was unknown, participants disliked candidates who used Meddle Ads.

Mediation Analysis. We employed the same mediation analysis strategy from Study 3. The independent variable was advertising strategy (1 = meddle, 0 = attack), the mediators were system-related risks and outcome-related risks, and the dependent variable was attitudes toward

the candidate. We found that Meddle Ads increased system-related risks (β = .37, SE = .080, p < .001), which led to negative attitudes toward the candidate (β = −.57, SE = .033, p < .001). There was a significant and negative indirect effect through concerns about system-related risks (indirect effect = −.21, SE = .047, 95% CI [−.31, −.12]). However, Meddle Ads only marginally increased outcome-related risks (β = .15, SE = .08, p = .07), and outcome-related risk was uncorrelated with attitudes toward the candidate (β = .006, SE = .033, p = .86). The indirect effect through outcome-related risk was non-significant (indirect effect = −.0008, SE = .006, 95% CI [−.015, .010]). In other words, in this study, we found no significant evidence that outcome-related risk drove consumers' aversion to the use of Meddle Ads.

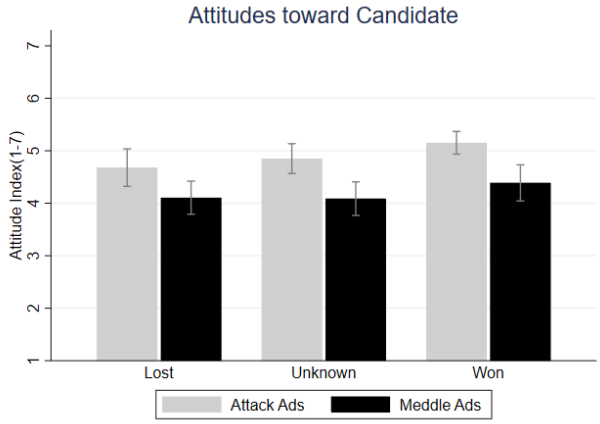


Figure 9. Attitudes toward candidate. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Discussion

In Study 4, consumers' aversion to Meddle Ads was driven by system-related risks, not outcome-related risks. Whereas a perspective that prioritizes outcome-related risks predicts moderation by the outcome of the political race, results from Study 4 found no such moderation. Instead, regardless of whether the candidate won, lost, or their fate in this political race was unknown, participants disliked candidates who used Meddle Ads. Results from the mediation analyses also supported these conclusions. Whereas system-related risks significantly mediated the observed effects, outcome-related risks did not.

STUDY 5: HEIGHTENED CONSEQUENCES

Study 5 tested the robustness of system-related risks in driving consumers' aversion to Meddle Ads. Some past research suggests that individuals sometimes tolerate problematic behaviors as a means to a moral end (Mueller and Skitka 2018; Skitka 2002) such as preventing the opposing party from gaining power. Thus, we tested whether reminding participants about the dangers of an out-party win would attenuate Meddle Ads aversion. Specifically, participants in our study read a brief article outlining the policies that the opposing party would implement if they were to win the election. Additionally, participants listened to voice recordings of fellow in-party members expressing their concerns about the possibility of an out-party win.

Method

We opened the survey to four-hundred Democrats recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk. In total, three-hundred ninety-six completed our survey (42% female; M_{age} = 41, SD_{age} = 13). Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions. In addition to varying the advertising strategy, we also varied whether participants were reminded of the consequences of an out-party win. In the Heightened Consequences condition, we used both written and audio content to make these consequences especially vivid, thereby maximizing perceptions of outcome risk. Specifically, participants in this condition read an article outlining key legislative changes Republican purportedly would enact if they won the 2024 election, including a national ban on abortion, reducing funding for Medicare, and restricting immigration. For example, participants read quotes from top Republican politicians asserting their intention to cut social security and Medicare (e.g., "Republican Senator Mike Lee recently said: 'It will be my objective to phase out Social Security. To pull it up by the roots, and get rid of it.'").

After reading the article, participants listened to quotes from Democrats about their fears of a Republican win (e.g., "As a mother to a daughter, I will continue to see my right to bodily

autonomy and necessary health care stripped away…"). Following that, all participants read an article about a Democratic candidate running for political office. The last paragraph in the article varied the advertising strategy (Attack Ads vs. Meddle Ads; same manipulation as Study 4). Next, participants reported their attitudes toward the candidate and their perceptions of the advertising strategy (same items as Study 3). Finally, participants reported their perceptions of system-related risks and outcome-related risks (same items used in Study 3).

Results

Attitudes toward Candidate. We regressed attitudes toward candidate on advertising strategy, the Heighted Consequences condition, and their interactions. We again found a main effect of the advertising strategy, such that attitudes toward the candidate were more negative in the Meddle Ad than in the Attack Ad condition ($\beta = -.58$, $t(392) = -3.89$, $p < .001$, $d = .40$). There was also a main effect of the Heighted Consequences condition. Participants reported more positive attitudes toward the candidate in the Heighted Consequences condition, compared to the control ($\beta = .32$, $t(392) = 2.19$, $p = .029$, $d = .23$). However, the interaction between advertising strategy and Heighted Consequences was non-significant ($\beta = .095$, $t(390) = .032$, $p = .75$, $\eta_p^2 = .00026$; see Figure 10). Regardless of whether they were reminded of what an out-party win would entail, participants evaluated candidates using Meddle Ads more negatively.

Mediation Analysis. We employed the same mediation analysis strategy from Study 3. Given the absence of significant interactions, the independent variable was advertising strategy (1 = Meddle Ads, 0 = Attack Ads), the mediators were system- and outcome-related risks, and the dependent variable was attitudes. Replicating results from Study 3, using Meddle Ads increased perceptions of system- ($\beta = .26$, SE = .10, $p = .008$) and outcome-related ($\beta = .43$, SE = .01, $p < .001$) risks, and each was associated with more negative attitudes toward the candidate (system: $\beta = -.37$, SE = .05, $p < .001$; outcome: $\beta = -.37$, SE = .05, $p < .001$). The indirect

effects through system- and outcome-related risks were significant (system: −.10, SE = .041, 95% CI [−.18, −.02]; outcome: −.16, SE = .049, 95% CI [−.26, −.07]).

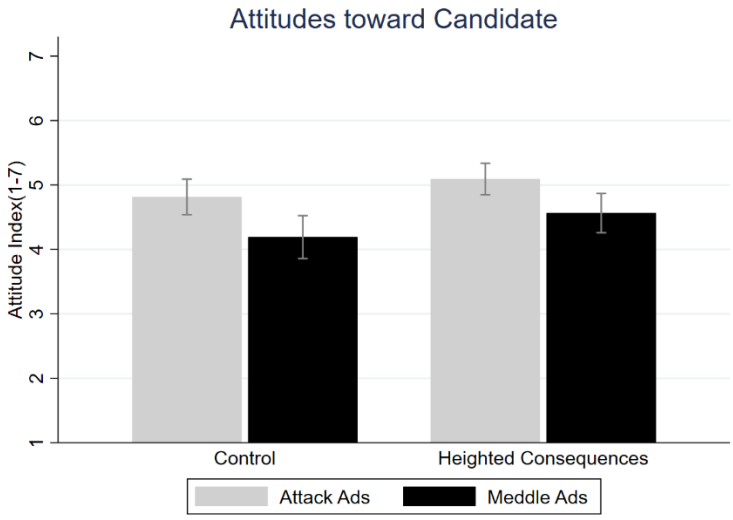


Figure 10. Attitudes toward candidate. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Discussion

Study 5 reveals that regardless of whether participants were reminded of the consequences of an out-party win or not, candidates who use Meddle Ads were perceived negatively. This result is noteworthy because reminders of the negative consequences of an out-party win were communicated in multiple ways, including reminders about policies that the out-party would pass, as well as more emotional messages voicing fears of fellow in-party members. These results suggest that the negative perceptions of Meddle Ads are unlikely to be attenuated by the potential consequences of an out-party win. In the next study, we turned to examining the system-related risk pathway.

STUDY 6: MANIPULATING SYSTEM RESILIENCE

Study 6 tested the system-related risk pathway by manipulating perceptions of how resilient and robust democracy is in the United States (H5). If consumers' aversion to Meddle Ads is driven primarily by system-related risks, then this aversion should be responsive to beliefs about how resilient the system is. Our pre-registered hypothesis was that when consumers were

reminded of the robustness of the existing system, Meddle Ads would be perceived as posing smaller system-related risks, which should attenuate consumers' aversion to their use.

Method

Six-hundred and twelve Democrats were recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (47% female; $M_{age} = 42$, $SD_{age} = 13$). Participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: Attack Ads, Meddle Ads, Meddle Ads (System Resilience). The first two conditions were identical to the conditions in previous studies (e.g., Study 3). In the "Meddle Ads (System Resilience)" condition, participants first read a short article on the resilience of democracy. The article described how the American democratic system has survived various challenges throughout its history, such as the rise of fascism in the early twentieth century and, more recently, election denialism. Afterwards, participants read the same article on the use of Meddle Ads as participants in the Meddle Ads condition. Next, participants reported their attitudes toward the candidate and their perceptions of the advertising strategy (same items as Study 3). Finally, participants reported their perceptions of system-related risks and outcome-related risks (same items used in Study 3; See Web Appendix).

Results

Attitudes toward Candidate. We investigated whether our manipulation affected attitudes toward the candidate. Replicating results from previous studies, candidates were disliked more when they used Meddle Ads compared to Attack Ads ($\beta = -.91$, $t(609) = -5.94$, $p < .001$, $d = .81$). However, consistent with our predictions, reading about the resilience of the system boosted attitudes toward candidates who used Meddle Ads: participants in the Meddle Ads (System Resilience) condition reported more positive attitudes toward the candidate than participants in the Meddle Ads condition ($\beta = .32$, $t(609) = 2.07$, $p = .039$, $d = .20$; Figure 11).

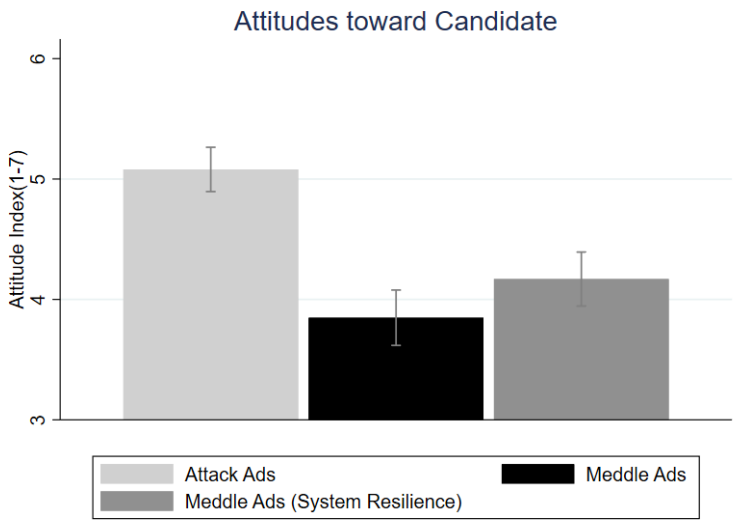


Figure 11. Perceptions of System-Related Risks and Attitudes toward candidate. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Mediation Analysis. We employed a similar mediation analysis strategy from Study 3, dummy coding our independent variable (Hayes & Preacher, 2014). Thus, the independent variable compared the two Meddle Ads conditions (1 = Meddle Ads [System Resilience], 0 = Meddle Ads), the control variable compared Attack and Meddle Ads, the mediators were system-related risks and outcome-related risks, and the dependent variable was attitudes. Reading about the robustness of the system reduced perceptions of system-related risks (β =−.35, SE = .097, p < .001), which led to more positive attitudes toward the candidate, since system-related risks and attitudes were negatively correlated (β = −.60, SE = .031, p < .001). Consistent with this, there was a positive indirect effect through system-related risks (indirect effect = .21, SE = .061, 95% CI [.33, .092]). Interestingly, our intervention also reduced perceptions of outcome-related risks (β = −.26, SE = .01, p = .008), which were negatively correlated with attitudes toward the candidate (β = −.46, SE = .038, p < .001). There was a significant indirect effect through this pathway (indirect effect = .11, SE = .049, 95% CI [.027, .22]).

Discussion

Study 6 provides causal evidence that consumers' aversion to Meddle Ads is driven by system-related risks (H5). In line with our predictions, we found that reminding participants of the robustness of the current system reduced their perceptions of system-related risks associated with Meddle Ads, which in turn led to more positive attitudes toward political candidates who used Meddle Ads. In the next study, we test a practically important boundary condition: whether the ads are paid for by the candidate themselves or outside groups.

STUDY 7: MODERATION BY AD SPONSOR

Study 7 attempted to address an important practical consideration. If marketers wish to use Meddle Ads, how could they do so without incurring the penalties documented in the current research? One potential way these penalties could be minimized is to ensure that Meddle Ads are paid for by outside groups. Changing the entity responsible for Meddle Ads from the candidate to outside groups should alleviate the candidate's responsibility in introducing risks. If the candidate is no longer responsible for the risks associated with Meddle Ads, then the penalties associated with their use should be attenuated or eliminated, even. Our pre-registered prediction was that people would penalize a candidate for the use of Meddle Ads only when they sponsored the ad themselves, but not when the ad was sponsored by outside groups.

Method

Eight-hundred and one participants were recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (52% female; M_{age} = 42, SD_{age} = 13; 48.19% Democrats; 25.22% Republicans; 25.22% Independents; 1.37% Other). Participants read an article about an in-party candidate. The last paragraph in the article varied the advertising strategy used by the campaign (Attack Ads vs. Meddle Ads). In addition to varying the advertising strategy, we varied the *sponsor* of the ads. In one condition, the sponsor was the candidate themselves. In the other condition, the sponsors

were outside groups; specifically, party-affiliated Political Action Committees (PACs) and the candidate's party's national committee (e.g., DNC). After reading about the advertising strategy and its sponsor, Participants indicated their attitudes toward the candidate, donation amount, system-related risks, and outcome-related risks (same items from Study 3).

Results

Attitudes toward Candidate. As pre-registered, we regressed attitudes toward candidate on advertising strategy, ad sponsor, and their interaction. We found a significant interaction between advertising strategy and ad sponsor ($\beta = 1.22$, $t(797) = 5.77$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .040$; see Figure 12). Decomposing this interaction, we found that, when the ad sponsor was the candidate, using Meddle Ads (vs. Attack Ads) led to more negative attitudes toward the candidate ($\beta = -1.33$, $t(405) = -7.88$, $p < .001$, $d = .79$). However, when the ad sponsor was an outside group, the differences in attitudes became non-significant ($\beta = .013$, $t(392) = .09$, $p = .93$, $d = .009$).

Donations. We found similar results for donations toward the re-election campaign of the candidate. There was a significant interaction between advertising strategy and ad sponsor ($\beta = 16.13$, $t(797) = 2.66$, $p = .008$, $\eta_p^2 = .0088$; see Figure 12). When the ad sponsor was the candidate, using Meddle Ads (vs. Attack Ads) led to a lower donation amount ($\beta = -15.22$, $t(405) = -3.70$, $p < .001$, $d = .37$). This translated to a decline of 40.6% in donation amount. However, when the ad sponsor was an outside group, the differences in donations became non-significant ($\beta = .92$, $t(392) = .20$, $p = .84$, $d = .021$).

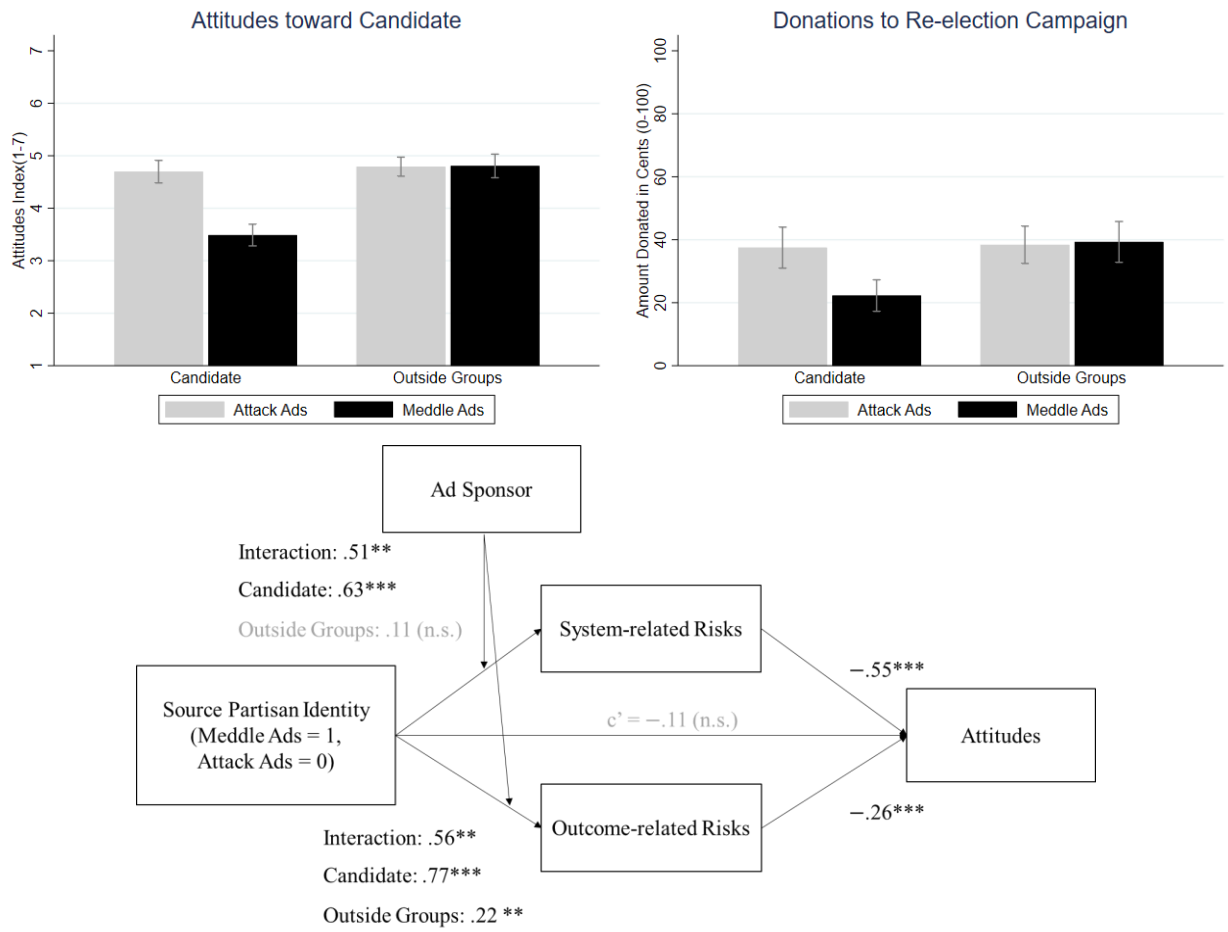


Figure 12. Top: Attitudes toward candidate; Donations. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Bottom: Mediation model. c' indicates the direct effect after controlling for mediators. Coefficients are standardized coefficients. ***p <.001, ** p < .05.

Mediation Analysis. We estimated a bootstrapped mediation using model 7 in SPSS. The independent variable was advertising strategy (1 = meddle, 0 = attack), the moderator was ad sponsor (1 = candidate, 0 = outside groups), the mediators were system- and outcome-related risks, and the dependent variable was attitudes. There was a significant interaction between advertising strategy and ad sponsor predicting system- (β = .51, SE = .14, p = .002) and outcome-related risks (β = .56, SE = .14, p < .001). When the ad sponsor was the candidate, meddling in out-party primaries increased system-related (β = .63, SE = .097, p < .001) and outcome-related risks (β = .77, SE = .095, p < .001) brought about by candidate's campaign. However, when the ad sponsor was outside groups, there was no significant relationship between advertising strategy

and concerns that the candidate's campaign could introduce system-related risks (β = .11, SE = .098, p = .25), and the relationship between advertising strategy and outcome-related risks was diminished (β = .22, SE = .097, p = .03). Overall, both system- (β =−.55, SE = .030, p < .001) and outcome-related risks (β =−.26, SE = .036, p < .001) were associated with negative attitudes toward the candidate. Thus, there was a significant and negative indirect effect through system-related risks when the ad sponsor was the candidate (indirect effect = −.34, SE = .056, 95% CI [−.45, −.24]), but not when the ad sponsor was outside groups (indirect effect = −.062, SE = .053, 95% CI [−.16, .045]; index of moderated mediation = −.28, SE = .078, 95% CI [−.44, −.13]). For outcome-related risk, the indirect effect was smaller when the ad sponsor was outside groups (outside groups = −.06, SE = .025, 95% CI [−.11, −.008]; candidate = −.20, SE = .044, 95% CI [−.30, −.12]; index of moderated mediation = −.15, SE = .046, 95% CI [−.25, −.07]).

Discussion

Replicating results from earlier studies, we found that candidates who used Meddle (vs. Attack) Ads were penalized. However, when Meddle Ads were employed by outside groups, such as party-affiliated political action committees (PACs), candidates were no longer penalized for using Meddle Ads. More specifically, manipulating the identity of the ad sponsor shifted attributions about the advertising strategy away from the candidate, which in turn reduced participants' tendency to see the candidate as introducing outcome-related and system-related risks. These results provide important practical insights to marketing managers. Having outside groups sponsor Meddle Ads provides candidates with the best of both worlds: they receive the potential benefit of picking their opponent in the general election, while also avoiding the penalties associated with this strategy that our research uncovered.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

In 2022, Democrats used a seemingly novel advertising strategy: Meddle Ads. Meddle Ads are ads intended to support and bolster an out-party candidate during the opposing party's primary. By elevating and bolstering a weak candidate (e.g., someone who is ideologically extreme or unqualified), the ad sponsor hopes to have an easier time winning in the general election. In the current research, we examined how consumers react to the use of Meddle Ads. Using a variety of empirical approaches (e.g., natural language processing, conjoint studies, incentive-compatible donation studies), we found that consumers are *averse* to the use of Meddle Ads, even from candidates belonging to their own party.

Consumers' aversion to the use of Meddle Ads was robust to many procedural variations. First, it emerged across different measures of aversion, including word-of-mouth (Study 1A), donation behavior (Study 1B), choice (Study 2), and attitudes (Studies 3-7). Second, this aversion was robust to various control conditions. It emerged when participants received no information about the advertising strategy of the candidate (Study 2), as well as when the candidate was described as using an issue-focused advertising strategy (e.g., focusing on the economy or on climate change; Studies 1A, 1B). It also emerged when the control candidate was described as using more adversarial or combative advertising strategies, such as Attack Ads (Studies 3-7). Relatedly, the aversion to Meddle Ads was present both when using externally valid stimuli, such as real, unedited articles from credible news sources like the New York Times (Studies 1A, 1B), and when using highly controlled experimental stimuli (Studies 2-7).

Consumers' aversion to Meddle Ads also held regardless of whether the candidate who used Meddle Ads belonged to one's own party or to the opposing party (Study 2); regardless of whether the ads targeted an extreme candidate or a non-extreme candidate (Study 3); and regardless of whether the candidate won or lost (Study 4). These results held when consumers

were reminded of the danger of an out-party win (Study 5). Moreover, consumers' aversion to Meddle Ads was detected in studies using both between- (Studies 3-7) and within-participant (Study 2) designs and regardless of the type of political race—when the candidate was running for a Governorship (e.g., Study 3), the U.S. House (Study 2), or the U.S. Senate (Study 1A).

Aside from establishing consumers' aversion to the use of Meddle Ads, we provided evidence for the psychological process behind this aversion. We proposed that consumers' aversion could be driven by perceived riskiness of this strategy. We further decomposed the risks associated with Meddle Ads into two types: outcome-related risks (e.g., losing elections) and system-related risks (e.g., losing trust in democracy). Across our studies, we found evidence that system-related risks were a more consistent driver of consumers' aversion to the use of Meddle Ads. Consumers believed that the use of Meddle Ads could breed distrust in the democratic process and cast doubts on election fairness. As a result, they penalized candidates who used Meddle Ads. We found less consistent support for outcome-related risks as the driving force behind Meddle Ads. Consumers appeared unresponsive to changes in outcomes: Regardless of whether the candidate who used Meddle Ads won, lost, or his fate was unknown, participants disliked the use of Meddle Ads (Study 3).

Theoretical & Practical Implications

The current research makes several theoretical contributions. First, historically, marketing research has occupied itself with studying political marketing tactics (Hoegg and Lewis 2011; Jung and Critcher 2018; Klein and Ahluwalia 2005; Newman and Sheth 1985; Phillips, Urbany, and Reynolds 2008). However, in recent years, less attention has been paid to the study of political marketing tactics. This is somewhat surprising given that spending on political campaigns is at an all-time high. Inflation-adjusted spending on political campaigns has increased from $1.61 billion in 1998 to $8.9 billion in 2022, a 450% increase (Giorono 2023).

This influx of spending has resulted in high levels of experimentation with new political tactics from both political parties, yet these new tactics remain largely unexamined by researchers. Thus, the current research directs attention to political marketing by examining how consumers react to a novel high-profile political marketing tactic: Meddle Ads.

Second, the current research is the first to investigate Meddle Ads. We examined how learning that a political candidate used Meddle Ads affected consumers' reactions to the candidate. In doing so, the current research opens the doors to new questions related to Meddle Ads. For instance, how does the use of Meddle Ads affect consumers' willingness to participate in political advocacy (Hussein and Tormala 2023)? Based on our findings, using Meddle Ads is seen as posing risks to systems. Perceiving system-related risks could lead to one of two effects: it could serve a compensatory motive, motivating consumers to engage in advocacy to compensate for an unreliable system. Alternatively, it could be demotivating, leading consumers to disengage from a seemingly dysfunctional system.

Our results support the latter possibility. Recall that our donations measure asked participants to allocate their bonuses across three options: to the candidate they read about, to another political candidate, or to the researchers. In other words, our measure allowed participants to penalize a candidate by either allocating more money to a different political candidate or by giving money back to the researchers. Hence, as a proxy for political engagement, we examined the total amount participants allocated to the two political candidates. If this amount stayed constant across conditions, then this would indicate that participants were still politically engaged (but funneled their money from the target candidate to a different candidate). However, if this total amount declined, this would suggest that participants were becoming more politically disengaged. In our studies, this total amount went down in the Meddle

Ads compared to the Attack Ads condition (see AAPE), which suggests that Meddle Ads lead to political disengagement. More research on how Meddle Ads, as well as other political advertising techniques, affect consumers' political engagement would be worthwhile.

Third, the current research posits a novel type of risk: system-related risks, which refers to consumers' loss of trust in systems and their concern about the system's ability to function reliably. Across our studies, we find that consumers are sensitive to system-related risks and are motivated to penalize actors that introduce such risks to the system. To our knowledge, the current research is the first to provide empirical evidence for consumers' sensitivity to risks-related to systems. We believe that this generative idea paves the way for exciting new research directions in consumer behavior, which we discuss in detail in the Future Directions section.

Fourth, the current research joins a rapidly growing literature within marketing focusing on threats to democracy. From misinformation and conspiracy theories to differences in perceptions, preferences, and behaviors between liberals and conservatives, consumer behavior researchers are increasingly investigating emerging threats to democracy and ways to mitigate them (e.g., Allard and McFerran 2021; Ding and Johar 2021; Jun and Johar 2022; Kyung, Thomas, and Krishna 2022; Lisjak and Ordabayeva 2022; Schoenmueller, Netzer, and Stahl 2023). Our research contributes to this fast-growing literature by highlighting how consumers react to the use of Meddle Ads, an example of undemocratic behavior that could undermine trust in democracy and election fairness.

Beyond these theoretical contributions, our findings have important practical implications for marketers. First, marketers should be cautious about using Meddle Ads, as this strategy comes with potential penalties. People talked more negatively about, donated smaller amounts to, were less likely to vote for, and held more negative attitudes toward candidates who used this

strategy, even when these candidates belonged to one's own political party. To avoid these potential penalties, marketers may wish to focus their advertising resources on other advertising strategies. For political races in which using Meddle Ads is crucial, our research suggests that these penalties are minimized if funding for Meddle Ads is provided by external sources. Second, marketers could exploit an opponent's use of Meddle Ads to undermine support for them. Our results suggest that consumers dislike candidates who use this strategy; thus, by highlighting an opponent's use of this strategy, marketers could sway voters away from them.

Open Questions

Concerns about Candidate's Character. One open question relates to the potential role inferences about the character of the candidate might have played in driving these results. It is possible that candidates who use Meddle Ads might come across as immoral, incompetent, and lacking warmth, because of their use of such an underhanded advertising strategy, and that such inferences (not perceptions of riskiness) drive consumers' aversion to Meddle Ads. To explore this possibility, we measured inferences about the candidate's character along the three primary person perception dimensions (warmth, competence, morality) in three studies (Studies 3, 4, and 5). Perceptions of morality, warmth, and competence all loaded on the same factor, so they were combined into a composite. Across all three studies, we found that accounting for inferences made about the character of the candidate does not change the significance nor the direction of our results. That is, even after controlling for how moral, competent, and warm, the candidate was perceived to be, perceptions of riskiness continued to drive consumers' aversion to Meddle Ads (for details, see AACPP).

Only Costs, No Benefits? The current research uncovers potential costs associated with the use of Meddle Ads. However, we stress that there are likely to be benefits too. For instance,

past research has found that extreme candidates tend to underperform in general elections (Hall 2015; Malzahn and Hall 2023). Nevertheless, the current research introduces potential complexities to the potential benefits of Meddle Ads. First, as more consumers become aware of the use of this strategy, our results suggest that candidates who use it may face backlash. Second, even if candidates who use this strategy do not suffer electorally (e.g., because people might vote for a candidate from their own political party no matter what), they might suffer in other ways. For instance, as people's attitudes toward them become less positive, people might donate smaller amounts to their campaigns, and might be less likely to advocate on their behalf. In short, we do not claim that Meddle Ads have no benefits; like any other advertising strategy, Meddle Ads are likely to have both benefits and costs, and whether the benefits or costs dominate will depend on the specifics of a given political race. By uncovering the costs associated with the use of Meddle Ads, we hope the current research help political marketers and campaign managers better navigate this calculus.

Directions for Future Research

System Risks and New Avenues in Consumer Behavior Research. One promising area for future research has to do with system-related risks. We believe this new type of risk has far-reaching implications for a variety of domains within consumer behavior—from attitudes and persuasion to financial decision-making and new product adoption. As a starting point, might there be individual-level differences in sensitivity toward system-related risks across consumers? Some consumers might be more concerned with system-related risks, whereas others might be indifferent towards them. If so, are consumers who are high on system-related concerns more susceptible to certain persuasive messages? For instance, might they be more responsive to ads

that paint a product as helping secure and ensure the stability of existing systems, rather than ads that position products as "disrupting" existing systems?

Beyond persuasion, system-related concerns might have important implications for financial decision-making. For example, system-related concerns could affect people's forecasts about the soundness of economic systems (e.g., the stock market). For instance, consumers who are high, compared to low, on system-related concerns might perceive abrupt changes in policy (e.g., the Fed's decision to bail out a failing bank or raise interest rates) as posing a threat to the financial system. Concerned that the existing system might unravel, or become less reliable, these consumers might change their investment strategy, for example shifting their investments from risky to safer assets. Exploring how system-related concerns affect perceptions of the stability of financial systems, as well as financial decision-making, would be worthwhile.

Novel Political Marketing Tactics. Another promising area for future research relates to new political marketing tactics. As mentioned, spending on political marketing is at an all-time high, which has resulted in novel tactics being used. However, scientific understanding of these new marketing tactics lags behind. We have examined one novel strategy here (i.e., Meddle Ads), but there are numerous other novel political marketing tactics that have emerged in the past years. As one example, both parties have historically attacked each other by casting political opponents as "too extreme." Interestingly, some campaigns have been attacking opponents by emphasizing their alignment with the opposing party. For instance, Democrat-affiliated PACS attacked Paul Junge, a Republican candidate in Michigan running for the U.S. House, by highlighting his credentials as someone who "went to liberal UC Berkeley" (Voter Protection Project 2022). Future research assessing this novel marketing tactic, as well as myriad others, would be valuable.

CONCLUSION

Information about the use of Meddle Ads is increasingly common. How do consumers react to the use of Meddle Ads? Eight multi-method studies provide evidence that consumers are averse to the use of Meddle Ads. Using numerous empirical approaches such as incentive compatible donation studies, conjoint analysis, and natural language processing, we find that consumers speak more negatively about, donate smaller amounts to, are less likely to vote for, and report more negative attitudes toward candidates who use Meddle Ads. We postulate that this aversion is driven by two types of risks: outcome-related and system-related risks. We find consistent evidence for the role of system-related risks and substantial but less consistent evidence for the role of outcome-related risks. Together, these results enrich our understanding of the use of a novel advertising strategy, introduce a new type of risk (system-related risk) to consumer behavior research, and revive interest in studying political marketing tactics. Moreover, they provide practical guidance for political marketers interested in Meddle Ads. We hope that our findings will inspire further research in these areas and contribute to a deeper understanding of the intersection of politics and marketing.

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Article

Undermining Your Case to Enhance Your Impact: A Framework for Understanding the Effects of Acts of Receptiveness in Persuasion

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Abstract

Past research has uncovered actions that would seem to undermine but in fact frequently enhance persuasion. For example, expressing doubt about one's view or presenting arguments against it would seem to weaken one's case, but can sometimes promote it. We propose a framework for understanding these findings. We posit that these actions constitute *acts of receptiveness*—behaviors that signal openness to new information and opposing viewpoints. We review four classes of acts of receptiveness: conveying uncertainty, acknowledging mistakes, highlighting drawbacks, and asking questions. We identify conditions under which and mechanisms through which these actions boost persuasion. Acts of receptiveness appear to be more persuasive when they come from expert or high-status sources, rather than non-expert or low-status sources, and to operate through two primary mechanisms: increased involvement and enhanced source perceptions. Following a review of this work, we delineate potentially novel acts of receptiveness and outline directions for future research.

Keywords

persuasion, receptiveness, openness, source perceptions, bias

Imagine that you are a policymaker and are about to present a plan to reopen the economy during the coronavirus pandemic. Would it make you more persuasive to express confidence or doubt about your plan? What if you described your own prior mistakes as a policymaker, or rather noted your successes? Would you be more convincing if you focused on the arguments supporting your plan or if you mentioned some of the arguments against it? If you asked questions or made declarative statements? It is intuitive to surmise that most people seeking to persuade others would choose to express confidence rather than doubt, to cite prior successes rather than mistakes, to focus on arguments that support rather than oppose their policy, and to use declarative statements rather than questions when endorsing it.

Indeed, we assessed these intuitions in a sample of participants from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (N = 253; 47.83% female; M_{Age} = 37.28). We asked participants to imagine that they were policymakers with a great deal of expertise who were trying to persuade others to their point of view on a particular issue. We then presented participants with the four pairs of actions noted above and asked them to indicate which of the two actions in each pair would make them more persuasive (see Appendix for exact phrasing and statistical analyses; Supplemental Study 1 [SS1]). The majority of participants indicated that conveying certainty (95.3%), making declarative statements (68.4%), focusing on supportive arguments (66.4%), and highlighting prior successes (61.7%) would make them more persuasive. Interestingly, though, a growing literature suggests that under specifiable conditions the counterintuitive action in each pair—that is, expressing uncertainty, asking questions, highlighting the shortcomings of one's argument, and playing up past mistakes—can boost rather than undermine persuasion. When and why do these counterintuitive actions boost persuasion? What do they have in common? This review attempts to answer these questions.

We posit that these diverse actions cohere around a single underlying construct: *acts of receptiveness*. We define acts of receptiveness as behaviors or actions that signal a person's openness to ideas, arguments, and attitudes that are new or opposing to their own. Acts of receptiveness suggest that the source is not overly zealous, biased, or one-sided in their beliefs. They signal open-mindedness—a willingness to consider ideas that may contradict one's own, a humility to acknowledge that one's position might be wrong, and balance or objectiveness in presenting arguments and opinions. This perception of openness, we submit, helps explain a diverse array of counterintuitive effects in persuasion—for example,

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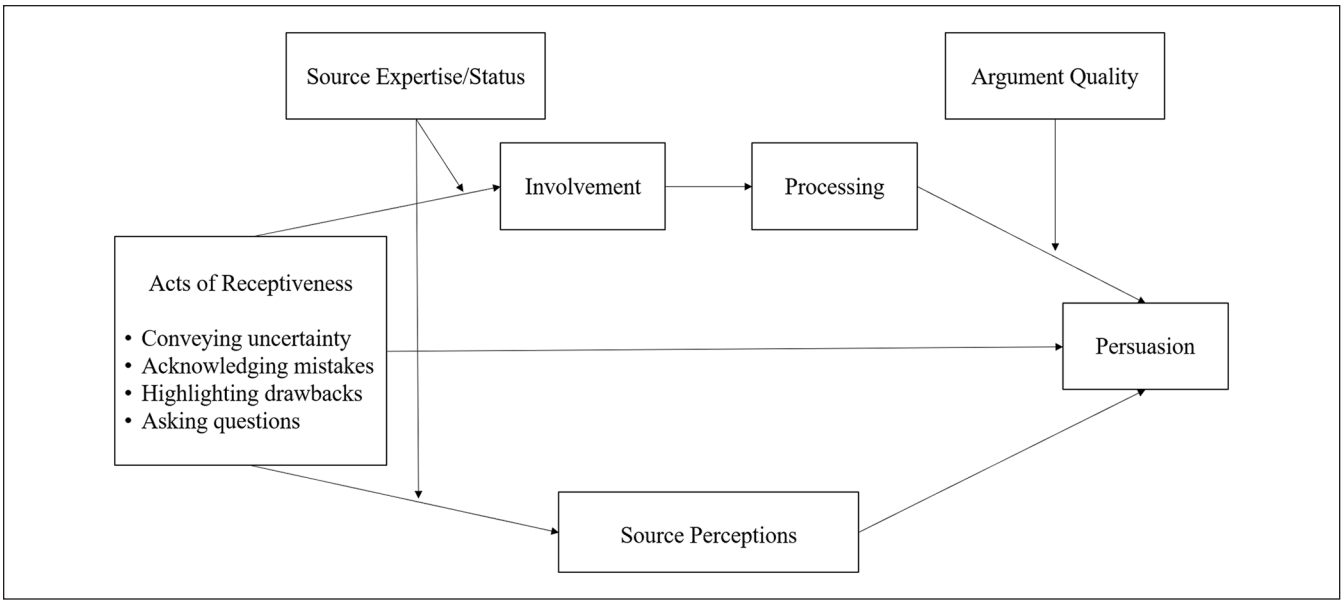

Figure 1. A simplified conceptual framework detailing the persuasive benefits of acts of receptiveness, as observed in past research.

why confessing doubts, playing up mistakes, highlighting drawbacks or negatives to one's position, and asking questions can sometimes enhance one's persuasive impact. We argue that these actions converge in that they convey receptiveness, which can be advantageous in persuasion. In this review, we document the ways researchers have manipulated acts of receptiveness and show that they have remarkably similar implications for persuasion. In particular, we review past research exploring the persuasive benefits of four classes of acts of receptiveness: conveying uncertainty, acknowledging mistakes, highlighting drawbacks to one's position, and asking questions.

In addition to identifying these classes, we review evidence suggesting that acts of receptiveness operate under common conditions and through similar mechanisms. Consider the conditions. Past research suggests that acts of receptiveness are especially likely to promote persuasion when source expertise or status is high—that is, when the person displaying receptiveness is perceived to be an expert or authority on the topic at hand (e.g., Blankenship & Craig, 2007; Karmarkar & Tormala, 2010; Reich et al., 2018). Under expert or high-status source conditions, it appears that message recipients can be more persuaded by people who express doubt rather than confidence about their opinion, who mention rather than mask mistakes they have made, who highlight flaws in their arguments or reference views that oppose their own, and who ask questions instead of making declarative statements. Under low-expertise or low-status source conditions, these same actions generally offer little advantage or can even backfire.

Why do acts of receptiveness boost persuasion for expert and high-status sources? The evidence points to two underlying mechanisms. First, when delivered by an expert or high-status source, acts of receptiveness can increase involvement—that is, interest in the message or topic at hand and motivation to think about it—which boosts message processing and promotes persuasion as long as the message contains reasonably strong arguments (e.g., Petty & Cacioppo, 1979, 1986). Under weak-argument conditions, increased involvement offers little persuasive benefit (and can even backfire) as it increases processing and tunes people in to the lack of cogent support offered in the message. Second, acts of receptiveness can elicit more favorable impressions of the source. For example, when expert or high-status sources highlight drawbacks to their position or acknowledge their own mistakes, people might view them more favorably—for example, as more trustworthy or likable. These perceptions, in turn, are well-documented facilitators of persuasion (e.g., McGinnies & Ward, 1980; Wood & Kallgren, 1988).

We present evidence for a new framework suggesting that acts of receptiveness can promote persuasion under conditions of high source expertise or status, and through increased involvement and enhanced source perceptions. Figure 1 offers a visual depiction of this framework, summarizing findings from extant research. After reviewing representative findings from the literature and how they speak to these conditions and mechanisms, we discuss the relationship between these mechanisms and the more specific pathways through which they might operate. To be clear, our argument is not that acts of receptiveness invariably promote persuasion, but rather that they can introduce an advantage under some conditions. We outline these conditions, highlight exceptions, and speculate about potential moderators in this review.

In addition to merging insights from persuasion research and organizing them into a coherent framework, our review

advances a growing literature focused specifically on receptiveness (Catapano et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2010; Itzchakov & Reis, in press; Minson et al., 2020; Reschke et al., 2020; Xu & Petty, in press; Yeomans et al., 2020). The bulk of the work on this topic has explored how *feeling* receptive can influence social and attitudinal outcomes. For example, recent work has explored dispositional receptiveness (Minson et al., 2020; Reschke et al., 2020; Yeomans et al., 2020). Reschke et al. (2020) found that individuals who scored highly on dispositional receptiveness were more likely to build close ties with others who held opposing political views, but only when those others also scored highly on dispositional receptiveness. Other work has explored situational factors that affect feelings of receptiveness. For instance, Catapano et al. (2019) investigated how perspective-taking in a self-persuasion context influenced felt receptiveness and, ultimately, openness to attitude change. The current review uses the lens of receptiveness to understand a wide range of empirical findings in the persuasion literature. However, rather than explore how feeling receptive affects one's openness to others and opposing views, we examine how actions taken by persuaders might shape perceptions of *their* receptiveness, and thus dictate their persuasive impact (see also Yeomans et al., 2020).

Our review also contributes to a burgeoning literature on source bias (Wallace et al., 2020a, 2020b, 2020c, in press). Biased sources are defined as those who present slanted or skewed (though not necessarily dishonest) perspectives, or as those who have vested interest in a specific outcome (e.g., a partisan news source). Work on this topic has distinguished perceived source bias from other source perceptions such as untrustworthiness (see Wallace et al., 2020a, for a review) and has shown that perceptions of source bias have implications for persuasion. For example, Wallace et al. (2020b) found that people expect biased (but not untrustworthy) sources to maintain their positions over time. Thus, when biased (but not untrustworthy) sources switch positions, people are more surprised, which boosts processing and promotes persuasion as long as argument quality is high. We view source bias and receptiveness as related constructs, such that the less biased a source seems, the more receptive to divergent viewpoints they are assumed to be. As such, we believe the current review contributes to the new and growing literature on source bias by delineating a series of actions a source can take to increase perceptions of their receptiveness and reduce their perceived bias.

The structure of our review is as follows: First, we review evidence for four different classes of acts of receptiveness in persuasion. For each, we highlight research that shows the predicted effect and speaks in some way to the proposed conditions and mechanisms. Following this review, we delve deeper into our framework and attempt to clarify its key components. For example, we speculate as to precisely how and why each of the two proposed mechanisms (involvement and source perceptions) translates into favorable persuasion outcomes and we discuss when each mechanism is likely to operate. Next, we reach beyond persuasion and consider how work in other domains might illuminate novel acts of receptiveness and how our framework might have implications for other phenomena, such as impression formation and management. We also highlight exceptions to our framework—that is, instances in which acts of receptiveness appear to offer no persuasive advantage or even backfire. Throughout the review, we identify unanswered questions and important steps for future research in this area.

Acts of Receptiveness

There are various actions a persuader can undertake to display receptiveness and, thus, potentially boost persuasion. In this review, we focus on four main classes: conveying uncertainty, acknowledging mistakes, highlighting drawbacks, and asking questions.

Conveying Uncertainty

One class of acts of receptiveness involves conveying uncertainty. By conveying uncertainty, we mean communicating or displaying doubt, hesitance, or ambiguity. For example, a source who expresses doubt about an opinion (Karmarkar & Tormala, 2010) or provides a range of possible outcomes when making a forecast or prediction (Howe et al., 2019; see also van der Bles et al., 2020) conveys more uncertainty than a source who expresses confidence or makes a singular, precise forecast or prediction. Conveying uncertainty constitutes an act of receptiveness in that it signals that the source has at least some openness to other perspectives. A source who conveys uncertainty takes a position or provides an estimate, but implicitly acknowledges that other positions or estimates exist and might be valid. By conveying uncertainty, the source suggests that they understand that their knowledge is not definitive and that they are open to other perspectives on the topic.

To verify this perspective, we conducted a study in which participants ($N = 200$; 46.97% female; $M_{Age} = 33.60$) were randomly assigned to read a control message or a message in which the source expressed uncertainty (see SS2 in Appendix). The message outlined a plan to reopen the economy during the Coronavirus pandemic and was identical across conditions, except that in the uncertainty condition it included two expressions of uncertainty (e.g., "I cannot be entirely sure, but I believe that . . .") that were omitted in the control condition. After reading the message, participants rated the source on open-mindedness and receptiveness. The open-mindedness item read, "How open-minded did you find the speaker to be? By open-minded we mean you find the speaker to be open to new information, and open to opinions and perspectives that differ from his own." The receptiveness item read, "How receptive did you find the speaker to be? By receptive we mean you find the speaker to be

interested in or willing to listen to new ideas or different ways of thinking about the issue." As detailed in SS2, the source was perceived as significantly more open-minded and receptive in the uncertainty condition than in the control condition. We now turn to the evidence suggesting that conveying uncertainty can also promote persuasion.

Expressing uncertainty. First, explicitly expressing uncertainty about one's position (e.g., one's judgment or opinion) has been shown to enhance persuasion under some conditions. In one study, Karmarkar and Tormala (2010) presented participants with a restaurant review in which the reviewer expressed uncertainty (e.g., "I don't have complete confidence in my opinion, but I suppose I would give . . .") or certainty (e.g., "I can confidently give . . .") about his opinion. In addition, the reviewer was described as either a renowned food critic (expert) or an administrator at a community college (non-expert). After reading the review, participants reported their attitudes toward the restaurant and completed measures of involvement. Karmarkar and Tormala found that participants reported more favorable attitudes toward the restaurant when the non-expert expressed certainty rather than uncertainty. However, participants reported more favorable attitudes toward the restaurant when the expert expressed uncertainty rather than certainty. Moreover, the involvement measures showed a similar pattern and mediated the attitude effect.

In another study, Karmarkar and Tormala (2010) provided further evidence for the involvement mechanism. In this study, in addition to expressed certainty and expertise, the authors manipulated the quality of arguments contained in the restaurant review. Discriminating between strong and weak arguments is a well-established indicator of message processing, such that greater argument quality effects generally reflect greater processing (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Thus, relative differences in argument quality effects can help pinpoint where message recipients feel most involved with a persuasive message (because involvement triggers deeper processing; e.g., Petty & Cacioppo, 1979). The authors followed the same procedure as in the previous study, but also presented strong or weak arguments in the review. They found that under non-expert source conditions, the argument quality effect was greater when the reviewer expressed certainty rather than uncertainty. Under expert source conditions, the argument quality effect was greater when the reviewer expressed uncertainty rather than certainty. In other words, participants processed the non-expert's message more carefully when he expressed certainty, but processed the expert's message more carefully when he expressed uncertainty. This boost in processing helped promote persuasion as long as the message was strong.

Further evidence for the persuasive role of expressing doubt about one's position comes from work by Hagmann and Loewenstein (2017). Hagmann and Loewenstein investigated the effects of expressing uncertainty when providing numerical estimates. They found that messages accompanied by expressions of doubt (e.g., "Although I am not completely convinced that my estimate is right, I think . . .") were more persuasive than messages accompanied by expressions of confidence (e.g., "I think someone would be foolish not to listen to my argument"). These results further underscore the notion that expressing uncertainty about one's position can facilitate one's persuasive impact in at least some cases.

Providing range estimates. Uncertainty can also be conveyed by providing a range of possible outcomes when articulating one's position or estimating an outcome. For example, when giving a numerical estimate as part of an argument, instead of offering a precise value (e.g., "our earnings will grow by 10%"), one could offer something more ambiguous such as a best-worst case range (e.g., "at best, our earnings will grow by 15%; at worst, 5%") or a rough rather than specific guess (e.g., "roughly 3–5" rather than "4"). Just as wider confidence intervals around a statistical estimate communicate less certainty about that estimate (Greenland et al., 2016), offering a wider range of values around a numerical estimate conveys reduced certainty. In essence, wider ranges introduce or recognize ambiguity, which functions as an acknowledgment of uncertainty.

A recent test of the effect of providing ranges of outcomes on persuasion was conducted by Howe et al. (2019). All participants received a prediction made by climate scientists about the effect of climate change on sea-levels. In one condition, participants received a precise estimate (4 feet over the next 100 years). In a second condition, participants received a range of estimates: the precise estimate along with a worst-case scenario (". . . about 4 feet. However, sea level could rise as much as 7 feet"). In a third condition, participants were given a wider range, including the precise estimate along with best- and worst-case scenarios (". . . about 4 feet. However, sea level could rise as little as 1 foot or it could rise by as much as 7 feet"). Participants then completed measures of message acceptance and trust in scientists. Howe et al. found that including the full range—that is, the best- and worst-case scenarios alongside the precise estimate—produced the greatest message acceptance. In other words, participants were most persuaded when the range of estimates (and, thus, presumably the degree of uncertainty conveyed) was greatest. Furthermore, this effect was mediated by trust in scientists (see also van der Bles et al., 2020).

Although not directly relevant to persuasion, range estimates have been shown to have benefits over precise estimates in the domain of motivation as well. For instance, motivation research has identified conditions under which uncertain rewards can be more motivating than their more certain counterparts (see Dhar et al., 1999; Goldsmith & Amir, 2010; Mishra et al., 2011; Ruan et al., 2018; Shen et al., 2015, 2019). Across domains, then, there appears to be a potential benefit to using range rather than precise estimates in some circumstances.

Emphasizing potential. Further indirect evidence for the upside of uncertainty comes from work on the preference for potential, which has shown that messages that emphasize high but uncertain potential are sometimes more persuasive than messages emphasizing high and very certain achievement (Kupor et al., 2014; Tormala et al., 2012; see also Poehlman & Newman, 2014; Sun et al., 2015). For example, Tormala et al. (2012) found that although potential is inherently less certain than achievement, high potential claims can generate more interest, and thus stimulate deeper message processing, which enhances persuasion under strong argument conditions. In one study, participants read a college professor's recommendation for an applicant to graduate school. In the opening paragraph, the professor praised the applicant's achievements or potential. The professor then provided strong or weak arguments in favor of the candidate. Results indicated that high potential claims were more persuasive than high achievement claims, but only under strong argument conditions. When the letter contained weak arguments, there was no difference between potential and achievement claims. Given that potential is imbued with uncertainty by its nature, these findings hint at the persuasive benefit of conveying uncertainty.

Conditions and mechanisms. In short, evidence from several streams of research suggests that conveying uncertainty—by expressing doubt, providing range estimates, and emphasizing potential—can promote persuasion. To the extent that conveying uncertainty implies receptiveness, as our data suggest (see SS2), these findings support the argument that acts of receptiveness can enhance persuasion.

In addition to providing diverse evidence for the advantages of conveying uncertainty in persuasion, past research also speaks to the conditions surrounding this effect and the processes driving it. First, as hypothesized, this effect appears to be most likely to emerge when the source of a message can be assumed to have, or is explicitly described as having, expertise or high status in the domain at hand. In the most direct evidence, Karmarkar and Tormala (2010) found that expressing uncertainty about one's opinion boosted persuasion when the source was an expert, but not when the source was a non-expert. Further consistent with this proposition, most studies pointing to the persuasive advantage of conveying uncertainty used message sources who had clear expertise or status on the topic at hand, such as college professors (Tormala et al., 2012) and climate scientists (Howe et al., 2019).

Also important, the positive effect of conveying uncertainty on persuasion appears to be driven by one or both of the postulated mechanisms: increased involvement (and thus processing) and enhanced source perceptions. Karmarkar and Tormala (2010) found that involvement increased when an expert expressed uncertainty rather than certainty about his opinion. Moreover, these authors found that participants were more responsive to argument quality when the expert expressed uncertainty rather than certainty, suggesting that participants processed the message more carefully. Likewise, Tormala et al. (2012) observed greater argument quality effects when messages emphasized potential rather than known accomplishments. Other evidence suggests that conveying uncertainty can enhance source perceptions. Howe et al. (2019) found that participants were more open to persuasion by messages that provided a range of estimates rather than a precise estimate, and trust in scientists mediated the effect. Combined, these findings suggest that the advantage of conveying uncertainty in persuasion can be driven by involvement (and thus processing) and enhanced source perceptions. Notably, Karmarkar and Tormala (2010) measured perceived trustworthiness and found that expressing uncertainty had no effect on this dimension. Understanding which mechanism operates when is an important question that we return to later in the article.

Acknowledging Mistakes

Another class of acts of receptiveness is acknowledging mistakes. By acknowledging mistakes, we mean explicitly or implicitly taking responsibility for an error that has been committed. Explicitly acknowledging a mistake may take the form of recognizing or highlighting one's mistake and/or apologizing for it. For example, a message source might confess, "I used to think X, but I was wrong," or, "I purchased Y, and that was a bad call; you should go with Z." Implicitly acknowledging a mistake may take the form of changing one's opinion to correct for a presumed error. For example, if an audience member challenges a seminar speaker about their interpretation of a study result, the speaker might say, "Yes, that's true; what I meant to say is . . ." or "I see what you mean; that might be a better interpretation." Acknowledging that one has erred or committed a mistake signals openness to information that is potentially adversarial to one's position. Rather than reverting to defensiveness or blame, acknowledging a mistake signals that one is not single-minded; that one is open to updating one's position.

Do people perceive individuals who acknowledge mistakes as more receptive? To find out, we conducted a study in which participants ($N = 200$; 52.24% female; $M_{Age} = 32.04$) read a message in which the source acknowledged previous mistakes or made no mention of mistakes (see SS3 in Appendix). Using the same measures as SS2, we found that participants perceived the source as more receptive in the mistakes condition than in the control condition. We now review evidence suggesting that acknowledging mistakes can promote persuasion as well.

Explicitly acknowledging mistakes. Reich and Maglio (2020) examined the effect of explicitly acknowledging a past mistake on the persuasiveness of one's current message. In one study, participants were asked to choose between two sets of headphones and read a review that recommended one set

over the other. The authors manipulated whether the reviewer referenced a prior purchase mistake ("I ended up buying the Nidec VIA headphones, and that was a mistake . . .") or success ("I ended up buying the Nidec VIA headphones, and that was a good choice . . ."). Importantly, in both conditions the reviewer recommended the same set of headphones for the current choice; the only difference was whether the prior purchase of a different set of headphones was framed as a mistake or a success. Reich and Maglio found that participants chose the recommended headphones more often when the reviewer referenced his own prior mistake rather than success.

In related work, Reich et al. (2018) investigated the consequences of learning that a product was made by mistake. In one study, participants read about a music producer who added the sound of his breathing to a recent song, which enhanced the music. In one condition, participants were told that the breath was added intentionally; in another, the breath was added by mistake. Pertinent to our framework, the authors also varied source expertise. Participants were told that the source was a hip-hop producer who worked in the recording industry (expert) or a community college administrator taking a music production class (non-expert). Participants were given a choice between listening to the song described in the study or listening to a song they already knew. In the non-expert condition, there was no effect of labeling the breathing as a mistake or as intentional. However, in the expert condition, labeling the breathing as a mistake increased the proportion of participants who chose to listen to the song described in the study.

Gonzales (1992) found that acknowledging a mistake can increase the persuasiveness of a direct request. In this experiment, participants spent 30 minutes completing a task and then learned that the task was the wrong one, which rendered their data invalid. The experimenter either acknowledged ("this whole mess is my fault") or denied ("this looks like my fault, but it's not") the mistake and then asked participants to return to retake the study. Participants were more willing to comply with this request when the experimenter had acknowledged rather than denied his mistake. In addition, participants viewed the experimenter more favorably (e.g., more trustworthy and friendly) when he acknowledged rather than denied the mistake, suggesting enhanced source perceptions under mistake-admission conditions (see also Kim et al., 2004).

The idea that mistakes can enhance source perceptions is reminiscent of classic research on the pratfall effect (Aronson et al., 1963). In this research, Aronson et al. (1963) investigated the effect of acknowledging a clumsy mistake on a person's perceived attractiveness.[1] Participants reviewed a tape recording of a candidate applying to join a College Quiz Bowl team. The authors manipulated the ability and clumsiness of the candidate during the interview. In the high-ability condition, the candidate correctly answered 92% of the questions asked; in the low-ability condition he answered just 30% correctly. In the clumsy mistake condition, the candidate spilled coffee on himself, mumbling "Oh my goodness, I've spilled coffee all over my new suit." In the non-clumsy condition, no such mistake occurred. The authors found that the mistake enhanced impressions of the high-ability candidate, but undermined impressions of the low-ability candidate. Although Aronson et al. did not assess persuasion, these results are consistent with the notion that under high expertise or status conditions, mistakes can enhance source perceptions.

Further underscoring these ideas, studies in diverse domains such as close relationships, medicine, and leadership point to the positive effects of acknowledging mistakes. For example, in relationships research, personally acknowledging a transgression has been shown to enhance relationship outcomes (compared with having the same transgression reported by a third-party; Afifi et al., 2001; Walters & Burger, 2013). Likewise, leadership research suggests that acknowledging mistakes enhances trust in leaders (Basford et al., 2014) and research on doctor–patient relationships suggests that doctors who acknowledge (versus fail to acknowledge) medical mistakes are trusted more and less likely to see patients switching to other doctors (Gallagher et al., 2003; Mazor et al., 2006, 2004; Sorensen et al., 2010).

Implicitly acknowledging mistakes. In addition to explicitly acknowledging mistakes, implicitly acknowledging mistakes appears to enhance persuasion. For example, John et al. (2019) explored the consequences of "backing down"—that is, changing or updating one's position in response to a correction. It seems reasonable to assume that when a source backs down, or updates their view in response to resistance or push back, they might be viewed as conceding that they erred or were mistaken. In one study, John et al. asked participants to imagine that they were investors judging the performance of entrepreneurs at a pitching competition. Participants learned that the entrepreneur they were evaluating was informed of a mistake in his business plan and then read that the entrepreneur backed down ("changes his initial business plan") or refused to back down ("sticks to his initial business plan"). Participants then indicated the extent to which they thought the entrepreneur should advance to the next round, and they rated the entrepreneur on intelligence and confidence. Results indicated that participants were more likely to advance the entrepreneur when he backed down rather than refused to back down. In addition, participants viewed the entrepreneur as more intelligent (but less confident) when he backed down, and perceived intelligence mediated the effect of backing down on participants' decisions to advance.

Kupor et al. (2018) provided further evidence that acknowledging (and fixing) mistakes might sometimes increase persuasion-type outcomes. In one condition, participants read that a lead engineer at a company failed to update the company's technology, but later realized his mistake and

company policies were changed to ensure that it would not reoccur. In another condition, the company proactively changed its policies to preempt any such mistake in the first place. Kupor et al. found that participants indicated a higher likelihood of purchasing the company's product when the policy was updated following rather than preceding a mistake.

Conditions and mechanisms. In sum, past research suggests that acknowledging mistakes—by explicitly referencing them or implicitly conceding them—can enhance persuasion. Given our data showing that people perceive those who acknowledge mistakes as more receptive than those who do not (see SS3), this work fits with our general framework for acts of receptiveness. Moreover, as hypothesized, the available evidence suggests that the effect of acknowledging mistakes on persuasion is most likely to emerge when the source's expertise or status is at least moderately high, and operates through at least one of the proposed mechanisms.

First consider the expertise condition. Reich et al. (2018) found that acknowledging a mistake boosted persuasion when the source was an expert (an experienced hip-hop producer with many successful albums) but not when the source was a non-expert (a community college student doing an assignment for class). In addition, even when source expertise was not manipulated, the sources used in the reviewed studies appeared to have knowledge or authority on the topic at hand—for example, an experimenter (Gonzales, 1992), an entrepreneur (John et al., 2019), a lead engineer (Kupor et al., 2018) or a consumer with past purchase experience in the relevant domain (Reich & Maglio, 2020). These observations fit with our proposition that acknowledging mistakes has the potential to promote persuasion when the person doing so has at least some expertise or status (see also Aronson et al., 1963).

Also important, aligning with one of our proposed pathways, the positive effect of acknowledging mistakes appears to be driven by enhanced source perceptions, such as likability (Aronson et al., 1963; Gonzales, 1992), knowledge (Reich & Maglio, 2020), trustworthiness (Basford et al., 2014; Gallagher et al., 2003; Mazor et al., 2004, 2006; Sorensen et al., 2010), and intelligence (John et al., 2019). We found no evidence to suggest that the persuasive effect of acknowledging mistakes is driven by involvement, but it stands to reason that this mechanism could play a role as well. Indeed, acknowledging a mistake might be unexpected or surprising, which is a well-known trigger of information processing (e.g., Baker & Petty, 1994). Future research investigating this potential mechanism would be worthwhile.

Highlighting Drawbacks

Another class of acts of receptiveness is highlighting drawbacks to one's position. Highlighting drawbacks involves bringing up defects, downsides, and opposing arguments to one's own point of view or position. We submit that doing so signals receptiveness, and thus can offer a persuasive advantage over doing the opposite—for instance, sharing only supportive arguments or asserting that one's proposal or position is perfect or superior on all dimensions. By sharing defects or flaws in one's own argument or points that oppose one's own, the source implicitly admits that their position is neither perfect nor the only position one could take. Instead of displaying a zealous dedication to a single position, the source displays receptiveness to other perspectives. To assess whether highlighting drawbacks does indeed boost perceived receptiveness, we ran a study (N = 200; 48.26% female; M_{Age} = 30.82) in which we manipulated whether the source did (e.g., "One of the disadvantages of this plan is that . . .") or did not highlight drawbacks to his own proposal (see SS4 in Appendix). As predicted, the source was seen as more receptive when he highlighted rather than ignored the drawbacks to his plan.

How does highlighting drawbacks affect persuasion? The most direct evidence comes from research on two-sided messages (Bohner et al., 2003; Etgar & Goodwin, 1982; Golden & Alpert, 1987; Kamins & Marks, 1987; Schwarz et al., 1980; Settle & Golden, 1974; R. E. Smith & Hunt, 1978; Xu & Petty, in press; for a review, see Crowley & Hoyer, 1994; for a meta-analysis, see Eisend, 2006) and blemishing effects (Ein-Gar et al., 2012), which suggests that highlighting drawbacks or counterpoints to one's position can enhance persuasion under some conditions.

Two-sided messages. Etgar and Goodwin (1982) offered a classic example in an advertising context. Participants read an ad for a beer brand that contained a one- or two-sided message. In the one-sided message condition, the ad claimed that the brand outperformed other brands on a variety of attributes. In the two-sided message condition, the ad claimed that the same brand outperformed other brands on some but not all attributes. Results indicated that compared with the one-sided message, two-sided messaging enhanced attitudes and increased purchase intentions.

In a similar study, Golden and Alpert (1987) presented participants with an ad for deodorant that contained a one- or two-sided message. The one-sided message listed exclusively positive attributes (e.g., non-irritating to the skin), whereas the two-sided message listed mostly positive attributes paired with two negatives (e.g., the packaging was not beautiful). Compared with one-sided messages, two-sided messages increased purchase intent, enhanced perceptions of the product's attributes, and boosted the believability of the advertisement.

In a more contemporary example, Xu and Petty (in press) provided participants with counterattitudinal messages about social issues (e.g., gun control) that were either one- or two-sided. Xu and Petty found that two-sided (versus one-sided) messages increased participants' felt openness and enhanced

persuasion. Moreover, Xu and Petty found that two-sided messages were particularly effective among participants with morally based attitudes, hinting at the possibility that acts of receptiveness might be especially impactful as the need to reduce resistance rises.

Blemishing. Related work by Ein-Gar et al. (2012) investigated the effect of blemishing—providing a minor negative detail in an otherwise positive message—on persuasion, and examined whether this effect would be moderated by depth of processing. Ein-Gar et al. presented participants with persuasive messages and manipulated the content of those messages (whether they contained only positive information or mostly positive information plus a minor negative detail) and participants' processing effort (high or low). Results indicated that including a negative detail generally increased persuasion (e.g., increased purchase intentions for the product being promoted). Moreover, this effect was especially likely to occur under conditions of moderate or relatively low processing—for example, when participants were focused on an unrelated task.

Conditions and mechanisms. In short, highlighting drawbacks to one's message or position can enhance persuasion. Taken with our own evidence that highlighting drawbacks increases perceived receptiveness (see SS4), this research provides further evidence that acts of receptiveness can boost persuasion under some conditions. Notably, we did not identify any direct evidence that this effect was moderated by source expertise or status, as our framework proposes. However, there is tentative evidence for the expertise condition in this domain. For example, in some studies, the persuasive messages came from celebrities who had used the advertised services in the past and might have been viewed as having relevant knowledge (e.g., Kamins et al., 1989). In others, the message source was an experimenter or salesperson, who presumably would be viewed as having status or knowledge about the product at hand (e.g., Ein-Gar et al., 2012).

We did find evidence consistent with one of the hypothesized mechanisms: enhanced source perceptions. Most germane, highlighting drawbacks has been found to increase source likability and perceived trustworthiness (Bohner et al., 2003; Hastak & Park, 1990; Kamins & Marks, 1987). Relatedly, a meta-analysis of the two-sided messaging literature concluded that delivering a two- as opposed to one-sided message generally promotes persuasion because it increases the perceived truthfulness and credibility of a message's claims (Eisend, 2006).

Asking Questions

Asking questions, as opposed to making declarative statements, constitutes a final class of acts of receptiveness. Intuitively, asking a question, even when one knows the answer, seems more open and inviting than does making a statement. A person who makes declarative statements (e.g., "this new policy will boost productivity") could be seen as more firm or assertive than someone who phrases the same position as a question (e.g., "won't this new policy boost productivity?"). By implicitly inviting input, a source who asks questions might be seen as more receptive to others' views. This prediction is consistent with literature spanning multiple domains, which suggests that asking questions can have numerous interpersonal benefits. For example, asking questions boosts the likelihood of receiving help (due to perceived humility; Cojuharenco & Karelaia, 2020), a second date (due to enhanced likability; Huang et al., 2017), and a good negotiation outcome (due to enhanced trust and likability; Bitterly & Schweitzer, 2020). In addition, asking questions—for instance, about intentions—has been shown to have a potent effect on recipients' judgments and behaviors (e.g., Morwitz & Fitzsimons, 2004).

To assess whether asking questions enhances a source's perceived receptiveness, we ran a study ($N = 200$; 49.50% female; $M_{Age} = 29.97$) in which participants read ostensible snippets of a public debate on how to respond to the coronavirus pandemic. In the questions condition, one of the speakers finished two of his sentences with questions that invited input (e.g., "Now, I would like to ask you: how can we make this plan better?"). The control condition omitted these questions. As detailed in SS5 in the Appendix, we found that the speaker was seen as more receptive when he asked rather than did not ask questions during his speech.

Consistent with this finding, previous research suggests that asking questions can convey receptiveness. Chen et al. (2010) had students engage in debates with counterparts who held opposing views. In one condition, the counterparts provided opposing arguments that ended with an elaboration question (e.g., "Can you tell me more about how come you think that?"). In another, only the opposing arguments were provided. Participants saw their counterpart as more receptive in the question condition relative to the control, and participants themselves became more receptive in turn.[2] This latter effect (whereby participants became more receptive to their partners' views) hints at a possible boost to persuasion from asking elaboration questions. We now turn to other types of questions explored in the persuasion literature.

Tag questions. One illustration of the persuasiveness of asking questions comes from work on tag questions. Tag questions refer to statements transformed into questions by adding a tentative query at the end, such as: Da Vinci was American, wasn't he? Because tag questions imply a request for confirmation (Lakoff, 1973; Ng & Bradac, 1993), we submit that they signal openness to input and other perspectives—for example, to confirmation or disconfirmation of the statement—from message recipients. Blankenship and Craig (2007) investigated the effect of tag questions on persuasion. In one experiment, the authors varied the use of tag questions (tag questions versus no

questions), argument quality, and source expertise. Undergraduates read an editorial promoting comprehensive exams as a new college graduation requirement. In the tag questions condition, the message included five tag questions such as "right?" and "isn't it?" and "don't you think?" In the control condition, these were omitted. In addition, the author of the message was described as either a high school student (low expertise) or a dean at the participants' university (high expertise). The authors found that when the source of the message was an expert and the message itself was strong, tag questions enhanced persuasion. If these conditions were not in place, tag questions backfired (see also Blankenship & Holtgraves, 2005).

Rhetorical questions. Further evidence that asking questions can promote persuasion comes from work on rhetorical questions (Ahluwalia & Burnkrant, 2004; Burnkrant & Howard, 1984; Petty et al., 1981; Zillmann, 1972; Zillmann & Cantor, 1974). In an early demonstration, Zillmann (1972) asked participants to act as jurors judging a juvenile charged with second-degree murder. In one condition, the defense arguments were framed as declarative statements (e.g., "but he never used his knife as a weapon before"); in the other, the arguments were framed as rhetorical questions (e.g., "but did he ever use his knife as a weapon before?"). Compared with declarative statements, rhetorical questions were more persuasive in the suspect's defense.

In follow-up research, Petty et al. (1981) shed light on when and why rhetorical questions enhance persuasion. Rhetorical questions, they argued, increased involvement, which boosted persuasion if the message contained strong arguments. To test this mechanism, the authors manipulated three variables: involvement, argument quality, and use of rhetorical questions. Undergraduates listened to a taped communication arguing for comprehensive exams as a graduation requirement. Participants in the high involvement condition were told that policy would be implemented at their own university next year. Participants in the low involvement condition were told that the exams would be implemented at a distant university 10 years later. Participants in the strong (weak) arguments condition were provided with compelling (specious) arguments. Finally, participants in the rhetorical questions condition encountered six argument-summarizing questions (e.g., "Wouldn't instituting a comprehensive exam be an aid to those who seek admission to graduate and professional schools?"), whereas those in the declarative statement condition received equivalent statements (e.g., "Thus, instituting a comprehensive exam would be an aid to those who seek admission to graduate and professional schools.").

Petty et al. found a three-way interaction. Of greatest import, under low involvement–strong argument conditions, rhetorical questions were more persuasive than declarative statements. Under high involvement–strong argument conditions, rhetorical questions were *less* persuasive than declarative statements. Importantly, though, these effects were not observed under weak-argument conditions. Petty et al. interpreted these results as indicating that rhetorical questions affected message processing. When participants were not highly motivated to process the message (relatively low involvement), questions boosted processing and enhanced persuasion when the message contained strong but not weak arguments. When participants were highly motivated to process the message (relatively high involvement), questions distracted from the content of the message, which decreased persuasion in response to strong arguments. Subsequent work replicated these effects placing rhetorical questions at the beginning rather than end of paragraphs (e.g., Ahluwalia & Burnkrant, 2004; Burnkrant & Howard, 1984).

Conditions and mechanisms. In short, past research suggests that asking questions—elaboration questions that convey interest in others' views, tag questions, and rhetorical questions—can boost persuasion under some conditions. Furthermore, asking questions appears to increase one's perceived receptiveness (see SS5; Chen et al., 2010). Taken together, these findings fit with our framework for acts of receptiveness. In fact, the persuasive advantage of asking questions appears to be most likely to occur under the conditions and through the mechanisms predicted by our framework. For instance, high source expertise or status appears to be conducive to these effects: Studies showing the persuasive benefit of rhetorical questions have used expert and high-status sources, such as a university president (Petty et al., 1981) or a lawyer (Zillmann, 1972), and research on tag questions has directly shown that tag questions boost persuasion when the source is high but not low in expertise (Blankenship & Craig, 2007).

Also important, research provides direct evidence for increased involvement and indirect evidence for enhanced source perceptions as drivers of the effect. Regarding involvement, both Petty et al. (1981) and Blankenship and Craig (2007) found that argument quality moderated the effects of questions on persuasion, consistent with an involvement account. Regarding enhanced source perceptions, question askers have been shown to be perceived as more humble (Cojuharenco & Karelaia, 2020), likable (Huang et al., 2017), and trustworthy (Bitterly & Schweitzer, 2020). These latter studies did not assess traditional persuasion outcomes, but if getting more help (Cojuharenco & Karelaia, 2020), second dates (Huang et al., 2017), and better negotiation outcomes (Bitterly & Schweitzer, 2020) can be viewed as persuasion-adjacent, the findings suggest that questions might promote persuasion through enhanced source perceptions.

Summary

The primary aim of this review is to integrate research from disparate literatures showcasing a broad array of actions that

would seem to undermine one's persuasiveness but often enhance it. Indeed, despite people's intuitions to the contrary (see SS1), conveying uncertainty, mentioning personal mistakes, highlighting drawbacks, and asking questions can in some cases be more persuasive than their opposites—conveying certainty, mentioning personal successes, focusing on the positives or supporting arguments, and making declarative statements. We propose that these diverse findings converge around a common theme of acts of receptiveness. When people engage in these actions, they show that they are open and receptive to new information or different perspectives, which boosts their persuasive impact.

As noted, the evidence suggests that despite their diversity, these acts of receptiveness produce similar persuasive consequences and operate under similar conditions and through similar mechanisms. As a starting point, although there are bound to be multiple moderators of these effects, previous research points to the source's status and/or expertise as a potentially important factor in determining when acts of receptiveness facilitate persuasion. In general, acts of receptiveness appear to confer greater persuasive benefit when the source is high rather than low in expertise or status. Supporting this condition are studies that directly manipulated expertise (Blankenship & Craig, 2007; Karmarkar & Tormala, 2010; Reich et al., 2018) and studies in which expertise or status was held constant at a moderately high or high level (e.g., Blankenship & Holtgraves, 2005; Gonzales, 1992; Howe et al., 2019; John et al., 2019; Petty et al., 1981; Reich & Maglio, 2020; Tormala et al., 2012).

Furthermore, based on the research reviewed, there appear to be two primary mechanisms driving these effects: increased involvement (and consequent message processing) and enhanced source perceptions (e.g., increased likability and trustworthiness). First, acts of receptiveness can affect persuasion by increasing message recipients' involvement and processing. Support for this mechanism comes from work on conveying uncertainty (Karmarkar & Tormala, 2010; see also Mishra et al., 2011) and asking questions (Blankenship & Craig, 2007; Petty et al., 1981). Second, acts of receptiveness can enhance recipients' perceptions of the source. In essence, acts of receptiveness appear to cast the source in a more favorable light—for example, as more trustworthy and likable. These perceptions, in turn, are well-documented facilitators of persuasion (e.g., McGinnies & Ward, 1980; Wood & Kallgren, 1988). We found evidence for the source perceptions mechanism in all four classes of acts of receptiveness (e.g., Aronson et al., 1963; Chen et al., 2010; Eisend, 2006; Gonzales, 1992; Howe et al., 2019).

A Closer Look at Mechanism

Although it is evident from our review that increased involvement and enhanced source perceptions tend to drive the positive effects of acts of receptiveness in persuasion, several questions remain. Why do acts of receptiveness affect involvement and source perceptions? Which source perceptions are most likely to be affected? What is the relationship between the involvement and source perceptions mechanisms? Here, we expand on the evidence for each mechanism and speculate as to how, when, and why they drive persuasion.

Increased Involvement

First, why would acts of receptiveness increase involvement? To answer this question, it is important to reiterate that the acts of receptiveness we reviewed appear to be especially likely to promote persuasion under high-status or expert source conditions. It could be that acts of receptiveness are surprising under these conditions, or incongruent with recipients' expectations for how experts or high-status individuals usually behave. For example, people might expect experts to have well-formed opinions that they express with certainty. If true, an expert who expresses uncertainty might violate expectations and surprise message recipients. Likewise, people might expect high-status sources to be able to rattle off prior successes, making it surprising when they detail personal mistakes. Expectancy violations and surprise, in turn, are well-documented determinants of involvement and processing (e.g., Baker & Petty, 1994; S. M. Smith & Petty, 1996). Indeed, this was the exact process outlined by Karmarkar and Tormala (2010) in their work on expressing uncertainty.

A closely related possibility is that acts of receptiveness pique curiosity (Berlyne, 1954; Loewenstein, 1994). When experts express uncertainty or high-status sources acknowledge mistakes, for instance, people might be curious to learn more. Why were they uncertain? What did they learn? This curiosity, in turn, could raise involvement and deepen message processing. Indeed, recent research suggests that curiosity stimulates information seeking and message processing in persuasion contexts, which can amplify the impact of a persuasive message (Kupor et al., in press; Kupor & Tormala, 2015). Although past research is clear in suggesting that feelings of involvement and consequent information processing help drive at least some acts of receptiveness in persuasion, a complete articulation of the reasons why (e.g., surprise, curiosity, or another intermediate mechanism) awaits further research.

Enhanced Source Perceptions

In addition to involvement, past research suggests that acts of receptiveness sometimes promote persuasion by enhancing source perceptions. What aspects of the source are most likely to be enhanced by acts of receptiveness? Are these effects confined to a specific trait or do they generalize to other traits (e.g., as a halo effect)? The literature is ambiguous with respect to these issues. In general, past research in this area either measured some perceptions but not others

with little to no explanation or used composite indices of numerous (potentially distinct) perceptions, which unfortunately obfuscates the matter. In this section, we offer speculation that we hope inches toward clarity on these issues and highlights useful next steps in research on this topic.

To begin with, which source perceptions are most likely to be enhanced by an act of receptiveness? In general, the evidence suggests that perceptions of warmth, such as trustworthiness and likability, are more likely to be affected than perceptions of competence, such as intelligence and knowledge (for more on warmth and competence, see Fiske, 2018). Indeed, the only evidence we identified pointing to the role of competence came from the domain of acknowledging mistakes, where acknowledging mistakes was associated with perceptions of greater intelligence and knowledge (John et al., 2019; Reich & Maglio, 2020). As noted, however, studies have shown that acknowledging mistakes can enhance perceived trustworthiness too (e.g., Basford et al., 2014; Mazor et al., 2006). For the other acts of receptiveness, the evidence generally revolved around perceptions of trustworthiness and likeability (e.g., Bitterly & Schweitzer, 2020; Eisend, 2006; Hastak & Park, 1990; Howe et al., 2019; Huang et al., 2017; Kamins & Marks, 1987)—that is, perceptions of warmth (Fiske, 2018).

The overall tendency for the source perceptions mechanism to revolve around perceived warmth might also shed light on the finding that expert and high-status sources are especially likely to benefit. First, by virtue of their expertise or status, these sources are already perceived as competent, so there might be less room to grow or need for growth on the competence dimension. Also important, though, expert and high-status sources (e.g., scientists) might often be assumed to have low warmth, meaning there is room and perhaps a need to grow on the warmth dimension. Consistent with this proposition, past research suggests a warmth–competence tradeoff such that people who are perceived as highly competent tend to be perceived as cold as well (Fiske et al., 2002, 2007; Judd et al., 2005; Kervyn et al., 2010). In general, this literature shows that perceived warmth and competence are negatively correlated, so much so that establishing that a person is high on one of these dimensions (e.g., competence) is often interpreted as implying that they are low on the other (e.g., warmth; Kervyn et al., 2012). Extending this notion to the current concerns, if experts are assumed to be cold, an act of receptiveness that enhances their warmth could be especially beneficial. If non-experts are already assumed to be warm (or at least warmer), they would be less likely to receive the same lift. Non-experts might be better off finding a way to convey competence (e.g., expressing certainty; Karmarkar & Tormala, 2010). Diving further into the implications of warmth–competence tradeoffs for persuasion would be an exciting path for new work in this area.

Ultimately, we suspect that even if the primary effect of acts of receptiveness is on perceptions of warmth, these effects can generalize. For instance, if one infers trustworthiness from an act of receptiveness in one context, this inference might extend beyond that context and reflect a more general impression of trustworthiness across settings. If true, an act of receptiveness in one domain (e.g., a product recommendation) might spillover and enhance one's persuasive impact in another (e.g., a policy endorsement; Wallace et al., in press; cf. Reich & Maglio, 2020). In addition, when an act of receptiveness influences perceptions of a specific trait such as trustworthiness, this effect might generalize to other traits (e.g., likeability). Indeed, our read of the literature is that acts of receptiveness can create global positive impressions. For example, many of the source impression indices in past research assessed multiple perceptions and showed high reliability across items (e.g., Gonzales, 1992). If acts of receptiveness can cause halo-type effects that shape general impressions of sources, this would be important in revealing generalized positive reactions that might predict consequences beyond persuasion in the moment (e.g., willingness to interact with and follow the source's advice in the future, to recommend the source to others, and so on). Future research exploring the global versus local impact of acts of receptiveness on source perceptions would expand our insight into these issues.

Which Mechanism, When?

Another important question is: How do the involvement and source perceptions pathways relate to each other? When does each mechanism operate? Unfortunately, the reviewed literature does not answer this question. Some studies point to one mechanism and some studies point to the other (for one attempt to address both, see Karmarkar & Tormala, 2010). Here, with the hope of stimulating future research in this domain, we offer initial speculation.

One possibility, rooted in the elaboration likelihood model (ELM; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), is that elaboration plays a role. Elaboration refers to an individual's extent of thinking; the degree to which someone is motivated and able to process the central merits of a message or position. Past research suggests that elaboration dictates the mechanism through which a variable affects persuasion (for reviews see Petty & Wegener, 1998; Tormala & Briñol, 2015). When elaboration is high, variables have been shown to affect persuasion by biasing the valence of thoughts that come to mind. This effect is likely to occur when the message itself is ambiguous in quality (i.e., not clearly strong or weak; e.g., Chaiken & Maheswaran, 1994). When elaboration is low, variables tend to affect persuasion by serving as a simple cue or heuristic. When baseline elaboration is moderate—that is, neither high nor low at the outset—variables often affect persuasion by influencing the amount of thinking that occurs. Extending this theorizing to the current concerns, the ELM might predict that when initial elaboration is moderate, acts of receptiveness operate through the involvement pathway, increasing interest in the message and stimulating deeper processing

that facilitates persuasion under strong but not weak-argument conditions. When initial elaboration is clearly low or high, however, perhaps the source perceptions pathway dominates and drives persuasion by acting as a cue (low elaboration) or biasing thoughts in a favorable direction (high elaboration).

To be clear, past research on acts of receptiveness does not speak to this issue, so the application of the ELM to this context is purely speculative. That said, studies highlighting the involvement mechanism hint at the possibility of moderate elaboration conditions at baseline, which would be compatible with an ELM account. For example, in their work on rhetorical questions, Petty et al. (1981) asked undergraduates to read about a campus policy (comprehensive exams). In the low involvement condition (where rhetorical questions boosted processing and enhanced the impact of strong arguments), participants read that the issue was being considered at a distant university for the distant future. This condition was designed to induce low elaboration, but it might actually have produced more moderate elaboration. Indeed, although comprehensive exams were not under consideration at participants' university, they were relevant to college education and might have been of interest to undergraduates, who perhaps wondered whether their university would consider a similar policy. Thus, elaboration levels might have been more moderate than low in this condition. Unfortunately, involvement was not measured in the study, so it is difficult to ascertain participants' precise levels of involvement.[3] For now, all we can do is conjecture. Further research is needed to assess whether elaboration moderates the mechanism driving the effects of acts of receptiveness.

As a second and perhaps simpler possibility, surprise or unexpectedness could also determine which mechanism operates. For example, particularly surprising acts of receptiveness might trigger the involvement pathway (e.g., Baker & Petty, 1994; S. M. Smith & Petty, 1996). Consistent with this speculation, past studies pointing to the involvement mechanism generally tested acts of receptiveness that seemed potentially surprising—for instance, when a renowned food critic expressed doubt about his opinion (Karmarkar & Tormala, 2010) or a university dean asked tag questions (e.g., "don't you think?") when promoting a campus policy (Blankenship & Craig, 2007). In each case, participants might have felt surprised, and thus increased message scrutiny. In contrast, in studies pointing to enhanced source perceptions, the acts of receptiveness seemed potentially less surprising, such as when an entrepreneur fixed a mistake in his model (John et al., 2019) or a scientist expressed uncertainty about a prediction (Howe et al., 2019). It could be that especially surprising acts of receptiveness trigger the involvement mechanism, whereas less surprising ones trigger the source perceptions mechanism.

Delineating the conditions under which involvement versus source perceptions guide the effects of acts of receptiveness will be complicated. In fact, source perceptions can influence involvement and message processing (e.g., Priester & Petty, 1995). Thus, it could be that acts of receptiveness that influence source perceptions sometimes affect involvement and processing as well. As one possibility along these lines, if an act of receptiveness makes a source seem more thoughtful (e.g., Kupor & Tormala, 2018), it might increase the perceived value or importance of attending to the source's message, which boosts involvement and deepens processing. Future work should investigate these complex and dynamic pathways.

Audience Characteristics

Our review has focused on actions persuaders (i.e., sources) can take to communicate receptiveness and open people up to their messages. Importantly, though, persuasion is also critically dependent on audience factors. Are there particular audience characteristics that determine the effectiveness of acts of receptiveness in persuasion? Past research is mostly silent on this issue, but we see it as a crucial topic for ongoing work in this area. One possibility we have already discussed is that the audience's processing motivation could play a role in determining which mechanism prevails. Here, we highlight additional audience characteristics—for example, initial attitude or position, moralization, dispositional receptiveness, and tolerance for uncertainty—that could shape whether an act of receptiveness is useful in persuasion.

Attitude Position

First, the audience's attitude position might play a moderating role. In particular, whether the audience's attitude is congruent or incongruent with the message could be an important factor. We submit that acts of receptiveness might be especially advantageous under counterattitudinal message conditions. Acts of receptiveness signal that a source is open-minded to other perspectives, which might diffuse the defensiveness or threat people sometimes feel from counterattitudinal messages (see Clark & Wegener, 2013). Rather than unabashedly trying to convert people to an opposing viewpoint, a source who displays receptiveness seems open to new or different perspectives (Chen et al., 2010; Xu & Petty, in press; see also Schwarz et al., 1980). This benefit could be especially useful in the face of counterattitudinal persuasion. When a message is proattitudinal—that is, already aligned with audience's attitude—the need to reduce threat or defensiveness abates and acts of receptiveness might have less impact.

Consistent with this general proposition, some of the work we reviewed used topics and messages that were clearly counterattitudinal in nature. For example, in their work on asking questions, Petty et al. (1981) had undergraduates read about comprehensive exams as a college graduation requirement (see also Blankenship & Craig, 2007). It is reasonable

to surmise that many students would be initially opposed to this idea. Likewise, Xu and Petty (in press) presented participants with one- or two-sided messages that contradicted their own viewpoints (e.g., regarding gun control or mask-wearing in a pandemic). Thus, there is reason to think that at least some of the effects we reviewed can operate under counterattitudinal message conditions. Note, however, that not all of the research reviewed used clearly counterattitudinal stimuli (e.g., Karmarkar & Tormala, 2010). For now, then, whether acts of receptiveness might be especially conducive to counterattitudinal persuasion remains an open question.

Moralization

Second, the extent to which the audience sees an attitude as grounded in morality might moderate the effect of an act of receptiveness. People differ in the extent to which they see their attitudes as morally based (Skitka, 2010). Two individuals holding the same attitude (e.g., pro-vegan) can differ in the extent to which they see their attitudes as grounded in morality (e.g., based on moral arguments like animal cruelty vs. non-moral arguments like health). We submit that acts of receptiveness might prove especially effective when the audience holds moralized attitudes. Indeed, engaging in an act of receptiveness (e.g., asking questions) could convey that the source acknowledges the importance of the topic and intends to treat the audience's view with respect and understanding. If true, this could put the audience at ease and open them up to the persuasion attempt. Consistent with this view, the Xu and Petty (in press) work on two-sided messaging found that two-sided messages were especially effective when the audience held a morally based attitude. Investigating whether moralization impacts the effectiveness of other acts of receptiveness would be another useful direction for future work.

Dispositional Receptiveness

Recent work has found that people differ in their natural tendency to be receptive to opposing views (Minson et al., 2020). Would the audience's disposition to be receptive moderate the effect of an act of receptiveness? An extensive literature on matching effects suggests that it might (see Teeny et al., in press). Indeed, past research has shown that matching a message to a recipient's personality tends to increase persuasion. For example, messages framed in extraverted terms have been shown to be more persuasive for extraverts than introverts (Wheeler et al., 2005). Perhaps acts of receptiveness are especially persuasive to audiences high in trait receptiveness (Minson et al., 2020), because they match those audiences' underlying inclination toward receptiveness. On the other hand, dispositionally receptive individuals are already open-minded and might not need an act of receptiveness to open them up to a persuasion attempt. It could be that individuals *low* in dispositional receptiveness respond more favorably to acts of receptiveness, precisely because they need a dose of receptiveness to open up to persuasion. Exploring matching versus mismatching effects would be a valuable step in this domain. As a note, dispositional receptiveness might also influence the *production* of acts of receptiveness. Extant research is unclear about when and why people use acts of receptiveness of their own accord, and one possibility is that the more naturally receptive people are, the more likely they are to use them (see also Yeomans et al., 2020). Future work on this topic could be enlightening.

Tolerance for Uncertainty

In addition to dispositional receptiveness, audiences can also differ in their tolerance for uncertainty. Tolerance for uncertainty captures comfort with and excitement about being in uncertain situations (Frenkel-Brunswik, 1949). People with low tolerance for uncertainty avoid uncertain situations, whereas those with high tolerance for uncertainty seek them out (Buhr & Dugas, 2002). It seems reasonable to speculate that acts of receptiveness sometimes trigger uncertainty. For instance, expressing doubts could induce uncertainty, highlighting drawbacks could make a choice seem uncertain, and asking questions could highlight a knowledge gap or missing information. If true, acts of receptiveness might be more effective for audience members with high rather than low tolerance for uncertainty (see Kupor et al., 2014, for an example of this result with the preference for potential). Moreover, related dispositional factors such as the preference for consistency (Cialdini et al., 1995) and need for cognitive closure (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994) might produce similar moderation effects. Future work examining these moderators would deepen our understanding of potential boundaries on acts of receptiveness.

Novel Acts of Receptiveness

Another important step for research in this area would be to explore novel acts of receptiveness. What other actions constitute acts of receptiveness, and how would those actions affect persuasion? Past research has explored a number of factors that open people up to new, opposing, or threatening information. We ask how these factors might be viewed through the lens of acts of receptiveness, and thus begin the process of brainstorming.

Affirmation

First, research on self-affirmation has shown that people are less defensive and more open to threatening information and divergent perspectives when they are affirmed—for example, when they are given an opportunity to express their values (Cohen et al., 2000; Sherman et al., 2000; Steele et al., 1993). Could persuaders harness this insight? Although it is unlikely that persuaders would be perceived

as more receptive by affirming their own values, affirming the *audience's* values could constitute an act of receptiveness and pave the way to persuasion. Consider a political example in which a conservative source seeks to persuade a liberal audience, or vice versa. Perhaps affirming the audience's liberal or conservative values at the outset of the pitch would cast the source as more receptive to opposing views and thus open the door to persuasion (e.g., via increased involvement or enhanced source perceptions). Indeed, research on moral matching suggests that couching a message in conservative or liberal values can make that message more persuasive for a conservative or liberal audience, respectively (e.g., Feinberg & Willer, 2015; see also Luttrell et al., 2019). Perhaps simply affirming the audience's values could induce the same underlying effect.

Deliberative Mindset

Research on mindsets has shown that being in a deliberative rather than implemental mindset sparks more open-minded information processing (Fujita et al., 2007; Taylor & Gollwitzer, 1995). In essence, choosing a goal is associated with increased openness to different information, whereas pursuing a goal creates more selectivity (Gollwitzer, 1990). For example, Taylor and Gollwitzer (1995) found that people in deliberative mindsets considered both the pros and cons of a decision, whereas those in an implemental mindset considered mostly the pros. Applying this finding to the current concerns, we submit that communicating that one has a deliberative mindset—or, more specifically, that one is still deliberating between the pros and cons on an issue—might convey receptiveness to others. Although disclosing that one is still deliberating or weighing various options could cast an individual as indecisive or ambivalent, it also suggests that the source is not fixated on one idea or resistant to different perspectives. As such, communicating a deliberative mindset (e.g., "I haven't come to a final decision yet; I'm still debating . . .") might constitute a novel act of receptiveness in persuasion.

Positive Mood

Another factor that can increase receptiveness is positive mood. Trope and Neter (1994) found that positive (negative) mood increases people's interest in negative (positive) feedback. In other words, positive mood increases people's receptiveness to negative information. Would *displaying* a positive mood (e.g., smiling or stating that one feels happy) convey such receptiveness? If people hold the lay theory that individuals in positive states feel less challenged by threatening information, they might indeed infer greater receptiveness on behalf of others in positive as opposed to negative moods. Positive emotional displays such as smiling have been shown to facilitate persuasion under some conditions (Gunnery & Hall, 2014). It would be informative to examine whether these effects function as acts of receptiveness.

Expressed Moderation

Expressing moderate as opposed to extreme views might also serve as an act of receptiveness. Indeed, in a world in which people are becoming increasingly extreme in their opinions (McCarty, 2019), expressing a moderate rather than an extreme position might come across as more receptive. Would this enhance persuasion? Recent evidence suggests that it could. Kupor and Tormala (2018) found that expressing moderate opinions, especially when the prevailing norm or default is to express extreme opinions, can be advantageous in persuasion. For example, Kupor and Tormala found that customer reviews with moderate ratings (e.g., 4 out of 5) were more persuasive than reviews with extreme ratings (e.g., 5 out of 5) when the default or normative rating in a particular context was extreme (i.e., 5 out of 5). Moderate ratings, they argued, can make the source seem more thoughtful, which boosts the perceived accuracy of their endorsement. Future research assessing whether moderate opinions also convey receptiveness and warmth (e.g., trustworthiness) would be valuable.

Pausing

Momentary interruptions of persuasive messages can increase persuasion by boosting curiosity and processing (Kupor & Tormala, 2015). While work on this topic has examined contexts in which external events interrupted messages, it hints at the possibility that pausing could offer a persuasive advantage of its own. Pausing during a message might undermine a source's perceived competence (e.g., if it implies hesitation or confusion), but also signal receptiveness. If asked a question, for example, a pause could indicate that the source has not considered the question before, while also suggesting that the source is deliberating or weighing multiple sides of the issue. To the extent that audience members perceive a pause to reflect an internal deliberation, we postulate that sources might be perceived as more receptive when using as opposed to avoiding pauses. In a sense, pausing might function as an implicit consideration of drawbacks or a signal that the source's certainty is low. If true, experts or high-status sources who pause might be more persuasive compared with those who do not (c.f., Ziano & Wang, in press).

Slow Speech

Pace of speech could also affect perceived receptiveness. Slow speech has been shown to communicate a lack of confidence (Guyer, Briñol et al., 2019), but it has potential to convey receptiveness too. A slow pace, for instance, might be viewed as more inviting and easier to interrupt with questions or comments. A source who speaks slowly is unlikely to be perceived as barreling through a message without giving others a chance to weigh in. In contrast, a fast pace seems more likely to convey a lack of receptiveness and be

perceived as an attempt to steamroll the audience with the source's perspective and arguments. Consistent with this possibility, recent research suggests that paralinguistic cues, such as speed of speech, can influence source perceptions such as thoughtfulness, sincerity, and confidence (Schroeder et al., 2017; Tenney et al., 2019; Van Zant & Berger, 2020). Notably, though, this research generally suggests that paralinguistic displays of confidence outperform paralinguistic displays of doubt (e.g., Guyer, Briñol et al., 2019; Van Zant & Berger, 2020). Future work should explore when the opposite effect emerges and whether these outcomes might be moderated by source expertise or status.

High-Level Construal

Finally, compared with low-level construal, high-level construal has been shown to increase receptiveness to unpleasant information, such as negative feedback (Freitas et al., 2001). Would communicating high-level construal suggest receptiveness to others? It might. Studies have shown that high-level construal increases people's use of abstract (versus concrete) language (Wakslak & Joshi, 2020) and that people are sometimes more likely to follow advice phrased in abstract (versus concrete) terms (Reyt et al., 2016). If audiences intuit that abstract language is associated with high-level construal, then using abstract language might constitute an act of receptiveness. On the other hand, there is reason to think that concrete language would convey greater receptiveness. For instance, concrete language might imply that someone (especially an expert) is trying to communicate simply or clearly to enhance the audience's understanding and facilitate dialogue. Consistent with this notion, use of concrete language has been shown to foster favorable reactions (e.g., trust) in investing, dating, and crowdfunding contexts (Larrimore et al., 2011; Pan et al., 2018; Toma & Hancock, 2012). Assessing the effect of abstract versus concrete language on perceived receptiveness would be another valuable step for research in this domain.

Potential Exceptions and Negative Consequences

To this point, we have focused on the evidence for and possibility of positive effects of acts of receptiveness in persuasion. Importantly, though, our review also identified exceptions—instances in which actions that would seem to fit our definition of acts of receptiveness appear to have no or even negative effects on persuasion. These exceptions are important to consider and may deepen our insight into the conditions under which acts of receptiveness foster persuasion.

First, although the acts of receptiveness we reviewed appear to promote persuasion under expert and high-status source conditions, they seem to offer less benefit or even backfire under non-expert or low-status source conditions. We uncovered direct evidence for this moderation in the context of expressing uncertainty (Karmarkar & Tormala, 2010), asking tag questions (Blankenship & Craig, 2007), and acknowledging mistakes (Reich et al., 2018; see also Aronson et al., 1963). Further indirect evidence speaks to this issue in the domain of expressing uncertainty. A number of studies have shown that people are more persuaded by information expressed with high rather than low certainty (e.g., Brewer & Burke, 2002; Gaertig & Simmons, 2018; Guyer, Fabrigar et al., 2019; Penrod & Cutler, 1995; Price & Stone, 2004; Sniezek & Van Swol, 2001), and in most of these studies the source had low or ambiguous expertise or status—for example, eyewitnesses with no particular credentials (Brewer & Burke, 2002; Penrod & Cutler, 1995) or study participants offering advice on topics on which they had no known expertise (Gaertig & Simmons, 2018; Sniezek & Van Swol, 2001). These findings fit with the notion that although expressing uncertainty can promote persuasion when the source has high expertise or status, it tends to hinder persuasion when the source has low expertise or status. In a potential departure from our framework, Price and Stone (2004) found that financial advisers were preferred when they made stock forecasts with more rather than less certainty; it seems safe to assume that financial advisers would be seen as experts in this arena. It could be that in some settings (e.g., investment decisions), people feel especially risk averse (or intolerant of uncertainty) and gravitate toward advisers (or sources) with both expertise and certainty to mitigate personal risk (see our section on tolerance for uncertainty for further discussion).

As another potential exception, consider hedging. Hedging refers to the use of language that qualifies, softens, or lessens the forcefulness of a message, including words or phrases such as "kind of" or "probably." Hedging can be associated with uncertainty and interest in other perspectives (Cheatham & Tormala, 2017) and would seem to constitute an act of receptiveness. However, Blankenship and Holtgraves (2005) found that hedging had no benefit and could even backfire, depending on participants' involvement levels. In the Blankenship and Holtgraves research, no information was offered about the source. It could be that in the absence of source information, hedging comes across as shaky or stammering and suggests a lack of expertise or status. It is worth exploring whether hedging might be conducive to persuasion (e.g., Yeomans et al., 2020) when the source has clear expertise or status in the domain of interest.

Why would acts of receptiveness require expertise or status? In addition to the two accounts provided already—namely, that acts of receptiveness are more surprising and deliver more-needed warmth under expert or high-status source conditions—it is possible that expertise and status shape the attributions people form following an act of receptiveness. In particular, expertise and status might attenuate concerns that an act of receptiveness reflects a lack of competence or knowledge, leaving openness and receptiveness as more likely inferences. For example, people may assume

that a source who asks questions or offers a range of estimates lacks knowledge or insight when that source is a nonexpert. These attributions are less viable when the source is an expert, which could shift the focus to more charitable inferences. Going forward, it would be useful to determine whether all acts of receptiveness are moderated by source expertise and status, or whether expertise and status uniquely moderate acts of receptiveness that seem to have the potential to reduce perceptions of competence and expertise (like conveying uncertainty, acknowledging mistakes, highlighting drawbacks, and asking questions). This distinction could prove particularly important as we explore novel acts of receptiveness that may not all have the same intuitive potential to undermine one's case.

Aside from exceptions introduced by source characteristics, the timing of an act of receptiveness could prove important as well. Some evidence comes from the literature on two-sided messaging. Contrary to the work reviewed earlier, Hastak and Park (1990) found that two-sided (versus one-sided) messages undermined persuasion. One salient difference between the Hastak and Park research and the work showing positive effects of two-sided messages is that Hastak and Park *began* their persuasive message with the negative information. It could be that the placement of negative information at the beginning of the message (as opposed to the middle or end) undermines the benefit of including it. Indeed, other work has found positive effects of including negative information on persuasion when negative information is included at the end but not the beginning of a message (Ein-Gar et al., 2012; Kamins & Marks, 1987; see Tenney et al., 2019, for a discussion of the role of timing in shaping the effects of expressed uncertainty). Investigating the temporal dynamics of acts of receptiveness would be worthwhile.

Status and Sociocultural Factors

A key aspect of our framework is that acts of receptiveness are more conducive to persuasion when the source is viewed as high rather than low in status. Prior research has shown that people sometimes rely on sociocultural factors—such as gender, race, and ethnicity—as indicators of social status. For example, women and people of color are often stereotypically viewed as having lower status than their male and white counterparts (e.g., Dupree et al., 2021; Eagly & Wood, 1982). Would sociocultural aspects of the source (e.g., gender or race) influence the effectiveness of acts of receptiveness? Like persuasion research more broadly, studies in this area have paid little to no attention to this issue. As one exception, Gonzales (1992) examined gender and found that acknowledging mistakes enhanced compliance when the source was male, but not when the source was female. Moreover, when other studies on acts of receptiveness offered a clue as to the source's gender, in most cases the source was likely to be perceived as male (e.g., a stereotypically male name). Thus, it could be that acts of receptiveness offer greater benefits to sources stereotypically viewed as having high status (such as white men) but have reduced value or even backfire when used by sources stereotypically viewed as having low status (e.g., women or people of color). A systematic study of how sociocultural factors moderate the effects of acts of receptiveness (and persuasion variables more generally) would be immensely valuable.

Summary of New Directions

As a summary of our framework and several promising new paths for research in this area, see Figure 2. This figure expands on Figure 1 to depict both the elements of our framework for which we identified empirical evidence in the literature and new elements that fit with our framework but have yet to be investigated empirically in the current context. Previously documented elements are presented as boxes and arrows with solid lines. Figure 2 also introduces additional factors—new moderators, mediators, and novel acts of receptiveness—that we have put forth as conjectures and promising directions for future research. These factors are presented as boxes and arrows with dashed lines.

Impression Formation and Management

Our review focuses on the role of acts of receptiveness in persuasion, but acts of receptiveness likely have implications for other phenomena as well—for example, impression formation and management. How do acts of receptiveness feed people's impressions? Past research suggests that they cast a favorable light, but there is some variance as to which dimensions are most likely to be affected. For example, most acts of receptiveness have been shown to affect perceived warmth, but acknowledging mistakes appears to affect perceived competence as well. Future research is needed to assess how acts of receptiveness influence fundamental dimensions of person perception (e.g., warmth versus competence) and map out which specific traits (e.g., trustworthiness, likeability) are most likely to be affected in a given context. Do people strategically use acts of receptiveness to foster favorable impressions? Our data suggest that people might be unaware of the persuasive benefits of acts of receptiveness, but perhaps they recognize that acts of receptiveness can help them achieve other goals, such as seeming likable or approachable. Exploring lay theories of the tradeoffs associated with these actions, and how these tradeoffs affect people's decisions to use them, would be worthwhile.

Finally, while our review has focused on the upside of acts of receptiveness, it is worth asking whether their opposite (acts of closed-mindedness) might have benefits as well. For example, perhaps being receptive to the views of an outgroup can make one seem weak-minded or wishy-washy to ingroup members. In some cases, displaying *resistance* to ideas espoused by outgroup members might boost a person's

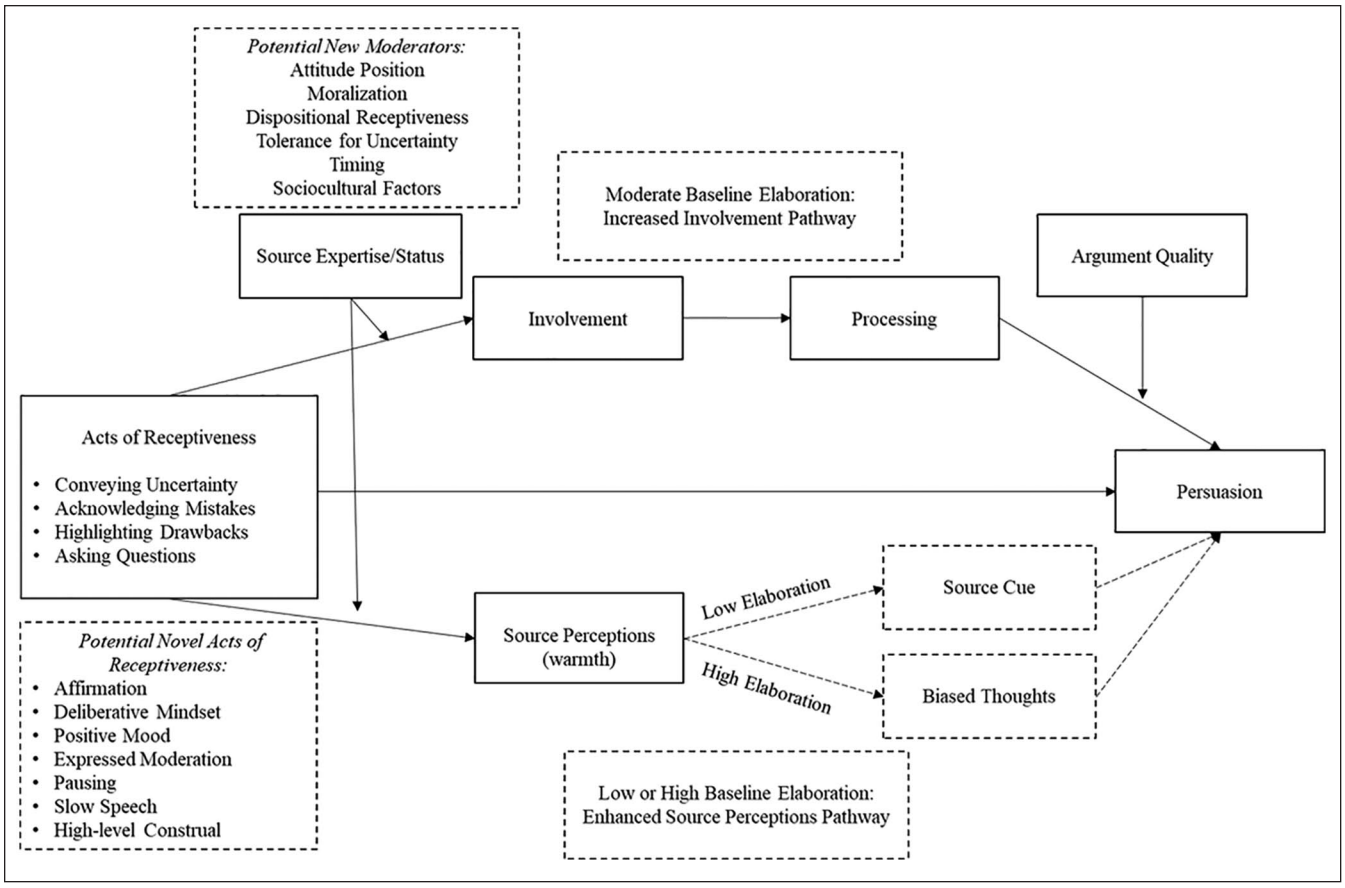

Figure 2. Detailed conceptual framework for the persuasive benefits of acts of receptiveness.
Note. Solid lines indicate results that have been directly observed in past research. Dashed lines represent (untested) conjectures and highlight directions for future research.

standing within their ingroup. In political domains, for instance, openness to changing one's mind can be associated with interpersonal penalties and fewer votes (Tomz & Van Houweling, in press). Outlining the contexts in which unreceptiveness yields positive outcomes is an important undertaking for ongoing research in this area.

Conclusion

This review documents a broad array of potentially counterintuitive persuasive actions and proposes a framework for viewing them through a common lens of acts of receptiveness. It appears that regardless of the specific action in question, acts of receptiveness can produce similar persuasive consequences and operate under similar conditions and through similar mechanisms. In merging insights from prior research on seemingly unrelated persuasion phenomena, our framework is both explanatory and generative. Indeed, our review organizes diverse persuasion findings under a common theoretical umbrella, and raises new questions and directions for future research. We hope that other researchers will be sparked to further enrich our understanding of the construct of acts of receptiveness, and further delineate the conditions and mechanisms that guide their effects.

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Notes

1. Aronson et al. (1963) did not detail the specific items included in their "attractiveness" measure.

2. The manipulation in this experiment involved more than asking a question, namely a preamble that expressed interest in the other person's views ("But I was interested in what you're saying."). Further research is needed to verify whether increased receptiveness was driven by the question, the preamble, or both.
3. Readers might wonder about the lack of a positive effect of rhetorical questions on persuasion under high involvement / strong argument conditions in Petty et al. (1981). Petty et al. (1981) used clearly weak or clearly strong arguments, so the ambiguous quality condition required for the biased thoughts mechanism was not in place. It could be that rhetorical questions played a different role under high elaboration in that study—for instance, reducing thought confidence, which attenuated the argument quality effect under high involvement (Petty et al., 2002). Indeed, Petty et al. (1981) inserted rhetorical questions at the end of arguments, and post-argument timing has been shown to be a key moderator of thought confidence effects in persuasion (e.g., Tormala et al., 2007).

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