The Impact of Late-Night Comedy on Citizens' Political Knowledge in a Hybrid Media Environment: Distraction or Facilitator?

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Abstract

It has been established that late-night comedy audience have specific patterns of media consumption involving exposure to both satirical and traditional news coverage. However, evidence of interaction effects of the exposure to late-night comedy and hard news is very limited. Even though political communication scholars embrace the framework of a hybrid political media environment assuming that individuals engage multiple news sources, still very little is said about the influence that late-night comedy might have on the information acquisition from traditional coverage. In this thesis, I explore the gaps in the research on political satire and access the questions whether exposure of an individual to the different types of political coverage may have consequences for his or her ability to learn from it. I pose my research questions and hypotheses based on previous findings from both late-night comedy and psychology of humor research. I suggest that watching a late-night comedy segment might have a positive as well as negative impact on the learning from traditional coverage depending on the circumstances of the exposure. The experiment was conducted on a sample of U.S. adults to reveal differences in factual information acquisition between individuals exposed to several sequences of news items including or excluding The Daily Show segment. Data analyses revealed no significant hypothesized differences between treatments, but individuals in the experimental conditions involving exposure to a late-night comedy segment scored significantly better on all knowledge items than participants in the control group and comparably with participants exposed to a news clip. Moreover, patterns in data consistent with Attention hypothesis were observed. This research provides a foundation for a further research on effects that late-night comedy might have on the information acquisition from traditional coverage.

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Introduction

Modern political informational environment is extremely diverse. At times, there is no more strict division between hard and soft news. Moreover, not only the boundaries between genres and types of coverage have become blurred, but the patterns of news consumption have changed as well. Even though Americans mostly still get information via traditional platforms like newspapers and TV, the audience, especially youngsters, is shifting to the digital mode of consumption (Kohut et al., 2012). Nowadays it is important for scholars to study not only the standalone effects of media on democratic citizenship, but also go beyond them by accessing the media's interplay in a "hybrid political media environment' (Holbert and Young, 2013). Even though in the latter case political communication research will rather focus on specific questions about particular interactions than on generalizations of effects, such approach might shed light on associations that simply cannot be revealed any other way. Research on media interaction is especially important in the case of late-night comedy coverage that is characterized by intertextuality and assumes that its audience is exposed to other sources of information as well. Scholarly interest in late-night comedy was boosted about ten years ago when a Pew Research Center report revealed that nearly a half of the young population in the United States watch these shows at least occasionally (Pew Research Center, 2004). However, before 2015 the findings regarding late-night comedy impact on political knowledge were mixed. Moreover, only a few studies were devoted to the questions how late-night comedy might affect information acquisition from the traditional coverage. Meanwhile, Jon Stewart himself stated that it is a very bold assumption to think that his show might be meaningful for anyone lacking preexisting knowledge: "If [kids] came to our show without knowledge, it wouldn't make any sense to them" (Jon Stewart, C-Span Newhouse School Forum, 2004).

Debate between Marcus Prior (2003) and Matthew A. Baum (2002a; 2002b; 2003) regarding the consequences of exposure to soft *versus* hard news for democratic citizenship became a theoretical framework for research on entertaining coverage for years¹. Holbert and Young (2013) refer to this frameworks as "competitive". Scholarly interest in political entertainment media in general, and in late-night comedy in particular, grew significantly in the last decade (see Baumgartner and Morris, 2008) and mostly resulted in studies that simply compare the effects of the exposure to different types of coverage. Entertaining programming was scrutinized for the range of phenomena indicative of traditional coverage: learning (e.g. Baum, 2003a), attitudes formation (e.g. Holbert et al., 2003), political choices (e.g. Cao and Brewer, 2008), selective exposure (Stroud and Muddiman, 2013), etc.

However, mostly because of the advent of the Internet, patterns of media consumption have become more and more fluid. It seems that today such a "competitive framework" is not always applicable to the political communication research. An approach to the process of news consumption as both complex and fragmented seems to be more fruitful, since the modern media environment is characterized by blurring of the boundaries between diverse outlets, between different ways of communication (TV, newspapers, Internet), and between hard news and entertainment (Sotirovic and McLeod, 2004). Even though there is still no established definition for the phenomenon, this idea of "fragmented media environment" is striking roots in political communication research. For instance, Delli Carpini and Williams (2001) noticed that the division between entertainment and views is becoming obsolete. Gray (2006) proposed to use the

¹ You can see this trend even in the titles of the papers: e.g. "Soft News and Political Knowledge: Evidence of Absence or Absence of Evidence? " by Baum (2003); "Late-Night Learning: Do Entertainment Programs Increase Political Campaign Knowledge for Young Viewers?" by Hollander (2005); "Soft News With Hard Consequences? Introducing a Nuanced Measure of Soft Versus Hard News Exposure and Its Relationship With Political Cynicism" by Boukes and Boomgaarden (2014), etc.

concept of "intertextuality" as the main characteristic of modern patterns of media consumption. Holbert and Benoit (2009) see in the studies of the "complementary dynamics" of the different media the only way to find the accurate understanding how citizens perceive political reality. Finally, Holbert and Young (2013) summarize all these ideas via the concept of a "hybrid political media environment".

The idea of complementary dimensions of traditional and entertaining coverage is especially relevant for the research on late-night comedy². Scholars found that people who consume political satire are the people who consume hard news as well (see Young and Tisnger, 2006; Hmielowski et al., 2011). Indeed, it seems that the audience is more likely to consume late-night comedy alongside the news-oriented coverage (Holbert and Young, 2013). The content analysis showed that Jon Stewart and his fellows' jokes are more often based on issues than on candidate traits in comparison with other entertainment programs (Annenberg Public Policy Center, 2006). Baym (2007, p. 361) calls *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* "discursively integrated", i.e., they break down "divisions between news and entertainment, public affairs, and popular culture, affective consumption, and democratic discourse". Moreover, more detailed analysis of audiences show that a significant part of the late-night comedy audience is quite unique, since it tends to use these shows rather as a supplement to the other news sources than their substitute as assumed earlier (e.g. Young and Tisinger, 2006; Hollander, 2005).

² Here, I want to clarify, that when I refer to late-night comedy in the present work I refer to *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*, since it is established among communication scholars that so called "Comedy Central humor" (Baek and Wojcieszak, 2009) is a standalone kind of the entertainment programing and softnews, and it may function differently from the other late-night programs (Sotirovic and McLeod, 2004). Some scholars even state that Comedy Central political satire format is rather an *alternative journalism* than *fake news* (Baym, 2005). However, in some cases I refer to *The Daily Show* standalone effects, since there are a bulk of studies that were conducted on this particular show. Due to the fact that humor might be incongruent among different hosts (LaMarre et al., 2014) these findings should not be generalized to the other shows.

Even though studies of the late-night comedy impact on political knowledge, attitudes and behavior in isolation from other media are still performed (e.g. Young and Hoffman, 2012; Taniguchi, 2009; etc.), there is a positive shift to the approach assuming multidimensionality of coverage (e.g. Xenos and Backer, 2009; LaMarre and Walther, 2013; Moy et al., 2006; Brewer et al., 2013; etc.). However, the range of the possible interactions between different types (hard or soft), sources (particular outlets and TV shows), and media carriers (TV, newspaper, and, of course, Internet) of coverage is so wide that there is still room for new research questions to emerge. For instance, Xenos and Backer (2009) found the positive influence of exposure to *The Daily Show* segment on the information uptake from the subsequently encountered news clip. However, there is a question whether we are allowed to generalize this effect for any other circumstances of exposure. Will this effect persist in case of the subsequent exposure to textual hard coverage? What happens if we switch *The Daily Show* segment to another late-night comedy show? How durable is this positive influence?

Even though it is unlikely that we will ever be able to test all possible range of effects, it is reasonable to check some established patterns of uninsulated media consumption. According the to the Pew's News Consumption Report (Kohut et al., 2012) both TV and newspaper news consumers are shifting to digital versions of outlets. It is also the case of The Daily Show since every episode is now available online the day it is on the air.³. Thus, the pattern of subsequent exposure to some TV coverage and then to digital hard coverage eventually used in laboratory experiments and argued for being an artificial collision of different types of media consumption (e.g. Stroud and Muddiman, 2013; Xenos and Backer, 2009) seems to be more than natural nowadays. Noteworthy is that so far only few attempts have been made to address media

³And there is indeed some part of audience that switched to the online consumption of the show (Larris, 2005).

interactions via experimental setting in order to shed light on some cognitive mechanisms involved that might be responsible for a lesser or greater uptake of information in the circumstances of a hybrid media environment.

Thus, in my thesis I aim to contribute to the notion regarding late-night comedy effects on political knowledge in the multidimensional political media environment. To my best knowledge, so far there has been no test for hypotheses whether late-night comedy provides a distraction from the substantial hard news coverage or, otherwise, contributes to the information uptake depending on circumstance of exposure to the humorous segment. I ran an experiment to see whether exposure to one out of three treatments including and excluding *The Daily Show* segment differs in its effect on learning about these particular topics.

The present work is organized in the following way. In Chapter 1, I address the late-night comedy phenomenon and argue why it is essential and natural to check its effects on political knowledge not in isolation, but in the context of exposure to other media and types of coverage. In Chapter 2, I discuss insights from psychological research on humor's effect on information processing and acquisition. In Chapter 3, I formulate my hypotheses based on the theory discussed in the first two chapters and describe the experiment's design and sampling process. In Chapter 4, I describe characteristics of the obtained sample, the results of the statistical analyses and interpret the findings. In Conclusion part, I address limitations and implications of the present thesis.

Chapter 1. Late-Night Comedy and Learning about Politics

In the first part of this chapter, I explore the late-night comedy phenomenon and discuss the features of its content and audience. The second part is devoted to the research that has already been performed on the association between late-night comedy and knowledge about politics. There I explore gaps in the experimental research on late-night comedy and knowledge acquisition and formulate my research questions.

1.1. Features of Late-Night Comedy Content and Audience

Research on late-night comedy boomed in the early 2000s after scholars realized that there is something more to this format than mere entertainment. Keen scholarly interest in satirical political coverage has its origins in the steadily growing attention of U.S. young adults to this kind of soft news. In 2004, a Pew Research Center report revealed that 47.7% of Americans between the ages of 18 and 24 watched political satire coverage at least occasionally (Pew Research Center, 2004). Today we know that these preferences were not just a fling. According to the recent data, 22% of young adults in the United States considering satirical shows as trusted news sources (Pew Research Center, 2014). These numbers fostered a myth that late-night comedy is a successful example of bridging tuned out youngsters to the realm of politics. Before 2004 late-night comedy mostly had been perceived by scholars as just another instance of soft news that were not considered to be a source of knowledge about politics itself, but rather a "gateway" to traditional media. According to Baum's "gateway" idea (2002; 2002b) soft news just ease individuals into learning about obscure political matters from hard coverage. In the context of youth disconnection from politics, Baum's proposition seemed to be particularly important. Therefore, increased exposure to late-night comedy among this demographic group was perceived by scholars as a positive development that can shrink the knowledge gap between news junkies and uninformed youngsters (see Baum, 2005) and resulted in growth of studies specifically exploring political satire phenomenon.

Noteworthy is that in the beginning, scholars treated TV political satire like just another instance of an entertainment show and referred to it in the broad framework of soft news (e.g. Baum, 2002; 2003; Prior, 2003; Sotirovic and McLeod, 2004). However, this boomed scholarly interest in late-night comedy resulted in more specific studies that very soon revealed that shows' content rather resembles hard coverage than soft programming. Since the end of the 1990s the number of political jokes in late-night talk shows was consistently increasing (Parkin et al., 2003). At the same time standalone satirical political shows becoming more popular. Finally, in the 1999 focus of *The Daily Show*, a half-hour late-night talk program, shifted towards pure political content since Jon Stewart became a host. Between 2001 and 2005 the audience of the show doubled from 750 thousand to 1.3 million (Willow, 2005). In the early 2000s there were no attempts to perform a proper content analysis of *The Daily Show* since it still was questionable for researchers whether it is meaningful to study late-night comedy for actual political content (Larris, 2005). However, soon researchers discovered that not only numbers of the show's audience were growing, but also the share of individuals who report late-night comedy as the main source of news and claim to derive some knowledge about the realm of politics from it. Finally, in 2004 Annenberg's scholars conducted several polls and found that *The Daily Show* viewers scored in political knowledge test higher than both audiences of Letterman and Leno and individuals who did not encounter any late-night comedy coverage in previous weeks (Annenberg Public Policy Center, 2006; Young, 2004b).

Scholars more or less agreed that late-night comedy positively differs in terms of providing information about politics from other entertainment programs, including late-night talk shows like Letterman and Leno (e.g. Brewer et al., 2013; Hollander, 2005; Cao, 2008). Latenight comedy researchers started to look whether it is something more here about the influence on the political knowledge that merely a Baum's "gateway" effect. Back then, in general, it was assumed that soft news programs contain rather superficial information about politics (Prior, 2003). There were some cases when entertaining shows were found to provide considerable coverage of the issues (e.g. coverage of U.S. foreign policy crises in the 1990s, Baum, 2003b), but these findings did not change the overall attitude. However, when content analysis of latenight comedy shows was conducted and it was revealed that shows differ from the other instances of the entertainment programming. Late-night comedy shows seem to be different from the rest of soft news coverage in terms of both quality and quantity of provided political information.

For instance, *The Daily Show* coverage of the presidential campaign events in 2004 was found to be competitive with traditional network news in terms of the amount of the information provided (Fox et al., 2007). Another analysis shows that *The Daily Show* delivers substantial coverage on public and political issues even in non-election years (Brewer and Marquardt, 2007). The Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism report indicates that 47% of overall *The Daily Show* content are about national or international politics (Rosenstiel and Mitchell, 2008). Baumgartner and Morris (2008) report that viewers found *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* to be more influential than other late-night talk shows. Faina (2012) argues that both Stewart and Colbert performed rather as public journalists than comedians. Baym (2005, p. 273) even calls *The Daily Show* "a version of news that entertains".

Nevertheless, these facts revealing the benefits of engagement with late-night comedy should not encourage an overoptimistic belief about youth re-connection to the realms of politics. Many researchers have scrutinized self-reported numbers from the Pew Research Center (2002, 2004). Even Jon Stewart, the host of *The Daily Show*, is not convinced: "I still think that's a fallacy that they get most of their news from us" (McFarland, 2004, p.14). Scholars acknowledged that there is a high probability that The Daily Show viewers are in general more informed than Leno's or Letterman's since the format of the pure political satire demands some preexisting knowledge to be able to "encrypt" the message. Thus, for instance, Pew's report (2004) states that after accounting for a person's education, political interest, and use of other media sources, there is a limited evidence that late-night comedy viewers who claim they are learning from these shows are actually more aware of issues and campaign events than nonviewers. Annenberg's Center scholars also concluded that there is no need of reinforcement of the myth that the late-night comedy tunes on politically unaware youth group (Annenberg Policy Center, 2006). Annenberg's figures show that The Daily Show audience is rather the most politically informed group in their age. Young and Tisinger (2006) found that late-night comedy viewers consume at least the same amount of information from traditional sources (in particular via online news outlets and talk radio). These findings contradict the belief that ones who are tuning into entertainment programs are likely to be apolitical citizens (Cao, 2008). Moreover, if the audience of late-night comedy does not seem to be disconnected from the traditional news, then it is rather questionable that shows contribute to the widening of the knowledge gap between uninformed citizens and news junkies as some researchers assume (e.g. Prior, 2007).

Even though there is still a belief that late-night comedy in general and *The Daily Show* in particular⁴ might have a standalone effect on the learning processes for some individuals since it is dealing with campaign events and issues, for the present study it is also important that at least some share of late-night comedy audience engages the interplay of the exposures to the different types of coverage. Since there are some individuals that encounter both traditional and entertainment coverage on the regular basis, it is reasonable to test if there is an effect of latenight comedy on learning outcomes emerged from the other sources.

Even though these insights regarding the unique content and audience of late-night comedy resulted in the emergence of questions about what these sophisticated individuals deriving from the shows as well as how their information processing ability is affected, scholars continued to test isolated effects of political satire on individuals' traits. Speaking of questions about political information acquisition, since then much ink has been spilled in attempts to establish whether late-night comedy contributes to political knowledge itself. However, most studies were conducted with survey (e.g. Baumgartner and Morris, 2006; Baum, 2005; Feldman and Young, 2008; Hollander, 2005) and very little was said about the interactions of late-night comedy with other media and specifics of learning in a hybrid political media environment. Moreover, only a few attempts were made to address these questions via experimental setting to reveal cognitive mechanisms that might be responsible for facilitating or decreasing of learning ability.

The next sections shed light on whether there is evidence for this interaction effects between exposure to late-night comedy and learning from traditional coverage.

⁴ Since majority of the studies devoted to the late-night comedy phenomenon accessing specifically *The Daily Show* impact.

1.2. Late-Night Comedy and Learning about Politics

In this section, I explore what have been studied up to date regarding late-night comedy's influence on political knowledge. The first section of this subchapter is devoted to the discussion of general provisions and non-causality studies conducted with survey data. In the second section, I discuss insights from experimental studies and address existing gaps in research.

1.2.1. Isolated Effects and Survey-based Research

Late-night comedy shows were examined in the search for evidence for a wide range of effects typical of hard news: on perceptions (e.g. Holbert et al., 2007), attitudes (e.g. Balmas, 2014), selective exposure (e.g. Stroud and Muddiman, 2013), learning effects (e.g. Baumgartner and Morris, 2006), attentiveness (e.g. Xenos and Baker, 2009), opinion-formation (LaMarre and Walther, 2013), etc. As discussed in the previous sections, in the beginning, late-night comedy was studied as an instance of soft news and for a long time was a subject of generalizations from other studies. Noteworthy is that regardless of the specific research question the majority of soft news studies had engaged one way or another in the debate between Mathew A. Baum (2002a; 2002b; 2003; 2005) and Markus Prior (2003) regarding soft news contribution to political knowledge. While Prior criticizes Baum's point that soft news may consistently contribute to factual political knowledge, Baum answers that actually it does not matter how much viewers or readers learn from soft news coverage, the only important thing is that they learn at least something. However, as mentioned in the Introduction, the "competitive framework" that emerged from this debate assumes comparison of the effects of soft and hard coverage on different variables associated with knowledge, elaboration, and behavior.

This implication of the "competitive framework" resulted in studies of isolated effects of late-night comedy on political knowledge. Moreover, even though there were some positive

findings regarding the influence of late-night comedy and soft news in general on learning about politics, the results across different studies are inconsistent and sometimes even controversial. For instance, Davis and Owen (1998) found that exposure to political talk shows is positively associated with public affairs knowledge. Moy et al. (2006) discovered some interaction effects between learning political candidates' standings and issues positions and watching of late-night comedy. Hollander (2005) found that even though exposure to the political satire is not associated with the information recall, it is strongly related to recognition of campaign information. However, these studies as many others, were performed with survey and then telling us very little about causal mechanisms of these effects. On the other hand, these findings are consistent with Baum's (2002; 2002b; 2003) argument that soft news and late-night comedy are able to provide at least some knowledge about politics. Perhaps, it was the reason why scholars did not move to the lab to conduct experiments for so long, since the Gateway Hypothesis and the "competitive" approach were more or less convenient framework for late-night comedy studies, and survey materials were suitable data to look there for evidence.

Meanwhile, researchers from Prior's "camp" had been finding negative associations between the exposure to soft news and political knowledge. Prior himself (2003, 2005) consistently claimed that soft news has no influence on the political knowledge. Bennet and Entman (2001) did not find evidence of an association between political knowledge and entertainment media controlling for other explanatory variables. Cao (2008) state that there is no direct link between late-night comedy watching and political knowledge. Some findings support the point of view that knowledge provided by soft news (including satire shows and online outlets like *Onion*) is much more superficial than actual factual knowledge. Nabi et al. (2007) pose that individuals tend to discount entertainment-based messages as less relevant in

comparison with hard coverage. Another Cao's (2010) study revealed the existence of negative interaction effects between watching *The Daily Show* and political attentiveness and, in particular, attentiveness to the presidential race 2004 news and to the Afghanistan war. Moreover, he claims that in a long run it results in a decrease in substantial knowledge among *The Daily Show* audience. Niven et al. (2003) stated that political comedy has some positive impact on political knowledge, but serious issues are rather trivialized there. Young (2004b) claimed that viewers with lower levels of political knowledge are more likely to be influenced by late-night comedy, but rather very superficial knowledge would increase. Baek and Wojcieszak (2009) claim that late-night comedy may increase knowledge only of relatively easy issues.

However, according to Baum's provision such kind of superficial knowledge seems to be a virtue of comedy coverage rather than a shortcoming. It allows comedy to reduce both opportunity cost of learning while providing context of entertainment (or laughter, in particular) as well as transaction cost associated with engaging with relevant information in other media, that is then processing more easily thanks to the prior exposure to comedy (Baum, 2003a). Thus, it seems while satire content does not provide substantial political knowledge by itself, it still remains a mediator ("gateway") between less engaged individuals and hard news coverage. This claim is supported by Young and Tisinger's (2006) who found that the audience perceives Jon Stewart's show as a supplement and news enhancer rather than a substitution for traditional hard news. In their turn, Kim and Vishak (2008) point out that comedy coverage itself is not very effective in transmission of political information, while it has an effect on learning in the context of more complex media environment.

However, speaking of controversial findings, one should still remember that some of these studies merely listed late-night comedy as an instance of the soft news. Nevertheless,

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according to the discussion in the previous subchapter, late-night comedy should be distinguished from the rest of the soft news. Even Prior (2005) voiced a reservation that his findings should not be generalized to any situation involving exposure to the soft coverage since the content of the entertainment media is quite inconsistent among different programs.

Thus, it seems that even if we assume that late-night comedy itself might have some equivocal or even negative effect on political knowledge⁵, there is still a room for the Baum's "gateway" theory. Overall, it is legitimate to shift the focus from the Prior's question whether content of soft coverage contributes to political knowledge to how the soft news in general and the late-night comedy, in particular, contribute to learning from traditional news outlets.

1.2.3. Media Interaction Effects and Insights from Experiments

Even though prior studies in general support the idea that the use of the different media resulted in different intensity of learning about politics (e.g. Pfau et al., 2001), only few studies attempted to access underlying learning mechanisms behind engagement with political satire shows. In the current section, I discuss these studies, which regardless of its limitations, were able to expand horizons of the notion of political satire effects on learning and its interactions with traditional coverage.

As outlined in the previous section, the majority of studies devoted to the late-night comedy effects on political knowledge were conducted via survey data (e.g. Baum, 2002a; 2002b; 2003a; 2005; Feldman and Young, 2008). However, it does not mean that political satire scholars entirely dismissed experimental approach. Meanwhile, effects of late-night comedy phenomenon not directly linked to the knowledge were actively researched in a laboratory

⁵ Especially, if we are considering provision of cues and heuristics as negative in comparison with actual learning about politics.

setting. For instance, effects of satire on attitudes were accessed mainly via using experimental methods (e.g., Holbert et al., 2007; Baumgartner and Morris, 2006). Even though at first sight these findings are not related to the research on information acquisition, insights from those studies might enhance our understanding of the interplay between entertaining and traditional political coverage. Some studies demonstrate that long-term exposure to late-night comedy might lead to the discounting of information in traditional coverage. Thus, Baumgartner and Morris' (2006) experiment towards political efficacy demonstrated capacity of the exposure to the late-night comedy to reduce the trust in the electoral process and the media in general. Earlier Morris and Baumgartner (2006) found the link between watching *The Daily Show* and cynicism towards traditional hard coverage. It is interesting that other instances of the late-night humor (like e.g. Letterman's talk show) were found to have a negative association with cynicism. LaMarre et al. (2009) found that recall of the late-night satirical content without recalling the fact that it was a joke might result in a misperception of the political issues.

However, some other studies demonstrate the positive influence of the exposure to latenight comedy on hard news processing. For instance, Brewer et al. (2013) found that exposure to *The Colbert Report* resulted in positive shifts in opinion about Super PAC phenomena, increased political trust and knowledge about the issue. It is hard to say what exactly could affect findings so dramatically: use of *The Colbert Report* instead of *The Daily Show* as a stimulus, particular issue that was just introduced to the public and therefore there was no stable opinion about it, or experiment validity. However, we should not be too skeptical for Brewer et al. findings since the framework of a hybrid political media environment assumes that there is a range of possible interactions between different types of coverage. Therefore, our goal as scholars to find some

micro patterns and dependencies that can be generalized at least for a particular type of coverage or for a subset of political issues.

Overall, even though listed findings tell us something about long-term consequences of the exposure to political satire for learning about politics, the mentioned studies support the notion that there is indeed an effect of late-night comedy watching on the perception of information in hard coverage. Nevertheless, we should neither dismiss nor generalize these findings for "here and now" exposure to the mixed coverage, but rather account for the possibility of the existence of both effects on the level of hypothesis formation. Based on that assumption I formulate my first research question:

RQ1: Do the circumstances of exposure have an impact on whether late-night comedy has a positive or negative effect on the subsequently encountered information acquisition?

Even though scholars extensively accessed long term consequences of durable exposure to political satire, little is known about patterns of learning processes associated with late-night comedy in the circumstances of immediate exposure. It is still unknown whether late-night comedy audiences have distinguished patterns of political message processing. However, it could be the case since discussion in the previous section shows that individuals engaging late-night comedy on the regular basis are likely to have specific patterns of news consumption. So far, only a few experiments addressing the questions of late-night comedy's influence on information acquisition have been conducted. Moreover, only one of them (Xenos and Becker's study) is assuming exposure of the same individuals to the different kinds of coverage.

The first exemption from the general trend of the survey data-driven research was Kim and Vishak's (2008) study where they used 20-minutes excerpts from hard coverage and *The Daily Show* that focused on the Supreme Court Nominations. They checked for the difference

between patterns of political information acquisition (online- vs. memory based information processing) triggered by the entertainment and hard coverage. They found that exposure to *The Daily Show* might be accounted for less effective learning. Their study was among the first that revealed that late-night comedy facilitates online-based information processing while traditional news outlets use results in memory-based processing. Thus, extensive exposure to late-night comedy might result in stable attitudes, but have a modest effect on the factual knowledge and it definitely does not promote the same amount of knowledge as the hard news coverage of the same duration containing the resembling information. The limitations of their experiment are that they found this association for the independent use of different kinds of media but did not account for the interaction between these media ubiquitous for the late-night comedy audience. Thus, Kim and Vishak's insights shed light on the isolated learning effect of the political satire, but not accounting for learning in the hybrid political media environment. Even though these findings might be generalizable for the share of late-night comedy audience that tuned out from the traditional coverage, there is still a need for research on interaction effects.

An experiment conducted later by Young and Hoffman (2012) supports the findings of Kim and Vishak. Scholars try to preserve the ecological validity of the study as much as possible and exposed participants in the course of the week to the real-world content of *The Daily Show* and *CNN Student News*. Young and Hoffman found that subjects who watched *The Daily Show* demonstrated not only a higher level of knowledge on the issues than the ones in the control group, but the amount of acquired information was comparable to the ones in the news experimental condition. However, researchers have concerns about whether it is possible to claim that different types of coverage can provide comparable knowledge gains for all political topics, from relatively easy to sophisticated ones.

Regardless of the limitations of the outlined studies, both Young and Hoffman's and Kim and Vishak's findings show that individuals exposed to satirical coverage tend actually to learn "at least something" in comparison with control group. However, since it seems to be more natural for the late-night comedy audience to engage political satire as well as traditional coverage, it is reasonable to test whether this knowledge gaining effects will persist in the case of mixed media exposure. Thus, I pose the following question:

RQ2: Does late-night comedy have an isolated effect on learning about politics in a hybrid media environment?

Another study of late-night comedy's influence on political knowledge was performed by Xenos and Becker's in 2009. This research was the first lab experiment designed to reveal comedy's effects on knowledge, learning and levels of attentiveness in the setting of the hybrid media environment. Their theory was built on the Baum's idea that learning about political issues through exposure to satirical coverage is a two-step process. First, exposure to the issue performed in a satirical way is expected to affect positively attentiveness to the issue in a way to initiate subsequent consumption of the relevant information in external sources. Second, increased attentiveness to the issue is expected to result in a greater level of information absorption in those sources. Xenos and Becker ran two experiments. In the first one, treatments differ by the initial exposure either to a hard news clip or a late-nigh comedy clip after which participants were offered to explore covered issue during unobtrusively monitored web-session. In a second experiment, participants were exposed to the two news stories from hard news broadcast receiving in advance either news or late-night comedy clip as stimuli. Findings from these two studies support the notion that political satire positively affect attentiveness to hard news content, but the effect is more prominent for viewers who generally are less interested in

politics. The second study's findings specifically demonstrate that less politically interested consumers of political satire tend to process information that they are later encountering in traditional news media more easily. Their overall findings support a "gateway" idea. However, it is still not clear if political satire can increase attentiveness to political coverage in general or just to the information relevant to the particular segment. Xenos and Becker hypothesized that there might be the priming effect of late-night comedy that facilitates the acquisition of the relevant hard news coverage. However, their experiment did not show the ultimate evidence for this provision. In other words, it is still a question whether this positive effect on interest in news about politics goes beyond the specific topics raised in the comedy coverage. The results of Xenos and Becker's study raise a question what cognitive mechanisms are responsible for converting attentiveness into knowledge and whether only previously primed issue would be affected.

Another attempt to expose individuals to the different types of coverage of the same issue was performed by LaMarre and Walther (2013). Even though they tested effects on the elaboration in their study and not a direct impact on the political knowledge, their findings are still relevant. They discovered that individuals in the "high ability" state of mind resulted from the prior exposure to a hard coverage piece who subsequently watched *The Daily Show* segment devoted to the same issue tended to process the segment more carefully in comparison with individuals who were not primed. This idea of "high ability" state of mind lets me assume that previously encountered relevant coverage might facilitate not only an elaboration of the subsequently encountered piece but learning processes in general. These findings go in accordance with the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986) assuming that prior exposure to the relevant message is expected to activate central processing that will result

in allocation of more cognitive resources on processing of the subsequently encountered message. This model might seem to resemble the patterns of news consumption assumed by Baum for a "gateway" effect, but other cognitive mechanisms seem to be responsible for them. Even though LaMarre and Walther use another explanation for increasing attentiveness to the issue and test the different direction of exposure than Xenos and Becker (hard coverage -> late night comedy), but in both cases exposure to the relevant coverage is expected to result in a greater elaboration and as consequence in a greater information uptake from the subsequently encountered piece. Thus, we can be claim that there is might be a pattern while mechanisms responsible for it should be explored further. Therefore, my third question is about learning facilitation effect, in general, without specifying the reason for it:

RQ3: Does late-night comedy facilitate learning from the subsequently encountered hard news covering the same issue?

Noteworthy is that Xenos and Becker's conclusions on the positive effect of late-night comedy on attentiveness go in accordance with side-findings of the other experiments. Thus, Rottinghaus et al. (2008) found in the focus group setting that exposure to *The Daily Show* segments resulted in increased participants' interest to other forms of news. Feldman and Young (2008) conducted a study that showed that late-night comedy viewers are likely to search traditional news for additional information.

Overall, Kim and Vishak's (2008) and Xenos and Becker's (2009) experiments are still being the most prominent works regarding the patterns of the information consumption indicative for the late-night comedy viewers. Moreover, Xenos and Becker's study is the only one that is trying to access effects of the political satire on knowledge in a multidimensional media environment. On the other hand, Xenos and Becker provide a very modest discussion

regarding the psychological side of humor processing, rather relying on Baum's "gateway" explanation. Therefore, to formulate hypotheses that might predict the direction of the late-night comedy effects on knowledge acquisition I need to turn to the insights from research on the psychology of humor, which findings are extremely relevant to the present study.

Chapter 2. Humor and Learning: Evidence from Psychology

It is quite surprising that so far in studies of late-night comedy so little has been said about humor processing per se. The rather controversial findings regarding the effects of latenight comedy on political knowledge discussed in the previous chapter indicate that there is something special about patterns of information acquisition involving exposure to late-night comedy. Therefore, it might be reasonable to look for the roots of that controversy in psychology research on humor.

In the late 1990s, experimental psychology research finally summarized the effects of humor on the memory. In his 1994 paper, Schmidt complained about the shortage of theoretical supply for the subject in previous decades. Moreover, until then very few experimental studies had been conducted in a way to reach any firm conclusion regarding the effects of humor on the information acquisition. In general, it was established that humor seems to have positive influence of attention, be able to increase probability of source-liking, has some effect on comprehension, but very weak or no effect on persuasion (Weinberger and Gulas, 1992). In the context of my research, I am interested in the findings from research on humor that document either increasing attentiveness to surrounding information or distraction from the original message, and provide evidence for either priming or 'high elaboration ability effect'. I discuss these findings separately in the following short sections.

2.1. Humor and Message Processing

As was said above, experimental studies of late-night comedy demonstrate that individuals seem to be able to derive some knowledge about politics from such kind of coverage as *The Daily Show* (e.g. Kim and Vishak, 2008; Young and Hoffman, 2012). That somehow evidences that satire incorporated in the coverage does not lead late-night comedy watchers fully astray from the political message.

Indeed, experiments conducted by Schmidt (1991, 1994) show that humor does not reduce ability for elaboration as it was generally assumed, but, on the opposite, increases it, that in turn results in better message recall. Insights from another research (Schmidt and Saari, 2007) on the processing of emotional message showed an association between memory and emotional words. However, the fact that Schmidt obtained his results in the lab and used random humorous material unrelated to late-night comedy makes it rather impossible to translate simply his findings to communication studies. Nevertheless, his insights might be useful for the future research on the late-night comedy and political knowledge.

However, effects of humor on message processing is still debatable. Weinberger and Gulas (1992) in contrast to Schmidt's findings claim that humor is associated with superficial, peripheral, processing. That might result in drawing attention away from the substantial message. Moreover, they assume that humor integrated with the serious message might compromise individual's ability to process messages in a proper way. However, there is no empirical evidence for these effects. Duncan and Nelson (1985) even found quite the opposite – some evidence that humor might result in less distraction.

So far, only a few communication studies turned for insights from psychology in order to investigate late-night comedy effects on patterns of message processing. However, in general, it was assumed that humor has rather negative consequences on the message processing. For instance, Nabi et al. (2007) found evidence for the Discounting Hypothesis that assumes that late-night comedy audience is discounting message simply because it is humorous and, as a

consequence, does not scrutinize it. Even though Nabi's et al. study was not conducted on the late-night comedy material (scholars used scripts by the stand-up comic Chris Rock), it affected train of thought of late-night comedy researches. Young (2008) arguing Nabi and his colleagues' hypothesis conducted an experiment to find an alternative explanation for low levels of argument scrutiny. She based her research on the insights of Schmidt's work (1991, 1994) and investigated whether humor component incorporated into message increases cognitive load and decreases cognitive resources available for its comprehension that results in more superficial argument scrutiny, but in greater level of attentiveness and recall. This Resource Allocation Hypothesis was also supported by the findings. In the study described in the previous chapter, LaMarre and Walther (2013) discovered that political humor increases one's elaboration on the issue, but does not result in increasing thinking about the substantial component of the message. These finding support Young's (2008) argument rather than Nabi's (2007).

LaMarre et al. (2014) made a concluding point on the debate between Nabi et al. (2007) and Young (2008). They claim that the Message Discounting and the Resource Allocation hypotheses are actually not controversial, they simply should not be applied to the same type of humorous messages. LaMarre et al. distinguished Horatian satire (e.g. *The Daily Show*) that simply "offers humorous commentary of socio-political ills" (LaMarre et al., 2014, p. 405) and Juvenalian satire (e.g. *The Colbert Report*) that is "more difficult to interpret, requiring audiences to close a broader gap between that the satirist say and what he/she means" (LaMarre et al., 2014, p. 405). Results of two experiments showed that in case of the former individuals seem to discount a message since they easily recognize a humorous setting, while in the latter case they are allocating resources to the complex satire comprehension and simply cannot fully elaborate

on the substantial message. However, in both instances, individuals still derived some information from the encountered coverage.

For my study, since I use *The Daily Show* segment as stimuli it is important that in case of exposure to Horatian satire the agency for message processing is left to individuals. It means that the likelihood of information acquired from *The Daily Show* is higher than from more sophisticated satirical shows, especially for motivated individuals. Moreover, Summerfelt et al. (2010) found in their study on jokes acquisition and comprehension that important information is *integrated* with joke will be remembered as well since memory will reproduce all relevant information.

Even though political communication scholars scrutinized late-night comedy for the decrease in elaboration, overall findings regarding the interaction between humor and message processing are rather positive in the context of my research question (RQ3). Even though it is assumed that humor is expected to reduce levels of elaboration and engagement with the substantial content it seems that exposure to humorous message still leads to learning.

2.2. Humor and Attention for Surrounding Information

Findings regarding interactions of humorous message and surrounding information are controversial. Research on the psychology of humor demonstrates evidence for the existence of both increasing and decreasing attention effects. However, the direction of the effect depends on the sequence of encountered messages. Markiewicz (1974) states that is important for scholars to go beyond the research of humorous messages per se and study the effects of humor external to the message. He performed several studies on relevant and irrelevant contiguous humor. Even though his findings are irrelevant to the present work, noteworthy is that he proposed the direction of research on "external" humor.

Insights from advertising research demonstrate that humor reduces learning and persuasion through distraction (Strenthal and Craig, 1973). In general, they argue that jokes that usually used at the end of the advertisement message distract the attention of the product name. More recent findings support the idea that entertainment message indeed may absorb individual's attention and jeopardize his or her cognitive efforts (e.g. Slater and Rouner, 2002). Another more recent research by Strick et al. (2010) also goes in accordance with these findings. They found that since the encrypting humorous message enhances attention to the humorous piece, attention for context information decreases. They tested these effects by exposing individuals to messages encountered in close temporal proximity. Some findings made by Schmidt (1994) are also consistent with this distraction paradigm. He established that in accordance with the theory of incongruity, humorous messages being listed together with non-humorous ones trigger increased attention at the expense of the latter. In general, findings demonstrate humor's ability to drive attention away from the substantial issue rather than prime it. Overall, these findings are particularly important for my questions on whether political satire messages might trigger a decrease in learning about politics due to imposing a distraction (RQ1, RQ3). I believe that these effects may take place in a hybrid political media environment where news consumers encounter both soft and hard coverage.

Nevertheless, there are studies that revealed the existence of positive effects of humor on information acquisition, even though scholars still assume that humor may yield complex patterns of information acquisition involving simultaneously positive and negative effects. Zilmann et al. (1980) found that use of humorous inserts in the children educational program does not only increase attention for the former, but also have an attention "spillover effect" on subsequent pieces of educational coverage. Their basic assumption was that once attention was

enhanced, it will remain increased for at least some part of the subsequently encountered coverage and, therefore, will positively affect learning. They found that this effect exists and it is actually decaying. However, through manipulation of the pace of the inserts Zilmann et al. were able to maintain an increased level of attention among the participants during most of the show. It is interesting that they found that humorous segments increased knowledge, even if they were irrelevant to the educational message. It goes in accordance with findings of Xenos and Becker (2009) discussed in the previous chapter, that it seems that exposure to the late-night comedy segment might facilitate learning of the political issues even irrelevant to the segment's content. Moreover, this finding makes questionable the main assumption of the Baum's "gateway" proposition that soft news facilitate information uptake from the tradition coverage through the priming of sophisticated issues. It seems that humor rather increases vigilance and facilitates learning of subsequent information ignoring the relevance of the content. Noteworthy is that in accordance with the distraction paradigm of humor influence Zilmann and his colleagues do not dismiss the fact that humor might briefly overload individuals and distracts from the information processing. However, there was no test in their study to reveal this association. Overall, even though Zilmann et al. insist that their findings should not be generalized to any other setting, their study provides me ground to formulate hypothesis associated with increased attention to the traditional coverage due to exposure to late-night comedy (RQ1) and check whether late-night comedy enhancing learning not only for relevant coverage (RQ3).

Another study with controversial findings (both positive and negative influences) is a natural experiment performed by Kaplan and Pascoe (1977). They conducted lectures using the humorous materials and then measured students' levels of information acquisition. They pose their study as the first attempt to measure how humorous message affects material encountered

immediately before and immediately after humorous item. Even though they found no significant difference in participants' quiz scores between humorous and serious experimental condition, their study provides some evidence for priming through humor. Kaplan and Pascoe report that a test revealed that participants receiving humorous treatment scored better on the items that were mentioned in humorous inserts and subsequently in the course of the lecture. That is exactly the mechanism Baum was looking for. These findings allow me to keep the his "gateway" proposition in mind and do not dismiss the possibility of the priming effect of late-night comedy (RQ3).

Noteworthy is that even at least half of outlined above research were mentioning by both Young (2008) and Nabi et al. (2007) in their debate discussed in the previous section, only some of effects of humor on information processing discovered by psychologists were considered. Perhaps it is due to the fact that research question in Young-Nabi debate shifted from the knowledge acquisition to the message elaboration. Even though the latter process seems to be rather responsible for long term effects resulted in opinion and attitudes formation, we should not dismiss the link elaboration might have to the immediate factual knowledge acquisition. It is important that there is very limited evidence in the field of political communication for the effects of exposure to late-night comedy on the processing of subsequently encountered hard coverage.

Thus, in my study I investigate whether increased attentiveness due to prior exposure to the late-night comedy segment might contribute to the learning from hard news coverage. Moreover, I test whether Schmidt's Incongruity Hypothesis is consistent with exposure to long humorous and non-humorous items, i.e. whether a late-night comedy segment might drive attention away from the previously encountered coverage.

Chapter 3. Research Design and Methodology

In the following chapter, I formulate my hypotheses and describe the design of an experiment I conducted to test them. In addition, I discuss the reliability of a sample derived via Amazon MTurk platform I used for my study.

3.1. Research Question and Hypotheses

Since it is established that the pattern of late-night comedy consumption includes exposure to hard coverage, in my study I access the effects that exposure to late-night comedy segment might have on information acquisition from the traditional media.

The major shortcoming of the previous studies is that it was assumed that the order in which individuals are exposed to the different kinds of coverage was straightforward. In the majority of studies (see Xenos and Baker, 2009; LaMarre et al., 2009; etc.) only effects of exposure to late-night comedy on the learning from subsequently encountered news items were accessed. To my knowledge, sequence of exposure has been varied only in two experiments (late-night comedy -> hard coverage, hard coverage -> late-night comedy), but in these studies not learning effects but deliberation (LaMarre and Walter, 2013) and gratification (Holbert et al., 2007) were accessed. However, psychology research on humor processing allows me to assume that the sequence of encountered messages might affect patterns of information processing. Moreover, usually studies that addressing influence of late-night comedy on political knowledge use only two news items to access interactions effects. However, patterns of news consumption show that it is rarely the case (see Pew Research Center, 2014). Thus, my research might be a valid attempt to establish late-night comedy effects on the learning from hard coverage

depending on the sequence of exposure to the items. Therefore, my research questions are the following:

RQ1: Do the circumstances of exposure have an impact on whether late-night comedy has a positive or negative effect on the subsequently encountered information acquisition?

RQ2: Does late-night comedy have an isolated effect on learning about politics in a hybrid political media environment?

RQ3: Does late-night comedy facilitate learning from the subsequently encountered hard news covering the same issue?

In order to try to answer these questions I use insights from previous research in both political communication and psychology that allow me to formulate several hypotheses that may shed light on how late-night comedy might affect political information acquisition accounted for the mixed patterns of media consumption.

According to the research devoted to incongruity and rehearsal mechanisms (see Schmidt, 1994; Young, 2009) humorous message is expected to receive more attention and as a consequence more cognitive resources will be allocated for its processing at the expense of surrounding information (i.e. messages encountered within close temporal proximity). Thus, the Incongruity Hypothesis will be the following:

H1a: The late-night comedy segment will negatively affect learning from the previously encountered news item according to the Incongruity Hypothesis.

According to research on humorous facilitatory effect on the information acquisition (e.g. Zilmann et al., 1980) as well as to some findings from the previous research on late-night

comedy (e.g. Xenos and Backer, 2009) humorous message is likely to enhance learning from the consequently encountered information. However, consistent with the findings of Zilmann et al. (1980) the effect will be decay very rapidly. Thus, the Attention Hypothesis will be the following:

H1b: The late-night comedy segment will positively affect learning from the consequently encountered messages according to the Attention Hypothesis. The effect is expected to diminish with time.

The isolated effect of late-night comedy on political knowledge is well developed in the literature (e.g. Hollander, 2005; Cao, 2010; Baek and Wojcieszak, 2009; etc.). Even though experimental studies still do not reach unanimous conclusion whether people learn more from late-night comedy segments than from news clips resembling the former in terms of the content, in general, it is assumed that the exposure to political satire has a positive effect on learning about politics. This influence is especially prominent for less knowledgeable individuals (e.g. Young and Hoffman, 2012). Since one of my treatments includes a news clip resembling *The Daily Show* segment's content as much as possible, I am able to conduct a post-hoc test to see whether there is a difference between amounts of acquired information for humorous and serious coverage of the same issues. Moreover, I test whether exposure to multiple news items might affect this influence. Thus, my third hypothesis is the following:

H2: Individuals exposed to the late-night comedy segment will acquire more information regarding issue than those who do not in the circumstances of the exposure to the multiple news items.

Studies regarding the use of humorous materials in the educational process (see Kaplan and Pascoe, 1977) revealed that humorous explanations of the concepts increase effectiveness of learning information related to this concept in the course of lecture. Moreover, these findings are consistent with Baum's "gateway" propositions (Baum, 2002a, 2002b, 2003a) that implies that individuals primed with soft news will find it easier to process more complicated aspects of the message in hard coverage. According to the hypothesis, this effect is expected to be especially prominent for individuals less interested in politics (Baum, 2002a, 2002b, 2003a). However, existing research on priming effects of late-night comedy provides rather mixing evidence. Xenos and Becker (2009) found that less politically interested individuals exposed to the comedy segment indeed tend to learn subsequent information from traditional coverage more easily, but this effect also persists for information unrelated to the content of comedy stimuli. Nevertheless, even though Xenos and Becker's attempt was a valid test of hypothesized association, it still needs a verification. In their turn, LaMarre and Walther (2013) found that exposure to the message facilitates the elaboration of the subsequently encountered relevant message. Even though they refer to the Elaboration Likelihood Model as to the mechanism responsible for facilitation effect, it is still about the idea that previously encountered message might ease the processing of the following relevant information. Since my research does not aim to reveal cognitive mechanism responsible for this effect (either priming or "high ability" state of mind), I will refer to it as to Gateway Effect Hypothesis, though not making a preference for Baum's explanation of the effect:

H3: The late-night comedy segment will positively affect learning from the consequently encountered relevant message according to the Gateway Effect Hypothesis.
In accordance with previous findings regarding political knowledge and learning all effects are expected to be more prominent for less knowledgeable and less interested in politics individuals.

3.2. Data

To test my hypotheses, I conducted an interactive media experiment on the SurveyGizmo platform, recruiting payable participants online through Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk). My experiment was a part of a project of the Central European University Political Behavior Research Group (PolBeRG) financed by CEU Research Support Scheme.

A total of 236 participants took part in an online experiment and survey on May 20th, 2015. 7 participants were excluded from the sample (N=229) due to the fact that their location information derived from the IP addresses did not correspond to the U.S. territory.

Participants were able to choose our study from the list of Human Intelligence Tasks (HITs) on the Amazon's MTurk. Then they proceeded to the SurveyGizmo survey platform through the external link where they were exposed to the experimental stimuli and then asked to complete a questionnaire. The overall task was expected to take 30-40 minutes to complete. Since stimuli introduced in the experiment were related to the knowledge of U.S. politics requirements for participants were the following: being a resident of the United States and being eligible to vote in the U.S. elections. The latter requirement was introduced in accordance with an assumption that people who are not eligible to participate in politics are less likely to follow the news and process stimuli carefully. Moreover, it allowed me to filter participants who just temporary reside in the United States (e.g. foreign students). Each participant was paid \$3 if she or he completed the survey (i.e. reached the last page with a payment code). I had an opportunity

to retract payment for ones with poorly completed surveys during the next 24 hours after it was submitted, but analysis showed no such instances (response rate 100%).

3.3. Considerations on MTurk's Sample Reliability

MTurk is an online platform for recruiting individuals to perform payable Human Intelligence Tasks (HIT). MTurk became a popular online sampling tool among social scientists due to its inexpensiveness in terms of both costs of experiment implementing and participants' recruiting. Berinsky and his colleagues (2012) report that as of October, 2011, more than 700 social sciences articles using the MTurk participant pool was found in Google Scholar. However, despite their availability and popularity MTurk samples raise several questions regarding representativeness and, therefore, external and internal validity of the study.

The main concern is related to the question to what extent MTurk participants' pool resembles national-wide probability samples. Berinsky et al. (2012) examined the MTurk U.S. sample and found that even though it differs from representative national samples (e.g. ANES), it is still more representative than convenient and undergraduate samples. They found that in comparison with national representative samples MTurk participants are on average younger (M=32.3), to some extent more interested in politics and more politically knowledgeable and substantially more liberal than individuals in national samples (Berinsky et al., 2012). Noteworthy is that these findings make MTurk sample suitable for my study since its participant pool characteristics on average are closer to *The Daily Show* audience than national representative samples. For instance, as discussed in the first chapter, Young and Tisinger (2006) found that *The Daily Show* audience on average are more likely to be educated young adult, interested in politics, more liberal and more politically knowledgeable than the average U.S. citizen.

Another concern is an internal validity of studies related to the question whether individuals recruited via MTurk are effectively engaging with the stimuli. However, Berinsky and colleagues (2012) found that "MTurkers" motivation and level of attention seem to be even higher in comparison with well-established high-quality Internet panels (e.g. Polimetrix/YouGov). They found that at least 60% of MTurk participants were able to answer questions of manipulation check, while only 49% of the Polimetrix/YouGov gave the right answers to the same questions.

Moreover, to test the reliability of MTurk samples Berinsky et al. (2012) replicated several experiments and found that the results of these studies do not significantly differ from the ones obtained earlier via national representative samples. Even though Berinsky and his colleagues' research still appears to be the most in-depth analysis of the MTurk participant pool, findings from several other studies also support their conclusions. For instance, Buhrmester et al. (2011) claim that MTurk can be used to gather high-quality data. Similarly to Berinsky and his colleagues, they found that MTurk sample only slightly differs from the standard Internet American samples and much more representative than college samples. Moreover, it appears that low compensation that is usually receiving MTurk's recruiters does not affect the quality of collected data (Buhremester et al., 2011). Casler et al. (2013) compared MTurk sample with a crowdsourcing sample (analog of a convenient sample recruited through social media) and a college sample and found that even though MTurk sample appears to be more demographically and socio-economically diverse, results of behavioral experiments conducted with all three samples are indistinguishable. It allows Casler and colleagues to conclude that MTurk's participant pool is more than suitable for behavioral studies.

Of course, all said above means that one should be careful when interpreting results based on MTurk participants' performance, but this proposition should be rather applied to research standards in general than to this particular sampling tool.

3.4. Experiment Procedure

After the introduction, each participant was asked whether he or she is a resident of the United States and is eligible to vote in the U.S. elections. The third mandatory question was about the participant's possibility to watch a 7-minute video clip. The individuals meeting these requirements were then randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions. In the first two treatments, individuals were consequently exposed to three textual news items produced from the articles derived from CNN.com, NBCnews.com, Washingtonpost.com and NewYorkTimes.com and one *The Daily Show* segment. Conditions differed in the order in which individuals were exposed to the items (see *Experimental Manipulation* section). In the third condition, individuals were exposed to the same three textual items and non-humorous news video segment. The fourth experimental condition was a control group and participants were exposed to three textual items and one video segment about celebrities and sports.

Then participants proceeded to manipulation check survey designed to provide information whether they actually watched the video clip. Ones that were assigned to any of the humorous conditions were asked additional questions whether they perceived the clip as funny and partisan balanced (see *Manipulation check* section for discussion).

After the exposure to the experimental stimuli and manipulation check questionnaire, participants proceeded to the survey regarding nudging acceptability. This survey was a part of other PolBeRG member's project and served as a distraction task in my study (it was expected to take participants around 10 minutes to finish it). Then subjects proceeded to the Media Use survey and Knowledge Battery designed to access their patterns of news consumption, prior media exposure, and degree of acquaintance with the U.S. politics and foreign affairs in general. Finally, participants were asked 20 knowledge questions about news items they were exposed to and some personal questions (socio-demographics, and political views).

3.5. Experimental Manipulation

As I mentioned above, participants were randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions: (1) humorous condition for the Attention and Gateway Effect Hypotheses check (N=55, will refer to it later in the text as TDS1 condition), (2) humorous condition for the Incongruity and Gateway Effect Hypotheses check (N=64, TDS2 condition), (4) non-humorous condition (N=48, News condition) for accessing baseline knowledge derived from the news items, and (5) control (standard treatment) condition (N=62, Control condition/group).

In all experimental conditions, participants were expected on average to spend around 11-15 minutes engaging with news stimuli. These figures are consistent with Pew Research Center (2010) estimates for how much time a day Americans spend on getting news online.

Noteworthy is that in humorous conditions (TDS1 and TDS2) more than half of that time (7 minutes 10 seconds) participants were supposed to watch *The Daily Show* segment and spend only the rest of the time reading textual news items (3-7 minutes). However, previous research on *The Daily Show* audience's habits (see, for instance, Baek and Wojcieszak, 2009) shows that in 2007 when all episodes became available online the part of the audience shifted to the online mode of the show consumption. Thus, it seems valid to assume that such mode of online media consumption involving exposure to *The Daily Show* segments and several textual news items might exist. Another reason to think that this assumption is reliable is mixed media consumption patterns including exposure to both hard news and political satire that indicative of late-night

comedy audience discussed in the first chapter. A different sequence of the items was used in

first two treatments in order to test the Incongruity, Attention, and Gateway Effect hypotheses

(see Fig. 1).

Figure 1. Experimental Conditions and Accessed Effects



The textual news items used in the first three experimental conditions were about the same length (350-400 words) that resembles the length of an average online news article. Individuals were expected to read each piece for 1-2 minutes based on the assumption that the average adult reads 250-300 words per minute (e.g. Duggan and Payne, 2009). To ensure that participants would engage with the text at least for some time, they were not allowed to proceed to the next survey item during 1 minute. This amount of time was chosen in order to not make fast-reading participants annoyed in case if they finish earlier. Participants were told that articles derived from the major U.S. news outlets to avoid "unknown source" message discounting, but were not provided with outlets' titles or bylines in order to avoid liberal or conservative bias to

the source of information⁶. All three articles had a layout resembling average high-quality news website (see Appendix 1). Topics were chosen based on the 1-week preceding experiment launch coverage (May 10th – May 17th): (1) Kerry and Putin meeting in Sochi, (2) the Bill against bulk data collection by the NSA, and (3) primaries nominations (four politicians' profiles). The first two stories were chosen due to their unpartisan message and relation to the national security and foreign policy, topics that for a long time are found to be suitable to test political knowledge (see Baum, 2003b). Moreover, both stories contain facts that might be rather obscure for the average U.S. citizen (e.g. the existence of the U.S.-Russia agreement on Syrian transitional government support) that make them suitable to check learning about political matters from the particular news item. On the other hand, participants were expected to show at least some interest in the topics since foreign policy and national security (especially when it is about private data collection) are supposed to affect citizens' lives regardless of socio-demographics characteristics and political views (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1993). Approaching primaries topic was chosen because candidates' nominations appeared to be the most prominent issue of the U.S. politics up to the moment of experiment launch. However, for the treatment were chosen not only frontrunners (i.e., Hilary Clinton and Jeb Bush), but underdogs as well. Doing so I tried to eliminate the pre-treatment effect of preexisting knowledge (see Druckman and Leeper, 2012) as much as possible. However, I do not think that it was reasonable to exclude information about frontrunners at all, since without presence of these politicians story may yield less attention from the average citizen than it is should in natural environment. Moreover, primaries were featured in The Daily Show segment as well, and this news item was used in order to access existence of a "gateway" effect.

⁶ In order to not violate copyright laws, all information about source and authors of the articles and photo images was provided on the last page of survey.

The Daily Show segment used in the first two humorous experimental conditions (TDS1 and TDS2) was combined from the parts of three different programs aired between April 30th – May 12th, 2015. The total length of the segment is 7 minutes 10 seconds that approximately is equal to the average length of *The Daily Show* video segments available on the show's official web page⁷. Page timer set on the treatment page did not allow participants to proceed to the next page for 7 minutes 10 seconds. That measure was performed to ensure that participants would be more likely to engage stimuli.

The segment featured four prospective nominees for the Republican and Democrat presidential candidates: Jeb Bush, Hilary Clinton, Carly Fiorina, and Bernie Sanders. I combined coverage from three different shows in order to provide balance between the number of republican and democrat nominees (Hilary and Sanders vs. Fiorina and Bush) as well as between front-runners and underdogs (Hilary and Bush vs. Fiorina and Sanders). Moreover, in the edited clip, host Jon Stewart more or less equally made fun of both democratic and republican candidates and criticized both Hilary's and Bush's family legacies (policies implemented by Bill Clinton and George W. Bush in the past). Thus, these manipulations were supposed to decrease the liberal bias of the show as much as possible.

In the third experimental condition (News condition), participants were exposed to the same three textual items used in TDS1 and TDS2 conditions and non-humorous news clip (length 7 minutes 3 seconds). The latter was combined from the segments of CNN, NBC News, and ABC News coverage and resembling the content of *The Daily Show* segment (i.e. features the same politicians and the same issues). This condition was used in order to access baseline knowledge that individuals are able to derive from the textual news items. Results obtained in

⁷ http://thedailyshow.cc.com/videos

TDS1 and TDS2 treatments were then compared to these numbers during statistical analysis. The sequence of the items in this condition was randomized in order to diminish priming effects that might occur.

In the Control condition, participants read three news items about baseball, Facebook and handmade postcards and watched a video clip (length 5 minutes 50 seconds) featuring Tailor Swift, Putin's participation in show hockey game and U.S. presidential libraries.

Data obtained via research design presented in this chapter as well as findings will be discussed in the following sections.

Chapter 4. Results and Discussion

In the following chapter, I present the characteristics of the data I obtained as well as the results of the conducted statistical analyses. Then I discuss patterns indicative of the data revealed by the interactions plot between response variable, experimental condition and preexisted political knowledge. Finally, I discuss limitations of the present research and alternative explanations for the findings.

4.1. Sample

The sample obtained via MTurk is non-representative. However, each MTurk participant with a U.S. account (requirement was set in HIT) was able to choose the task after it was posted. All participants were U.S. residents and were eligible to vote in U.S. elections (even if not registered with the party). As for race and ethnicity, seventy-one percent of the sample was Caucasian, 10.0% Afro-American, 7.0% Asian, 7.0% Hispanic/Latino, 1.3% Native American and 1.7% reported "Other." The sample consists of males and females almost equally, 51.1% and 48.9% correspondingly. The average age is 35.6. The mean level of education was between unfinished college and B.A. degree. The average household income was between \$30,000-49,000. Speaking of partisanship, 41 % of the sample were Democrats, 34.5% Independent and 13.1% Republicans. Even though the sample appeared to be substantially more democratic, distribution of individuals on the political views 5-point scale from "Very Conservative" to "Very Liberal" was almost normal (skew=-0.21, kurtosis=-.048).

4.1.1 Manipulation Check

Several participants reported that they were not be able to watch the video. Hence their records were excluded from the sample (N=229). Moreover, across all four treatments the percentage of people encountered technical problems were approximately 4 %, which means that the exclusion of these individuals is not expected to lead to any systematic bias.

To see whether individuals effectively engaged with the experimental stimuli manipulation check was conducted. Participants in each condition were asked four trivia questions related to the content of the different parts of the video (see Appendix 2). In the all experimental conditions individuals on average answered 3 out of 4 questions correctly (M=3.27, SD=1.00 for two TDS1 and TDS2 conditions; M=3.75, SD=1.02 for the News condition; M=3.73, SD=0.93 for the Control condition). I can conclude that the participants of the experiment engaged the stimuli effectively. Moreover, these results allow me to assume that participants in all experimental conditions spent on average the same time engaging video and textual items before proceeding to the factual knowledge batteries.

To find whether participants perceived segment as humorous, the scale developed by Nabi et al. (2007) was used. Participants were asked whether they found the segment amusing/not amusing, funny/not funny, humorous/not humorous, entertaining/not entertaining (7-points scale was used for each question, Cronbach's α =0.97). Then, combined index of perceived humor was calculated for each individual. On average participants in TDS1 and TDS2 conditions perceived *The Daily Show* segment as expected (M=5.49, SD=1.58).

To see whether the attempt to diminish partisan bias by providing the same amount of satirical coverage of both parties was successful, participants were asked if they find that Jon Stewart made fun of both parties' members. The majority of participants, the 90.68% and

98.31%, exposed to *The Daily Show* segment found that Jon Stewart was making fun of Democratic and Republican nominees correspondingly.

4.1.2. Measures

Political Knowledge. Preexisting political knowledge was accessed via a battery of 15 questions. The battery was originally developed by Paul Weith for the CEU Political Behavior Research Group project in 2014. The questions regarding current events knowledge in the battery were updated. The battery equally consisted of open-ended questions, multiple-choice questions and true/false questions (see Appendix 2 for the questions). Questions order, as well as answers order, were both randomized for each individual. Political knowledge was measured on the scale from 0 to 15 corresponding to the number of correct answers given by each individual. Political knowledge variable also serves as a proxy for interest in politics, since original political iInterest variable in the sample was heavily skewed to the high values. The political knowledge variable is normally distributed in both the full sample and in each experimental condition subset.

Moreover, original political knowledge index measured on the scale from 0 to 15 was recoded to the 3-level factor variable in order to divide sample into three equal groups of individuals with low, medium and high levels of political knowledge. That factor variable is also normally distributed in the full sample as well as in each experimental condition subset.

Issue Knowledge. Post-test knowledge for each issue covered in the treatment was accessed. Participants in each condition were asked a battery of five factual knowledge questions regarding each topic (see Appendix 2 for questions). Four knowledge indices were then calculated to reflect the number of correct answers to the five questions.

Issue Knowledge: Video Clip Knowledge. Participants were asked questions on the Republican and Democratic nominees for the Presidential race discussed in both *The Daily Show*

segment and hard news video segment. Video Clip knowledge index was calculated (M=2.87, SD=1.42).

Issue Knowledge: House's Bill against NSA Bulk Data Collection. Participants were asked questions on the details of discussion regarding the Bill and issue's background information. Security Issue knowledge index was calculated (M=3.07, SD=1.42).

Issue Knowledge: Nominees' Profiles. Participants were asked questions on the background information about Democratic and Republican nominees provided in textual news items. Primaries Issue knowledge index was calculated (M=3.02, SD=1.56).

Issue Knowledge: Kerry and Putin Meeting. Participants were asked questions about the U.S. foreign policy issues and related information. Foreign Policy knowledge index was calculated (M=2.00, SD=1.38).

Prior Media Exposure. Participants were asked a battery of questions regarding media use, including exposure to *The Daily Show* specifically and to the news about issues used as stimuli in the course of the 2 weeks prior to the experiment. It was found that on average about 1/4 of the sample encountered prior media exposure on these issues: 20.94% of the sample watched John Stewart's show in 2 weeks prior to the experiment, 38.43% followed the news regarding approaching primaries and nominees, 16.60% followed the news regarding Kerry and Putin meeting in Sochi, 38.14% followed the news regarding House's bill against NSA bulk data collection.

4.2. Results

Three hypotheses assuming exposure to the multiple types of coverage (H1a, H1b, H3) posited that individuals should score differently on issue knowledge scales depending on the nature of items to which they were exposed (involving/not involving late-night comedy

coverage) and the sequence of the exposure. H2 states that individuals exposed to the late-night comedy segment should score more on Video Clip knowledge scale in comparison with the control group. To test hypotheses, I first conducted independent samples t test comparing scores on post-test issues knowledge scales by the condition. However, due to the relatively small sample size I also conducted Wilcoxon's test for the central tendency for independent samples since Wilcoxon's test is less sensitive to violations of data assumptions. Results of Wilcoxon's test are consistent with the t test results. I concluded then that data do not violate assumptions of t test, which is more convenient for analysis since it shows the direction of the effect. T test results are reported in Table 1. Since four issue knowledge indices are basically testing the same hypotheses, conventional threshold of significance (p<0.05) was adjusted via the Bonferroni correction (p<0.0125 after adjustment) to rule out comparisons that might be significant only by chance.

From Table 1 we can see that experimental stimuli were successful as far as all *t* tests including control group as an independent sample are significant across all issues. Participants in each experimental condition (TDS1, TDS2, and News) scored significantly higher on all four knowledge scales than ones in the Control group (p<0.001). These results are consistent with H2, showing that participant receiving humorous treatment (TDS1 and TDS2) scored more than ones in the control group. However, RQ2 posited that participants might learn more from late-night comedy than from the news clip resembling in terms of content. We can see from Table 1 that it is indeed the case for participants in TDS1 condition where they were exposed to *The Daily Show* segment at the beginning of the treatment.

	Posttest	t					
	Knowledge	Comedy 1	Comedy 2	News	Control		
	M (SD)	(N=55)	(N=64)	(N=48)	(N=62)		
Video clip knowle	dge						
TDS 1	3.58 (1.18)		0.39.	0.73**	1.66***		
TDS 2	3.19 (1.36)	- 0.39.		0.33	1.27***		
News	2.85 (1.27)	- 0.73**	- 0.33	_	0.93***		
Control	1.92 (1.31)	- 1.66***	- 1.27***	- 0.93***			
Primaries knowled	Primaries knowledge						
TDS 1	3.35 (1.40)	_	- 0.03	- 0.32	1.50***		
TDS 2	3.38 (1.42)	0.03		- 0.29	1.52***		
News	3.67 (1.37)	0.32	0.29	_	1.81***		
Control	1.85 (1.35)	- 1.50***	- 1.52***	- 1.81***			
Security Issue knowledge							
TDS 1	3.24 (1.21)	_	0.002	0.09	0.56***		
TDS 2	3.23 (1.44)	- 0.002	_	0.09	0.56***		
News	3.15 (1.43)	- 0.09	- 0.09	_	0.47***		
Control	2.68 (1.24)	- 0.56***	- 0.56***	- 0.47***			
Foreign Policy Issue knowledge							
TDS 1	2.35 (1.47)		0.08	0.22	1.01***		
TDS 2	2.27 (1.40)	- 0.08		0.14	0.93***		
News	2.13 (1.35)	-0.22	- 0.14		0.79***		
Control	1.34 (1.07)	-1.01***	- 0.93***	- 0.79***			

Table 1. Means and t Tests Comparing Posttest Knowledge on Four Items by Condition (N=229)

Two-tailed t test, ***p<0.001, **p<0.125, *p <0.5, . p<0.1

Only tests with p<0.125 passed significance threshold after the Bonferroni adjustment.

Then, the sample was divided into the three subsets to distinguish individuals with low, medium and high political knowledge using 3-level factor political knowledge variable. Similarly, independent samples *t* test for each pair of conditions was performed for each issue knowledge scale (see Appendix 3 for tables). Even though knowledge indices means across conditions differ for all three subsets, the overall pattern persist. However, it is interesting that in the subset of individuals with the low level of political knowledge the difference in scores on Security and Foreign Policy items between individuals received humorous treatment (TDS1 and TDS2) and ones in the Control group disappeared. Moreover, the difference between acquired knowledge from the video clip between TDS1 and News conditions is not significant anymore (see Appendix 3 for tables). However, since multiple *t* tests may overestimate differences and then might lead to the Type I error (Hair et al., 2010), more conservative test accounting for another explanatory variables is needed. Therefore, I ran series of tests for analyses of covariance (ANCOVA) for each pair of experimental conditions controlling for preexisting political knowledge, and for exposure in the previous 2 weeks to news about particular response item. Additional contol variables (Education, Partisanship, Income, Gender) were found to have no effect on the response variables and did not increase model fit substantially, these models are not reported in the present thesis. Regression diagnostics did not reveal any violations of test assumptions.

ANCOVA results (Table 2) are consistent with patterns revealed during *t* test analysis. Even controlling for preexisting political knowledge and prior exposure to the news about issues or *The Daily Show* coverage, individuals in all experimental conditions (TDS1, TDS2, News) scored significantly better than ones in the control group. However, accounting for control variables experimental stimuli seem to have a less substantial effect on the Security item knowledge. E.g., in the News condition the result do not even pass significance threshold after the Bonferroni adjustment. Comparisons across pairs of experimental conditions (TDS1 VS TDS2, TDS1 VS News, TDS2 VS News) did not reveal any significant differences across the groups' means, except for knowledge on the video clip between TDS and News condition (F (2, 103) = 8.925, p <0.0125) (see Appendix 3 for the tables).

Dependent variables	SS	Df	F	р	η2			
TDS1 condition (N=117)								
Video Clip	73.805	1	54.874	0.000***	0.417			
Knowledge								
Primaries knowledge	59.035	1	44.285	0.000***	0.481			
Security knowledge	8.076	1	6.491	0.0124**	0.233			
Foreign Policy	29.390	1	20.305	0.000***	0.242			
Knowledge								
TDS2 condition (N=12	26)							
Video Clip	53.312	1	36.209	0.000***	0.339			
Knowledge								
Primaries knowledge	71.514	1	50.570	0.000***	0.449			
Security knowledge	11.030	1	7.612	0.006**	0.247			
Foreign Policy	29.226	1	22.265	0.000***	0.274			
Knowledge								
News condition (N=11	News condition (N=110)							
Video Clip	22.915	1	15.736	0.000***	0.244			
Knowledge								
Primaries knowledge	86.595	1	60.819	0.000***	0.483			
Security knowledge	6.842	1	4.514	0.036*	0.178			
Foreign Policy	19.573	1	14.736	0.000***	0.181			
Knowledge								
***p<0.001, **p<0.0125, *p<0.5, . p<0.1								

 Table 3. Analyses of Covariance Results: Main Effects of Experimental Conditions (TDS1, TDS2, News) VS

 Control group on Political Knowledge Items Scales

Only tests with p<0.0125 passed significance threshold after the Bonferroni adjustment.

Control variables:

Preexisting Political Knowledge,

Prior Exposure to *The Daily Show* / Prior exposure to the approaching primaries' coverage / Prior exposure to the news regarding House's bill against NSA / Prior exposure to the news about Kerry and Putin meeting

Finally, I performed multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) using as response variables correct answers on five knowledge questions for each issue (Video Clip, Primaries, Security, Foreign Policy). This analyzes was performed to replicate ANCOVA test with the same control variables to check the reliability of the knowledge scales and to see whether the variance of responses on different questions might affect tests results. MANCOVA was chosen for this analysis since it is the most convenient and reliable test for simultaneous comparison of differences between the groups means across multiple variables. MANCOVA results for experimental conditions against control group reported in Table 4. Before conducting multivariate analyses, I checked for multicollinearity of dependent variables and differences in

cell sizes. All characteristics were within the acceptable limits for running a MANCOVA.

0.397

TDS2, News) VS Control group on Political Knowledge Items Scales						
Dependent variables	Pillai test statistic	F	Df	Error df	Pr <f< td=""><td></td></f<>	
TDS1 Condition VS Control group						

14.090

5

109

0.000***

Table 4. Multivariate Analyses of Covariance Results: Main Effects of Experimental Conditions	(TDS1,
TDS2, News) VS Control group on Political Knowledge Items Scales	

Primaries knowledge	0.452	17.504	5	106	0.000***	
Security knowledge	0.113	2.779	5	107	0.021*	
Foreign Policy Knowledge	0.162	4.213	5	109	0.001**	
TDS2 Condition VS Control group						
Video Clip Knowledge	0.338	11.973	5	117	0.000***	
Primaries knowledge	0.457	19.321	5	115	0.000***	
Security knowledge	0.161	4.522	5	118	0.000***	
Foreign Policy Knowledge	0.159	4.411	5	117	0.001**	
News Condition VS Control group						
Video Clip Knowledge	0.294	8.423	5	101	0.000***	
Primaries knowledge	0.505	20.627	5	101	0.000***	
Security knowledge	0.091	2.055	5	102	0.077.	
Foreign Policy Knowledge	0.124	2.899	5	102	0.017*	
***p<0.001, **p<0.0125, *p <0.5, . p<0.1						

Control variables:

Video Clip Knowledge

Preexisting Political Knowledge,

Prior Exposure to The Daily Show / Prior exposure to the approaching primaries' coverage / Prior exposure to the news regarding House's bill against NSA / Prior exposure to the news about Kerry and Putin meeting

Overall MANCOVA results are consistent with previous tests that allow me to make a conclusion that calculated knowledge indices on 0 to 5 scale can be considered as reliable. MANCOVA results for the rest pairs of conditions (TDS1 VS TDS2, TDS1 VS News, TDS2 VS News) were insignificant, except for the positive effects of TDS1 (F(5,94) = 6.168, p<0.000) and TDS2 (F(5,104) = 7.990, p<0.000) conditions on the knowledge about issue covered in video clip in comparison with News condition. Noteworthy is that MANCOVA is the only test where this effect of the TDS2 condition not only surpassed significance threshold for the first time, but test statics is comparable to the effect of TDS1 condition demonstrated by both ANCOVA and t test. It might be due to the fact that MANCOVA is more sensitive to the differences in the

variance among variables constituted 5-level knowledge indices. Even though I do not consider that evidence of the TDS2 condition effect is sufficient to reject null hypothesis that there is no difference between TDS2 and News condition, I will keep this finding in mind when discussing results.

Overall, according to both *t* test and more conservative ANCOVA and MANCOVA results we cannot reject null hypotheses either for the Incongruity (H1a), Attention (H1b) or Gateway Effect (H3) hypotheses. However, there is an evidence for a hypothesis on isolated positive effect of late-night comedy on knowledge acquisition in circumstances of multiple media exposure (H2). I will discuss these findings in the next section.

4.3. Discussion on Findings

Evidence in the data is not sufficient to reject either of H1a, H2a or H3 hypotheses. In this section, I look into patterns observed on the interactions plots to see whether they are consistent with hypothesized effects. I discuss possible limitations and alternative explanations.

I made two-way interactions plots for three subsets of the sample sliced by the levels of preexisted political knowledge to see patterns of interactions of experimental condition and score on the issue knowledge scale for each group of individuals. One should remember that these differences between groups' means might be insignificant, and here I refer only to visible discrepancies (see next page).



Figure 3. Two-way Interaction for Primaries Issue Knowledge (N=229)



Figure 4. Two-way Interaction Plot for Security Issue Knowledge (N=229)







As we can see from Figure 3, there is no visible difference between the acquired factual knowledge about Primaries issue between individuals in TDS1 and TDS2 condition for all three subsets of the sample. In both cases, individuals were exposed to the Primaries textual item after *The Daily Show* segment. On the one hand, this pattern might be consistent with the assumption

that participants in both conditions got in a "high ability" state of mind, and temporal proximity of the exposure to the subsequent information (right after *The Daily Show* segment or delayed by reading two other news stories) does not influence strength of this effect. On the other hand, participants in the News condition seem to score higher on this scale across all knowledge subsets than both TDS1 and TDS2 subjects that is not consistent with "gateway" idea. According to the Gateway Effect Hypothesis individuals who received relevant information piece prior to the exposure to the news item were expected to acquire more information from the latter.

One possible explanation for this effect is that satirical coverage might affect individuals' perception to the following relevant message and for some reason discount it. For instance, Baumgartner (2008) claims that exposure to late-night comedy might have long-term negative consequences for attitudes towards hard news since political satire contributes to cynicism and decreases trust towards traditional coverage. It might be the case that these mechanisms work in the short run as well and individuals exposed to the satirical coverage became more skeptical towards all new information on the issue. On the other hand, these findings are inconsistent with results of Xenos and Becker's (2009) study where individuals tended to learn more from any coverage encountered after *The Daily Show* segment, including relevant one. However, Xenos and Becker used a sequence of news video clips and, thus, my negative findings might be accountable for the subsequent exposure to textual items. Therefore, my research results show that we should further specify the Gateway Effect Hypothesis and check the interaction between different items in terms of both content and media carrier. Overall, it seems that the Gateway Effect for Primaries item knowledge is rather absent.

Moreover, another evidence that scholars should further scrutinize the Gateway Effect comes from Figure 2. In accordance with Gateway Effect Hypothesis individuals in the News

condition were expected to score high on the Video Clip knowledge scale. However, they scored lower than individuals in the TDS2 condition (significantly lower in MANCOVA only, p<0.000) and significantly lower in only three tests (p<0.0125) than individuals in the TDS1 condition. However, since I had no another News condition to compare "high ability" and "low ability" states of mind (LaMarre and Walther, 2013), I have no baseline to make a conclusion about this effect.

The Attention Hypothesis (H1b) posited that individuals in the TDS1 condition were expected to score better on these two scales than ones in the News condition. Figures 4 and 5 demonstrate that in high and low political knowledge subsets there a room for the these hypothesized effects since individuals in the TDS1 condition scored higher on Security issue and Foreign Policy issue scales than participants in the TDS2 and News conditions. However, since these differences between the group means are not significant, further research is needed to establish this pattern of late-night comedy positive influence on learning from subsequently encountered coverage. It is possible that even replication of resembling study with a bigger sample may reveal it.

The Incongruity Hypothesis (H1a) states that individuals in the TDS2 condition were expected to derive less factual knowledge from Foreign Policy and Security items than ones in the News condition do. Figures 4 and 5 demonstrate that negative effects of the acquisition of surrounding information established in the psychology of humor and advertising studies seem to be not applicable to late-night comedy in the present research. Individuals in the TDS2 condition with low political knowledge seem to score on these two scales approximately as much as individuals in the News condition. Individuals in the TDS2 condition in the high political knowledge subset scored on average as much as TDS1 viewers. However, this inconsistency in

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information acquisition patterns between subsets might be due to the small sample size or higher interest in the security and foreign policy topics among individuals with higher levels of political knowledge. A subset of individuals with middle levels of political knowledge seems to behave anomaly on these two scales, especially on the Security scale. In generall, it seems provisions that late-night comedy negatively affect learning from coverage encountered before or after might be overestimated.

Overall, the two-way interactions plots show that on average the patterns of information acquisition seem to be resembling for each political knowledge group. However, according to the previous research these patterns should differ for less and more knowledgeable individuals (e.g. Young and Hoffman, 2012; Xenos and Becker, 2009, etc.). For instance, Xenos and Becker (2009) who use the same 5-level scales predicted that individuals with low political interest were supposed to score low in the News condition and high in the TDS condition, while ones with high levels of political interest should score better in the News condition and worse in the TDS condition. The findings supported that prediction and individuals in both subsets scored equally on the economy issue knowledge scale in the TDS condition. However, there is nothing like this happening in the data in this thesis. Discarding anomaly behavior of mediocre knowledgeable participants in the Security case, we can see that patterns of information acquisition are the same in each knowledge group, and there are almost no intersections. Such behavior might be the case that the sample's interest in politics is heavily skewed towards high values. Thus, one possible explanation is there were no actual indifferent participants in the sample who were supposed to demonstrate different patterns of information acquisition. Another possible explanation is that subjects recruited via MTurk might be driven by professional responsibility and engage with stimuli more deliberately than they would be in the circumstances of natural exposure.

Overall, the results of statistical analyses provide firm evidence that late-night comedy have isolated effect on the political knowledge and that this effect persists in circumstances of multiple exposure to different news sources and substantially significant not only in comparison with group that received no treatment but also with group who watched resembling news video clip (H2). The evidence for the Incongruity Hypothesis (H1a) was not found in the data. With respect to the Attention Hypothesis (H2a), there was no sufficient evidence to support it. However, the patterns in the data let me assume that further research might corroborate this effect. The Gateway Effect Hypothesis (H3) did not receive enough evidence either, but patterns in the data show rather negative effects of the exposure to late-night comedy on the learning of further relevant information. As far as previous findings on "gateway" effect are controversial as well (e.g. Xenos and Becker, 2009; LaMarre and Walther, 2013), there is a need for specification of the mechanisms that might be responsible for a "gateway" effect and more sensitive tests that can provide evidence for it.

Conclusion

Modern political media environment has made the distinction between hard and soft coverage fuzzy and blurred. There are types of coverage that no longer fit this "competitive framework". Research in political communication has shifted towards accessing interaction effects between exposure to different media. For instance, Brewer and Marquardt (2007) address in their study the problem of metacoverage, by trying to learn how a satirical "package" of the news influences the perception of this news. Feldman and Young (2008, p. 417) state that the study of entertainment media effects' interaction with traditional coverage becomes more and more important since for the contemporary audiences a choice between soft and hard news is no more "a zero-sum game." Even more radical is Balmas (2014), who claims that we can only grasp the merits of entertainment-based political communication by considering it within an environment where individuals are exposed to multiple sources of political information. In accordance with the latter, Xenox and Becker (2009) believe that if one wants to obtain results approaching the complexity of reality, one should examine entertaining coverage within complex environments that involve content from other media.

Indeed, late-night comedy is an especially relevant subject for the study of the interplay between different media due to the humorous nature of the shows. According to psychological research, exposure to humor results in unique patterns of cognitive processing. Humor seems to be simultaneously responsible for increasing attention (see Zilmann and Williams, 1980) as well as for decreasing the ability for message elaboration (e.g. Coulson and Kutas, 2001). There is some evidence that, on the one hand, humorous message may facilitate subsequently encountered information acquisition (see Kaplan and Poscoe, 1977), but, on the other, would negatively affect uptake of the context information encountered in close temporal proximity (see Strick and al.,

2010). Moreover, the type of humor used in the message might have an additional effect on information processing (e.g. Horatian via Juvenalian satire, LaMarre et al., 2014). Thus, humor in late-night comedy might be accountable not only for the processing of the information *within* the segment, but also for the processing of surrounding information (e.g. news coverage encountered before or after). Some research has aimed to access late-night comedy effect on elaboration and information processing (Young, 2009; LaMarre and Walther, 2009; Kim and Vishak, 2008), however not much has been said about the impact on learning. Even though there is a bulk of studies exploring whether late-night comedy affects learning about politics by individuals exposed to it, to my knowledge, there was only one attempt to establish these effects via experiment involving exposure to different types of coverage. Xenos and Backer's (2009) study showed that participants tend to acquire information differently in the treatment with comedy stimuli, but the mechanisms behind this pattern are rather latent. Moreover, one experimental study is definitely not enough to say whether this effect actually exists.

Therefore, I aimed to feel gaps in the research on late-night comedy effects on learning about politics in a hybrid political media environment that involves exposure to the multiple types of coverage. To pose my hypotheses I turned to the insights from the psychology of humor research since this area seems to be underrepresented in the research on late-night comedy. I hypothesized that depending on the circumstances of the exposure, late-night comedy might have either positive or negative impact on the learning about the issue, but late-night comedy itself will always have positive effect on the information acquisition. To test my hypotheses I employed experimental design and ran my study on a sample of U.S. adult. Participants were exposed to one out of three experimental stimuli deploying use of different sequences of the news items including or excluding exposure to *The Daily Show* segment, about one-quarter of

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the subjects were assigned to the control group that received no treatment. Then scores of participants on the four issue knowledge scales were compared among the groups.

Findings of this thesis contribute to the research on late-night comedy in particular and political communication in general. It was established that late-night comedy itself has substantially significant effect on learning about the issue in comparison with both control group and experimental condition involving exposure to the resembling in terms of the content news video clip. However, learning patterns among the groups of individuals with low, medium, and high political knowledge are not consistent with previous studies in the field. These findings need to be replicated on other samples and different news topics.

Statistical analysis of the results revealed no significant effects of exposure to the latenight comedy segment on the acquisition of information from the hard news coverage. However, data was examined for the search for patterns consistent with rejected hypotheses. I concluded that future research is needed to specify the Gateway Effect Hypothesis and to corroborated observed patterns consistent with the Attention Hypothesis. The Incongruity Hypothesis assumed the negative impact of the exposure to late-night comedy on the learning was rejected. The value of this research is that it provides a ground for specification of these effects and direction for the development of more sensitive tests.

Overall, this study has several limitations. First is the small sample size, that might result in underestimation of some effects and impossibility of testing hypotheses on different subsets of the sample since some group sizes are too small for implementing any conventional test. A second limitation is deploying of the unrepresentative Amazon MTurk sample. The main concerns here are about the engagement of participants with the experimental stimuli. Even though in the experiment design measures were employed to reduce risks of non-compliance,

some patterns in the data let me assume that subjects might engage with stimuli *too* effectively that raises concern regarding experiment validity. This concern is consistent with Prior and Lupia's (2008) worries that payable participants might exercise too much effort engaging with surveys. This issue might be solved by replication of the study on other samples. A third concern is related to the content of the experimental stimuli since such studies are always limited by the course of the current event. For instance, it seems that participants even in a control group were too knowledgeable about security topic (House's Bill against NSA bulk data collection). However, even in this case stimuli worked effectively since subjects exposed to them scored significantly higher on the knowledge scale than ones that received no treatment. Nevertheless, findings of this study should be generalized to a very limited number of instances since it is still not established how much influence a particular issue choice might have on the information acquisition.

Regardless its limitations and shortcomings, my study confirmed positive effects of the exposure to late-night comedy on learning about politics in circumstances of multiple exposure and provides a foundation for the future research on the Attention and Gateway Effect Hypothesis. Due to time constraints and available financial limits, I was able just to scratch the surface of this extremely complicated issue of interactions between different types of political coverage and their consequences on learning and attitudes. However, scholarly attention to this topic is warranted since modes of political news consumption are shifting and merging that will sooner or later will result in that a "hybrid" framework of analyses will become even more demanded.

Appendix 1. Experimental Stimuli

Copyright statement:

The articles and pictures that used as a treatment were drawn from the web-pages of the following news outlets: The New York Times, CNN News, NBC News, Washington Post. The video clips were combined from segments derived from The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, CNN News, NBC News, ABC News. National Geographic Channel. All materials are used for nonprofit and research purposes only. You can access full versions of news items used in the study as well as textual and photo credentials via external links: http://thedailyshow.cc.com/videos/a4vlat/democalypse-2016---vet-hard http://thedailyshow.cc.com/videos/r50ky1/democalypse-2016---road-back-to-your-own-house---chances--ha http://thedailyshow.cc.com/videos/sx65zl/hillary-s-democratic-opponent---dirty-donating http://movies.nationalgeographic.com/movies/pandas/ http://www.nbcnews.com/watch/nbc-news/russian-president-scores-eight-goals-in-sochihockey-game-446990915688 http://www.nbcnews.com/watch/nbcnews-com/there-are-some-strange-things-at-ourpresidential-libraries-445651011891 http://abcnews.go.com/ThisWeek/video/jeb-bush-stumbles-iraq-war-31106323 http://edition.cnn.com/2015/05/05/politics/carly-fiorina-hillary-clinton-immigration/ http://www.msnbc.com/rachel-maddow-show/watch/sanders-boasts-175-000-pledgedvolunteers-439573571604 http://edition.cnn.com/videos/politics/2015/05/18/newday-inside-politics-hillary-back-on-thecampaign-trail.cnn http://www.nbcnews.com/politics/congress/house-advances-bill-end-nsas-bulk-collectionphone-records-n358541 http://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/kerry-flies-russia-talks-putin-iran-isis-yemen-n357486 http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/us/elections/2016-presidential-candidates.html http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/18/sports/baseball/mets-noah-syndergaard-shuts-downbrewers-in-citi-field-debut.html http://www.nbcnews.com/nightly-news/cards-n359786 http://www.nbcnews.com/tech/internet/groups-concerned-facebooks-internet-org-buildingwalled-garden-n360936



House Advances Bill to End NSA's Bulk Collection of Phone Records

The House on Wednesday overwhelmingly approved legislation to end the federal government's bulk collection of phone records, exerting enormous pressure on Senator Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, the Senate majority leader, who insists that dragnet sweeps continue in defiance of many of those in his Republican Party.

Under the bipartisan bill, which passed 338 to 88, the Patriot Act would be changed to prohibit bulk collection by the National Security Agency of metadata charting telephone calls made by Americans. However, while the House version of the bill would take the government out of the collection business, it would not deny it access to the information. It would be in the hands of the private sector — almost certainly telecommunications companies like AT&T, Verizon and Sprint, which already keep the records for billing purposes and hold on to them from 18 months to five years.

So for the N.S.A., which has been internally questioning the cost effectiveness of bulk collection for years, the bill would make the agency's searches somewhat less efficient, but it would not wipe them out. With the approval of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court, the spy agencies or the F.B.I. could request data relevant to an investigation. Corporate executives have said that while they would have to reformat some data to satisfy government search requirements, they could most likely provide data quickly.

The legislation would also bar bulk collection of records using other tools like so-called national security letters, which are a kind of administrative subpoena.

The near unanimity in the House is not reflected in the Senate, where a bipartisan group that backs the House bill faces opposition from Mr. McConnell and a small but powerful group of defense hawks who want no change, and from another faction led by Senator Rand Paul, Republican of Kentucky, that is pressing for even greater restrictions of data collection.

A compromise of some form must be reached before June 1, when the provision of the Patriot Act that allows the N.S.A. dragnet expires.

The debate over the issue, which intensified after the surveillance efforts were exposed by Edward J. Snowden, was complicated by a federal appeals court ruling last week that found the National Security Agency's bulk collection of phone records illegal, and by the coming expiration of the Patriot Act at the end of the month.



Kerry Meets Putin in Russia for Talks on Iran, ISIS and Ukraine

Secretary of State John F. Kerry met with Russian President Vladimir Putin for more than four hours on May 12th, marking a high-profile attempt to ease tensions between Russia and the West as relations have deteriorated to their worst level since the Cold War.

Kerry was the most senior U.S. official to visit Russia since the crisis in Ukraine started last year, rekindling antagonism reminiscent of Soviet times. But both sides appeared pleased with Tuesday's talks, which included four additional hours of discussion between Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

Kerry had not visited Russia since May 2013, as Moscow's decision to grant asylum to former National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden effectively put an end to high-level contacts. Russia's subsequent annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula and support for rebels in eastern Ukraine put relations in a deep freeze.

On Ukraine, both sides insisted they supported the cease-fire agreement reached in February in Minsk, Belarus. And Mr. Kerry made clear that his warning about taking military action applied to the Ukrainian government lead by president Petro Poroshenko as well as Moscow. But the Russians provided no hint that they were yet prepared to stop training separatists in eastern Ukraine or whether they would remove their troops.

The quick trip on Tuesday appeared to be a new effort to rekindle cooperation in areas where the United States and Russia might be able to work together, even if ongoing fighting in Ukraine remains an open sore. Talks with Iran on a nuclear deal are in their final, crucial weeks. Both the United States and Russia fear the rise of the Islamic State in Syria, while Russia is also a major supporter of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, who is battling a four-year-old uprising. Moreover, Putin and Kerry discussed implementing a 2012 U.S.-Russian strategy for a transitional government in Syria that has been a complete failure to date.

Kerry made no mention Tuesday of Crimea, saying instead that "it is clear the U.S. and E.U. sanctions will begin to be rolled back" if the Ukrainian peace deal is fully implemented.

Despite the lack of any major breakthroughs, the meetings still could mark the beginning of a gradual warming of relations, said Angela Stent, director of Georgetown University's Center for Eurasian, Russian and East European Studies.

Putin and Obama have met several times in recent years on the sidelines of international events. The most recent encounters have all been brief, and Obama canceled a one-on-one summit that had been scheduled in Moscow in August 2013.

Presidential Race 2016 Candidates Profiles



Carly Fiorina

Ms. Fiorina has offered little in the way of specific policy proposals, but she is running as a center-right Republican. She opposes abortion rights, but is supportive of same-sex marriage. She is pro-business and backs a more aggressive American military posture abroad. More than any issue, her message centers on her identity as a female success story, rising from a secretarial pool to become chief executive of Hewlett-Packard. She has the private-sector experience that Mrs. Clinton and many Republicans in the race lack.



Hilary Clinton

Expect a nearly constant emphasis on leaving a better country to voters' children and grandchildren. Mrs. Clinton will weave in her own experiences as a mother and grand-mother to try to persuade voters that she is best positioned to address income inequality and to aid the middle class. Her economic message will highlight issues that resonate with women in particular, including a higher minimum wage, paid family and medical leave, early childhood education, and affordable child care. Earlier in April Clintons Foundation was in center of the scandal. Reuters reported that for three years in a row beginning in 2010, the Clinton Foundation reported to the IRS that it received zero in funds from foreign and U.S. governments, a dramatic fall-off from the tens of millions of dollars in foreign government contributions reported in preceding years.



Ted Cruz

Mr. Cruz will seek the Republican nomination by running not just as the most conservative candidate, but as the boldest one in the field. He will emphasize his hard-line stances against President Obama, particularly his attempt to defund the health care law, which made him a deeply unpopular figure among his party's leaders. A favorite of Tea Party activists, Cruz is known for his filibuster-like speech to protest the Affordable Care Act as a government shutdown loomed in 2013. He argues that in recent political history, Republicans have won only when they run as conservatives. Mr. Cruz's message will be that he represents the most emphatic turn away from Mr. Obama and liberalism.



Bernie Sanders

Mr. Sanders, who has called himself a "Democratic socialist," will seek the Democratic nomination by imploring the party to return to its populist roots and boldly use government to address economic inequality. In doing so, he surely hopes to nudge Mrs. Clinton to more aggressively address issues such as stagnant wages, declining unionism and soaring college debt. His presence in the race could make more centrist Democrats uncomfortable, however, if he attacks Mrs. Clinton directly for her ties to financial institutions, many of which will be important sources of donations to her campaign.

Appendix 2. Survey Items

Presentation

Dear participant,

Thank you for your interest in our survey. It should take approximately 35-40 minutes to complete. We will ask about your views on various issues regarding politics, media and society, and also some questions on your person.

As part of the study, you will be asked to read and watch a few short news items. Before starting the survey, please ensure that you have a possibility to watch 6-7 minutes long video segment with sound.

It is most important to us that you always respond truthfully and to the best of your knowledge. If you prefer not to answer a question, please just skip it and move on to the next (doing so will not affect your pay). That being said, it is also important to the success of this survey that you answer the questions as fully as possible. The survey is part of a larger research project at Central European University (Budapest, Hungary), and if you have any questions, please feel free to contact us at plbrgbud (at) gmail.com.

Please notice that participants must reside in the United States and be eligible to vote in U.S. elections (even if not registered).

All information that you provide will be kept confidential, and will not be passed on to any third party. If you experience any problem or inconvenience with the survey, please let us know immediately.

1. Are you a U.S. resident?

1. Yes 2. No 2. Are you eligible to vote in U.S. elections (even if not registered)? 1. Yes 2. No 3. Do you have a possibility to watch 6-7 minutes long video segment with sound in the next 20 minutes? 1. Yes

2. No

In this section, we ask you a few questions regarding The Daily Show segment you watched.

check (**TDS** 1 and TDS2 conditions)

Manipulation

4. Were you able to watch the video? *

- 1. Yes
- 2. No
- 5. Which of the following politicians was not discussed in the segment?
 - 1. Bill Clinton
 - 2. Barak Obama
 - 3. Jeb Bush
 - 4. George W. Bush
- 6. Which 20th century catastrophe was mentioned in the segment about Jeb Bush?
 - 1. 9/11 terrorist attack
 - 2. Sinking of the Titanic
 - 3. Chernobyl disaster
 - 4. Siberian meteorite
- 7. Which reality show was mentioned in the segment?
 - 1. America's Next Top Model
 - Big Brother
 - 2. 3. Keeping Up with the Kardashians
 - 4. The Biggest Loser

8. Which of the following politicians was not discussed in the segment?

- 1. Carly Fiorina
- 2. Ted Cruz
- 3. Jeb Bush

4. Hilary Clinton 9. Please, indicate on the scale from 1 to 7 how amusing you found The Daily Show segment where 1 is for "Not Amusing" and 7 is for "Amusing". 1 - Not Amusing 2 3 4 5 6 7 – Amusing 10. Please, indicate on the scale from 1 to 7 how funny you found The Daily Show segment where 1 is for "Not Funny" and 7 is for "Funny". 1 - Not Funny 2 3 4 5 6 7 – Funny 11. Please, indicate on the scale from 1 to 7 how entertaining you found The Daily Show the segment where 1 is for "Not Entertaining" and 7 is for "Entertaining". 1 - Not Entertaining 2 3 4 5 6 7 – Entertaining 12. Please, indicate on the scale from 1 to 7 how humorous you found The Daily Show segment where 1 is for "Not Humorous" and 7 is for "Humorous". 1 - Not Humorous 2 3 4 5 6 7 - Humorous 13. Did you find that Jon Stewart made fun of Democratic nominees in this segment? 1. Yes 2. No 14. Did you find that Jon Stewart made fun of Republican nominees in this segment? 1. Yes 2. No In this section, we ask you a few questions regarding the video segment you watched. 15. Were you able to watch the video? * 1. Yes 2. No 16. Which Disney's cartoon is mentioned in the segment? 1. The Beast and The Beauty 2. Aladdin

- 3. Hercules
- 4. Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs

Manipulation

(News condition)

check

17. Which contender Carly Fiorina is addressing in the segment?

- 1. Bernie Sanders
- 2. Jeb Bush
- 3. Hilary Clinton
- 4. Marco Rubio

18. According to the segment, which nominee was able to conduct the most successful fundraising in first 24 hours after the announcement?

- 1. Hilary Clinton
- 2. Bernie Sanders
- 3. Ted Cruz
- 4. Carly Fiorina
- 19. To which animals the "National Geographic" segment was devoted?

In this section, we ask you a few questions regarding the video segment.

- 1. Crocodiles
- 2. Pandas
- 3. Lions
- 4. Foxes

Manipulation check (Control group)

Control group)

20. Were you able to watch the video? *

- 1. Yes
- 2. No
- 21. Which politician is singing in the segment?
 - 1. Barak Obama
 - 2. Bill Clinton
 - 3. Mike Huckabee
 - 4. Hilary Clinton
- 22. Which pop star was featured in the segment?
 - 1. Taylor Swift
 - 2. Lana del Rey
 - 3. Madonna
 - 4. Lady Gaga
- 23. To which animals the "National Geographic" segment was devoted?
 - 1. Crocodiles
 - 2. Pandas
 - 3. Lions
 - 4. Foxes
- 24. In what sports Vladimir Putin participated in the segment?
 - 1. Soccer
 - 2. Judo
 - 3. Hockey
 - 4. Alpine skiing

Distraction Task. A survey designed by another researcher.

Media UseIn the next section, we will ask you some questions about media and politics.QuestionnairePlease answer to the best of your knowledge

50. How much are you interested in politics?

- 1. Not at all
- 2. Not very interested
- 3. Somehow interested
- 4. Very interested
- 5. Don't know / Don't want to answer
- 51. What is your main source of news about politics?
- 1. Newspapers
 - 2. TV
 - 3. Internet
 - 4. Don't know / Don't want to answer

- 52. How many days a week do you read/watch the news?
 - 1. 7 days (every day)
 - 2. 5-6 days
 - 3. 3-4 days
 - 4. 1-2 days
 - 5. Almost never.
 - 6. Don't know / Don't want to answer
- 53. Please, specify which news outlets you follow (if any).
- 54. How often do you watch The Daily Show with Jon Stewart?
 - 1. Several days a week
 - 2. About one or two times a week
 - 3. A few times a month
 - 4. Less frequently
 - 5. Never
- 55. How often did you watch The Colbert Report (until December 2014)?
 - 1. Several days a week
 - 2. About one or two times a week
 - A few times a month
 Less frequently

 - 5. Never
- 56. How often do you watch The Last Week Tonight with Jon Oliver?
 - 1. Every week
 - 2. About one or two times a month
 - 3. A few times in couple months
 - 4. Less frequently
 - 5. Never
- 57. How often do you watch The Nightly Show with Larry Wilmore?
 - 1. Several days a week
 - 2. About one or two times a week
 - 3. A few times a month
 - 4. Less frequently
 - 5. Never

58. Did you watch The Daily Show with Jon Stewart during the last two weeks?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

59. Were you following the news about Republican Presidential Primaries during last two weeks?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No
- Don't remember 3.

60. Were you following the news about Democrat Presidential Primaries during the last two weeks?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No
- Don't remember 3.

61. Were you following the news about Kerry and Putin meeting in Sochi during last two weeks?

- Yes 1.
- 2. No
- 3. Don't remember

62. Were you following the news about the bill against NSA's bulk collection of citizens.' data during the last two weeks?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No
- 3. Don't remember
Knowledge Battery In the following section, we will ask a few questions about your knowledge of American politics. For some questions you will have to pick the right answer, for others you have to decide if a statement is true or false, for the rest of the questions, you will have to type in the right answer. You will have 15-20 seconds to answer each of these questions. You will be automatically forwarded to the next page when the time is up.

Please, click the "Next" button when you are ready to start.

- 63. Who served as chairman of the Federal Reserve for most of Obama's presidency?
- 64. Hassan Rouhani is the current president of Iran.
 - True
 False

65. The annual federal budget of the United States for any of the past four years, rounded down to the nearest trillion, would be \$7 trillion.

- 1. True
- 2. False

66. Please name the act signed into law in 2001, aimed at deterring and punishing terrorist acts in the US and the world by means such as enhancing law enforcement investigatory tools and broadening the discretion of law enforcement.

67. Affirmative action refers to policies aimed at granting university education to children from families living below the poverty line.

- 1. True
- 2. False

68. The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPAC) is better known as...

69. When the media mentions a "drone war," what do they refer to by "drone"?

- 1. an unmanned road vehicle used in military operations
 - 2. an unmanned aerial vehicle used in military operations
 - 3. an infantry man of the special forces
 - 4. an assault rifle

70. Which US president do you associate with the No Child Left Behind Act?

- 1. Ronald Reagan
- 2. George H. W. Bush
- 3. Bill Clinton
- 4. George W. Bush
- 71. The office held currently by Jacob Lew is:
 - 1. Secretary of Defense
 - 2. Secretary of Treasury
 - 3. Speaker of the House of Representatives
 - 4. White House Chief of Staff
- 72. The unemployment rate in USA, to the nearest integer, is roughly equal to...
 - 1. 7 %
 - 2. 9%
 - 2.
) /0

 3.
 11 %
 - 4. 13 %
- 73. The current US Secretary of Health and Human services is...
 - 1. Kathleen Sebelius
 - 2. Sylvia Burwell
 - 3. Arne Duncan
 - 4. Bill Corr

74. Earlier this month Parliamentary elections were held in the United Kindom. Who is the leader of the party that got the majority?

- 1. Ed Miliband
- 2. Harriet Harman
- 3. David Cameron
- 4. Tony Blair
- 75. The two main export partners of the United States are Canada and Mexico.
 - 1. True
 - 2. False
- 76. The Republicans are generally more opposed to taxation than the Democrats.
 - 1. True
 - 2. False
- 77. Please name the current Secretary of Defense.

 you have to decide if a statement is true or false. for the rest of the questions, you will have to type in the right answer. You will have 15-20 scoods to answer each of these questions. You will be automatically forwarded to the next page when the time is up. Please, click th "Next" button when you are ready to start. Yideo Clip T8. Which of these politicians said that he/she would have authorized Iraq invasion back in 2003 ever "knowing what we know now"? Hilary Clinton Carly Florina Bernie Sanders Jeb Bush Bill Clinton signed a Violent Crime Control Act which resulted in dramatically increased incacreeration. I'rue False Which office does Bernie Sanders currently hold? Governor Congressman Senator Which office does Bernie Sanders were running for nomination for Democratic presidential candidate? (Write a number in the space below.) Suthich candidate for nomination for President is accused of firing 35,000 private sector employees? Which to the sec score they foldicate acque to trick of Obmaccare? Carly Fiorina True False Which to the sec conservative politician expected to run for the presidential nomination next year Knowledge Which to these conservative politician expected to run for the presidential nomination next year Showledge Which candidate Carly Fiorina opposes both abortion and same-sex marriage. I'rue False Which candidate Carly Fiorina opposes both abortion and same-sex marriage. I'rue False Which candidate Carly Fiorina opposes both abortion and same-sex marriage. Hilary Clinton Joe Suth Which candidate is planning to talk a lot about economic inequality in his/her campaign? Mike Huckab	Issue Knowledge batteries intro	In the following section, we will ask a few questions about information you engaged during watching/reading news stories. For some questions you will have to pick the right answer, for others
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Foreign Policy 88. The meeting between Putin and Kerry was the fourth in a series of the highest level	Foreign Policy	88. The meeting between Putin and Kerry was the fourth in a series of the highest level
Knowledge meetings between US and Russian officials since 2014.	Knowledge	meetings between US and Russian officials since 2014.
Questions 1. True	Questions	1. True
2. False		2. False

89. Vladimir Putin is the current Russian prime-minister.

- 1. True
- 2. False

90. The Russia-USA program for transitional government in ______ is a complete failure up to date. Choose the country.

- 1. Yemen
- 2. Ukraine
- 3. Syria
- 4. Iran
- 91. Who is the current U.S. State Secretary?
- 92. Which peninsula was annexed in 2014 by Russia?

98. In what year were you born?

demographics questions

Socio-

- 99. In what country were you born?
- 100. How long have you been living in the U.S.?
 - 1. Less than 1 year
 - 2. Between 1 and 5 years
 - 3. Between 6 and 10 years
 - 4. Between 11 and 15 years
 - 5. Between 16 and 20 years
 - 6. All my life
 - 7. Don't know / Don't want to answer
- 101. Are you eligible to vote in the U.S.?
 - 1. Yes, but I am not registered voter.
 - 2. Yes, I am registered voter.
 - 3. Yes, I am registered voter affiliated with the party.
 - 4. No
- 102. What is your gender
 - 1. Male
 - 2. Female
 - 3. Don't know / Don't want to answer
- 103. What is the highest level of education you have completed:
 - 1. Did not attend any school
 - 2. Primary school
 - 3. High school
 - 4. Some college
 - 5. Bachelor's degree
 - 6. Master's degree
 - 7. Doctoral degree
 - 8. Don't know / Don't want to answer
- 104. What is your household's annual income:
 - 1. None
 - 2. Under \$10.000
 - 3. \$10.000 \$19.999
 - 4. \$20.000 \$29.999
 - 5. \$30.000 \$39.999
 - \$40.000 \$49.999
 - 7. \$50.000 \$74.999
 - 8. \$75.000 \$99.999
 - 9. \$100.000 \$150.000
 - 10. Over \$150.000
 - 11. Don't know / Don't want to answer
- 105. Please, indicate your race.
 - 1. Caucasian
 - 2. Black
 - 3. Asian
 - 4. Hispanic/Latino
 - 5. Native American
 - 6. Other
 - 7. Don't know / Don't want to answer

106. How would you describe your political views:

- 1. Very conservative
- 2. Conservative
- 3. Moderate
- 4. Liberal
- 5. Very liberal

107. Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?

- 1. Republican
- 2. Independent
- 3. Democrat
- 4. None of this
- Don't know / Don't want to answer 5.
- 108. Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican or Democratic party?
 - Closer to Republicans
 Closer to Democrats
- 109. Would you call yourself a strong republican or a not very strong democrat?
 - 1. Strong
 - 2. Not very strong
- 110. Would you call yourself a strong republican or a not very strong republican?
 - 1. Strong
 - 2. Not very strong
- 111. Are you currently employed?
 - 1. Yes
 - 2. No
- Don't know / Don't want to answer
- 112. Please state in which of the following sectors you work most:
 - 1. Public sector
 - 2. Private sector
 - 3. Not-for-profit non-governmental organizations
 - 4. Don't know / Don't want to answer

Last Page

Thank you for answering our survey. Your response is very important for us.

Please enter your survey code in the open Amazon mTurk window to validate the completion of your HIT.

The survey covered a wide range of research topics, your contribution is extremely useful. It gives us an insight into how people form views about certain things. We value your participation in this study and more generally in the MTurk community, and thank you for helping us understand the world just a little bit better. If you have any concerns, please do not hesitate to contact us at plbrgbud (at) gmail.com.

Thank you for your time and effort.

Appendix 3. Additional tests results

	Posttest Knowledge M (SD)	t			
	()	Comedy 1	Comedy 2	News	Control
		(N=18)	(N=27)	(N=18)	(N=23)
Video clip knowledge					
TDS 1	2.78 (1.31)	_	0.37	0.61	1.26**
TDS 2	2.41 (1.22)	- 0.37	—	—	0.89**
News	2.17 (1.42)	- 0.61	- 0.24	0.24	_
Control	1.52 (1.08)	- 1.26**	- 0.89**	- 0.64***	0.64***
Primaries knowledge					
TDS 1	2.50 (1.38)	—	- 0.10	- 0.37	1.54***
TDS 2	2.59 (1.60)	0.10	—	—	1.64***
News	3.00 (1.46)	0.50	0.41	- 0.41	_
Control	0.96 (0.93)	- 1.54***	- 1.64***	- 2.04***	2.04***
Security Issue knowled	dge				
TDS 1	2.67 (1.37)	_	0.26	0.27	0.62
TDS 2	2.41 (1.39)	- 0.26	_	_	0.36
News	2.39 (1.54)	- 0.27	- 0.02	0.02	0.35***
Control	2.04 (1.26)	0.62	- 0.36	- 0.35***	_
Foreign Policy Issue k	nowledge				
TDS 1	1.89 (1.41)	_	0.22	0.33	1.02*
TDS 2	1.67 (1.30)	- 0.22	—	—	0.80*
News	1.56 (1.15)	- 0.33	- 0.11	0.11	_
Control	0.87 (0.97)	- 1.02*	- 0.80*	- 0.69***	0.69***

Table 3.1. Means and t Tests Comparing Posttest Knowledge on Four Items by Condition for Individuals with Low Political Knowledge (N=86)

Two-tailed t test, ***p<0.001, **p<0.125, *p<0.5, . p<0.1 Only tests with p<0.125 passed significance threshold after the Bonferroni adjustment.

Table 3.2. Means and t Tests Comparing Posttest	Knowledge on Four Items by Condition for Individuals
with Modium Political Knowlodge (N-60)	

	Posttest Knowledge	t			
	M (SD)				
		Comedy 1	Comedy 2	News	Control
		(N=19)	(N=16)	(N=16)	(N=18)
Video clip knowledge	•				
TDS 1	3.74 (0.93)	_	0.23	0.86**	1.90***
TDS 2	3.50 (1.03)	- 0.23	_	0.62	1.67***
News	2.87 (0.81)	- 0.86**	- 0.62	_	1.04**
Control	1.83 (1.15)	- 1.90***	- 1.67***	- 1.04**	—
Primaries knowledge					
TDS 1	3.68 (1.29)	_	- 0.12	- 0.12	1.57***
TDS 2	3.81 (0.83)	0.12	_	0.00	1.70***
News	3.81 (1.33)	0.12	0.00	_	1.70***
Control	2.11 (1.37)	- 1.57***	- 1.70***	- 1.70***	—
Security Issue knowl	edge				
TDS 1	3.21 (1.18)	_	- 0.60	- 0.41	0.31***
TDS 2	3.81 (1.11)	0.60	_	0.19	0.92***
News	3.62 (1.20)	0.41	- 0.19	_	0.73.
Control	2.89 (1.18)	- 0.31***	- 0.92***	- 0.73.	_
Foreign Policy Issue	knowledge				
TDS 1	2.31 (1.31)	—	0.07	- 0.06	0.76***
TDS 2	2.25 (1.29)	- 0.07	_	- 0.12	0.69***
News	2.38 (1.50)	0.06	0.12	_	0.82.
Control	1.56 (1.04)	- 0.76***	- 0.69***	- 0.82.	_

Two-tailed t test, ***p<0.001, **p<0.125, *p<0.5, . p<0.1

Only tests with p<0.125 passed significance threshold after the Bonferroni adjustment.

	Posttest Knowledge M (SD)	t			
	111 (62)	Comedy 1	Comedy 2	News	Control
		(N=18)	(N=21)	(N=14)	(N=21)
Video clip knowledge					
TDS 1	4.22 (0.81)	_	0.26	0.51	1.79***
TDS 2	3.95 (1.24)	- 0.26		0.23	1.52**
News	3.71 (0.99)	- 0.51	- 0.23	_	1.29***
Control	2.42 (1.53)	- 1.79***	- 1.52**	- 1.29***	—
Primaries knowledge					
TDS 1	3.83 (1.20)	_	- 0.21	- 0.52	1.21***
TDS 2	4.05 (1.02)	0.21	_	- 0.31	1.43***
News	4.36 (0.93)	0.52	0.31		1.74***
Control	2.62 (1.20)	- 1.21***	- 1.43***	- 1.74***	—
Security Issue knowle	dge				
TDS 1	3.83 (0.79)	_	- 0.02	0.26	0.64***
TDS 2	3.86 (1.24)	0.02	_	0.29	0.67.
News	3.57 (1.16)	- 0.26	- 0.29	_	0.38***
Control	3.19 (0.98)	- 0.64***	- 0.67.	- 0.38***	_
Foreign Policy Issue	nowledge				
TDS 1	2.83 (1.38)	_	- 0.21	0.26	1.17***
TDS 2	3.05 (1.24)	0.21		0.48	1.38***
News	2 57 (1 22)	- 0.26	- 0.48		0.90***
Control	1.67 (1.07)	1.17***	- 1.38***	- 0.90***	_

Table 3.3. Means and t Tests Comparing Posttest Knowledge on Four Items by Condition for Individuals with High Political Knowledge (N=74)

Two-tailed t test, ***p<0.001, **p<0.125, *p<0.5, . p<0.1 Only tests with p<0.125 passed significance threshold after the Bonferroni adjustment.

Table 3.4. Analyses of Covariance Results: Main Effects of TDS 1 Experimental Conditions VS TDS2 Condition on Political Knowledge Items Scales (N=119)

Dependent variables	SS	Df	F	р	η2
Video Clip Knowledge	2.952	1	2.622	0.108	0.338
Primaries knowledge	0.033	1	0.022	0.882	0.285
Security knowledge	0.151	1	0.109	0.742	0.246
Foreign Policy Knowledge	0.014	1	0.008	0.929	0.170

***p<0.001, **p<0.0125, *p<0.5, . p<0.1

Only tests with p<0.0125 passed significance threshold after the Bonferroni adjustment.

Control variables:

Preexisting Political Knowledge, Prior Exposure to *The Daily Show* / Prior exposure to the approaching primaries' coverage / Prior exposure to the news regarding House's bill against NSA / Prior exposure to the news about Kerry and Putin meeting

Table 3.6. Analyses of Covariance Results:

Main Effects of TDS 1 Experimental Condition VS News Condition on Political Knowledge Items Scales (N=103)

Dependent variables	SS	Df	F	р	η2
Video Clip Knowledge	9.812	1	8.925	0.003**	0.340
Primaries knowledge	3.400	1	2.302	0.132	0.266
Security knowledge	0.001	1	0.001	0.976	0.175
Foreign Policy Knowledge	0.336	1	0.183	0.670	0.105

***p<0.001, **p<0.0125, *p<0.5, . p<0.1

Only tests with p<0.0125 passed significance threshold after the Bonferroni adjustment.

Control variables:

Preexisting Political Knowledge, Prior Exposure to *The Daily Show* / Prior exposure to the approaching primaries' coverage / Prior exposure to the news regarding House's bill against NSA / Prior exposure to the news about Kerry and Putin meeting.

Table 3.7. Analyses of Covariance Results: Main Effects of TDS 2 Experimental Condition VS News Condition on Political Knowledge Items Scales (N=103)

Dependent variables	SS	Df	F	р	η2
Video Clip Knowledge	2.394	1	1.926	0.168	0.311
Primaries knowledge	3.305	1	2.132	0.147	0.245
Security knowledge	0.131	1	0.084	0.773	0.200
Foreign Policy Knowledge	0.356	1	0.217	0.642	0.154

***p<0.001, **p<0.0125, *p<0.5, . p<0.1

Only tests with p<0.0125 passed significance threshold after the Bonferroni adjustment.

Control variables:

Preexisting Political Knowledge, Prior Exposure to *The Daily Show* / Prior exposure to the approaching primaries' coverage / Prior exposure to the news regarding House's bill against NSA / Prior exposure to the news about Kerry and Putin meeting

Table 3.8. Multivariate Analyses of Covariance Results: Main Effects of TDS1 Experimental Condition VS TDS2 Condition on Political Knowledge Items Scales

Dependent variables	Pillai test statistic	F	Df	Error df	Pr <f< th=""></f<>
Video Clip Knowledge	0.054	1.261	1	110	0.286
Primaries knowledge	0.029	0.637	1	106	0.672
Security knowledge	0.048	1.126	1	111	0.351
Foreign Policy Knowledge	0.033	0.747	1	110	0.589
· · ·					
***n<0.001 **n<0.0125 *n<0.5 n<0) 1				

Control variables:

Preexisting Political Knowledge,

Prior Exposure to *The Daily Show* / Prior exposure to the approaching primaries' coverage / Prior exposure to the news regarding House's bill against NSA / Prior exposure to the news about Kerry and Putin meeting

Table 3.9. Multivariate Analyses of Covariance Results: Main Effects of TDS1 Experimental Condition VS News Condition on Political Knowledge Items Scales

Dependent variables	Pillai test statistic	F	Df	Error df	Pr <f< th=""></f<>
Video Clip Knowledge	0.247	6.17	1	94	0.000***
Primaries knowledge	0.047	0.899	1	92	0.485
Security knowledge	0.029	0.559	1	95	0.731
Foreign Policy Knowledge	0.010	0.184	1	95	0.968

Control variables:

Preexisting Political Knowledge,

Prior Exposure to *The Daily Show* / Prior exposure to the approaching primaries' coverage / Prior exposure to the news regarding House's bill against NSA / Prior exposure to the news about Kerry and Putin meeting

Table 3.10. Multivariate Analyses of Covariance Results: Main Effects of TDS2 Experimental Condition VS News Condition on Political Knowledge Items Scales

Dependent variables	Pillai test statistic	F	Df	Error df	Pr <f< th=""></f<>
Video Clip Knowledge	0.278	7.990	1	104	0.000***
Primaries knowledge	0.023	0.473	1	101	0.679
Security knowledge	0.029	0.628	1	104	0.796
Foreign Policy Knowledge	0.022	0.469	1	103	0.798
- · · ·					

***p<0.001, **p<0.0125, *p <0.5, . p<0.1

Control variables:

Preexisting Political Knowledge,

Prior Exposure to *The Daily Show* / Prior exposure to the approaching primaries' coverage / Prior exposure to the news regarding House's bill against NSA / Prior exposure to the news about Kerry and Putin meeting

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