How College Students' Use of Facebook and Twitter Influences, Changes, or Reinforces their Political Ideologies

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Abstract

College students are frequently turning to social media for instant access to political news. However, researchers are finding that today's youth are not as politically involved, or politically active as older generations were (Baumgartner & Moriss, 2010). This study surveyed 63 college students to answer questions regarding their political affiliation and ideologies, as well as questions that give further insight into how the political news they consume on Facebook and Twitter influences their political beliefs. The results of the survey found that college students trust Twitter substantially more than Facebook for their political news. The results also show that college students believe Twitter has a Liberal bias, while Facebook has a Conservative bias. Overall, the findings suggest that college students are greatly distrustful and concerned with how today's political news is circulated, arguing that political news is built off bias.

Introduction

The way in which college students, consume political news and information can have a drastic effect on their political self-efficacy and involvement. Just in the last century, advancements in technology have revolutionized the way people and political leaders communicate (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010). By the 1950s, the radio and the TV became the first revolutionary way for people to get their American political news. Franklin D. Roosevelt was the first president to popularize the use of the radio to communicate with the public dubbing them "Fireside chats" (Braden & Bandenburg, 2009). Television was the next great big invention that gave people the ability to not only listen to their political figures directly, but they were able to see them. It wasn't until the 1990s that the launch of the World Wide Web revolutionized the way society, as well as today's youth, participate in American politics.

In 2019, everyone has the ability to have their voice heard online with social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. These sites enable college students to get instant access to news and information regarding politics. However, researchers are finding that today's youth are not as politically involved, or politically active as older generations were (Baumgartner & Moriss, 2010). In a time where college students can receive instant access to information regarding political news, as well as the ability to have their voices shared and heard online, why is it that today's youth are lacking in political self-efficacy? What impact does social media have on the political affiliations and ideologies of today's college student youth? The population of this study will target currently enrolled college students to answer questions regarding their current political affiliation and ideologies, as well as questions that give further insight into how social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter influence their political opinions.

Literature Review

Youth politics and social media

It is generally understood that the way youths participate in American politics is vastly different than that of older generations. Today's youth are much less likely to spend time volunteering or showing up to a protest rally than those of older generations (Baumgartner & Moriss, 2010). They are also less likely to vote or contribute donations or resources towards a political cause. Media habits between younger and older Americans are also different. Youths

are much less likely to watch a traditional television news broadcast, listen to the news on the radio, or read a daily newspaper than their older counterparts. It may come as no surprise that the internet may be the culprit in this disconnect between political participation among youth. As the internet continues to evolve, the methods that youth use to learn about and participate in politics changes. Changes are particularly noted in youth's use of social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to engage in politics (Baumgartner & Moriss, 2010).

Youth Political Involvement in the 2008 Presidential Election

In the past twenty years, young adults have increasingly used social media as their primary source of political news. In Jody Baumgartner and Jonathan Morris's research on the political involvement of young adults leading up to the 2008 presidential election, they argue that since a majority of youth use social media a primary source of news, for them, it's not much different than reading a daily newspaper. This becomes problematic because it gives youth the idea that you get more news on social media than you would with traditional news sources. However, youths not only falsely assume that they get more political news on social networking sites, but youths typically follow online news that is presented in the form of humor (Baumgartner & Moriss, 2010). Social networking sites attempt to use political humor as an opportunity to stimulate youth's participation in political discourse, but there is a lack of evidence that youth take advantage of on that opportunity (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010).

Overall, Baumgartner and Morriss's research suggests that youth's use of social media resulting in an increase of political participation and engagement is not the case. In fact, users of social media sites tended to seek out political news that corresponds with their own personal political views. These results tell us that youth's use of social media as their primary source of obtaining political news has a positive effect on their knowledge about the current events in politics, but this comes at a cost of their news being personally biased.

Social Media and Self-efficacy in American Politics

College students turning to social media for political news raises some concerns on how much this influences their political self-efficacy. The 2016 presidential election was tremendously voiced online leaving many to blame social media's extensive coverage of Donald Trump for winning the election. New technologies on social media during the 2006 and 2008 election season allowed users to better participate in creating and exchanging media-rich content. Young adults utilized video sharing and social networking sites to share campaign news with others, acquire campaign information, discuss political views, and express support for a particular candidate. However, some researchers have discovered there may be a misconception that more attention and exposure to political news on social media would motivate young adult's to be political involvement.

Mathew Kushin and Masahiro Yamamoto's research on college students' use of online media and political decision making in the 2008 election. They wanted to examine college students' political self-efficacy and situational political involvement in relation to their social media attention, online expression, and traditional internet attention. Their results found that respondents who attended to radio for political news were significantly more likely to be politically efficacious than other traditional sources. Attention to newspapers was only a significant predictor of situational political involvement (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010). There was a significant correlation between situational political involvement and online expression, but not political self-efficacy.

Further research revealed correlations among attention to news on traditional Internet sources and situational political involvement and political self-efficacy. Their study indicated that young adults' desire to express what they learn, is connected to a desire to learn more about the election. When it came to young adults, Kushin and Yamamoto found that the internet was only an important source of obtaining political information but not political self-efficacy (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010). While young adults may have been more cognitively involved in the 2008 election by voicing their opinions, sharing information, and discussing issues, this doesn't translate to an increase in political self-efficacy.

Kushin and Yamamoto's research suggests that social media use for political news may not affect political self-efficacy. Other researchers were curious to see how social media use predicted an individual's social capital. Nakwon Jung and Sebastian Valenzuela collected data on various U.S. demographics of people who used online and offline sources of media to gather political information. What they discovered was that there was a positive relationship between people who actively sought political information online and offline and an individual's political knowledge or social capital (Jung & Sebastian, 2012). While there may be a correlation between political social capital and knowledge of American politics, there was no evidence indicating that this increases political participatory behaviors.

Echo Chambers

The rise of social media has given people a new method of being able to voice their opinions about anything, and have their voice heard across the country. This is especially true when it comes to American politics. During election seasons people may find that their social media feeds are filled with partisan views on political issues. Some argue that social media sites are to blame for intensifying political polarization by creating what are called "echo chambers" which prevent people from being exposed to political information that contradicts their preexisting beliefs.

In a study conducted by Christopher Bail et al. they wanted to see whether disrupting selective exposure to partisan information among Twitter users shapes their political attitudes. The study surveyed a large sample of self-identified Republicans and Democrats over the age of 17 who visit Twitter at least three times a week to complete a five 10-min surveys between mid-October 2017 and 1.5 month later. The respondents were given a cash incentive to follow a Twitter bot that exposed the respondents to Tweets from high-profile political leaders of opposing political ideologies for 1 month. The respondents were then re-surveyed to see if the exposure to tweets from political figures of opposing political ideologies had an effect on their political attitudes. They found that Democrats who followed a Conservative Twitter bot exhibited slight increases in Liberal attitudes posttreatment, while Republicans who followed a Liberal Twitter bot became substantially more conservative posttreatment (Christopher Bail et. al, 2018).

It is interesting to note that the researchers were unable to pinpoint what caused this substantial increase in conservative views by Republicans. However, they hypothesized that one cause could be due to Republicans holding more traditional beliefs and are less likely to agree with changes in American policy. The implications associated with hyper-partisan tweets can be dangerous when the messages are geared to further divide people between party lines. Political polarization is especially problematic in today's American Politics as President Trump is the first president to exploit Twitter as a means to gain support in his party and distrust in the other.

Online Political Socialization

Some social researchers are working off prior research on social capital's role in online political participation. Chris Yang and Jean DeHart surveyed college students after the 2012 election to see if behavioral factors, such as online social capital could predict their online political participation. Their survey found that students who spent more time on Facebook had more social capital than Twitter users (Yang & Dehart, 2012). College students who frequently used Facebook and Twitter were found to be a significant predictor of their online political participation. However, demographics also played a large role in how politically involved they were online. Specifically, older, non-white, female college students were more likely to be politically active online than younger White males (Yang & DeHart, 2012).

Some researchers discovered that the factors that contributed the most in college student's online political involvement were if they were well-educated millennials who also had a strong social trust in others (Yang & DeHart, 2012). Other researchers argue that the more time spent on social media for political news does not necessarily mean higher rates of political self-efficacy (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010). Social media's influence on college student's political views is still being understood by researchers. With more studies and understanding of this still evolving form of online content sharing, we will be better equipped to understand how social media affects an individual's political involvement. Instead of only buying into political news that leans towards our own biased views, we should be able to see both sides of an issue and work together to come to a mutual agreement.

Research Design & Methodology

For this survey, 63 currently enrolled college students participated. Administered via a link through Google Forms, the survey consisted of 24 questions with one optional response question. The survey employed the use of multiple choice answer questions, as well as scale rating questions where the answers ranged from one to five. There were also two written response questions. One of the written response questions were required, but the second one was optional. The first part of the survey had the participants will out a set of demographic questions such as age, gender, ethnicity, and more. Part two of the survey asked the participants questions pertaining to their current political affiliation and ideologies. These were followed by a set of questions regarding the participants' usage of Facebook and Twitter as a source of staying up to date on political news, as well as questions regarding their opinions on political biases these social networking sites hold. The survey ended with questions regarding participants' current opinions on American political journalism, with one written response question asking to explain their answer to the prior multiple choice question (See Appendix for full list of survey questions). Administering a survey was the best way to gather the most data and insight on college students' use of Facebook and Twitter and political news consumption, whereas interviews would have to broad and ranging answers.

The survey was distributed through a few different sources of online media. I posted a link to the survey on both my personal Twitter and Facebook page, as well as posting the link on a VCU class Facebook page. I also distributed the survey through direct messages to a variety of friends who were currently enrolled in a college. Furthermore, I distributed an email with a link to the survey to students in five of my enrolled courses. Lastly, the survey was submitted to the r/RVA, r/College, and r/SampleSize subreddits on Reddit.com, strictly asking for participants currently enrolled in college. By using these methods, I was able to get a wider range of

participants currently enrolled as college students, as well as widening the scope of the locations of the college student participants.

Results

      The purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between college students' exposure to political news on Facebook and Twitter, and if it reinforces or changes their political ideologies. The study also examines college students' opinions regarding modern day political news journalism. **Tables 1-5** show the demographics of the participants of the survey.

Table 1

What is your gender?

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	27	42.9
Female	36	57.1
Total	63	100.0

Table 2

What is your Age?

Age	Frequency	Percent
18-20	29	46.0
21-24	30	47.7
25+	4	6.4%

Table 3

What is your ethnicity?

Ethnicity	Frequency	Percent
White/Caucasian	37	58.7
Black/African American	9	14.3
Hispanic/Latino	7	11.7
Other	10	15.9

What is your sexuality?

Table 4	Sexuality	Frequency	Percent
	Straight/Heterosexual	52	82.5
	LGBTQ	11	17.4

What is your annual income?

Table 5	Income	Frequency	Percent
	$0-$1,000	18	28.6
	$1,001-$10,000	32	50.8
	$10,001-$30,000	13	20.6

Of the 63 college students who completed the survey, over half were female with 36 responses. The remaining 27 were male. 46% of the respondents were between the ages of 18 to 20. Another 47% percent were between the ages of 21 to 24, followed by 6.4% consisting of the respondents aged 25 and older (Grouped the ages 18-20 (18=9.5%, 19=12.7%, 20=23.8%) and 21-24 (21=28.6%, 22=11.1%, 23=4.8%, 24=3.2 %,) and 25+ (25=1.6%, 26+=4.8%). When it comes to the ethnicity of the respondents, 58.9% were Caucasian. About 15% were African-American. Just over 10% were Hispanic-Latino. The remaining 10 respondents identified as either, bi-racial, Asian-Pacific Islander, North African, or Middle Eastern (Grouped together Asian/Pacific Islander (7.9%), North African/Middle Eastern (1.6%), White and Black Caribbean (1.6%), Biracial (1.6%), Black and White (1.6%), and Mixed Black and White (1.6%)). The majority of the respondents identified as Heterosexual with 82%, while 17% consisted of respondents who identified as members of the LGBTQ community (Grouped Gay/Lesbian/Homosexual (7.9%), Bisexual (7.9%), and Pansexual (1.6%) together). Lastly, 28% of the respondents received an annual income of $0-$1,000. Half, or 50.8% of the respondent's annual income was $1,000-$10,000. Followed by 20 percent receiving an annual income of $10,000-$30,000.

The next set of survey questions were in regard to the political party the respondents' affiliated with most. 60% identified with the Democratic Party, while a mere 8% identified as Republican. Another 27% said they were Independent, unaffiliated with a political party, while 4.8% were unsure (Grouped Democratic Liberal (39.7%) and Moderate Liberal (20.6%) together. I also grouped Conservative (3.2%) with Moderate Conservative (4.8%) together. For independents, I grouped the respondents who said they were independent (9.5%) with the respondents who don't identify with any party (17.5%)). However, when asked where their political ideologies land on a scale of 1-5 (1=far left Liberal, 5=far right Conservative), 66% said Liberal, while Conservative political ideologies at 12.7%. The remaining 20% of respondents

claimed to have more moderate political ideologies (Grouped the respondents from 1 (23.8%) and 2 (42.9%) as Liberal, as well as grouping the respondents who chose 4 (11.1%) and 5 (1.6%) as conservative). **See Figure 1**.
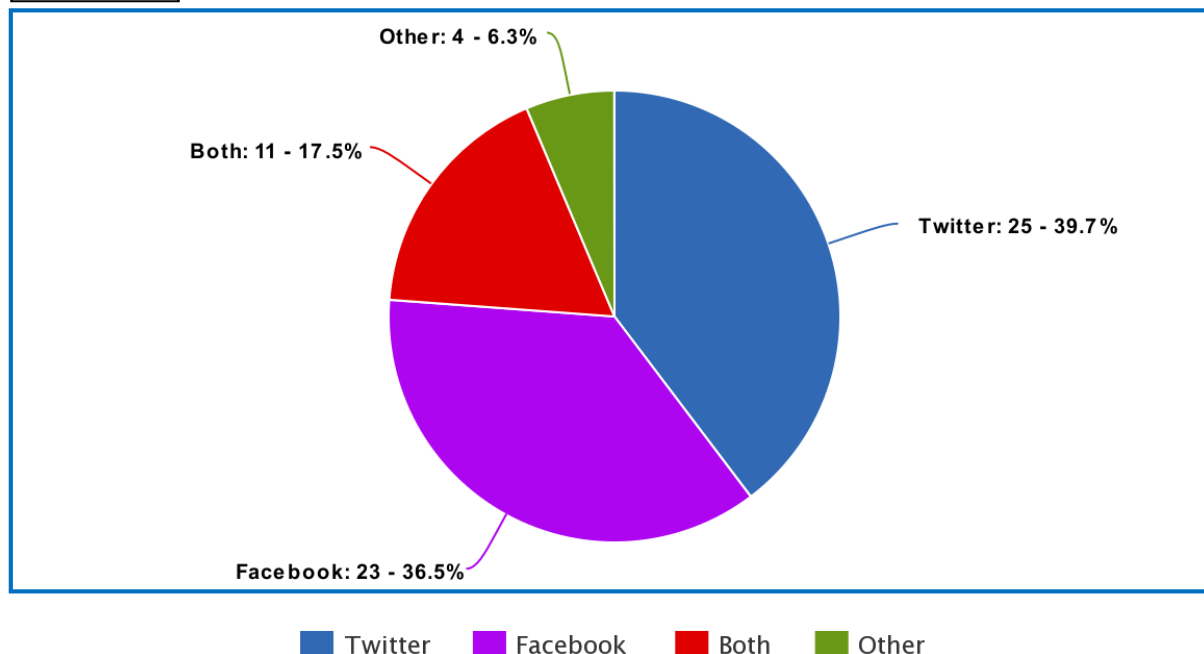
Figure 1

Respondents' Political Ideologies
Survey of 63 College Students

- Unsure: 3 - 4.8%
- Republican-Conservative: 5 - 7.9%
- Independent: 17 - 27.0%
- Democratic-Liberal: 38 - 60.3%

Democratic-Liberal   Independent   Republican-Conservative   Unsure

meta-chart.com
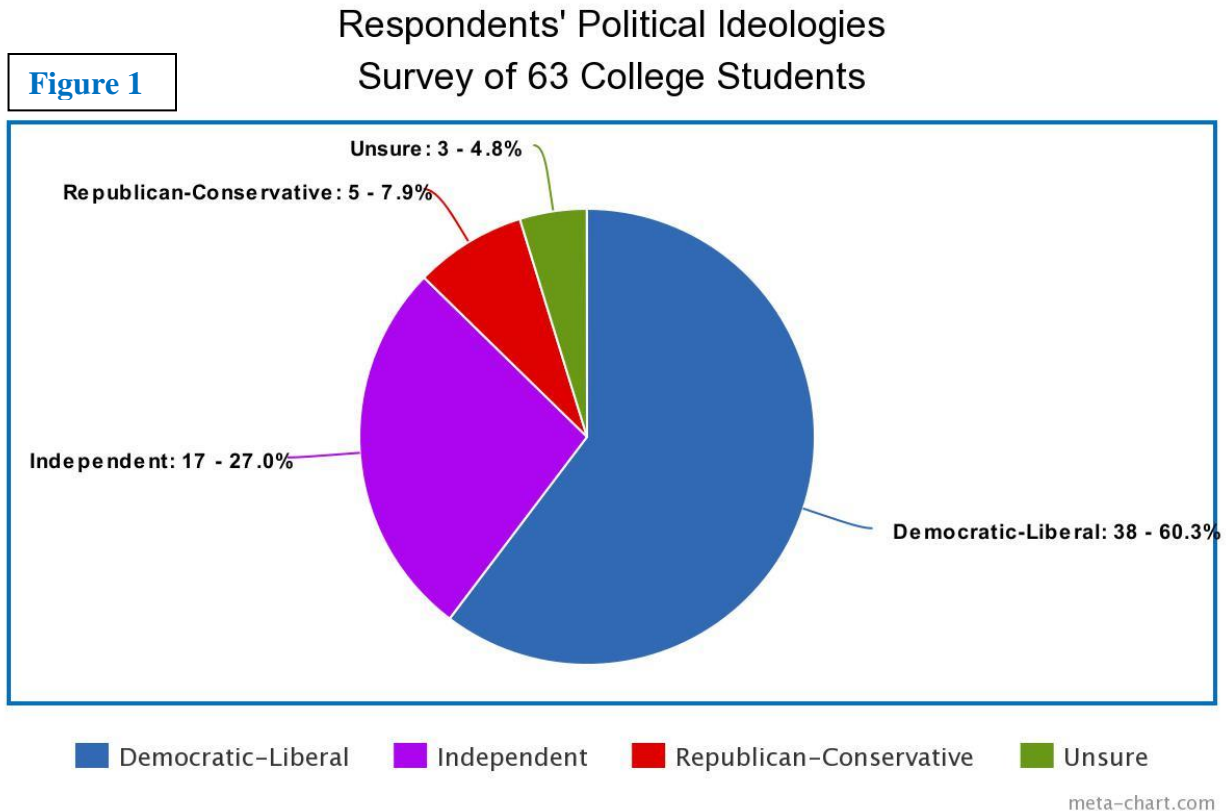
The study also sought more insight into the influence social media has on reinforcing college students' political ideologies. However, with a lot of different forms of social media out there, I narrowed the scope of social media to Facebook and Twitter. Between Facebook and Twitter, the respondents were asked which they felt exposed to more political news. About 40% of respondents claimed that Twitter exposed them to more political news than on Facebook which had 36%. 17% of the respondents said that both Facebook and Twitter exposed them to the same amount of political news, while the remaining 6.4% said neither (Grouped together the respondents who answered "Neither" (1.6%), respondents who said they "Don't use Twitter" (1.6%), respondents who chose "Reddit" (1.6%), and "Other" (1.6%)). **See Figure 2**.

Between Facebook & Twitter, which exposes more political news
Survey of 63 College Students

Figure 2

Other: 4 - 6.3%

Both: 11 - 17.5%

Twitter: 25 - 39.7%

Facebook: 23 - 36.5%

■ Twitter ■ Facebook ■ Both ■ Other

meta-chart.com

The following question asked the respondents which they felt shared more reliable or truthful political news. About 43% of respondents felt that Twitter shared more reliable or truthful political news, while only 2 respondents or just over 3% said that Facebook shared more reliable or truthful political news (Grouped together respondents who selected "Both" (1.6%) and "About Equal" (14.3%)). However, 38% of the respondents claimed neither Facebook nor Twitter was a reliable source of political news. Lastly, 16% of the respondents claimed that both Facebook and Twitter shared an equal amount of reliable or truthful political news. **See Figure 3**.

Another question regarded whether the respondents check the source of political news they read on either Facebook or Twitter. Among Twitter users, 41% answered "Yes" to if they check the source of a political post, while about 8% said "No" and about 43 percent answered "Sometimes" (Grouped together the respondents who chose "Sometimes" (39.7%) with the respondents who said it depends on if the source is Liberal (1.6%) or Conservative (1.6%)). When it came to political posts on Facebook, 46% answered "Yes" to if they check the source, 12% answered "No", and 20% answered "Sometimes" (Grouped together the respondents who answered "Sometimes" (17.5%) with the respondents who said it depends on if the post is more conservative (3.2%)).

I then had the respondents' answer questions on social media and political bias. 54% of the respondents claimed Twitter was liberally biased, while 3% agued Facebook. 19% claimed both Facebook and Twitter were liberally biased, 20% were unsure, and another 3% said neither were liberally biased. When asked the same question regarding which social media platform they felt were conservatively biased, 52% said Facebook and only 1% said Twitter. Furthermore,

about 5% said both were conservatively biased, 14% said neither, and 27% were unsure. **See Figures 4 & 5**.

Between Facebook & Twitter, which shares more reliable political news
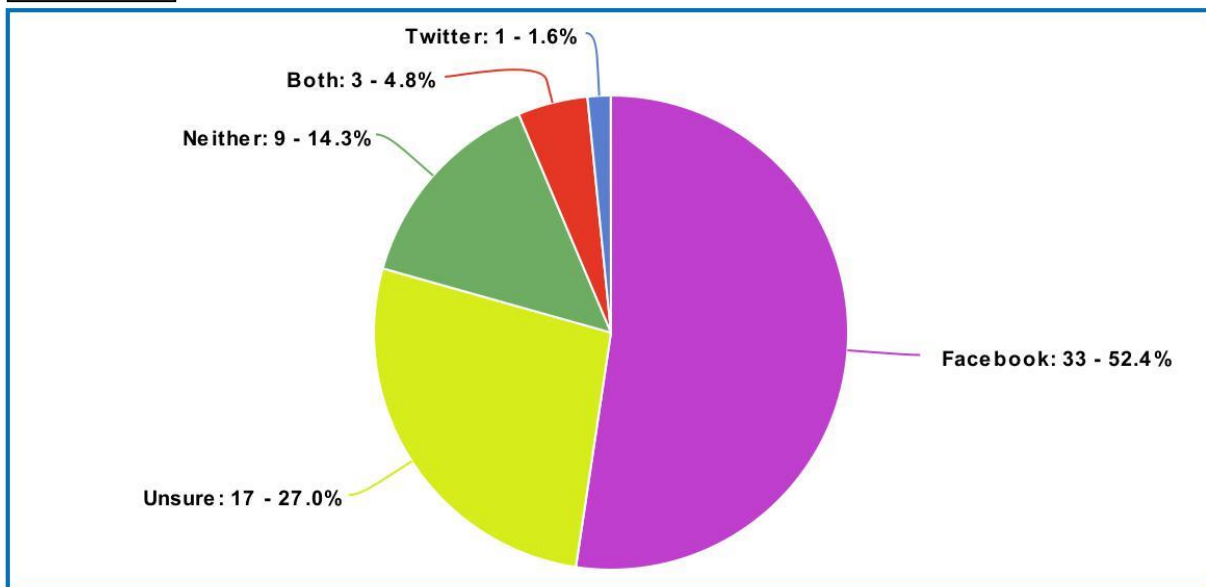### Survey of 63 College Students

Figure 3

Facebook: 2 - 3.2%
Both: 10 - 15.9%
Twitter: 27 - 42.9%
Neither: 24 - 38.1%
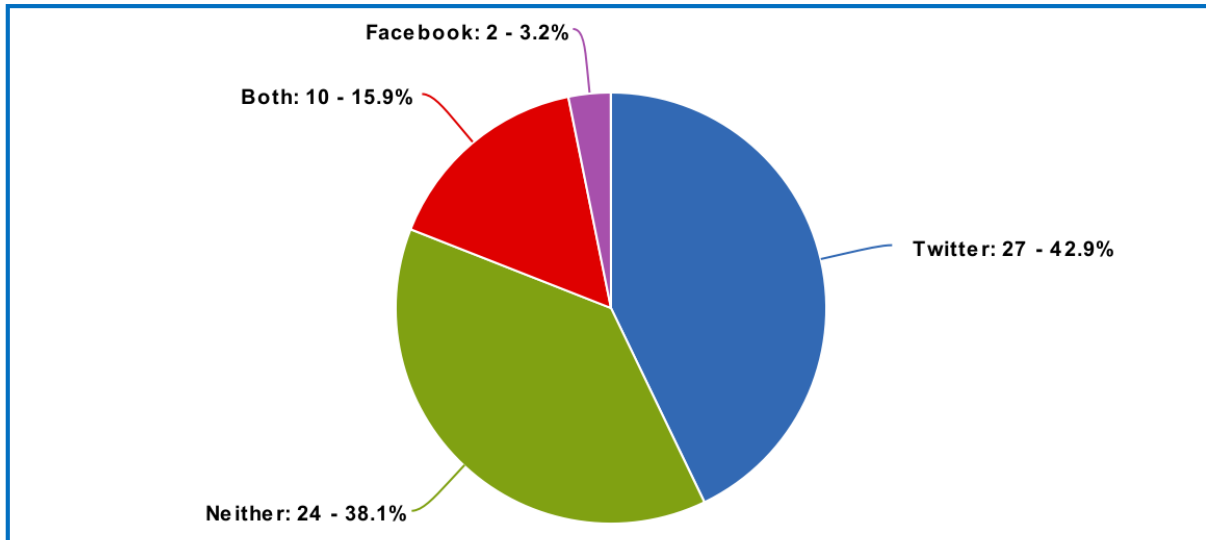
- Twitter
- Neither
- Both
- Facebook

Which is more conservatively biased
Survey of 63 College Students

Figure 4

Twitter: 1 - 1.6%
Both: 3 - 4.8%
Neither: 9 - 14.3%
Facebook: 33 - 52.4%
Unsure: 17 - 27.0%

- Facebook
- Unsure
- Neither
- Both
- Twitter

meta-chart.com

Figure 5

Which is more liberally biased
Survey of 63 College Students

Neither: 2 - 2.4%
Facebook: 2 - 2.4%
Both: 12 - 14.5%
Unsure: 13 - 15.7%
Twitter: 54 - 65.1%

Twitter Unsure Both Facebook Neither
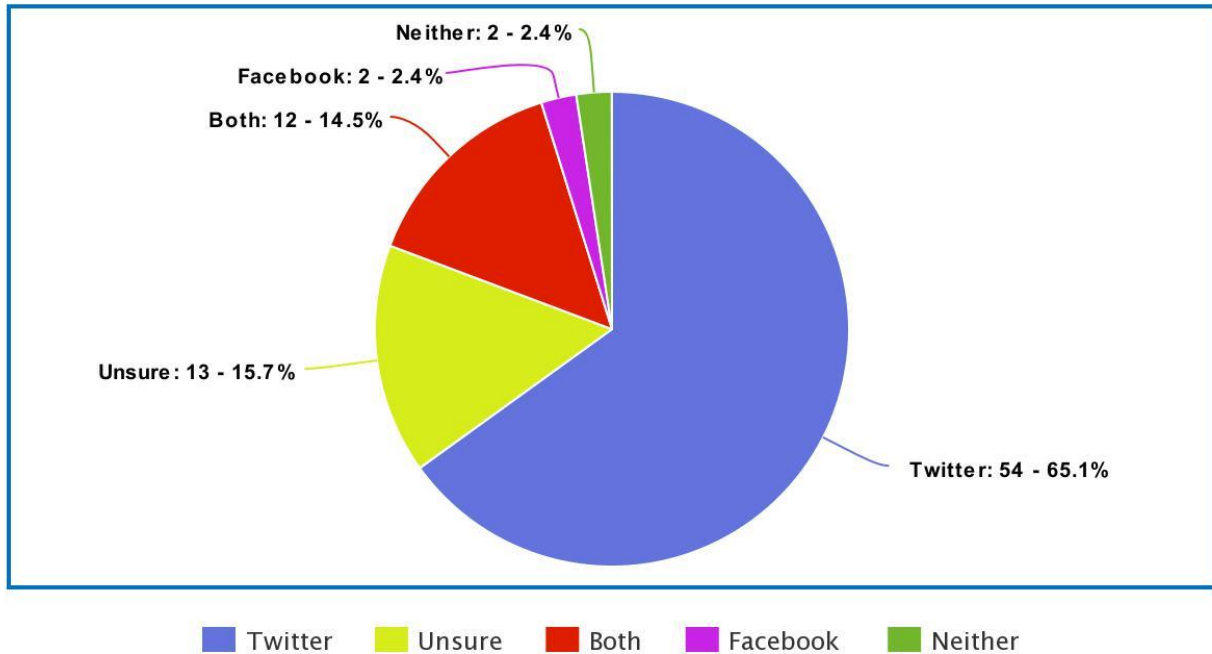
meta-chart.com

I followed up that question with whether they used Facebook or Twitter as a primary source of political news. About 24% of respondents answered "Yes" to if they used Twitter as a primary source of political news, 47% answered "No", and about 16% claimed they sometimes use Twitter as their primary source of political news (Excluding the 12.7% of respondents who said they don't use Twitter). When asked the same question on whether they use Facebook as their primary source of political news, an astounding 0% of respondents answered "Yes", with almost 67% answering "No". The remaining respondents said they sometimes use Facebook as their primary source of political news (Excluding the 20.6% of respondents who don't use Facebook). **See Figures 6 & 7**.

Is Twitter your primary source for political news
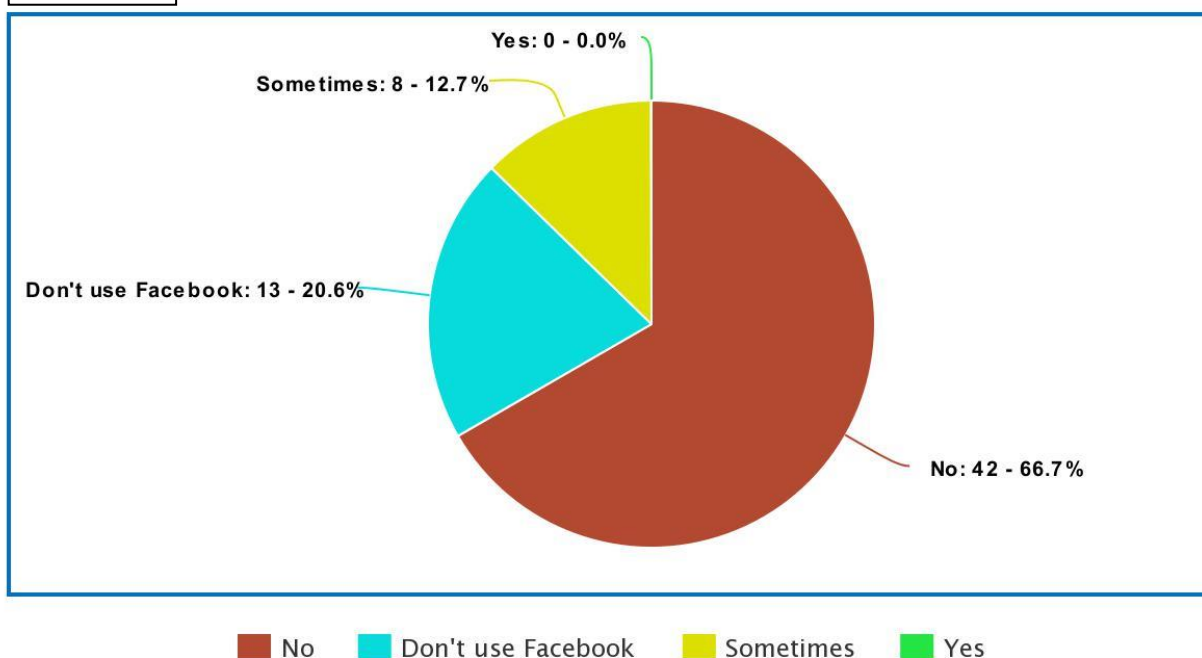### Survey of 63 College Students

Don't use Twitter: 8 - 12.7%

Sometimes: 10 - 15.9%

No: 30 - 47.6%

Yes: 15 - 23.8%

■ No ■ Yes ■ Sometimes ■ Don't use Twitter
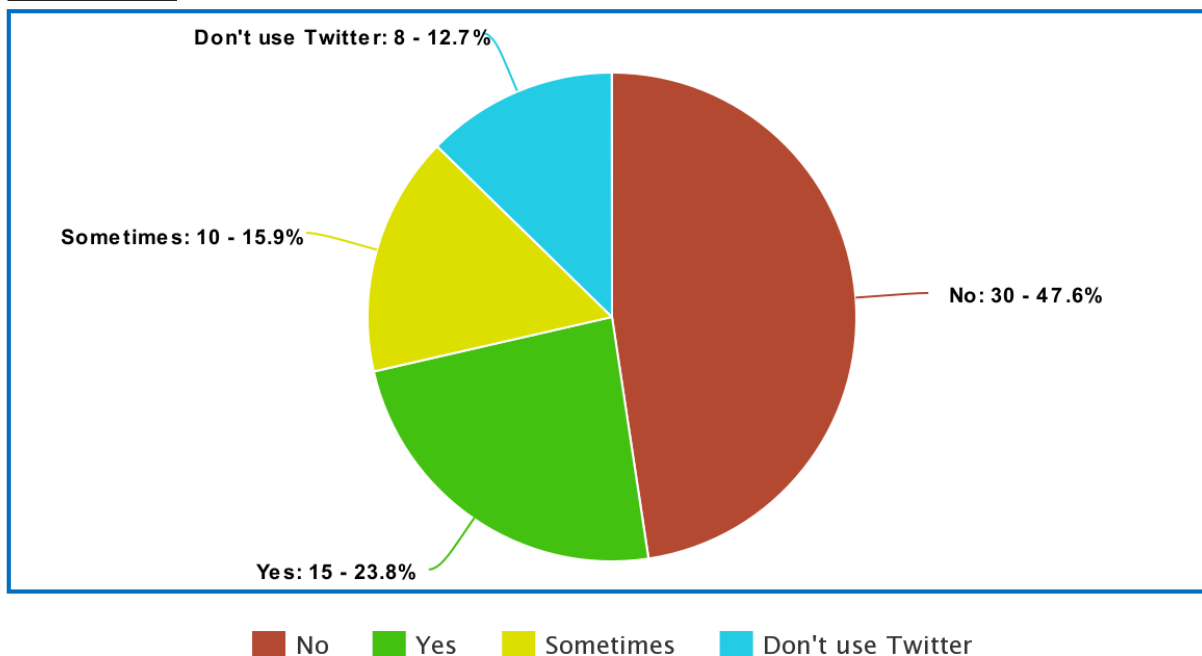
meta-chart.com

Is Facebook your primary source for political news
Survey of 63 College Students

Yes: 0 - 0.0%

Sometimes: 8 - 12.7%

Don't use Facebook: 13 - 20.6%

No: 42 - 66.7%

■ No ■ Don't use Facebook ■ Sometimes ■ Yes

meta-chart.com

For the final few questions, I asked the respondents if they have seen a Liberal or Conservative political post that made them question their prior political ideologies. 50% of the respondents answered "Yes" when to seeing a Liberal political post that made them question their prior political ideologies, while the other 50% answered "No" (Grouped together the respondents who answered "Yes" (22.2%), "Once or Twice" (22.2%), and "More than a few times." (4.8%)). Conversely, about 40% of respondents answered "Yes" when asked if a Conservative post made them question their prior political ideologies, while 60% answered "No" (Grouped together respondents who answered "Yes" (17.5%), "Once or Twice" (19%), and "More than a few times" (3.2%)).

Two more survey questions had the respondents chose on a scale of 1-5 how overall trustworthy they felt today's political journalism was, and how concerned they were about the current state of American political news journalism. About half of the respondents, or 49% selected "3" for how trustworthy today's political journalism was. However, 49% selected "4" for how concerned they were about the current state of American political news. **See Graph 1 & 2**.
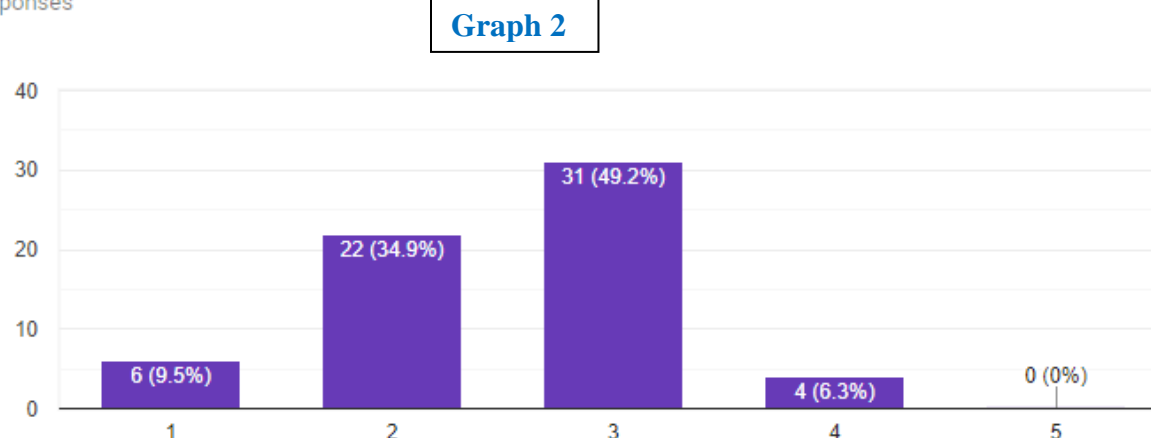
On a scale from 1-5 how concerned are you about the current state of American political news journalism?

63 responses

Graph 1
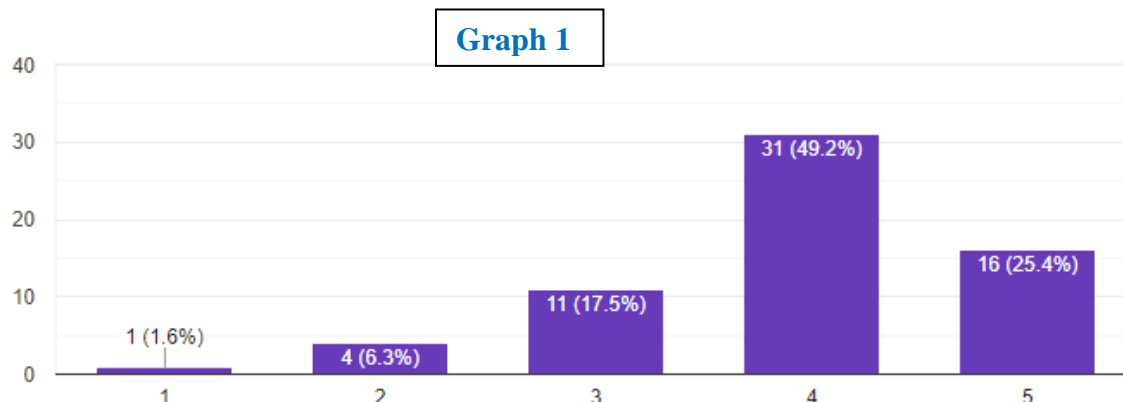
On a scale of 1-5, how trustworthy do you think political journalism is today, as a whole?

63 responses

Graph 2

The final multiple-choice survey question had the respondents choose between Liberal and Conservative news as being more trustworthy. 31% of the respondents felt that Liberal news was more trustworthy, while 11% said Conservative news were more trustworthy. About 16% were unsure, and another 41% didn't believe that either Liberal or Conservative news was trustworthy. A total of 0% of the respondents selected the option, "Both Conservative and Liberal news is trustworthy".

In a follow-up question, the survey asked the respondents to explain the answer they chose for which political news was more trustworthy. I organized the respondents' written answers with whether they selected "Conservative news", "Liberal news", "I'm not sure", and "Neither Conservative or Liberal news" as being more trustworthy. I noticed similar themes presented in their responses. The respondents who chose "Conservative news" argued that Liberal news was biased and trying to discredit anything that Conservative news discusses. Similar responses were noted when analyzing why respondents chose "Liberal news"; arguing that Conservative news was too biased and promoted fear-mongering. When it came to the "I'm not sure" or "Neither" respondents, they also argued similarly – that they didn't trust either because they were too biased.

Chart 1 below shares seven respondents answers explaining why they trust Liberal or Conservative news the most, as well as seven responses from the respondents who were unsure or felt neither were trustworthy. The chart also includes quotes from 15 of the respondents who answered the optional question at the end of the survey which asked, "Do you have further opinions regarding political news, whether it be how it is shared, has changed, or anything that you would be willing to share?" 18 respondents answered this question (The remaining three were not applicable). I sorted the responses from the optional question by the answer the respondent chose for the question regarding which political party they trusted more.

Chart 1

Which is more trustworthy?	**Respondents' Reasoning (Why?)**	**Optional Ending Response Question (Anything else they'd like to say**
Conservative News	• "Many conservative news outlets directly site statistics and data which is often ignored by liberal news outlets because it would destroy their arguments." • "Bias will always take effect when talking about morals, ideas and beliefs. As a republican I will obviously find republican news more trust worthy as well as I would assume some with a more liberal mind set. Just being honest - Although most media overall is very bias and untrustworthy."	• "Politics has become a bickering platform. There is no discussion and no talk across the aisle. Everyone is stuck in there ways (both parties) and if someone disagrees with you then you must "hate them" at least that's what our society tells us. Anyways I love Jesus and I love all people" • "I tend to get most of my political news from YouTube" • "I believe that everyone has the same goal in mind, but people argue on how to get

	• "Liberals are trying to maintain a status quo, they won't report anything that goes against it" • "I believe that liberals will do anything to discredit anyone. If there is an accident or an incident, people on twitter will go on a witch hunt to ensure that this person's life is ruined. People that are far left are quick to cut people off because they don't like to listen to another point of view." • "Conservatives are more likely to try to be unbiased and honest, and when they are biased, they aren't hiding that fact." • "Facts" • "Conservatives don't blame pewdiepie for mass shootings."	towards that goal. To understand someone's point of view, everyone needs a bit of empathy. Far left and Far right will never come to an agreement because of their inability to have empathy for one another" • "I want to see more honest journalism. All I want to see is more reliable sources and acknowledgement of biases, if nothing else."
Liberal News	• "Conservatives say more false things than liberals" • "I feel that conservative news is more likely to false, fear mongering, use scare tactics, and less basis in science, statistics, and facts." • ""Fear-mongering". Fox news and other platforms that have a Republican agenda love to instill fear in people. Fear everything. Fear god! It's biased. Liberal news tends to be more fact oriented." • "Because liberal-leaning news doesn't offer a financial incentive to rich people ("the elite" if you want to go that way with it) while right-leaning media can always have a pro-big business message or one that reinforces the current institution" • "I find that Conservative news outlets are extremely unwilling to admit to any mistakes within the party or the President. While still	• "clickbait titles are an issue on both sides because many people are too lazy to actually read on and this spreads misinformation" • "Twitter's "retweet" function makes things slightly more reliable because you can see discussion on it from all across the site where on Facebook a lot of the times sharing makes responses to the original post less accessible (but still there)." • "I think the rise in opinion based reporting, as well as a dying news market combined with the ease of access to information is creating an environment that easily spreads misinformation rapidly with little ability to stop it. this cycle is perpetuating the continued divide in our country"

	extremely biased, I think liberal-leaning networks are slightly more willing to question their own authority.” • “Conservative news feels much more like fascist propaganda than liberal news” • “Most conservative news is from fox which has been shown to not be a reliable news source and is labeled as propaganda.”	• “It's hard to form an exact opinion because we all now have camcorders in our pockets. Everything can be documented. Everything can be edited. Our first impressions on news events are typically from social media reactions from our friends/acquaintances/enemies that we follow. No Bueno.” • “Everything in political news must be taken with a grain of salt as it usually doesn't show the whole story”
I'm not sure	• “I feel that news outlets have a tendency to put their spin on the information, instead of just give the straight facts.” • “I feel like far left liberal news and far right conservative news are both biased based on which party they are. I like to read more moderated news. I wouldn't say one or the other is more "trustworthy", I think it depends on where and what you are reading specifically.” • “Truth is hard to come by these days from anyone who reports news.” • “Because they both take their own sides and tries to paint their own picture for their "audience".” • “There is really no way nowadays to get any news that is not biased towards one party or another.” • “neither party is entirely innocent” • “Regardless of where my political beliefs and values fall on the liberal/conservative scale, I feel like both sides try and push their views/agendas in any way possible. I feel both sides accuse the other of	• “Most of the controversy begins with the title...but I'm not sure on how to fix it.” • “I think social media has led people to become extremely polarized in their political views and with the abundance of sources and articles out there it's become so easy for people to cite their beliefs and values using incorrect or biased information and claiming that it's correct just because it's gone viral. As a whole, everyone needs to improve their reading comprehension skills and check their sources before stepping into an argument and people need to worry less about saying their opinion the loudest and focus more on trying to listen and understand the other side.”

	being untrustworthy and I feel both sides have a fair mix of sources that can be considered honest and dishonest."	
Neither Conservative nor Liberal News	• "Both parties have their own perspectives about topics. One party is going to talk more proudly about their positions while most likely bashing or completely ignoring the other side of the conversation." • "News is supposed to be objective, and just facts news that is biased towards a certain school of thinking shouldn't be considered as news" • "Because both views are bias." • "I feel that people in politics can be hard to trust sometimes. Though I identify as democratic I can't always trust people within that party as well. It's hard for me to believe what anybody is telling me. Just like with the last presidential election I did not want Hilary but I DAMN SURE did NOT want trump. I still voted for Hilary though. I just do not have conservative views and could never see myself identifying as conservative.. EVER!" • "Either way there are stances/biases that are taken. I want news with just facts." • "News/information from each other political party will always be biased - they will always have something to prove. I think a third-party, international news source is the best place to get information from since they're more likely to be unbiased." • "I think whoever is creating the headline to the news stories is	• "I check newspapers and npr for most news, because it tends to be less unbiased. • "Should be fact checked by Facebook/twitter before being shared, especially for verified accounts." • "Facebook (and any other social media/news source) pages or websites in general that spread clearly false information (vaccines causing autism or the earth not being round) should be swiftly deleted." • "Everything needs to be taken with a healthy dose of skepticism and people need to do actual research on topics they follow instead of surrounding themselves in an echo chamber"

	trying to get many different people to click on it and read, and tries persuading the audience to feel the same way. Personally I think it depends on where the news is coming from rather than what political party the news is trying to appeal to."	

I also created a word cloud of the participant's responses. See Word Cloud 1.

Word Cloud 1

Limitations

There were a couple of limitations to the study. First, the sample size could have been larger. Having a smaller sample size limits the scope of data that could have been collected. Even though I submitted the survey to a few subreddits on Reddit.com, the majority of the participants were VCU students. If college students from other colleges filled out the survey, I would have received a more diverse sample size. A larger sample size would have also helped diversify the amount of Liberal and Conservative responses. Another limitation of the study is that it primarily focuses on college students' use of Twitter and Facebook for their political news, but there are a plethora of other mediums that college students could use, whether it be other social networking sites or through TV programs. I also could have included some questions regarding how politically active they were online, instead of just their views of online political news.

Discussion

When it came to political ideologies of the college students who took my survey, the majority of them, or 60% identified as more Democratic/Liberal, with the least amount of the sample identifying as Republican/Conservative at just 8%. The second highest percentage of college student's claimed to be Independent of a party with 27%, which wasn't surprising to me. Colleges are typically represented as having more Liberal ideologies or are Independent because they don't like or trust either political parties.

The results from the survey show that the participants were exposed to a similar amount of political news from both Facebook and Twitter, with Twitter at near 40% and Facebook at 36%However, when asked which one they felt shared more reliable and truthful political news, near half, or about 43% of the participants trusted Twitter, while the lowest amount of participants at 3% said they trust Facebook for political news. Furthermore, the respondents are more likely to check the source of a political post on Facebook (46%) than on Twitter (41%). This could be because the respondents felt Facebook was less trustworthy, so they were more obligated to check the source, or this could be because it is easier to check sources on Twitter.

Even though most respondents read and trusted political news on Twitter, only about 24% said they used Twitter as their primary source for political news. On the other side of the spectrum, none of the sixty-three respondents said they use Facebook as their primary source for political news. What I found as one of the more interesting results from the survey, were that over half of the participants, or 54% claimed that Twitter had a Liberal news bias, and over half, or 52%, feel that Facebook had a Conservative news bias. One reason for this may be due to a larger number of college students moving from Facebook to Twitter to post, share, and voice their political opinions. At the same time, a growing number of older, traditionally conservative generations are using Facebook for the same thing. Regardless, these results from the survey conclude that college student's trust and prefer the political news they are exposed to on Twitter than on Facebook.

I asked the respondents in two separate questions if they saw a Conservative or Liberal post on social media that made them question their prior political ideologies. The results found that half of the respondents, or about 50% have seen a Liberal post that made them question their prior political ideologies, while the other half hasn't. A possible reason for the half who haven't seen a Liberal post that made them question their prior political ideologies could be due to them

already holding Liberal views. This could also be due to already having a largely Liberal sample. However, much less of the respondents at 60%, claimed to have seen a Conservative post that made them question their prior political ideologies. If more Liberal and Conservative respondents use Twitter or Facebook as a source of political news, but follow and receive news that leans towards their beliefs, their political ideologies may be reinforced. These findings would be consistent with Christopher Bail's research on selective exposure to partisan information among Twitter users shaping their political attitudes (Christopher Bail et. al, 2018).

I wanted to see how the respondents would to choose between Liberal news and Conservative news as being more trustworthy overall, in distributing political news. Interestingly, the second lowest percentage (11%) of respondents chose Conservative news as being more trustworthy, while Liberal news was the second highest (31.7%) as being more trustworthy. However, the majority of participants (41.3%) said that neither Conservative nor Liberal news was trustworthy in distributing the news, while absolutely zero of the participants said they trusted both. I found it interesting that none of the respondents used Facebook as a primary source of political news, or trusted Liberal and Conservative news as a whole. However, this could also be resulting from the sample of the survey primarily being primarily Liberal. These findings would be consistent with previous studies in which youth's use of social media may have a positive effect on their political knowledge and awareness, at the cost of their news being more politically biased (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010).

The most insightful data collection came when evaluating the written responses where the participants explained why they trust either Conservative or Liberal news more, as well as why they answered neither, or unsure. What I found were that the respondents who trusted Conservative news more than Liberal news argued that it was because the other party had a political bias, sharing biased political news. The same reasons were noted with the respondents who trusted Liberal news more, claiming that Conservative news was politically biased. Furthermore, more similarities were found in the explanations of the respondents who don't trust either or were unsure. Most, if not all of their reasons were because they felt that both Liberal and Conservative news was biased against distributing trustworthy news. They also argued that the rising exposure to partisan clickbait news that negatively depicted the opposing political party makes it difficult to place their trust in the political news and information they were receiving. These results agree with findings from prior research arguing that political news exposure to college students doesn't necessarily result in higher rates of political involvement (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010). Instead, they echo chambers that make it hard for college students to believe the news they receive. College student's political ideologies are reinforced by increased exposure to political news that more closely aligns with their own political ideologies, or further validating their feelings on particular political beliefs. These findings are also consistent with previous research (Christopher Bail et. al, 2018).

Two of the near-final questions had the respondents decide on a scale from one to five how concerned they were about the current state of American political journalism, and how trustworthy they felt American political journalism was as a whole. For the first scale question, I found it interesting that half of the respondents, or 49%, chose number four, while the second highest number of respondents, at 25% chose number five. Only one respondent selected number one. When it came to the second scale question the same amount of respondents who chose the number four for the previous scale question, chose number three (49.2%) for how trustworthy they felt about political journalism as a whole. However, none selected number five, which means none of the respondents felt completely trusting of today's political journalism.

From the results of the scale questions, it's apparent that the college students in the survey sample are highly concerned about the current state of American political journalism. I'm not too surprised by that particular result because political news has become a big issue in modern society. As many of the respondents mentioned in their written responses, political news has turned into a battleground of bias between Liberals and Conservatives. College students consistently exposed to biased political news makes it hard for them to know what news is real or who could be trusted. The second scale question is broader to include all methods of distributing political news. It's interesting that half of the respondents chose number three, or the middle ground of how trustworthy they felt political journalism was as a whole. However, the fact that none chose number five, while only a few chose number four, these results tell us that there is a disconnect between college students wanting reliable unbiased news, but not being able to trust the ones who deliver that news.

Conclusion

Social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter have become two of the fastest ways for people to post, share, comment, and participate in the current events of politics. With more college students turning to Facebook and Twitter as their source for political news, the greater the potential influence they may have on their political affiliations and ideologies. The results from the study, however, reveal that college students prefer Twitter as a better and more reliable way of receiving their political news. Facebook, on the other hand, is not nearly as trusted or reliable according to the college students who participated in the survey. The college student participants also believe that Twitter has a Liberal bias, while Facebook has a Conservative bias.

Regardless of whether the respondents trusted Twitter or Facebook as a source for political news, and regardless of the political affiliations of the respondents, the results from the survey reveal that college students are highly concerned over media bias when it comes to the distribution of political news. This can also have an even greater influence on what college students believe, and who they trust and affiliate with politically. It's important that college students can trust the political news that is presented to them, is delivered with truth and without bias.

Appendix – Survey Questions

Are you currently enrolled as a college student?

○ Yes

○ No

What is your age?

○ Under 18

○ 18

○ 19

○ 20

○ 21

○ 22

○ 23

○ 24

○ 25

○ 26+

What gender do you identify as?

○ Female

○ Male

○ Other...

What is your ethnicity?

○ White/Caucasian

○ Black/African American

○ Hispanic/Latino

○ Asian/Pacific Islander

○ Native American/American Indian

○ North African/Middle Eastern

○ Other...

What is your sexual orientation?

○ Straight/Heterosexual

○ Gay/Lesbian/Homosexual

○ Bisexual

○ Other...

What is your personal annual income?

○ $0 - $1,000

○ $1,001 - $10,000

○ $10,001 - $30,000

○ $30,001 - $50,000

○ $50,001 - $100,000

○ Over $100,000

Which political party would you say you identify as? *

○ Democratic Liberal

○ Republican Conservative

○ Independent

○ Moderate Liberal

○ Moderate Conservative

○ I don't identify with any party

○ I'm not sure

On a scale of 1-5 (1=far left Liberal 5=far right Conservative) where do your political ideologies land?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Far left liberal	○	○	○	○	○	Far right conservative

Between Facebook and Twitter, which social media platform do you see having more posts regarding political news or politcial information? (Wheather it is posts from news sources or people you follow on Twitter or Facebook.)

○ Facebook

○ Twitter

○ Neither Facebook nor Twitter

○ Both Facebook and Twitter

○ Other...

Which social media platform do you feel circulates more reliable in distributing truthful political news?

○ Facebook

○ Twitter

○ Neither

○ Both

○ About Equal

When spotting political news/political posts on Twitter, do you tend to check the source for accuracy?

○ Yes

○ No

○ Sometimes

○ I check the source if the post is more Liberal

○ I check the source if the post is more Conservative

○ I don't use Twitter

When spotting political news/political posts on Facebook, do you tend to check the source for accuracy?

○ Yes

○ No

○ Sometimes

○ I check the source if the post is more Liberal

○ I check the source if the post is more Conservative

○ I don't use Facebook

When spotting political news posts on Facebook, do you tend to read more than just the title?

○ Yes

○ No

○ Sometimes

○ I don't us Facebook

○ Depends on the content

When spotting political news posts on Twitter, do you tend to read more than just the title?

○ Yes

○ No

○ Sometimes

○ I don't use Twitter

○ Depends on the content

Which platform do you think shares more Liberally biased news?

○ Twitter

○ Facebook

○ Both

○ Unsure

○ Neither

Which platform do you think shares more Conservatively biased news?

○ Twitter

○ Facebook

○ Both

○ Unsure

○ Neither

Is Twitter your primary source of staying up to date on political news?

○ Yes

○ No

○ Sometimes

○ I don't use Twitter

Is Facebook your primary source of staying up to date on political news?

○ Yes

○ No

○ Sometimes

○ I don't use Facebook

Have you seen a post about Liberal politics that made you question your stance on prior political ideologies?

○ Yes

○ No

○ Once or twice

○ More than a few times

Have you seen a post about Conservative politics that made you question your stance on prior political ideologies?

○ Yes

○ No

○ Once or twice

○ More than a few times

If you had to choose between Liberal and Conservative news, which do you feel is more trustworthy?

○ Conservative news is more trustworthy

○ Liberal news is more trustworthy

○ Neither Conservative or Liberal news are trustworthy

○ Both Conservative and Liberal news are trustworthy

○ I'm not sure

Depending on your answer to the last question, why do you feel that way? *

Long answer text

On a scale of 1-5, how trustworthy do you think political journalism is today, * as a whole?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not trustworthy at all	○	○	○	○	○	Trustworthy all the time

On a scale from 1-5 how concerned are you about the current state of * American political news journalism?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not concerned	○	○	○	○	○	Very concerned

(Optional) Do you have further opinions regarding political news, whether it be how it is shared, has changed, or anything that you would be willing to share?

Long answer text

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