THE ROLE OF ALTERNATIVE INFORMATION SOURCES IN PUBLIC OPINION PERCEPTION: HOW SOCIAL MEDIA AND RELIGIOUS MEDIA USE MEDIATE THE IMPACT OF INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES ON FALSE CONSENSUS

by

TAISIK HWANG

(Under the Direction of Itai Himelboim)

ABSTRACT

The topics discussed and developed in this dissertation aim to offer a conceptual model describing how individual attributes and media behaviors affect perception of public support for one's own position regarding sociopolitical issues. The model proposes that individual differences in religiosity and media skepticism directly influence perceptions of public opinion on sociopolitical issues, resulting in false consensus, and that, at the same time, use of alternative media sources mediates the influence of individual differences on false consensus. This model was tested using samples drawn from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) as well as structural equation modeling (SEM). Our findings demonstrate that religiosity, media skepticism, religious media use, and social media use all influence overestimation of public support for one's own attitudes, albeit on different issues. The differences between relationship-oriented and content-oriented social media were also found in our model. We also found that religious media use fully mediates the effect of religiosity on false consensus about marijuana use and

affirmative action. Another contribution of this dissertation is the development of refined measures of media use to better capture various dimensions of this popular concept. The implications of this dissertation and suggestions for future research are discussed.
INDEX WORDS: False consensus, Religiosity, Media skepticism, Social media use, Religious media use

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INTRODUCTION

Objectives and Justification of the Dissertation

Much research has explored and tested the role of communication and mass media in shaping and shifting public opinion from many perspectives (Entman, 1993; Hoffman, Glynn, Huge, Sietman, & Thomson, 2007; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). A new approach to public opinion processes has also identified perception as a key determinant of opinion formation and spawned a string of hypotheses and theories in the perceptual influence literature (Glynn, Herbst, O'Keefe, Shapiro, Lindeman, 2004). False consensus, or overestimation of public support for one's opinion, is one of the more researched concepts in this area, and yet more research is needed to help understand psychological, individual, social factors affecting this outcome variable. This dissertation seeks to contribute to the literature by developing a conceptual framework that integrates individual predispositions (i.e., media skepticism and religiosity) and media behavior (i.e., religious media and social media use) based on cognitive and motivational theories (e.g., selective exposure and motivated reasoning). The results from this dissertation will help us understand the determinants and causal process of false consensus, with the addition of independent and intervening variables that have rarely been examined in relation to the phenomenon.

Explaining how this egocentric bias occurs is important as false consensus may cause detrimental effects on our society and not least on a politically polarized society. First, misperception of public opinion in favor of one's own preferences can be harmful

to democratic political system (Krosnick, 1990). Scholars argue that the perception of opinion climate may be more important than the actual opinion distribution in determining opinion expression (Glynn & Park, 1997; Miller & Morrison, 2009; Matthes et al., 2010). For instance, Glynn and Park (1997) found that perceived prevalence of opinion is correlated with opinion expression when generalized other are used as a reference group. When the misperception results in an actual shift in the average group members' attitudes the group exhibiting false consensus may be susceptible to extremism. In a less extreme case, incorrect expectations about a candidate's positions on issues due to false consensus may lead to a fall in public support for that candidate's policies, which voters find incongruent with their initial expectations (Krosnik, 1990). Moreover, false consensus can have negative impact on individuals' behavior. Incorrect perception of strong support for their own views may make people "more willing to act on their views" and "less prepared to compromise" and thus "less likely to modify their attitude" (Watt & Larkin, 2010, p. 724).

The primacy of the traditional mass media in public opinion research has been challenged as the expansion of the Internet gives rise to a host of online media. Great potential online media have as a source of information has garnered much attention from communication and political science scholars (Chang, 2005; Price, Nir, & Cappella, 2006). With the increase in popularity of social media, moreover, scholars have attempted to see how individuals use social media for political participation (e.g., Gil de Zúñiga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012; Valenzuela, 2013) and decision making (e.g., Kushin, & Yamamoto, 2010). However, scholars have rarely examined the role of social media use in political attitudes formation and change. Especially, few studies have investigated how

these new communication technologies affect public opinion formation in general and perception of public sentiment on political, social, or moral issues. As such, this dissertation will provide empirical evidence that use of social media has impacts on public opinion perception about certain issues by causing individuals to committing egocentric attribution bias.

An inevitable conflict between religion and social science has been discussed among social scientists (Bellah, 1970; Nelson, 1970; Shepherd,1972). A scientific approach to study of religion suggests that we are not studying religion per se but human considerations such as religious behavior, beliefs, motivation, and perception (Hood et al. 2009). The goal of social scientists is to understand many ways in which people's religious faith operates in their social, cultural, or political context. Psychologists try to focus on the individual in comprehending these ways, whereas sociologists attempt to investigate the role religion plays in society. For instance, William James (1902/1985), one of the founders of the psychology of religion, examined whether religion does good or harm to the individual while delving into the nature of religion. On the other hand, Putnam and Campbell (2010), well-known American political scientists, examined religion's changing role in the contemporary United States, including the relationship between religion and public opinion, which will be discussed later in Chapter 4. Our study will also contribute to communication science by providing evidence for how false consensus is affected by religiosity and religious media—religious variables that have rarely been explored in the perceptual influence literature.

Media use has been one of the most researched concepts in quantitative communication science and particularly in the media effect literature. On the one hand, a

more sensitive measure of this construct enables the identification of more subtle media effects (Becker & Whitney, 1980; Chaffee & Schleuder, 1986). Considerable debate, on the other hand, has continued over reliability and validity of self-reported measures of media use (Coromina & Saris, 2009; de Vreese & Neijens, 2016; Eveland et al., 2009; Niedereppe, 2016; Prior, 2009). Scholars have recommended several ways to improve the quality of self-reported measures of media use (Chang & Krosnick, 2003; Coromina & Saris, 2009; Newton, 2000; Eveleand et al., 2009). For example, measures asking about specific domains or types of media are better than generic measures (Newton, 2000; Eveleand et al., 2009). Measures combining exposure, attention, and reliance are preferable to simple exposure to achieve construct validity in that the former work better in accounting for the variance of dependent variables (Becker & Whitney, 1980; Eveland et al., 2009). Another contribution of this dissertation will be the development of a refined measure of media use, building on these recommendations. We developed measures of media use asking about specific domains (i.e., information, news, and opinion) and specific types of media (i.e., two types of religious media and two types of social media) and combined exposure, attention, and reliance to better capture various dimensions of the construct.

Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

A conceptual model proposed in this dissertation describes how individual attributes and media behaviors affect false consensus, an overestimation of public support for one's own position on sociopolitical issues. This model proposes that individual differences in religiosity and media skepticism directly influence perceptions of public opinion, resulting in false consensus, and that the use of alternative information sources

(i.e., religious media and social media) mediates the influence of individual differences on false consensus. Theoretically, false consensus is here defined as "a tendency to perceive one's own choices and judgments as relatively common when making inferences about target groups." Target groups in our work refer to the general adult population in the U.S. as we are interested in how people perceive the climate of public opinion about various societal issues.

Theoretical definitions of other major constructs are as follows. Media skepticism is defined as "the extent to which an individual is critical of the mainstream news media." It does not concern objective characteristics of the media but subjective perception of the audience (Tsfati, 2003). Media skepticism is also applied to the mainstream media as a whole (or as an institution) rather than as a particular channel or source (Ladd, 2011; Tsfati, 2003). Most Americans, if not all, seem to have a clear idea about the institutional news media as research consistently shows that they do not have difficulty answering survey questions regarding media trust (Ladd, 2011; Tsfati, 2002). The use of religious media and social media as alternative information sources is employed as intervening variables in this dissertation. The concept of alternative media is defined as "those media that are perceived to provide information neglected or unsupported by the mainstream media." This definition suggests that alternative media is defined as such by individual audience members. Thus, it is a subjective matter as different individuals turn to different media sources when seeking information not found in the mainstream media.

Media use is defined as "the extent to which audience members have encountered, relied on, and devoted attention to specific media sources and/or content."

As mentioned in the previous section, it is vital to capture several dimensions of media use because media effects don't typically occur just from exposure (Chaffee & Schleuder, 1986; Rubin, 1993). An increasing number of scholars argue that adding essential dimensions of the construct (e.g., attention, reliance) to exposure should more adequately reflect an individual's use of media. Thus, we combined exposure, attention, and reliance for our measure of alternative media use. Our measures demonstrated acceptable internal consistency (.79 for religious media use; .76 for social media use; see Table 3). Confirmatory factor analysis revealed that media use explains better the variance of reliance than that of exposure for religious media use, and the variance of reliance or attention than that of exposure (See Table 9). In addition, our measurement model in Figure 4 shows that our measures of media use have good convergent and discriminant validity.

Finally, religiosity is defined as "the extent to which an individual believes in her religious doctrines, practices or participates in religious activities, and perceives the importance of her own religion in everyday life." This conceptual definition fully mirrors the three essential components of the construct: cognitive, behavioral, and affective dimensions. A review of the extant literature recommends that religiosity should be conceptualized as a multidimensional phenomenon, not emphasizing one aspect over others (Bjarnason, 2007; Cornwall et al. 1986; De Jong et al. 2001; Holdcroft, 2006; King & Hunt, 1972; Wilkes et al. 1986). It is a legitimate concern that our measure may for the most part reflect the Judeo-Christian religious tradition as with other measure of religiosity developed in the U.S. (Croucher, Turner, Anarbaeva, Oommen, & Borton, 2008; Koenig et al., 2001). However, Putnam and Campbell's (2010) measures of

religiosity, which is comparable to our measures, demonstrated that they can capture highly religious members of different traditions (e.g., Christians and Muslims).

Our conceptual model is based on several assumptions derived from such theories as selective exposure, motivated reasoning, active audience, and reinforcement effects. Simply put, we assume that active and motivated audience members selectively expose themselves to non-mainstream media channels that offer attitude-consistent messages, and that these media have reinforcing effects on the audience members, by which the likelihood of overestimation of public support for one's own attitudes is increased. We also assume that people understand the difference between the two types of media, that is, mainstream vs. alternative media. This may not be considered an assumption in and of itself as there can be many more types of media one can imagine. It is necessary, however, to conceptualize these two different types of media as a binary approach to understanding the media landscape is appropriate for the purposes of this dissertation.

These assumptions offer the rationale behind the hypotheses proposed in our work, along with supporting empirical evidence found in various research fields including social psychology, political communication, and social media. Our hypotheses are as follows:

H1: Religiosity will be positively associated with overestimation of public support for one's own attitudes toward societal and ethical issues, controlling for religious media use.

H2: Media skepticism will be positively associated with overestimation of public

support for one's own attitudes toward societal and political issues, controlling for social media use.

H3: Religiosity will have positive relationship with religious media use.

H4: Media skepticism will have positive relationship with social media use.

H5: Use of religious media will be positively related to overestimation of public support for one's own attitudes toward societal and ethical issues.

H6: Use of social media will be positively related to overestimation of public support for one's own attitudes toward societal and political issues.

H7: Religiosity will be positively associated with media skepticism.

In addition, we ask the following research questions given the paucity of empirical studies that explored the relationships between religiosity and social media and between media skepticism and religious media:

RQ1: What is the relationship between religiosity and social media use?

RQ2: What is the relationship between media skepticism and religious media use?

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation follows the alternative dissertation format that includes six chapters, with an entire chapter devoted to each major concept (i.e., false consensus, media skepticism, alternative media use, and religiosity). Chapter 1 begins with a historical overview of the main outcome variable, or false consensus, to lay conceptual foundation for the construct and provide its definition. The irresistible nature of this

egocentric bias in perceiving the climate of public opinion has been evidenced by a number of empirical studies and meta-analytic reviews, regardless of confusion and debate surrounding an appropriate terminology. Mechanisms that are believed to underlie false consensus and variables that have association with it are also reviewed in this chapter for building up a theoretical model and identifying the most consistent covariates in the literature.

Chapter 2 discusses media skepticism as one of the major exogenous variables affecting both social media use and false consensus. This chapter offers an historical overview of audience distrust of media, primarily based on three lines of research: the source credibility research, the media credibility research, and the political disaffection literature. The last strand of research will help us delineate the difference between cynicism and skepticism and thereby propose a conceptual definition of media skepticism. Chapter 3 conceptualizes both alternative media and media use given the central role the use of alternative information sources play as mediators in affecting false consensus. In this chapter, two types of social media are introduced building on previous conceptual and empirical work: relationship-oriented (e.g., Twitter and Facebook) and content-oriented (e.g., blogs, YouTube, and podcasts). Chapter 4 introduces and discusses religiosity as an important concept in communication research, given relatively little research devoted to the relationships of this variable with other communication-related factors or phenomena.

Chapter 5 proposes a conceptual model based on five assumptions: (1) Audience members are variably active users of the media; (2) Individuals selectively expose themselves to information sources that support rather than oppose their attitudes; (3)

Individuals are motivated reasoners; (4) Individuals perceptually differentiate mainstream and alternative media; (5) The media have effects that reinforce preexisting attitudes of the audience. The proposed model in Figure 3 is stated in the form of hypotheses and research questions in this chapter. Chapter 6 details the methodological design of this dissertation, including a multi-stage survey approach. Given that we use a convenience sample (i.e., Amazon Mechanical Turk workers) to collect data, a screening survey needed to be administered to obtain a heterogeneous sample with enough religious respondents.

Chapter 7 reports the findings of our work and Chapter 8 provides interpretation and implications of these findings, with limitations and suggestions for future research. Our analysis revealed that religiosity, media skepticism, religious media use, and social media use all influence overestimation of public support for one's own attitudes, albeit on different issues. The difference between relationship-oriented and content-oriented social media was also found in the context of our conceptual model. In addition, religious media use fully mediated the effect of religiosity on false consensus on certain issues, which accounts for the causal process of misperception of public opinion. The contributions of this dissertation to the relevant literature, including the above findings, are discussed in Chapter 8.

CHAPTER 1

FALSE CONSENSUS

Introduction

Our tendency to see our own attitudes, behaviors, and opinions as relatively appropriate, while seeing alternative choices as inappropriate, seems irresistible and ineradicable (Krueger & Clement, 1994; Ross, Greene, & House, 1977). This phenomenon called false consensus has sparked much interest among social psychologists (e.g., Buunk, Kluwer, Schuurman, & Siero, 2000; Crano, 1983; Fabrigar & Krosnick, 1995; Miller & Morrison, 2009; Watt & Larkin, 2010) and communication scholars (e.g., Gvirsman, 2015; Matthes, Morrison, & Schemer, 2010; Wojcieszak, 2011, Zhang & Reid, 2013). Despite several decades of research supporting the false consensus hypothesis, it still needs further investigation as to under what conditions false consensus takes place as well as what enhances or attenuates its effect. In other words, there are still personal or social factors affecting false consensus that have been little investigated in the extant literature. To advance our knowledge of the impact of some of such factors on perceiving public support for one's own view, however, the first step should be a careful explication of the concept of false consensus, and that is the primary objective of this chapter.

The chapter is organized as follows. The next two sections will discuss conceptual foundation and robustness of the false consensus phenomenon and define the concept of false consensus, based on a review of earlier conceptualizations. A historical

overview of the construct will also lead to looking at the consequences of this egocentric bias and thus justifying the significance of studying false consensus in an ever-polarizing society like ours. The subsequent two sections will present two distinct themes or categories (i.e., opinion versus trait/ability/taste) studied when attempting to identify the phenomenon, as well as introduce two broad mechanisms that are believed to underlie false consensus (i.e., motivational and non-motivational perspectives). Some of the underlying mechanisms (e.g., selective exposure, motivated reasoning) are noteworthy because they are used to form the theoretical basis for a model proposed in this dissertation, linking personal attributes (i.e., media skepticism and religiosity) and media behavior (e.g., social media and religious media use) and false consensus. The remaining section will list variables that have been thought of as covariates in the literature and review the relevant studies, followed by the concluding remarks in the last section.

Conceptual Foundation of False Consensus

As social beings, people make judgments about others, issues, and events all the time and these judgments are deeply rooted in their own perceptions (Glynn, Herbst, O'Keefe, Shapiro, Lindeman, 2004). In Lippmann's term, it is "the pictures in our heads" that matter when we comprehend and appraise "the world outside" because we are to reconstruct it based on a simpler model due to our sensory and cognitive limitations (Lippmann, 1946, p. 3). These perceptions help us form an attitude and opinion concerning objects and, in many ways, play a crucial role in the public opinion process. Here, perception refers to "a summary attitude that is based on all of our past and present sensory information" (Glynn et al., 2004, p. 212). In a sense, it is not the reality that shapes or shifts public sentiment of a given issue but the perception of that reality.

For this reason, scholars have devoted much attention and effort to developing theories and models that address perceptions of others' opinion and the influence these perceptions have on the formation of public opinion (e.g., Glynn, Ostman, McDonald, & McDonald, 1995; Hoffman, Glynn, Huge, Sietman, & Thomson, 2007; Krueger, & Clement, 1994; Marks, & Miller, 1987; Mullen, Atkins, Champion, Edwards, Hardy, Story, & Vanderklok, 1985; Price, 1989). Glynn and his colleagues (1995, 2004) discussed some of the major approaches to public opinion formation, all of which are predicated on the assumptions that individuals value what other people think about public issues and that perceptions of others' thoughts, to some extent, affect their opinions about the issues.

In the absence of precise information about others' actual opinions, however, people make their own guesses about them and thus consensus is "in effect self-generated" (Orive, 1988, p. 953). The psychological mechanism through which an individual forms such self-generated consensus is termed "social projection" (Orive, 1988, p. 953), which may lead to an incorrect perception of majority opinion. False consensus can be seen as a special case of social projection, or the misperceptions (Bauman & Geher, 2002; see Glynn et al., 2004 for a comparison of false consensus, pluralistic ignorance, and looking glass perception) and has garnered substantial interest since Ross, Greene, and House demonstrated in their seminal 1977 article that people tend to estimate the climate of opinion based on egocentric biases (Bauman, & Geher, 2002; de la Haye, 2000 ; Krueger, & Clement, 1994; Marks & Miller, 1987; Mullen et al., 1985; Ross et al., 1977; Sherman, Presson, & Chassin, 1984; Wojcieszak, 2008; Wojcieszak, & Price, 2009).

The phenomenon of overestimating others' support for one's own beliefs and preferences has been termed "attributive projection" (Holmes, 1968; Suls & Wan, 1987), "false consensus" (Ross, Greene, & House, 1977), "assumed consensus" (Crano, 1983), "assumed similarity" (Cronbach, 1955), "perceived similarity" (Jones, 2004), "looking glass perception" (Fields & Schuman, 1976; Wallen, 1943). The confusion over terminology is further compounded by scholars who differentiate between some of these terms. For example, Glynn et al. (2004) make a distinction between false consensus and looking glass perception. Marks and Miller (1987) also discuss false consensus, assumed similarity, and perceived similarity under different paradigms in their theoretical review of the literature. Of these various labels, false consensus or false consensus effect has been used more frequently in social psychology as well as communication research although some scholars have opposed the use of this term (Dawes, 1989; Dawes & Mulford, 1996; Hoch, 1987). Dawes and Mulford (1996) argue that the word 'false' in false consensus is misleading because the terminology implies irrationality. Assuming that others think or behave like we do is reasonable and logical in that one's own traits has a heuristic value in predicting others' traits under conditions of uncertainty (Dawes & Mulford, 1996; Kulig, 2000). Furthermore, these opponents of the term 'false consensus' provide evidence that individuals do not weight their own response enough to ascertain the false consensus effect (Dawes, 1989; Hoch, 1987).

However, meta-analytic reviews of the false consensus literature have consistently showed that false consensus is a commonplace phenomenon (Marks & Miller, 1987; Mullen et al., 1985; Mullen & Hu, 1988) and persists even after learning about the population (Butler, Giuliano, & Guiso, 2015). For example, Ross and his

colleagues (1977) found that false consensus is a fairly common phenomenon across a variety of issues and especially on political and social issues as the respondents' intuitive estimates of consensus are "systematically and egocentrically biased in accord with" their own behavioral choices (p. 95). After conducting a meta-analysis of 115 tests of the false consensus hypothesis, Mullen et al. (1985) also reported that the combined effects of the tests are statistically significant and of moderate magnitude, with the categories of political expectations and factual information producing the strongest false consensus effects. Thus, the phenomenon of assuming similarity between self and others when estimating the climate of opinion will be described as 'false consensus' in this dissertation.

Conceptual Definition of False Consensus

Ross et al. (1977) coined the term "false consensus" to refer to a tendency for individuals to view their own beliefs, attitudes, and behavioral choices as "common and appropriate" to a given circumstance, while seeing alternative responses as "uncommon, deviant, or inappropriate" (p .280). That is, false consensus is an overestimation of public support for one's own views (Wojcieszak, 2011). It is "individuals' tendency to attribute their own sentiments to others" (Wojcieszak & Price, 2009, p. 27). In Gilvoch's (1990) conceptualization, it refers to "the idea that people project onto others their own beliefs, attitudes, and predispositions" (p. 623). According to Jones (2004), false consensus means a "general tendency to assume that our beliefs, traits and many other behavioral attributes are shared by most people" (p. 417). Drawing upon Ross et al.'s (1977) original conceptualization, Gilovich, Jennings, and Jennings (1983) described the concept as "a tendency for people to view their own behavior and judgments as relatively common and

appropriate to existing circumstances while looking upon alterative behavior as relatively uncommon and less reflective of environmental influences" (p. 550). They introduced the idea of situational attribution—i.e., certain behavior choices or decisions are thought to be determined by situational factors, as opposed to personal factors, by including 'environmental influences' in their conceptualization.

Mullen et al.'s (1985) operationalization of false consensus clearly shows the relative nature of this egocentric bias. False consensus is said to occur when an individual engaging in a given behavior "estimates that behavior to be shared by a larger proportion of some reference group than would be estimated by a person engaging in an alternative behavior" (p. 263). This means that false consensus per se has no direct bearing on the overestimation, underestimation, or accuracy of the estimate with regard to the actual consensus for their own behavior. Conservative Christians do not necessarily believe that a majority of the pubic share their own stance, for example, on abortion or same-sex marriage even though their estimates of the percentage of those who have a similar orientation can exceed the estimates made by their secular counterparts.

In sum, the concept of false consensus has been described in many different ways, and yet its conceptual meanings put forth by various scholars do not vary. Building on Sherman and his colleagues' work (Sherman, Chassin, Presson, & Agostinelli, 1984; Sherman, Presson, & Chassin, 1984; Sherman, Presson, Chassin, Corty, & Olshavsky, 1983) the concept of false consensus is defined in this dissertation as follows:

> A tendency to perceive one's own choices and judgments as relatively common when making inferences about target groups.

The suggested conceptualization concisely epitomizes the relative nature of the false consensus phenomenon, while specifying the context in which the egocentric bias occurs. It does not include one's own 'characteristics' 'attributes' 'traits' or 'behavior' in its conceptual definition but focuses on one's own 'choices and judgments' because this dissertation will deal with issue-specific measurement and participants' opinions on social issues, as opposed to their trait, ability, or behavior in a given situation.

Consequences of False Consensus: Why It Matters

A survey of the consequences of this egocentric bias makes a case for studying false consensus especially in a politically polarized society. First of all, scholars argue that the perception of opinion climate is probably more important than the actual public opinion in determining opinion expression (Glynn & Park, 1997; Miller & Morrison, 2009; Matthes et al., 2010). For example, Glynn and Park (1997) found that perceived prevalence of opinion is correlated with opinion expression when generalized others are used as a reference group. Matthes et al. (2010) also provided evidence that showed a positive relationship between majority opinion climate and opinion expression for individuals holding their attitudes with low or moderate attitude certainty. Miller and Morrison (2009) conducted three studies to test whether group members exhibiting greater false consensus are more likely to express their opinions than group members not displaying false consensus. Using opinions on drinking practices on campus as a relevant issue to college students, they found empirical evidence that "descriptive norm deviants" who are viewed by themselves and others as less deviant than "prescriptive norm deviants" are more vocal because, in part, of their exaggerated view of the commonness

of their opinion (p. 745). Here, descriptive norm deviants refer to those who deviate from "what group members actually think and do" even though they do not deviate from "what group members believe they should think and do in order to fit in" as prescriptive norm deviants do (Miller & Morrison, 2009, p. 741). This misperception of the popularity of their opinion, or false consensus, can have detrimental impact on behavior of individuals or groups. When the misperception results in an actual shift in the average group members' attitude these groups may be susceptible to extremism.

False consensus can have negative impact on an individual's behavior as well. Bauman and Geher (2002) assessed the potential effect that erroneous social norms attributed to false consensus have on behavioral intentions. Building on the theory of reasoned action, they stated that a particular behavior can result from behavioral intentions, which in turn can be more influenced by perceived norms rather than by actual beliefs. That is, normative beliefs and motivation to comply with these referents direct behavior due mostly to peer pressure. Their findings include that the extent to which people display false consensus is a significant predictor of their behavioral intentions for such social issues as "legalization and government regulation of drugs" and "lowering the drinking age to 18" (Bauman & Geher, 2002, p. 307). Incorrect perceptions that a large fraction of their peers smoke marijuana, for instance, may be guiding students' own behavioral intention to engage in these activities. Similarly, Botvin, Botvin, Baker, Dusenbury, and Goldberg (1992) demonstrated that student who believed the majority of peers or adults smoked were more likely to smoke. Watt and Larkin (2010)'s conclusion that prejudice is considered the most solid predictor of false consensus alludes to the negative consequences of the phenomenon for the following reason:

> The illusion of strong support among prejudiced people can be expected not only to make them more willing to act on their views, but also more forthright in expressing their opinions, less prepared to compromise, and less likely to modify their attitude (p. 724).

In addition, inaccurate perception of public opinion in favor of their own preferences can be harmful to democratic political system (Krosnick, 1990) and fall into a fallacy in business decision-making process (Massey & Thaler, 2013). Krosnik (1990) demonstrated that voters were fairly accurate in perceiving where presidential candidates stand relative to one another on controversial economic and policy issues. At the same time, however, he acknowledged that his data did not negate the possibility of false consensus in candidate perception, which occurred in past studies using different analytic methods. More importantly, Krosnik (1990) warned that incorrect expectations about a candidate's positions on issues due to false consensus may lead to a fall in public support for the government policies, which voters find incongruent with their initial expectations. In business decision-making context, Massey and Thaler (2013) suggested false consensus as one of the factors that causes decision makers to overestimate the need to trade up to a commodity—a player in this case—they value because they unreasonably believe that their competitors value it similarly. In other words, false consensus may partially account for "the winner's curse," a tendency for professional sports teams to overvalue top picks and thus to overpay to secure their picks.

Two Distinct Themes Studied in the Literature

In their pioneering research on the false consensus effect, Ross and his colleagues (1977) claimed that people tend to see their own "behavioral choices" and "judgments" as more common and apt than alternative responses. Although individuals have this egocentric bias for both their behavioral choices and judgments, the distinction exists between these two categories or themes. For instance, participants in one of their studies (i.e., Study 2 in Ross et al., 1977) who preferred brown bread or Italian movies were more likely to think that their peers shared these traits than the participants who preferred white bread or French movies. Likewise, college students who expected to see woman in Supreme Court within decade tended to perceive relatively high consensus for their own views than the students who did not. Ross et al. (1977) found fairly strong evidence supporting the false consensus hypothesis for the items dealing with three of the seven descriptive categories: political expectations (e.g., removal of Nixon from office?, woman in Supreme Court within decade?); personal traits and views (e.g., shy/not shy, optimistic/not optimistic); and personal problems (e.g., think about dying?, hard to make friends?). The other three general categories that received sporadic support included personal preferences (e.g., to be alone/with others, city/country life), personal characteristics (e.g., brown/blue eyes, first-born/later-born child), and personal expectations (e.g., marriage by age 30?, live outside U.S. for one year?). The only category that did not support the false consensus hypothesis was personal activities (e.g., tennis playing, blood donation).

These seven categories used in Ross et al.'s (1977) study have been narrowed down to two more broad categories since: opinion versus trait (Matthes, Morrison, &

Schemer, 2010); opinion versus abilities (Campbell, 1986; Morrison & Matthes, 2011); or opinion versus taste (Spears, Ellemers, & Doosje, 2009). In other words, when scholars attempt to examine the extent to which people perceive a false consensus they employ items dealing with opinions (e.g., attitudes toward social or political issues) and/or items dealing with traits, taste, and abilities (e.g., physical traits or taste in music) as dependable variables. Sherman, Chassin, Presson, and Agostinelli (1984) introduced another distinction that seems to overlap with the aforementioned distinctions: universally versus variably evaluated attributes. Universally evaluated qualities are those for which all judges agree on which levels of the quality are good or bad regardless of their own position on that quality. For instance, all people will agree that being considerate is good regardless of whether they consider themselves considerate or not. Variably evaluated qualities are those for which different judges disagree on which levels of the quality are good and bad. In other words, attitudes toward different levels of the attribute depend on the judge's own position on that quality. For example, people who is pro-life think that abortion is bad whereas those who is pro-choice evaluate abortion as a good thing.

As Campbell (1986) has aptly pointed out, all these distinctions seem to have one thing in common; that is, whether or not societal norm and/or normative consensus exist with regard to the evaluation of positions on a given attribute. When societal norm does not exist for appraising position on the attribute, individuals should tend to overestimate public support for their own position. Given the uncertainty of the norm concerning the attribute, they should be motivated to perceive a false consensus for their preferred position because high consensus implies that the preferred position may indeed be a more

suitable and appropriate one to hold. This is where motivated reasoning can come into play as one of the mechanisms that factor into the false consensus phenomenon. A further discussion about motivational factors and motivated reasoning is given below in the section on suggested mechanisms of false consensus.

When societal norm or normative consensus exist for assessing positions on the attribute, however, the manifestation of false consensus depends on "the social desirability of one's own position" (Campbell, 1986, p. 282). Individuals holding desirable positions should underestimate consensus in order to display their competence, virtue, or distinctiveness, whereas individuals holding undesirable positions should overestimate consensus to discount perceived deficiencies in their abilities. In fact, the former case of underestimating public consensus is called false uniqueness, the perception that one's own position is more uncommon than is actually the case (Suls & Wan, 1987; Suls, Wan, & Sanders, 1988). According to Suls and colleagues' study (1988), for example, those who did not smoke marijuana tended to underestimate the degree of consensus for their desirable behavior (i.e., false uniqueness), compared to marijuana smokers who tended to overestimate consensus for their behavior (i.e., false consensus). Spears et al. (2009) argued that false consensus occurs for opinions while false uniqueness transpires for taste-based preferences. Their argument goes along with other studies in the literature, which is presented in the following paragraph. Whether they underestimate or overestimate consensus for their attitudes and behaviors, these perceived consensus exhibits a self-serving bias in terms of maintaining self-esteem, self-confidence, or cognitive balance.

This dissertation will be focusing only on one of these two themes, that is, opinion as its aims are to investigate to what extent psychological (e.g., media skepticism and religiosity) and social (media use) variables enhance or exacerbate a built-in bias of false consensus with regard to perceiving public opinion on societal issues. In other words, it will not be studying if these personal, social factors affect false consensus in relation to perceiving others' traits, taste, and abilities. Much research in the false consensus literature has in fact concentrated on using items that tap into opinions, belief, and attitude toward such issues as abortion, defense spending, gun control, legal marijuana, casual sex (Fabrigar & Krosnick, 1995; Goethals, 1986), equal rights (Wojcieszak, 2011), presidential candidates (Brown, 1982; Krosnick, 1990), euthanasia, extraterrestrial life, environmental protection (Sherman et al., 1984), segregation and desegregation (O'Gorman, 1979), dismantling of settlements (Gvirsman, 2015), Canadian constitutional referendum (Koestner et al., 1995), and even division of household labor (Buunk et al., 2000) to demonstrate empirical evidence for the perseverance, moderators, or consequences of this egocentric bias.

It is to be noted that people tend to show greater false consensus effect for opinion items (i.e., questions tapping into attitudes toward sociopolitical issues) than for behavioral items (i.e., questions dealing with physical characteristics, personal traits, and preferences) (Bauman & Geher, 2002; Campbell, 1986; Ross et al.,1977; Spears et al., 2009). As such, items asking individuals' opinions on an array of social and political issues in this dissertation should produce overestimates of consensus for the study participants. More to the point is that false consensus will be more pronounced for media

skeptics and religious people than for their counterparts due to the nature of their media behavior, information environment, and biased cognitive processing.

Suggested Mechanisms of False Consensus

Scholars have proffered theoretical explanations for the presence of false consensus phenomenon, and these mechanisms can be categorized into two distinct perspectives: motivational and non-motivational (Marks & Miller, 1987; Ross et al., 1977). A motivational viewpoint emphasizes the self-serving process or ego-defensive function of attributive projections, whereas a non-motivational perspective stresses cognitive availability or selective exposure. To put it differently, false consensus may occur because of the belief that our opinions are appropriate or the desire to see oneself positively (i.e., self-protection) and because of our tendency to interact more frequently with congenial others, whether people or media (i.e., selective exposure). In this section, motivational and cognitive mechanisms are discussed as a thorough understanding of these two basic mechanisms will lay a theoretical foundation for the model proposed in the chapter 5 of this dissertation.

Since Ross et al. (1977) suggested motivational factor and selective exposure and availability factor as major mechanisms in explaining the false consensus phenomenon, scholars have identified two more theoretical approaches that may account for this perceptual distortion (Marks & Miller, 1987; Spears & Manstead, 1990). These two latter approaches are salience and focus of attention and logical information processing. Both selective exposure/availability and salience/focus of attention arguments can be grouped under the non-motivational perspective. These arguments from the non-motivational

perspective are explained prior to the motivational perspective, in which motivated reasoning is introduced as another approach.

The Non-Motivational Perspective

The selective exposure/availability argument holds that people tend to associate with others whose background, interests, values, outlook, and the like are similar to them, and that this exposure to a limited and biased sample of people increases the cognitive availability of similarity and the possibility of boosting estimates of consensus for one's own attitudes as a result. In other words, exposure to a biased sample of similar others results in the availability in memory of instances of similarity between self and others and thus the overestimation of consensus for one's position (Marks & Miller, 1987; Ross et al., 1977; Sherman, Presson, Chassin, Corty, & Olshavsky, 1983; Wojcieszak, 2011). This argument goes back to Kahneman and Tversky (1973), who suggested that people are apt to be misled by the availability of behavioral choices in predicting the likelihood of those options, and the behavioral options they favor are more available, compared to the choices they do not.

The salience/focus of attention argument posits that when attention is focused on one position this preferred position tends to be more perceptually salient than alternative positions. It follows that the greater perceptual salience of the preferred position makes it more available in immediate consciousness and thereby augments estimates of consensus for that position. This argument is not directly linked to the selective exposure/availability argument, but both arguments put an emphasis on the role of cognitive availability of familiar or preferred information in making an estimate of public opinion consensus. Furthermore, it is reasonable to combine these two arguments to

assert that when a choice is made based on selective exposure to a biased sample of similar others, it is very likely that that choice gets more attention and becomes more salient in perceiving public opinion on an issue related to that choice.

There have been some empirical studies that provide support for the non-motivational perspective. For example, Sherman et al. (1983) found a significant association of selective exposure and perceptions of the climate of opinion as individuals' estimates of smoking prevalence were positively correlated with the number of their friends who smoked. Wojcieszak (2011) also examined the relationship between involvement with ideologically homogeneous online groups and false consensus, using a highly unconventional sample (i.e., neo-Nazi online groups). The results of his study suggested that participation in homogenous groups significantly predicted the overestimation of public discontent with equal rights.

The Motivational Perspective

Motivational processes come into play when one conforms to the behavior of one's peers or when one distorts one's response to report an opinion that seems to be more common, and "presumably more normative" than one's real response (Ross et al., 1977, p. 297). That is, false consensus may represent motivational distortion that result from one's need to appear normal, appropriate, and rational. (Mullen et al., 1985). This motivational strategy to look normal could be intentional or unintentional as a nonmotivational perceptual distortion could be an intentional or unintentional one. In fact, Mullen et al. (1985) made further distinction between the two general perspectives by adding intentionality: a nonmotivational and unintentional mechanism and a motivational and intentional mechanism. When Ross et al. (1977) suggested possible factors in the

false consensus phenomenon, however, they did not strictly distinguish between intentional and unintentional for both mechanisms. Goethals (1986) even suggested an unintentional, motivational explanation for the phenomenon. Moreover, operationally differentiating between unintentional, motivational strategy and unintentional, nonmotivational strategy is not an easy task, as Mullen et al. (1985) admitted. Thus, whether any of these two factors (i.e., motivational and nonmotivational) is intentional or not is not of our concern. Either way, the motivational perspective stresses "the functional value of a perceiver's relative positioning of self and others" (Marks & Miller, 1987). Perceiving increased similarity between self and reference groups may help maintain self-esteem, cognitive balance, or self-confidence, bolster perceived social support, and reduce tension in engaging with others.

There are two ways that motivation may lead to false consensus: one's prior commitment to a position and uncertainty about the appropriateness of one's position (Marks & Miller, 1987). When one shows a favorable attitude toward abortion, for example, this prior commitment may motivate perceived consensus by triggering the need to be adequate or correct. It is interesting that one's preferred position is used in both motivational and non-motivational perspectives when examining its role in enhancing a consensus estimate of that position. Alternatively, being less certain of the norm or the adequacy of one's position may result in greater perceived similarity between self and others by engaging the need to look appropriate. There are other situational factors that engage motivational processes (Marks & Miller, 1987). For instance, projecting one's belief onto favorable targets, as opposed to unfavorable targets, help maintain self-esteem, or cognitive balance. In addition, one may exaggerate similarity

between self and others when expecting future interaction with them to enhance positive outcome expectancies. However, these situational factors are not of concern in this dissertation for two reasons. First, reference groups will not be specific targets. Second, this dissertation is not interested in manipulating interaction between survey participants and target groups. The attitudinal (i.e., prior commitment) and situational (i.e., uncertainty of the norm) factors contribute to the importance of motivated reasoning in terms of illuminating a logical yet neglected mechanism that may underlie the false consensus phenomenon.

Motivated reasoning has not been proposed as one of the theoretical mechanisms that factor into misperception of public opinion until recently. Kunda (1990) provided considerable evidence that supports the notion that all reasoning is motivated in such a way that people tend to arrive at their desired conclusions. In fact, social psychologists have long posited that motives affect perceptions, attitudes, and attributions, causing people to make self-serving attributions (Festinger, 1957). Building upon this starting premise, Lodge and Taber (2000) proposed a theory of motivated reasoning, in which individual differences in reasoning should have an influence on the perception of public opinion. Motivated reasoning, in this sense, refers to "an individual's goal in the context of forming an attitude" (Bolsen, Druckman, & Cook, 2014, p. 236). Taber and Lodge (2006) argue that although tension exists between "the drives for accuracy and belief perseverance" people are motivated to apply their reasoning power in favor of their prior, favored conclusion, when focusing on reasoning about sociopolitical issues (p. 756).

According to Lodge and Taber (2000), an individual's goas or motives fall into two broad categories: accuracy and directional (or partisan) goals. Accuracy goals refer to

the need to be accurate about a given issue, while directional goals refer to the need to maintain a desirable conclusion and reject disagreeable information. Research on motivated reasoning provides substantial evidence that directional goals affect reasoning in such a way that people are more likely to seek instances that are consistent with their preferred position on a task at hand (Gvirsman, 2015; Meirick, 2013; Nir, 2011; Strickland, Taber, & Lodge, 2011; Wojcieszak, 2011). For example, Nir (2011) employed Lodge and Taber's (2000) motivated-reasoning goals typology to determine if and to what extent individuals' perceptions of aggregate opinions are swayed by the relative mix of accuracy and directional goals. It was found that directional goals lead the respondents to overestimate support for their favored presidential candidate as well as their own ideological leaning. In contrast, accuracy goals increased respondents' ability to reason opposite points of view and lead to relative underestimates of support. Meirick (2013) found empirical support for his hypothesis that Republicans were more likely than non-Republicans to hold the misperception that health care reform would create so-called death panels, which is consistent with the motivated reasoning argument.

The motivated reasoning model has something in common with the logical information processing model that active reasoning processes underlie one's perceptions of public opinion climate. However, it does not derive from attribution theory—i.e., the idea that the attribution of the cause of one's own behavior to situational factors influences assumptions about the commonness of that behavior—as the logical information processing argument does (Marks & Miller, 1987; Spears & Manstead, 1990). The motivated reasoning does not concern whether people attribute their behavior to situational factors. Nor does it assume that situational forces will affect perceivers and

others similarly, thereby overriding individual differences. A more thorough discussion about motivated reasoning as well as selective exposure theories will be provided in the chapter 5, which proposes a theoretical model for this dissertation.

Variables Affecting False Consensus

Research that focused on how individual level factors enhance or attenuate false consensus has produced fruitful results in some cases and inconclusive results in others. For instance, it was found that perceived social distance between self and others weaken the magnitude of false consensus, suggesting that false consensus becomes greater when estimation is made for ingroup members than for outgroup members (de la Haye, 2000; Jones, 2004; Zhang & Reid, 2013). This dissertation, however, do not pursue the difference between consensus estimates made for one's ingroup and outgroup because its participants were asked to estimate the percentage of people in general who would support their own positions on given issues. There are other variables that may be considered to affect individuals' estimates of public support for their preferred stances. These factors are introduced in this section as they are candidates for covariates in the analysis of data with our major variables—i.e., media skepticism, religiosity, and alternative media use. A review of studies that touched on the relationship between false consensus and these major variables follows although they are very few.

There have been mixed findings concerning the association between opinion relevance and false consensus. Jones (2004) and Krosnick (1990) found no evidence that false consensus was related to issue involvement or importance, whereas Crano (1983) showed that a tendency for overestimation was enhanced by vested interest, which was conceptualized as the hedonic relevance of a specific attitude in question. Fabrigar and

Krosnick's (1995) meta-analysis of the results of six experiments reported no reliable association between attitude importance and the magnitude of false consensus. Still, Campbell (1986) demonstrated that personal importance or relevance exerted differing effects on the estimation of consensus as accuracy increased on opinion items and decreased on abilities items as a function of relevance. Although it may be seen as a slightly distinct construct, how opinion strength relates to false consensus is unclear as well (Wojcieszak, 2011). In sum, previous studies showed varied results in relating attitude importance/relevance and false consensus although the assumption on which they were based—i.e., that attitudes individuals consider personally important are more salient, accessible and involve more personal investment to the self—seems logical.

The role of knowledge or information has been examined either in increasing the accuracy of opinion distributions or in decreasing overestimation of public support for one's view (Gvirsman, 2015; Joslyn, 1999; Kreger & Clement, 1994; Krosnick, 1990; Lemert 1986). In fact, decades of research has focused on the study of political knowledge and knowledge gaps, linking political knowledge with such socioeconomic factors as education, income, and media coverage (Jerit, Barabas, & Bolsen, 2006). Operationally, political knowledge has been categorized as either general or domain specific. General measures usually ask questions about civics-style facts, while domain-specific measures inquire about facts regarding specific programs, problems, or policies. According to Krosnick (1990), although accuracy of Americans' perceptions of presidential candidates on controversial issues was generally high for the entire sample, it was particularly higher for the politically knowledgeable, suggesting that knowledge decreases consensus bias. Similarly, it was demonstrated that education or political

sophistication reduce the magnitude of false consensus (Joslyn, 1999; Lemert, 1986). By contrast, some studies show that false consensus persists even in the face of information on actual distributions of responses (Krueger & Clement, 1994; Kulig, 2000). Gvirsman's (2015) study found that misperception of public opinion was stronger among knowledgeable moderates, those who are knowledgeable and hold moderate ideologies. That knowledge increases false consensus, particularly among moderates, may indicate the idea of motivated reasoning (Gvirsman, 2015).

Scholars have also investigated if and to what extent political affiliation, ideology, or extremism factor into the misperception of public opinion (Gvirsman, 2015; Watt & Larkin, 2010; Wojcieszak, 2008, 2011). Given polarization in online and offline communities, research into the role of ideology or extremism in false consensus grows in importance (Wojcieszak, 2008). Gvirsman's (2015) study demonstrated that ideology positively predicts false projection, defined as the correlation between personal attitude and misperception of public opinion. Misperception of public opinion was calculated by taking the difference between estimates of the percentage supporting the dismantling of settlements and the actual percentage of the proponents of this view in her study. Gvirsman (2015) showed that the more liberal the participants, the greater the false projection. Wojcieszak (2011) also reported that ideological extremism was positively related to false consensus as those who are more extreme in their agreement with ideology-specific statements exhibited greater false consensus effect. Examples of such statements included "All non-white people who are now in the U.S. should be deported and not allowed back into the country," and "I would mind if a close relative or family member wanted to marry a non-white person." However, it was found that the influence

of extremism on false consensus varies with issues; extremism increased overestimation of public support for the neo-Nazis environmentalists, while it increased underestimation of public support for the environmentalists. In any case, it is certain that political ideology and/or affiliation have significant relationship with false consensus, and thus ideology was included as one of the covariates in the data analysis.

Given our cognitive and physical limitations to the world around us, the notion that the media plays a pivotal role in the perception of public opinion is a legitimate claim. In fact, Noelle-Neumann (1974) attributed importance to powerful influences of the mass media on the perception, formation, and presentation of the public's opinions. That the media are ubiquitous and consonant with one another (i.e., they repeat the same message over and again) suggests that we learn most of social norms and customs from the media (Glynn et al., 2004). It follows either that the media can distort the perception of public opinion by presenting unique examples (Daschmann, 2000; Noelle-Neumann, 1974;) or that the media can reduce overestimation of public support for one's own view by exposing people to a diversity of information sources (Watt & Larkin, 2010; Wojcieszak, 2011; Wojcieszak & Rojas, 2011). Testing the sole effect of general media use on false consensus, however, Gvirsman (2015) demonstrated that media use did not contribute to overestimating the support for dovish public views. In other words, media use has null effect on false consensus in her study. Although limited research suggests contradictory results as to the impact of mass media on the perception of the climate of opinion, the role of alternative media (e.g., social media and religious media) in perceiving public opinion deserves attention and further investigation (Wojcieszak, 2011). These alternative

media help create a customized information environment, which tend to expose individuals to like-minded sources, and thus may exacerbate false consensus.

There is still lacuna in the literature in understanding to what extent media skepticism and religiosity affect false consensus, which makes this dissertation worthwhile. Trust (or distrust) in the media has been considered as a factor in influencing the perception of the climate of opinion. Some studies tested the notion that people who distrust the news media would not entirely accept what they are saying, and found supporting evidence for their hypothesis (Ladd, 2011; Tsfati, 2003). Few studies have investigated the possible relationship between religiosity and public opinion perception. For example, Buunk, Kluwer, Schuurman and Siero (2000) showed that religiosity is positively correlated with perceived prevalence of unequal division of labor among Dutch women, meaning that false consensus was heightened by religiosity on this particular issue. As such, more research is needed to add to our knowledge about the role played by these individual level attributes in public opinion perception.

Conclusion

The idea that we have a tendency to see our own behavior, attitude, and opinions as enjoying public support, compared to alternative choices, has garnered much attention since Ross et al.'s (1977) seminal study, and has rekindled interest among communication scholars (Gvirsman, 2015; Wojcieszak, 2011; Wojcieszak & Price, 2009) in the age of new media. Two possible explanations for false consensus have been suggested thus far: selective exposure to a biased sample of like-minded people; and a motivated strategy to appear appropriate and normal. These motivational and non-motivational explanations for

the false consensus phenomenon may not be separable as it is likely for both mechanisms to work simultaneously in our cognitive processing (Brown, 1982; Sherman et al., 1983). As such, this dissertation combines selective exposure and motivated reasoning arguments in order to present a theoretical model linking personal attributes (i.e., media skepticism and religiosity) and media behavior (e.g., social media and religious media use) and perception of public opinion.

CHAPTER 2

MEDIA SKEPTICISM

Introduction

In 2016, polling company Gallup reported that the level of trust in mass media has dropped to a new low in 2016, with 32 percent of Americans stating at least a fair amount of confidence in the media to offer accurate and fair news coverage. Media trust has dropped more substantially for the younger respondents (aged 18 to 49) than for the older (aged 50 and older) as only 26 percent of younger Americans expressed a great deal or fair amount of trust in the media, which is down from 36% in 2015 (Gallup, 2016). A story about ever-declining trust in the news media in an era of media fragmentation and political polarization is nothing new. The General Social Survey (GSS), a large, national survey conducted every few years by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, began to include a question probing confidence in the press in 1973. Taking the year 1973 as a starting point, the GSS data showed a steady decline in confidence in the press over a four-decade period with some exceptions, in which the confidence level fluctuated (Ladd, 2012; Tsfati, 2002). This waning credibility of the news media in the United States has sparked much discussion among communication scholars, with more emphasis laid on searching for the causes of media distrust (e.g., Cozzens & Contractor, 1987; Ladd, 2012; Lee, 2010; Jones, 2004) or investigating a shift in media credibility (e.g., Bucy, 2003; Flanagin & Metzger, 2000; Johnson, & Kaye, 1998; Kim & Johnson, 2009).

An attempt to reveal the consequences of distrust of the mass media is another line of research that has emerged in recent years as a promising research agenda (Carr, Barnidge, Lee, & Tsang, 2014; Tsfati, 2002; Tsfati & Peri, 2006). This dissertation follows this strand of research and seeks to contribute to academic progress in communication research by examining the influence of audience media skepticism on perception of public opinion, and more specifically on false consensus—a largely ignored topic (Tsfati, 2003). Although the concept of media skepticism has its root in the media credibility research in terms of conceptualization and operationalization, two features makes it distinct from media credibility. First, media skepticism deals with the mainstream/institutional media in general as the object of inquiry rather than specific media channels such as radio, television, or the Internet (Carr et al., 2014; Ladd, 2011; Tsfati, 2002). Second, this concept is not so much a feeling of mistrust of the media as a questioning of the institutional news media (Austin & Pinkleton, 1995; Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Yamamoto & Kushin, 2014). It is a subjective opinion of audience members toward the mainstream media, which may be deemed beneficial to deliberative democracy (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Hart, 1999; Tsfati, 2003).

The chapter is organized into seven sections, this introduction being the first of them. The next section offers an historical overview of audience distrust of media with three subsections based on distinct lines of research: the source credibility research, the media credibility research, and the political disaffection literature, in which conceptual differences between cynicism and skepticism are discussed. Facing the growing distrust in the mass media among Americans, researchers explored why they do not trust the media, that is what predicts media skepticism. These various predictors or correlates of

mistrust are reviewed in the subsequent section. As mentioned above, the primary interest of this dissertation is to study the consequences of media skepticism in a communication environment. The next two sections address this question. One chapter examines how mainstream media skepticism relates to exposure to alternative media sources in general and social/religious media in particular. Another chapter reviews studies about the influence of media skepticism on perception of climate of opinion as well as false consensus. The remaining chapter discusses conceptualization and relevant operationalization before proposing a conceptual definition for this work, followed by a brief concluding remarks in the last chapter.

A Historical Overview of the Development of Media Skepticism

Credibility research has garnered much attention from mass communication scholars since the 1950s (e.g., Hovland & Weiss, 1951) and media credibility has resurfaced as a critical issue to news organizations over the past few decades (Bucy, 2003; Carr, Barnidge, Lee, & Tsang, 2014; Tsfati & Cappella, 2003). A review of the literature on media credibility shows that there have been three lines of research (i.e., source credibility, medium credibility, and message credibility), with more research focusing on the first two strands (Golan & Day, 2010; Mackay & Lowrey, 2007). The fact that a majority of source credibility studies dealt with mediated messages (e.g., newspaper articles, recorded audio or video messages, and print advertisements) as the object of investigation justifies a review of this research tradition (Tsfati, 2002). In fact, according to Wilson and Sherrell's (1993) meta-analysis of source credibility studies, only 16% of the studies dealt with face-to-face presentations as the object of inquiry. Thus, this section first discusses source credibility research and then media credibility studies. Research on

message credibility is not of interest here because the concept of media skepticism does not focus on the specifics of mediated messages. A review of the literature on political disaffection follows as it is significant to understand the difference between skepticism and cynicism in conceptualizing the construct under investigation.

Source Credibility

Source credibility has been thought of as a key factor in understanding the way audiences appraise messages being communicated. In their seminal study on the impact of source credibility on communication effectiveness, for example, Hovland and Weiss (1951) found that opinions were changed immediately after exposure to communication materials when it was presented by high credibility sources such as well-known periodical publications and experts. Hovland and his colleagues also identified expertise and trustworthiness as key components of source credibility (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953).

Subsequent researchers appear to reach consensus on the value of these two components in discussing source credibility (Greer, 2003; Jo, 2005; Metzger, Flanagin, Eyal, Lemus, & McCann, 2003; Miller & Kurpius, 2010). High-expertise sources typically generate the greatest attitude change among those who receive the message when compared to low-expertise sources. Similarly, information from sources perceived as high in trustworthiness leads to more change in attitude relative to information from sources rated as low in trustworthiness. This consistent finding related to expertise and trustworthiness in the source credibility literature has implications for probing the relationship between mistrust of mainstream news media and use of alternative information sources. It seems reasonable and logical to expect that those who distrust the

media in terms of these two key components are very likely to seek out different information outlets, when facing the need to formulate their own opinion about the important societal issues. It is counterintuitive that people would use the news media they do not trust, after all.

Media Credibility

As seen above, source credibility (or persuasion) researchers conceptualized credibility as a static and objective attribute of the source (Tsfati, 2002). A review of media credibility studies reveals at least two different approaches to understanding the concept of credibility. First, this concept is defined in terms of audience perception of the sources rather than in terms of characteristics of the sources. Beginning in the 1960s, communication scholars became interested in to what extent audience members place their trust in news media (Bradley & Greenberg, 1966; Carter & Greenberg, 1965; Westly & Severin, 1964). When examining the relative credibility of news sources (e.g., newspapers versus television), they asked for the opinions of audience members about the reliability and believability of given sources for news. This audience-based approach to conceptualizing media credibility was also took by the scholars in the 1980s, who developed the measurement models of credibility (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986; Meyer, 1988). Whether media credibility was thought of as a unidimensional or multidimensional concept, the purpose of the measurement was to assess individuals' perception of believability of news media. As such, the concept may be labeled as "perceived media credibility" or "perceived credibility" (Golan & Day, 2010; Kiousis, 2001; Mulder, 1980; Tsfati, 2002).

Second, the object of investigation in the media credibility literature is media (or

mediated) sources, as opposed to face-to-face sources, when attempting to measure the credibility of sources. Straightforward as it may sound, that is what makes the media credibility research differ from the source credibility research. Whereas source credibility studies examine the attributes of communicators (e.g., high expertise vs. low expertise sources), media credibility studies focus on cross-media comparison, probing the perceived credibility of media channels (e.g., online vs. traditional news media). For example, Kiousis (2001) reported that newspapers were rated as most credible, followed by online news and television. Other studies, however, demonstrated the opposite results; that is, online media were seen as more credible than traditional media (Flanagin & Metzger, 2000; Johnson & Kaye, 1998).

Another point is worth noting here before making conceptual sense of skepticism because skepticism is closely related to the mainstream media in this dissertation. When survey respondents are asked to rate the level of trust they have in the media, this question conjures up the image of mainstream news organizations staffed by professional journalists for most of them (Ladd, 2011; Jones, 2004; Tsfati, 2002). As Jones (2004) noted, this explains much of why President Trump or political talk radio host Rush Limbaugh can attack the media without confusing their audiences. As the media means mainstream media for most Americans, the term "media skepticism" means skepticism about the mainstream media as a whole, not particular media channels. In this dissertation, media skepticism is always closely connected with the image of mainstream news organizations that people have in mind, both conceptually and operationally.

Despite the mixed results of media credibility research regarding relative perceived credibility of different media channels, a comparison of mainstream news

media and alternative sources—whether online or not—may present a different picture. As more news organizations develop their online counterparts, declining credibility of traditional/mainstream news media may also be dragging down credibility of online news sources (Johnson & Kaye, 2010). According to Johnson and Kaye (2010), there was a drop in credibility scores for online sources by the mid-2000s. Based on surveys of politically interested Internet users during the 1996, 2000, and 2004, they found that credibility scores for online sources jumped in 2000, while they declined in 2004.At the same time, online users gradually and increasingly realized that differences between traditional and online media do not lie in form (i.e., how the news and opinions are delivered) but in content (what news and opinions are delivered). In fact, several scholars have explored credibility of nontraditional/alternative media such as blogs (Johnson & Kaye, 2004, 2008), independent web-based newspapers (Kim & Johnson, 2010), and sectorial news media (Tsfati & Peri, 2006), and suggested that users judge them as more credible than mainstream news media. Thus, an attempt to distinguish alternative information sources from mainstream media in assessing trust in media is no less important than the cross-media comparison. A more detailed discussion on mainstream and alternative media is offered in Chapter 3, in which social media and religious media are discussed as alternative sources of information.

Skepticism and Cynicism

Before delineating the concept of media skepticism, it is necessary to make a clear distinction between cynicism and skepticism. The literature on political disaffection suggests that although these constructs both point to negative dispositions toward the political systems and institutions, including mass media, they are two different concepts

(Cappella& Jamieson, 1997; Hart, 1999; Hutchens, Hmielowski, Pinkleton, & Beam, 2016; Pinkleton, & Austin, 2004; Pinkleton, Austin, Zhou, Willoughby, & Reiser, 2012; Yamamoto & Kushin, 2014). This difference has been implicitly noted with contrasting modifiers connected to each concept: "healthy skepticism" vs. "corrosive" or "unhealthy cynicism" (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Pinkleton, & Austin, 2004).

Citing *New York Times* columnist Tom Friedman, Cappella and Jamieson (1997) indicated that skepticism is about being cautious but not being gullible, whereas cynicism is about being totally mistrustful and being scornful of the media. Cappella and Jamieson (1997) observed voters who watched and read different sets of reports for a mayoral race in Philadelphia and the health care reform debate, and found that strategic frames can activate cynical attributions. When reporters and politicians use conflict to promote and justify their own discourse, the first spiral of cynicism begins. The second spiral of cynicism preys on the first in that public cynicism about the press and the political process is reinforced when the public witness "the tactical focus of the press and the conflictive, hyperbolic, dismissive rhetoric of its leaders" (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997, p. 237). The escalating cynicism results in political disengagement and mainstream media alienation (Austin & Pinkleton, 1999; Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Hutchens et al., 2016; Pinkleton, Austin, & Fortman, 1998).

In general, cynicism refers to a feeling of mistrust and an absence of confidence in the political system (Austin & Pinkleton, 1995; Yamamoto & Kushin, 2014) and skepticism is defined as a distrust of and a questioning of the political process (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Hutchens et al., 2016). The cynic is a person "who believes in human frailty and institutional corruption and who harbors an overwhelming need to predict

future unhappiness," while the skeptic believes that "deep reflection about human affairs is best," given the fallible nature of human knowledge and decisions (Hart, 1999, p. 179). In contrast to detrimental effects of cynicism on democratic political system, skepticism is viewed as beneficial to deliberative democracy.

For example, cynicism is negatively associated with efficacy or external efficacy, a belief that individuals can affect public affairs and governmental decision-making process by their efforts (Pinkleton & Austin, 1998; Pinkleton et al., 1998; Pinkleton et al., 2012). The cynic is likely to be politically disaffected and less involved given the positive relationship between efficacy and involvement (Pinkleton, & Austin, 1998; Pinkleton et al., 1998). This means that cynics "distance themselves from public affairs and may refuse to engage in civic participation" (Pinkleton et al., 2012, p. 25). In the case of cynicism, the negative feeling toward the political system and institutions can increase individuals' distrust of information provided by the institutions and disengage them from political and civic participation (Pinkelton et al., 2012).

Skepticism, on the other hand, positively predicts efficacy and negatively predict apathy that reflects lack of interest and of attention to politics (Pinkleton et al., 2012; Yamamoto & Kushin, 2014). Benefits of healthy skepticism in forming an engaged, informed citizenry were demonstrated by Hutchens et al.'s (2016) recent longitudinal study, suggesting that a strong positive relationship between skepticism and political information seeking persists over time. Hutchens and colleagues (2016) also found that skepticism has an over-time indirect effect on levels of factual knowledge through seeking out information. Skeptics also tend to express their own opinions online (Yamamoto and Kushin, 2014), think that citizen news program and journalist are more

credible than professional report and journalist (Carr et al., 2014), and expose themselves to nonmainstream or alternative media (Ladd, 2011; Tsfati, 2010; Tsfati and Peri, 2006).

Variables Related to Trust in Media

Factors affecting trust in media include political affiliation and ideology (Jones, 2004; Lee, 2010), media use (Bucy, 2003; Carter & Greenberg, 1965; Rimmer & Weaver, 1987), as well as other demographic variables (Greenberg, 1966; Tsfati & Ariely; Westley & Severin, 1964). How gender, age, education, income, and media use relate to perceived credibility of media have attracted scholarly attention since the 1960s. However, more recent research taking an audience-based approach has moved beyond demographic variables and included such individual factors as audience expertise (Meyer, Marchionni, & Thorson, 2010), media skepticism (Carr et al., 2014; Tsfati & Cappella, 2003), and religiosity (Golan & Day, 2010; Golan & Kiousis, 2010). Some of these factors are discussed in detail here with the exception of religiosity. A review of the studies regarding the relationship between religiosity and trust in mass media is presented in Chapter 4, which addresses religiosity as a concept in communication research.

Demographic variables

Let us first look at demographic variables in terms of their association with trust in the media. Gender seems to be significantly associated with audience perception of the news media as women are more likely than men to trust television over newspapers (Greenberg, 1966; Westley & Severin, 1964), online sources (Johnson & Kaye, 1998), and mass media, or mainstream media (Robinson & Kohut, 1988; Tsfati & Ariely, 2013). Age, on the other hand, is deemed a weaker predictor or nonfactor in accounting for variance in media credibility (Greenberg, 1966; Johnson & Kaye, 1998; Tsfati & Ariely,

2014). However, age was one of the two more powerful demographic variables in Robinson and Kohut's (1988) study, with the other being gender. The younger respondents (aged 18-24) rated three television networks (i.e., ABC, CBS, NBC) as more believable than their older counterparts did. Mixed results have also been found for education. Some studies show a negative relationship between this variable and perceived credibility of the media (Johnson & Kaye, 1998; Robinson & Kohut, 1988; Tsfati & Ariely, 2014), while other studies report null relationship between them (Kim & Johnson, 2009; Lee, 2010). In a similar vein, one's economic status, or income, seems to be a negative predictor of perceived media credibility in some cases (Lee, 2010; Robinson & Kohut, 1988), whereas it is considered a poor indicator of media credibility and especially of online credibility in other cases (Johnson & Kaye, 1998; Kim & Johnson, 2009).

In general, political correlates—that is, partisanship and ideology—prove to have statistically significant relationships with trust in the news media (Jones, 2004; Lee, 2010; Robinson & Kohut, 1988). Research shows that both ideological conservatives and self-identified Republicans tend to distrust the mainstream media in the United States. In other cultural contexts, conservative ideology is not always a negative predictor of trust in the media. For example, it is positively associated with media trust in some countries such as Sweden (Tsfati & Ariely, 2014). Within the context of the American media landscape, however, Jones (2004) found that conservatives were more likely than nonconservatives to distrust media, and Lee (2010) reported that media trust was negatively predicted by Republican leaning as well as conservatism. Robinson and Kohut's (1988) study obtained similar results using three networks (i.e., ABC, CBS, NBC)

as representing the news media. That conservative Republicans distrust the media does not necessarily justifies allegations of liberal media. In fact, there is no scholarly consensus on the argument that the national news media exhibit a liberal bias (See D'Alessio & Allen (2000) and Lee (2005) for a review of the literature on liberal media bias). For better or worse, it appears true that there exists the public perception of libera news media, which in turn affects public distrust in media, despite journalistic norm of balanced reporting at work (D'Alessio & Allen; Lee, 2005; Watts et al., 1999).

Media Use

Much of the early research found that increased media use leads to enhanced media credibility (Carter & Greenberg, 1965; Greenberg, 1966; Westely & Severin, 1964). For example, Carter and Greenberg (1965) noted that "there is some relationship between use and believability" especially "in the case of conflicting reports" (p. 34). Similarly, Westely and Severin (1964) concluded that there seems to be "a factor of media loyalty" based on their finding that the frequency of use of a specific medium can be seen as a strong predictor of the credibility of that medium (p. 333). More recent work, however, reports confounding results, suggesting that perceived levels of credibility depends on the type of questions employed in a given survey (Johnson & Kaye, 1998; Kiousis, 2001; Rimmer & Weaver, 1987; Wanta & Hu, 1994). The overall conclusion of Rimmer and Weaver's (1987) study included that a correlation between media use and credibility varies depending on the type of media use question asked, and that general preference measures such as the Roper-type questions tend to have stronger associations with media credibility measures, as opposed to sheer frequency of media use showing weak associations with them. Johnson and Kaye (1998) noted that reliance is a better measure

of credibility than general use for both traditional and online media, while indicating that the perceived credibility level of the media in question is modest. Similarly, Wanta and Hu (1994) found a significant relation between reliance and believability for newspapers and TV, but did not find a significant correlation between exposure and believability. Kiousis (2001) found a marginal correlation between media use and news credibility for newspaper and the Internet, but not for television.

Media Skepticism

The focus on audience-based factors is predicated on the assumption that audience characteristics account for the variance in the media credibility variable, as much as, if not more than, media attributes do (Gunther, 1992, p. 162). Media skepticism has especially gained interest over recent years in explaining decreased trust in the mainstream news media (Carr et al., 2014; Hutchens, Hmielowski, Pinkleton, & Beam, 2016; Tsfati & Cappella, 2003). In their experiment embedded in a web-based survey, for example, Carr et al. (2014) showed the evidence that the assessments of credibility are conditional upon pre-existing levels of media skepticism. Tsfati & Cappella (2003) explored an association between media skepticism and mainstream news exposure, and found that skeptics tend not to expose themselves to the national television news and daily newspapers, which they do not trust. As Cozzens and Contractor (1987) have aptly observed, this concept of media skepticism has potential utility in understanding the role of active audience in many research areas such as political disaffection, media credibility, and public opinion perception.

Media Skepticism and Alternative Media Sources

Based on the general reasoning of the source credibility literature, researchers have directed their efforts to studying if and to what extent media skepticism leads individuals to utilize alternative sources of information (Carr, Barnidge, Lee, & Tsang, 2014; Johnson & Kaye, 1998; Ladd, 2011; Mackay & Lowrey, 2011; Tsfati, 2010; Tsfati & Peri, 2006). When commercial Internet service providers (ISPs) began offering service in the 1990s, this new platform might be viewed as alternative sources of information for those who were antagonistic or skeptical of the mainstream news media. This partially explains Johnson and Kaye's (1998) findings that traditional newspapers and candidate literature were judged as less credible than their online counterparts, although none of the sources were rated "much above somewhat credible" (p. 331). In fact, the potentiality of new media has always triggered scholarly debate on whether or not the rise of new media would entail displacement or complementarity effects (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2000; Dutta-Bergman, 2004; Kayany & Yelsma, 2000). The competition-based displacement theory simply posits that the new medium displaces the old media, and has been continued for every new technology (e.g., television and the Internet). The media complementarity theory suggests an alternative approach, which is premised on the assumption that media are not homogeneous and amorphous entities. It asserts that people use online and traditional media to fulfill their information needs within a specific content domain (e.g., politics, religion, or sports).

In any case, audience members, who have either cynical or skeptical attitudes toward mainstream media in traditional or online form, are turning to such alternative media as independent news sites (Kim & Johnson, 2010), social media (Johnson & Kaye,

2004, 2008), and religious media (Bailey, Cammaerts, & Carpentier, 2007; Tsfati & Peri, 2006). To help ascertain the causal relationship between media distrust and reliance on alternative media, Ladd (2011) turned to the General Social Survey (GSS) time series data, in which some of the respondents from the 2000 survey had been reinterviewed in 2001. His study demonstrated that those with "hardly any" confidence in the press increased their use of partisan political magazine when searching for candidate information, whereas those with "only some" or "a great deal" of confidence decreased their usage of the medium. Although distrust in media exerted little discernible effects on individuals' choices for mainstream, institutional news sources, it did lead skeptics to rely on other sources of political information (Ladd, 2011).

Carr et al. (2014) examined responses obtained from an online experiment on MTurk to investigate the effects of media skepticism on credibility assessment of two different news sources (i.e., professional report vs. citizen report and professional journalist vs. citizen journalist). Their results showed that skeptics perceive the citizen report and journalist as more credible, while non-skeptics think the opposite, and suggested that evaluations of media credibility for different types of sources depend on an individual's predispositions toward the media. Tsfati (2010) and Tsfati and Peri (2006) also found a positive relationship between media skepticism and exposure to alternative news sources such as nonmainstream news sites and sectorial and extranational news channels in the context of Israeli media outlets. Kim and Johnson (2009) suggested that people considered independent web-based newspapers to be more credible than either traditional news media or their online counterparts, using a sample of politically interested people in South Korea.

Although some scholars have attempted to see how individuals use social media for political participation (Gil de Zúñiga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012; Valenzuela, 2013) and decision making (Kushin, & Yamamoto, 2010), little is known about the relationship between media skepticism and social media (use). Especially, there is a dearth of research investigating how social media can mediate or moderate the relationship between media trust and public opinion perception. Social media here may be defined as a group of Internet-based services that enable the creation and exchange of user-generated content, and include blogs, virtual game worlds, collaborative projects, as well as social networking sites (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). What is known to date is that blogs are seen as more credible than traditional media (Johnson & Kaye, 2004; Mackay & Lowrey, 2011). Mackay and Lowrey (2011), for example, relied on a student sample to assess the credibility of different types of online news formats—that is, online newspapers and blogs. During the experiment, the participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions (i.e., online newspaper, journalist's blog, or citizen's blog), which contain the identical news stories. They rated the blog formats as more credible than the newspaper websites, a finding that supports the previous research by Johnson and Kaye (2004). In this way, Mackay and Lowrey (2011) offers one explanation for the result that audiences may be less trusting of corporations or institutions.

When it comes to television viewing motivations, two primary types of television use have been identified: ritualized and instrumental (Rubin, 1984). Ritualized viewing involves more habitual use of television with a greater attachment with the medium itself, whereas instrumental viewing involves a more goal-oriented use of the medium. Building upon the uses and gratifications theory, Abelman (1987) added reactionary viewing to the

aforementioned two types of motivation. By reactionary viewing motivation, Abelman (1987, 1988) meant turning to alternative channels such as sermons and children's programs on religious stations to the plethora of secular programming. Reactionary viewing motivation turned out to be related with reduced television affinity as well as negative perception of commercial programming (Abelman, 1987). Applying the concept of reactionary viewing to the discussion of media skepticism, religious media may be used as alternative sources of information for consumers who consider themselves religious. More discussion on motivations for religious media use will be given in Chapter 3, which provides a historical and conceptual understanding of alternative media as well as media use. Before ending this section, it should be noted that the potential role of religious media in shaping public perception has rarely been examined empirically. Scholars have explored how religious media consumption affects attitudes toward political candidates (Newman & Smith, 2007) or same-sex marriage (Perry & Snawder, 2016), not perceptions of such public issues. One of the aims of this dissertation is to fill these research gaps, by testing the joint effects of media skepticism and religiosity on false consensus through religious media use.

Media Skepticism and Perception of Public Opinion

Scholars have studied the role of media in affecting, shaping, or changing public opinion, from a variety of perspectives—for example, agenda-setting (McCombs, & Shaw, 1972), framing (Entman, 1993; Entman, Matthes, & Pellicano, 2009), and cultivation perspectives (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, & Shanahan, 2002). As discussed earlier in this chapter, a more recent trend in the media credibility literature has been a shift to investigating the role of audience-based factors in assessing the perceived

credibility (Golan, 2010; Johnson, & Kaye, 1998; Kiousis, 2001; Metzger, Flanagin, Eyal, Lemus, & McCann, 2003). Despite extensive research on perception of public opinion and media credibility, there has been surprisingly little research connecting the two. In fact, it is over the past few decades that scholarly interest in the relationship between media trust and public opinion perception has increased in popularity (Ladd, 2011; Tsfati, 2003).

Trust in the media exerts an influence on the perception of the climate of public opinion on political and social issues as most individuals, if not all, in a mass society depend on media reports in aggregating collective opinion. It follows that those who distrust the media will have different viewpoints about the world than those who trust them because source credibility is central in the assessment of the message being communicated (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). For the most part, these arguments have been theoretically assumed rather than empirically tested even though some studies explored the association of the news exposure and perceptions of public sentiments (Mutz, 1998; Mutz & Soss, 1997).

Ladd (2011) presented empirical evidence that distrust in the news media leads to a more partisan and less accurate beliefs about various societal matters, identifying the moderating role of media trust in the media's influence over public perceptions. Using the 2000 American National Election Studies (ANES) survey data, he compared the mean perceptions of Republicans and Democrats in five policy areas—federal budget deficit, national economic performance, national security, crime, and the moral climate—and found partisans who distrust the media having more polarized perceptions, when compared to their more trusting counterparts, on these issues except crime. The

respondents who distrust the news media rely more on their partisanship, while updating their beliefs less in response to events.

Ladd (2011)'s another experiment illustrated how media skepticism causes individuals to be more resistant to information, even when they receive the exact same message. Overall, the participants with positive attitudes toward the press were swayed by media messages, whereas those with negative attitudes toward the press were very resistant. Tsfati's (2003) findings also showed that those favorably predisposed to the media tended to accept the climate of public opinion attributed to the media, while those unfavorably predisposed tended to reject the mediated climate of opinion. In other words, media skepticism was negatively associated with individuals' agreement with the media's presentation of public opinion. It follows that media skeptics are more likely than non-skeptics to exhibit false consensus bias when perceiving public opinion because they are impervious to the influence of the media. The skeptics will rely on biased sample of like-minded people and preconceived opinions, not media portrayal of public opinion, in order to assess public attitudes toward issues at hand. This is one of the hypotheses that will be tested in this dissertation.

Conceptualization of Media Skepticism

Let us recapitulate and add to the key points that have emerged from the historical review presented earlier in this chapter so as to help arrive at a conceptual definition for this dissertation. First, the concept of media skepticism does not relate to objective characteristics of the media but to a subjective perception or opinion of the audience (Tsfati, 2003). In fact, the subjective nature of audience attitudes toward the media has been documented in the literature on persuasive press inference (Gunther, 1998;

Gunther & Christen, 2002) and hostile media perception (Ariyanto, Hornsey, & Gallois, 2007; Choi et al., 2009; Vallone, Ross, & Lepper, 1985). For example, research on hostile media perception shows that partisans on both sides see the identical media content as biased against their own points of view, suggesting that "the bias is at least partially one of perception" (Ariyanto et al., 2007, p. 267). Another line of research also indicates that the perceived slant of media report of an issue affects estimation of opinion climate on that issue (Gunther & Christen, 2002). That is, the persuasive press inference hypothesis suggests that individuals infer public opinion from their perceptions of the media message and their assumptions about the influence of that message on others (Gunther, 1998).

Second, the concept of media skepticism is applied to the mainstream media as a whole (or as an institution) rather than to a particular source (Ladd, 2011; Tsfati, 2003). Ladd (2011) demonstrated that "most Americans have relatively clear and firmly held attitudes toward the institutional news media" despite the fragmentation of the media landscape in the past 40 years (p. 93). Institutional or mainstream news media is an abstract concept representing an array of "major news organizations and journalists that aspire to the standards of professional journalism" (Ladd, 2011, p. 93). When asked to respond to the survey questions regarding media trust, less than 1% of respondents refuse to answer or select the "don't know" response (Tsfati, 2002). In addition, views about the news media are relatively consistent across various question wordings such as "the media," "the news media," or "the press" (Ladd, 2011). This empirical evidence implies that most, if not all, people think about the credibility of institutional news sources when evaluating the news media.

Conceptually, skepticism has been understood as suspending trust in government in political science (Mishler & Rose, 1997; Seligson, & Carrión, 2002), as individuals' predisposition to doubt persuasive messages in consumer research (Moore & Rodgers, 2005; Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998), and as a critical but open approach to news media information in communication research (Pinkleton & Austin, 2004). Skepticism does not involve excessive trust or insufficient trust in the attitude object—whether government or mass media—, but rather suggests being suspicious of the truth, value, motives, or appropriateness of the target or its messages. As applied to mass media, media skepticism is conceptualized as "the degree to which individuals are skeptical toward the reality presented in the mass media" (Cozzens & Contractor, 1987) or "a subjective feeling of alienation and mistrust toward the mainstream news media" (Tsfati, 2003). For instance, media skepticism is the notion an individual has toward news media or journalists that they are not objective or fair when reporting about public affairs, the perception that the news media do not always tell the whole story, or the belief that one needs to question and verify what is said in the media.

Cozzens and Contractor (1987) suggested several reasons for the development of media skepticism. First, although children initially have difficulty distinguishing between reality and fantasy they gradually learn that televised images are primarily staged and dramatic. This in turn leads them to discount mediated images because they realize that media can easily conflate reality with fantasy. Second, individuals become skeptical of media because they perceive and recognize the political and economic motives at play within the workings of the mainstream media. Third, disparity between personal experiences and media portrayals of reality may lead to media skepticism. Accordingly,

media skepticism is seen as the tendency to discount the media portrayal of reality based on maturation, perceived source credibility, and personal experiences conflicting with it in Cozzens and Contractor's (1987) conceptualization.

A review of the literature on the operationalization of media skepticism reveals that the items used to measure this construct include media credibility items (Cozzens & Contractor, 1987; Gunther, 1992; Tsfati, 2003). Media credibility is, for the most part, operationalized as believability when measured as a single dimension (Bucy, 2003; Westley & Severin, 1964). According to Gaziano and McGrath (1986), a factor analysis of 16 items measuring attitudes toward traditional media, or newspapers and television, on various dimensions showed that 12 of the items converged on what they call a credibility factor. These items include being fair, accurate, trustworthy, and unbiased. In fact, Tsfati's (2003) media skepticism scale and Carr et al.'s (2014) measure can be regarded as a combination of media credibility and trust scales.

Cozzens and Contractor (1987) developed their own media skepticism scale along two dimensions: belief (5 items) and behavioral intention (5 items). Items measuring the belief dimension concern accuracy, fairness, and distortion, while items tapping into the behavioral intention dimension relate to perceived importance and intended action. Cozzens and Contractor's (1987) scale was originally used to test how nonmediated personal experience affects media skepticism when it runs counter to the information presented in the news media. They found that participants who received the disconfirming nonmediated message were more skeptical than participants who did not with regard to the belief scale. There was no significant difference between experimental groups and control groups with respect to the behavioral intention scale.

In sum, it seems that the concept of media skepticism is a unidimensional construct that can be measured by tapping into a single dimension of trust, belief, or credibility. As mentioned above, items that tapped the behavioral intention dimension in Cozzens and Contractor's (1987) scale failed to distinguish treatment group and control group. Moreover, these items appear to measure something that has to do with consequences of media skepticism, not the concept itself. Thus, media skepticism is considered unidimensional and the following definition is proposed for this dissertation:

Media skepticism can be defined as the extent to which an individual is critical of the mainstream news media.

Conclusion

Trust in the news media has long been a topic of interest in mass communication research due to the crucial role of the media in disseminating and interpreting information for their audiences, and thereby engaging them in the democratic process. In the face of ever-growing distrust in the media, scholars have sought to uncover the causes of this decline in media trust and to compare the credibility of different media channels. However, there has been relatively little effort to investigate the consequences of media skepticism (Carr et al., 2014; Tsfati, 2002, 2010) and this dissertation seeks to contribute to the literature by testing the relationship between mainstream media skepticism, exposure to alternative media sources, and false consensus. To the extent that individuals are critical of the mainstream news media, the use of different sources of information such as social media and religious media and the resulting biased perceptions of the

climate of public opinion will have implications for the media industry, including alternative media.

CHAPTER 3

ALTERNATIVE MEDIA USE:

SOCIAL MEDIA AND RELIGIOUS MEDIA

AS ALTERNATIVE SOURCES OF INFOMRATION

Introduction

Various conceptions of alternative media have been attempted with different criteria being used for distinguishing mainstream and alternative media (Atkinson, 2005; Atton, 2002; Bailey, Cammaerts, & Carpentier, 2008; Downing, 2001; Hamilton, 2000, 2001; Kenix, 2011). Scholars have suggested commercialism, sources of funding, organizational practices, and relationship with power as such criteria, but at the same time have recognized that the growing convergence of media tends to negate the strict dichotomy between alternative media and mainstream media. However, it is entirely possible that audience members perceive the distinction between the two fields, regardless of scholarly discussion and principles on alternative media (Kenix, 2011). Among many forms of alternative media, social media and religious media are of major concern in this chapter. The rise and increasing popularity of social media have enabled "community, alternative, oppositional, participatory and collaborative media practices," which in turn may provide alternative information sources to mainstream media (Deuze, 2006, p. 263). For religious audience members, such religious media as *The 700 Club*, *Focus on the Family*, and *Christianity Today*, offer alternatives to secular mass media (Abelman, 1988a, 1990; Laney, 2005).

This chapter is organized into six sections. The immediately following section reviews some perspectives on understanding alternative media in relation to mainstream media and proposes a conceptual definition of alternative media. The next two sections discuss how religious media and social media have been utilized as alternative sources of information. Here, different social media platforms are divided into two types of social media—that is, content-oriented and relationship-oriented social media. A review of the literature on the conceptualization and measurement of media use and a conceptual definition of it are presented before a summary of this chapter is given in the last section.

Defining Alternative Media

As briefly mentioned in chapter 2, the rise of new media always rekindles scholarly interest in whether or not a new communication medium would pose a threat to the existing media in terms of time and function. Regardless of their consent to the displacement effects of new media, scholars have in common that in reality people are taking advantage of newly introduced media, not settling for the information presented by the traditional media (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2000; Dutta-Bergman, 2004; Kayany & Yelsma, 2000). In the case of mainstream media skeptics, they are turning to alternative sources of information such as independent online news sites, blogs, or religious media (Bailey, Cammaerts, & Carpentier, 2007; Johnson & Kaye, 2004, 2008; Kim & Johnson, 2010; Tsfati & Peri, 2006). Thus, it is inevitable to discuss what constitutes alternative media, as opposed to mainstream media, prior to conceptualizing the use of social media and religious media as alternative sources of information.

As with the concept of mainstream media, various conceptual understandings of alternative media have been developed (Atkinson, 2005; Atton, 2002; Bailey, Cammaerts,

& Carpentier, 2008; Downing, 2001; Hamilton, 2000, 2001; Harcup, 2005; Herbst, 1996; Kenix, 2011). Finding criteria that distinguish alternative media from mainstream media continues to be an elusive venture. This is the case not only because scholars have suggested different yardsticks by which to judge alternative media as such (e.g., ownership, journalistic practices, or individual/organizational motivation), but because each medium, at some point, can be alternative to something else (Downing, 2001). For example, mainstream news media faced competition from cable television channels beginning in the 1970s and 1980s, from political talk radio programs due in part to the abolition of the fairness doctrine by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in 1985, and from the Internet since the invention of the web browser in 1993 that enabled the growth of online alternative information sources (Ladd, 2011). In the case of cable channels such as CNN, MSNBC, or FOX, they are no longer considered alternative media from an institutional and commercial perspective.

Another difficulty in conceptual judgment is a converging media spectrum, in which the demarcation of alternative and mainstream media has been blurred in terms of organizational practices (Harcup, 2005), commercialism (Hamilton, 2000), and technological capabilities inherent in digital communication (Kenix, 2011). For instance, communicative technological advancements are driving a convergence of the media, given the integration of a new interactive form of citizen-based news into the mainstream media practices. After interviewing journalists who have experience in both alternative and mainstream media, Harcup (2005) found some crossover of content, ideas, style, and people between the two fields. Moreover, commercialism and sources of funding cannot be used as a demarcation point because there existed such alternative media as the *Appeal*

to Reason, a left-wing political newspaper, that sought mass circulation and advertising as the primary source of capital even in the early 1900s (Hamilton, 2000).

When it comes to other criteria defining alternative media, what separates mainstream and alternative media is organizational practices for Bailey et al. (2007), Harcup (2003), O'Sullivan (1994). Alternative media tend to have more balanced, horizontal structures, blur the distinction between producers and sources, and be attentive to the marginal and the powerless. Alternative media seek to involve ordinary citizens in their democratic process of production, with a commitment to innovation in form and content. Criticizing professional journalism practice, they encourage audience participation and allow the needs and goals to be expressed by the audience itself. The democratization of communication by alternative media allows for the facilitation of discourse on specific communities and groups, possibly underrepresented groups.

This criterion of organizational practices inevitably leads to another diverging point between alternative and mainstream media, which is relationship with power (Atkinson, 2005; Chomsky, 1997; Herbst, 1996). Atkinson (2005) defined alternative media as "any media that are produced by non-commercial sources and attempt to transform existing social roles and routines by critiquing and challenging power structures" (p. 78). Through qualitative content analysis of alternative media used by Mystical City audiences (e.g., *Democracy Now!*, *Indymedia.org*, *The Nation*), Atkinson (2005) identified and classified two different portrayals of power: traditional power and hegemonic power. The first category of traditional power reflected notions about material conditions, in which corporations dominate the decision-making process of society by dominating money. The second category of hegemonic power reflected the notion of

ideological conditions, in which an elite group manipulate ideological assumptions in society to suit the interests of the elite group. Atkinson (2005) noted that alternative media call for resistance through physical means or speaking truth. Alternative media are communication back channels for political frustration used by those who tend to be excluded from the dominant discourse of society (Herbst, 1996). In other words, they provide counter-hegemonic discourses that differ from those propagated by mainstream media, which serve the establishment and the ideology of the powerful (Chomsky, 1997).

This traditionally accepted notion of binary opposition between mainstream and alternative media has been challenged in the recent past as reductionism by Kenix (2011) or simplified arguments by Downing (2001). Although their criticism of the strict dichotomous view enjoys legitimacy to some extent among alternative media scholars (e.g, Atton, 2002; Harcup, 2005), how active audience members perceive the difference of the two media sources is another matter entirely. Research shows that people expose themselves to alternative media rather than mainstream media when seeking information for protest participation (Boyle & Schmierbach, 2009) or when feeling less dependent on and skeptical of the mass media (Jackob, 2010; Tsfati & Peri, 2006). Here, alternative media or alternative sources of information include activist Internet sites, protest newspapers, magazines and newsletters (Boyle & Schmierbach, 2009), sectorial or extranational media (Tsfati & Peri, 2006), and non-media sources such as official authorities or experts (Jackob, 2010).

That individuals turn to alternative sources of information due to media skepticism or information needs implies that audience members expect from alternative media information that is not available from mainstream media. In other words, lay

people—and especially media skeptics—think of alternative media as distinct entity relative to their mainstream counterparts, whether ideologically or organizationally. This question of perceived difference between mainstream and alternative media has hardly been studied and thus remains a research gap, despite the recent scholarly interest in a convergence in the media spectrum (Kenix, 2011). Even the critic of the binarism Linda Kenix (2011) admitted that audiences' perceptions of media may or may not have any basis in scholarly principles, and indicated that these perceptions may guide how audience members view individual media and contribute to "the popular belief that mainstream and alternative media are mutually exclusive entities" (p. 18).

To sum up, alternative media can be seen as an attempt to counterbalance the dominance of the mainstream media in terms of worldview, ideology, values, and the like, especially from the perspective of audience. As such, the notion of alternative media being in opposition to mainstream media is maintained for the purposes of the dissertation, given its focus on the mediating effects of alternative media use on false consensus. Thus, alternative media is defined as:

> Those media that are perceived to provide information neglected or unsupported by the mainstream media.

Religious Media as Alternative Information Sources

Any research endeavor involving religion as its major subject should start with a sufficiently clear meaning of the term, otherwise confusion will arise from two different understandings (Marsden, 2001; Stout, 2013). This dissertation's primary meaning for

religion refers to organized religions—"an organized system of beliefs, practices, rituals, and symbols," involving faith in the transcendent and formation of relationship with other believers (Koenig, King, & Carson, 2001, p. 18). This definition comes from the substantive approach, which emphasizes essential meanings, practices, and characteristics that a religion must have (Berger, 1974; Demerath, 1999; Hoover, 1998; McCloud, 2003; White, 1997). Another approach is the functional perspective, which stresses the social and psychological functions religion serves. For example, some of the cultural phenomena such as Elvis Fandom, Trekkies, and Deadheads that resemble a religion or a cult can be deemed as having religious dimensions from the functional perspective. A detailed discussion on these two broad perspectives will be presented in Chapter 4, in which the concept of religiosity is explicated in the context of communication research. It will suffice at this point to limit the definition of religion to organized religion whose focus is on rituals, practices, community, and belief in the sacred and transcendent.

A clear demarcation between the two general conceptions is a necessary condition for understanding what the term "religious media" means in this chapter and elsewhere in the dissertation. As briefly discussed earlier, the culturalists adopt the functional viewpoint, referring to religion as a set of symbols or a cultural activity that helps understand the meaning or ultimate condition of life (Bellah, 1964; Berger, 1967/2011; Hoover, 1998). For them, even secular media can serve religious purposes to the extent that individuals find "de-contextualized and non-intentional religious meanings" in popular media genres such as fantasy movies, adventure stories, or mythic video games (Hjarvard, 2012, p. 35). In other words, the mass media can provide fodder for the construction of religious meanings among individuals (Hoover & Lundby, 1997). From

the substantive viewpoint, on the other hand, religious media has been understood as "the utilization of media, through its unique identity, to achieve religious objectives, ultimate goals, and divine aspirations" (Hosseini, 2008, p. 67), or the participation in mediated communication by religious actors using their own media (Hjarvard, 2012). They are purveyors of religious messages utilized often by various religious denominations, leaders, and their agents.

As with other forms of media, religious media have evolved with technical advancements (Wikle, 2015). Examples of religious media include national television (e.g., Pat Robertson's Christian Broadcast Network and the Catholic Church's Eternal Word Television Network), radio programs (e.g., Dr. James Dobson's *Focus on the Family* and Southern Baptist Convention's *For Faith & Family*), religious periodicals (e.g. the evangelical magazine *Christianity Today* and the mainline Protestant magazine *The Lutheran*), religious websites and social media (e.g., religion websites and blogs such as religionnews.com, beliefnet.org, or www.buddhanet.net) (Gaddy, 1984; Newman & Smith, 2007; Perry & Snawder; 2016). Printing technology that enabled mass production of the Bible in the 1450s ushered in the age of mass media, but scriptures are not considered a form of religious media for the purposes of this dissertation. Religious media command vast audiences in the United States. According to the Barna Group's (2005) report, nearly half of the adults claim to listen to a religious radio broadcast (46%) and watch a religious program on television (45%) each month. In addition, 35% claim to have read a Christian periodical and 16% say they visit faith-oriented Internet sites in a typical month.

Although the primary purpose of many religious media is to communicate religious messages and worldview, an increasing number of these media are including political and social content (Abelman & Pettey, 1988; Frankl, 1998; Vinson, 2009). A content analysis of the top 10 televangelists on TV in 1986 (e.g., Jimmy Swaggart, Jim Bakker, and Jerry Falwell) revealed that content of the evangelical programs had become increasingly political and evaluative (Abelman & Pettey, 1988). More recent research also confirmed that religious broadcasters provide information on current issues blended with traditional moral values or a Christian perspective (Frankl, 1998; Lesage, 1998). It should be noted that conservative Christians account for at least 30% of the American population and their media consumption pattern tend to differ from that of other Americans (Rossman, 2009). Then, it should come as no surprise that these believers selectively attend to alternative religious media to bolster their beliefs, while avoiding secular mainstream media (Jelen & Wilcox, 1993; McFarland, 1996; Rossman, 2009).

Theoretically, one of the perspectives used to explain the patterns of media use by religious audiences is secularization thesis, which became “the reigning dogma” among sociologists of religion by the early 1970s (Swatos & Christiano, 1999, p. 210). A basic tenet of this perspective is that the separation of church and state in modern society results in erosion of religious beliefs and commitments (Berger, 2011; Stout, 2012; Warner, 1993). Mass media have been deemed a major factor that accelerates secularization as they provide people with competing information and knowledge that may weaken religious authorities and truth. There is empirical evidence supporting the secularization thesis in terms of media use by religious individuals. Research shows that active church members tend to read news about religion (Buddenbaum, 1982) and

family-focused content (Grunig, 1979), while people who have conservative religious beliefs are more likely to avoid sexually oriented television programs (Hamilton & Rubin, 1992). Also, religious people are less likely to use the Internet that embodies a more secular worldview (Armfield & Holbert, 2003).

A discussion on the secularization thesis as the rationale for media behavior of religious individuals helps account for the motivations for using religious media. Following the uses and gratifications research tradition, Rubin (1984) identified two motivations for watching religious fare on television: instrumental use and ritualized use. Instrumental media use refers to "goal-directed use of media content to gratify informational needs" whereas ritualized media use refers to "habitualized use of a medium to gratify diversionary needs" (p. 69). Using a purposive quota sample of 300 adults, Rubin's (1984) study demonstrated that these two viewing patterns were clearly distinguishable motivations. Abelman (1987, 1988a, 1990) added reactionary media use as another viewing pattern among viewers of religious fare. Reactionary use refers to selecting religious programming as alternative media sources, and thereby denoting dissatisfaction with secular fare.

Hamilton and Rubin (1992) administered questionnaires to 346 religious liberals, moderates, and conservatives to examine how religiosity affects their motives for watching television. Their findings included that religious conservatives tend to avoid TV content deemed morally offensive. Abelman's (1987) canonical correlation analysis examined the interrelationships among the set of viewing motives and indicated three roots significant at the .001 level, with the first root being reactionary use. Reactionary viewers used religious television due to their negative perception of secular programming.

Abelman's (1988a) study conducted on viewers of *The 700 Club*—the most popular religious TV program at the time—in a large midwestern community produced similar results. These empirical findings identifying reactionary media use support the secularization thesis in that people of faith seek religious sources as alternative media, believing that exposure to mainstream media weakens their religious commitment.

Not only that, the other two motivations (i.e., ritualized and instrumental media use) can be also seen as support for the secularization explanation for religious audiences. Religious media, whether television or websites, are utilized ultimately for reinforcement of faith among these audiences (Abelman, 1988a, 1990; Laney, 2005). Laney's (2005) factor analysis using the sample of 450 visitors to Christians church websites pointed to faith factor that drove religious website use. This result is consistent with Abelman's (1988a) study that suggested faith as an underlying motive for religious TV usage. Instrumental religious motivation leads religious individuals to seek out religious oriented information that mainstream media refuse to provide and discuss, in an effort to maintain their faith (Laney, 2005). Ritualized religious motivation is nothing more than a part of religious convictions to the extent that religious media use reflects a sense of importance for the religious life (Abelman, 1987, 1988b).

When it comes to social media, there has been little research into motivations for use of religious social media (Nyland & Near, 2007). Exploring causes and consequences of religious social media use could be a potentially fruitful research area as such endeavor will add to understanding of religious audiences and social media's impact on religious organizations, communities, as well as society. In this regard, this dissertation contributes

to developing the aforementioned research area by investigating the relationship between religious media use—including social media use—and misperception of public opinion.

Social Media as Alternative Information Sources

According to Pew Research Center (2017), there has been steady increase in social media use among American adults since it began tracking social media adoption in 2005. The share of the adults who used at least one of the social media platforms was only 5% of the population in 2005, but it had risen to almost 50% in 2011 and to nearly 70% of the public by 2016. The most popular of the major social media sites is Facebook, whose user base seems to represent the U.S. population in general as the site reaches 68% of the population (Pew Research Center, 2017). Similar shares of Americans use social media platforms such as Twitter (21%), Instagram (28%), and LinkedIn (25%). Another survey by Pew Research Center (Gottfried & Shearer, 2016) reported that a majority of U.S. adults (62%) see news on social media, with 18% doing so often. More specifically, 70% of Reddit users get news on this platform, 66% of Facebook users see news on the site, and 59% of Twitter users get news on Twitter. Given that these survey results reflect generally one type of social media (i.e., social networking service), recent years witness exponential growth in use of social media.

Social media is by definition "all about participation, sharing, and collaboration," (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 65), and social networking site best represent these key features. Social networking sites (SNSs) are web-based services that enable users to construct a public profile and to articulate a list of other users connected with them, and to traverse these connections as well as other connections made by others (Ellison, 2007). Intense interest in SNSs in recent years ignited a fast-growing number of research articles

that utilize data gathered from these sites and that investigate the consequences of the use of these services (Ellison, 2007; Parmelee & Bichard, 2011). However, SNSs are not the only form of social media.

Social media has been defined as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). According to the typology developed by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), there are six types of social media based on levels of social presence/media richness and possibility of self-presentation/self-disclosure: collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia), content communities (e.g., YouTube), virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft), blogs, social networking sites (e.g., Facebook and Twitter), and virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life). Another framework has been proposed by Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, and Silvestre (2011) that defined social media by using seven functional building blocks: identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups. Different social media tend to concentrate on some primary blocks than others. For instance, Facebook focuses on relationships and conversations; YouTube on sharing and groups; and LinkedIn on identity and reputation.

Various social media can be classified into broadly two types for the purposes of this dissertation: relationship-oriented and content-oriented social media. Relationship-oriented social media include social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter, whereas content-oriented social media include blogs, Wikipedia, YouTube, and podcasts. This classification scheme is based on conceptual and empirical support in the literature (Ellonen & Kosonen, 2010; Moore, Hopkins, & Raymond, 2013; Zhang &

Wang, 2010). For example, Zhang and Wang (2010) identified the differences between interest-oriented social media and relationship-oriented social media by examining two Chinese SNSs (i.e., Douban.com and Xiaonei.com). These two SNSs differ in terms of their structural features. The interest-oriented social media tend to bridge weak ties, which in turn contributes to collective action, while the relationship-oriented social media tend to foster strong ties among existing social contacts (Zhang & Wang, 2010). Ellonen and Kosonen (2010) also identified two modes of social media mediated interaction in the context of buyer-seller collaboration: relationship-oriented mode and instrumental mode of interaction. Relationship-oriented mode stresses reciprocal and bilateral communication, whereas instrumental mode emphasizes one-way seller controlled communication. As such, the content-oriented type reflects the features of the interest-oriented/instrumental social media, and the relationship-oriented type echoes the characteristics of the relationship-oriented social media.

One line of research on social media focuses on the role of social media as alternative communication channels for news, information, and unheard voices and opinions (Broersma & Graham, 2012; Bruns, Highfield, & Lind, 2012; Kwak, Lee, Park, & Moon, 2010; Petrovic, Osborne, McCreadie, Macdonald, & Ounis, 2013). Traditionally, dissident, topical newspapers, newsletters, journals, and ideological book publishers, and relatively small radio and television stations fall under the term “alternative media” (Berlet, 1998). With the development of digital communication technology, however, people began to capitalize on such social media as blogs, podcasts, YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook, as alternative platforms of public communication. One of the primary research questions of this dissertation is to look at how social media affect false consensus by

providing alternative information sources. Thus, a discussion is presented of the suggested two types of social media (i.e., blogs and Twitter) as alternative information sources in the remaining part of this section.

Blogs represent the earliest form of social media in that they serve to elicit and aggregate information from numerous contributors (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Sunstein, 2007). That is, blogs enable interaction with others through addition of comments although they are mostly managed by one person. By their very nature, blogs provide differing perspectives on facts and values and thus may function as alternative sources of information (Sunstein, 2007). To the extent that blogs offer the possibility of producing one's own media content or opinion, they may be deemed alternatives to mainstream news media (Deuze, 2006). Bailey et al.'s (2007) case study of blogs in the Second Iraqi War is a case in point. Their in-depth analysis of Salm Pax (known as the Baghdad Blogger), the so-called mil-blogs (which is eye-witness accounts of American soldiers), and the Abu Ghraib pictures (of prisoner abuse), showed how blogs manifest themselves as a medium capable of generating alternative discourses and challenging the hegemonic ideology preferred by the mainstream media.

Twitter also enables the dissemination and sharing of information that are neglected by mainstream media. For example, individual Twitter users, whether affiliated or non-affiliated with news media, can be a valid source when reporting events. Studies focusing on high-profile journalists' Twitter use revealed that those who are working for mainstream news media tended to rely on average people when reporting on crisis situations (Hermida, Lewis, & Zamith, 2014; Vis, 2013). Vis's (2013) analysis of the way the social media service was used by mainstream news media journalists—i.e., Paul

Lewis (*The Guardian*) and Ravi Somaiya (*The New York Times*)—during the 2011 UK riots revealed that they were seeking verifiable information concerning their stories in substantial amount of their tweets from all potential sources. In a similar vein, Hermida, Lewis, and Zamith's (2014) content analysis of the sources by Andy Carvin of NPR on Twitter during the Arab Spring found that on balance, "nonelite sources had a greater representation in the content than elite sources" (p. 479). For instance, nonaffiliated activists comprised the greatest single share of tweet mentions in terms of the relative frequency of tweet mentions, while alternative voices received far more tweet mentions (i.e., nearly half of all tweet mentions in the sample) relative to mainstream media and institutional elites.

Petrovic et al. (2013) recommend that Twitter could be a good source when providing detailed information that major news media miss out during an event and indicated that this microblogging service not only covered most of the events reported by newswire providers but also details of minor events ignored by mainstream news media. In fact, social media's potential to offer alternative information and opinions has been manifested in a series of "blog wars between the journalism industry and its independent, upstart critics" in the early 2000s (Bruns et al., 2012). For Poell and Borra (2012), Twitter is "the most promising platform for crowd-sourcing alternative" information sources when compared to such social media platforms as YouTube and Flickr (p. 709). To the extent that social media platforms constitute "coffeehouses" or public forum populated by users with diverse backgrounds and expertise, they function as alternative media for the public.

Conceptualizing Media Use

No one can deny that media use is one of the most frequently used variables in the empirical literature on media effect, and thus that careful explication and measurement of this concept is crucial (Jerit & Barabas, 2011; McLeod, 2001; Slater, 2004). More sensitive media use measures enable the identification of more subtle media effects by isolating differential effects of various news sources (Becker & Whitney, 1980; Chaffee & Schleuder, 1986). For example, scholars have insisted that one should focus on the amount of exposure to content within a medium rather than focusing on time spent with the medium (McLeod, 2001; Shoemaker & Reese, 1990). In addition, Becker and Whitney (1980) showed that the media dependency index—a combination of reliance, exposure, and attention—provided considerably more support for the hypothesized relationships among media use, knowledge, and trust than a simple exposure measure. Chaffee and Schleuder (1986) also recommended that the level of attention to the medium be included with the concept of media use because audience members do not allocate their attention evenly across all media and their content. As such, this section reviews the literature on the concept of media use before offering a conceptual definition of it.

Media use has been the concept of great value in mass communication and political communication studies. Among other things, mass communication scholars have probed into the relationship between media use and media credibility (Greenberg, 1966; Johnson & Kaye, 1998; Kiousis, 2001; Rimmer & Weaver, 1987; Wanta & Hu, 1994), while political communication researchers have been interested in the impact of media use on political variables such as knowledge gain, political participation, or assessment of

government (Becker & Whitney, 1980; Chaffee & Schleuder, 1986; Drew & Weaver, 1990; Eveland Jr., Hutchens, & Shen, 2009; McLeod & McDonald, 1985). Earlier studies on media credibility employed single media use measure, to produce a general conclusion that media choice is positively related with credibility. That is, those who use newspaper or television more often tend to view these media as more credible than those who use them less often (Carter & Greenberg, 1965; Greenberg, 1966; Westley & Severin, 1964). Rimmer and Weaver (1987), however, demonstrated that this positive association between media use and media credibility varies depending on the type of media use question asked. In general, sheer frequency of media use was not associated with newspaper or TV credibility, whereas media preference or choice showed some correlation, although weak, with media credibility. Their explanation for these findings is that preference measures are more attitudinal and affective in nature than frequency measures that are mostly behavioral. Rimmer and Weaver (1987) concluded that frequency of media use should be distinguished from preference for or reliance on media.

More recent research found similar results as those obtained by Rimmer and Weaver (1987) regarding the association between types of media use and media credibility (Johnson & Kaye, 1998; Kiousis, 2001; Wanta & Hu, 1994). Johnson and Kaye's (1998) study support earlier research on traditional media that reported that media credibility is more strongly related to reliance on the media than amount of use. However, correlations for online media (e.g., online newspapers and online news magazines) were weaker than for tradition media (e.g., newspapers and news magazines). Based on his finding that media use was marginally correlated with perceptions of news credibility, Kiousis (2001) also suggested that frequency measures were not strongly related to media

credibility. Kiousis's (2001) study did not include the measure of reliance on media, which makes impossible the comparison of frequency and reliance in their relationship with credibility. In Wanta and Hu (1994)'s study on the influence of media credibility, reliance, exposure on agenda setting, there was no significant linkage between frequency of use and believability, while there was a significant correlation between reliance and believability.

In addition, Rubin's (1993) argument that media effects don't typically occur just from exposure, or frequency of media use, finds support in the literature on media use and political processes. Some scholars in this literature believe that it is essential to combine attention to media with exposure in order to tap a more general concept of media use (Chaffee & Schleuder, 1986; Drew & Weaver, 1990; Eveland Jr. et a., 2009). For them, the concept of media use should reflect "the correspondence between exposure to a source and devotion of cognitive effort to that source" because they go hand in hand within a given medium (Eveland Jr. et al., 2009, p. 241). They criticized the previous studies that found null or negative correlations between audience knowledge of public affairs and media exposure or reliance, and provided empirical evidence that the positive association of attention with knowledge (Chaffee & Schleuder, 1986; Drew & Weaver, 1990; McLeod & McDonald, 1985). Based on these findings, Drew and Weaver (1990) even suggested that media attention and media exposure are measures of different concepts, while Chaffee and Schleuder (1986) offered modest suggestions that adding attention to simple exposure should more adequately reflect an individual's use of media.

In summary, a review of the literature on the concept of media use shows that there is little consistency in the conceptualization and measurement of this construct.

Some studies employ simple exposure or frequency of use (measuring the behavioral dimension), while others use media preference and reliance (measuring the attitudinal dimension). Still other studies involve media attention (measuring the cognitive dimension) when investigating media effect in political communication and public opinion. Given the amorphous state of measurement, scholars have developed a more general concept such as media dependency (Becker & Whitney, 1980) and media orientations (McLeod & McDonald, 1985) in order to tap dimensions relevant to specific media effects. For example, Becker and Whitney (1980)'s media dependency is a combination of reliance, exposure, and attention into single indices. Media orientations incorporates exposure to media, exposure to particular content, media reliance, level of attention, and motivation for use to form another alternative concept (McLeod & McDonald, 1985). These broad concepts of media use were found to account for additional variance of the outcome variables (e.g., economic knowledge and political participation) beyond simple exposure (McLeod & McDonald, 1985) and to provide more support for the hypothesized relationships with knowledge about local and national affairs than exposure (Becker & Whitney, 1980).

Thus, it is vital to capture various dimensions of media use when the purpose of study is to make comparisons between media (e.g., mainstream versus alternative media), as Chaffee and Schleuder (1986) have aptly observed. Attention measures are essential when cross-sectional design is implemented, in which "media use levels will be confounded with individual differences of other kinds (Chaffee & Schleuder, 1986, p. 103). Based on their review of the literature and their own online survey study, Eveland and colleagues (2009) also concluded that the most promising approach is to combine

exposure and attention to a given medium when conceptualizing and operationalizing media use. Building on the extant literature and Slater's (2004) definition of media exposure, the following conceptual definition of media use is offered:

> The extent to which audience members have encountered, relied on, and devoted attention to specific media sources and/or content.

Conclusion

Despite the converging media landscape that blurs the lines between mainstream and alternative media, the distinction between the two fields may persist in the minds of many audience members. Alternative media are the purveyors of information, news, and opinions that are not delivered or supported by the mainstream media from the perspective of the general public. Research shows that people of faith turn to religious media such as *The 700 Club*, *Christianity Today*, and *Focus on the Family* to strengthen their belief, value, worldview because these media serve as a safe haven from secular culture propagated by mass media. Content-oriented social media (e.g., blogs and YouTube) and relationship-oriented social media (e.g., Facebook and Twitter) can also be used as alternative information sources due to their inherent characteristics that allow for the creation and exchange of user-generated content. An attempt to investigate the mediating effect of the use of these alternative media on the relationship between individual traits and false consensus will add to our understanding of the impact of alternative media use on perceptions of public opinion.

CHAPTER 4

RELIGIOSITY AS A CONCEPT IN COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

Introduction

A close examination of the concept of religiosity has been carried out in various disciplines, including psychology (Batson, Schoenrade, & Ventis, 1993; Beit-Hallahmi & Argyle, 1997), nursing (Bjarnason, 2007), mental health (Hackney, & Sanders, 2003), business ethics (Vitell, 2009), and consumer research (Wilkes, Burnett, & Howell, 1986). In contrast, there has been a paucity of interest in a thorough analysis of this concept among communication scholars (Egbert, Mickley, & Coeling, 2004) despite the fact that a number of studies in the field of journalism and mass communication empirically have investigated the role of religiosity in different settings and with different populations (Al-Menayes, 1997; Armfield & Holbert, 2003; Bobkowski, 2009; Calzo & Ward, 2009; Croucher, Oommen, Borton, Anarbaeva, & Turner, 2010; Golan, 2002; Golan, & Day, 2010; Golan & Kiousis, 2010; Hamilton, & Rubin, 1992; Sanaktekin, Aslanbay, & Gorgulu, 2013). In their review of the most widely used measures of religiosity and spirituality, Egbert et al. (2004) warn health communication researchers against using a sloppy conceptualization of the constructs and their related measurements.

As a matter of fact, few studies whose focus is on the intersection of religion and communication-related variables have attempted to delineate religiosity explicitly. Many studies published within the mass communication research areas tend to discuss the measurement of religiosity without fully explaining what they mean by this terminology.

An abundance of scales of religiousness, religious beliefs, attitudes, orientation, commitment, and the like present in the literature also adds to the necessity of explicating this concept of religiosity as a reference work for scholars who are studying its influence on the relation between human beings and communication technology and media (Hill & Hood, 1999).

This chapter is presented largely drawing upon the guideline suggested by Chaffee (1991). The next section gives a comprehensive overview of the relevant literature across diverse research fields in a way that can systematically organize empirical studies along their relative position within a constructed typology. The subsequent two sections propose conceptual and operational definitions that seem heuristically promising for future research intended to unravel the complex interplay between people's religiosity and its social factors and outcomes from a social-psychological paradigm. The next three sections review the previous studies that address the relationships between religiosity and other variables relevant to this dissertation. A short summary of this chapter follows in the conclusion section.

Two Distinct Approaches to Defining Religion

Debates over the definition of religion among scholars of religion have generally fallen into one of two perspectives: substantive versus functional (Hill & Hood, 1999; Hoover, 1998). A substantive approach focuses on the essential characteristics of religion, meaning that if something is essentially religion it is deemed as such. On the other hand, a functional viewpoint centers on "the purpose, meanings, and practices that surround those areas of culture" that people think of as religious (Hoover, 1998, p. 15). While the functional perspective obviously counts on overgeneralization, it can embrace a wide

range of religious practices and cultural phenomena that appear to be (potentially) religious. The discussion about the way in which religion is defined or understood pertains to how religiosity should be conceptualized and consequently operationalized.

Scholars who advocate a culturalist turn in the study of media and religion argue that the functional approach should be compatible with the rise of numinous experiences that occur outside religious institutions in a postmodern era (Campbell, 2010; Hoover, 2002; Lundby, 1997). For example, Campbell (2010) borrows Clifford Geertz's definition that describes religion as "a cultural system" for her work on how different religious communities engage with new media or computer-mediated communication (p. 7). As Lövheim and Lynch (2011) have aptly observed, however, the functional approach inevitably leads to "an empirical confusion of what is actually studied" as anything can be religion that proffers symbols and practices of meaning-making in day-to-day life in this view (p. 115).

What is defined as religion from the functional perspective may be given a separate term—that is, spirituality. Distinguishing religion and spirituality, Koenig, King, and Carson (2001) describe spirituality as "the personal quest for understanding answers to ultimate questions about life, about meaning, and about relationship to the sacred" (p.18). Kirkwood (194) and Moberg (2002) also understand this concept as an individual's existential aspirations of searching for meaning and purpose in life. Given the existence of a special term that can capture the broad definition of religion as provided by the functional approach, a more parsimonious understanding of religion should help researchers conceptualize its derivative term, or religiosity. Koenig et al.'s (2001) definition is deemed a relevant one in this regard:

> Religion is an organized system of beliefs, practices, rituals, and symbols designed (a) to facilitate closeness to the sacred or transcendent (b) to foster an understanding of one's relationship and responsibility to others in living together in a community. (p. 18)

Evolution of the Concept of Religiosity

A systematic review of the literature can identify two general approaches to the conceptualization of religiosity: a conceptually oriented approach versus an empirically oriented approach (Cornwall, Albrecht, Cunningham, & Pitcher, 1986). Based on the assumption that certain dimensions of religiosity exist, the first approach attempts to measure these dimensions by inventing varied scales (e.g., Allport & Ross, 1967; Glock & Stock, 1966; Lenski, 1963). For instance, Allport and Ross (1967) in their seminal research paper propose two types of fundamental religious orientation—i.e., extrinsic and intrinsic—inherent in churchgoers while evaluating their own Religious Orientation Scale, which dates back to the early 1950s when Allport (1950) conceptualized mature and immature religious sentiment. Lenski's (1963) Religious Orientation and Involvement Inventory, consisting of associational involvement, communal involvement, doctrinal orthodoxy, and devotionalism, was also created in light of his pre-determined definition of religion.

By comparison, the empirically oriented approach directly looks for "mathematical relationships among sets of items from a large pool of indicators" (Cornwall et al., 1986, p. 226). Studies taking this approach aim to develop the

multidimensional conception of religiosity with the method of factor analysis (e.g., De Jong, Faulkner, & Warland, 2001; King & Hunt, 1972). King (1967) and King and Hunt (1969, 1972, 1975) produced a series of articles that examined different dimensions of religious behavior and congregational involvement using the pre-existing ten scales. After finding out that theses scales primarily converge on six factors, King and Hunt (1972) conclude that decisions concerning the existence of dimensions are "personal judgment of researchers," contingent on knowledge of the given data and results of data analysis (p. 247). To investigate whether common dimensions of religiosity crosscut cultural differences, De Jong et al. (2001) conducted an oblique factor analysis on the assumption of interrelationships among the dimensions, using a list of items selected from previous research. Their second-order factor patterns revealed the emergence of three global conceptualizations of the construct: generic religiosity, religious knowledge, and social consequence.

De Jong et al. (2001) point out an increasing concern among scholars surrounding "the problem of specificity versus generality in measuring the religious variable (p. 881). This is a matter of great import because dimensionality of religiosity ultimately depends on how the concept is defined or vice versa. Before attempting to conceptualize religiosity, a search for major dimensions of this complicated concept is clearly warranted. Thus, previous literature on religiosity is analyzed in a dichotomous way in which unidimensional and multidimensional conceptions are explored.

Dimensions of the Concept

When religiosity is conceptualized as a unidimensional construct, church attendance has been treated as a primary measure suggesting that this concept is closely

tied to religious behavior (King & Hunt, 1972; Wilkes et al., 1986). In some studies, on the other hand, religiosity was understood by measuring self-rating of subjective religiousness or religious commitment (Roccas, 2005). This unidimensional conceptualization of religiosity employing simple, often single-item, measures was challenged since the 1950s as demonstrated by Pressey and Kuhlen (1957) and Steinitz (1980), who note that frequency of church attendance does not validly reflect religious commitment. It seems evident that single aspect of religiosity, whether central or not, does not present a holistic picture of the concept.

A more consensual approach to comprehending religiosity is the idea that the multifaceted nature of religion necessitates treating this construct as a multidimensional phenomenon (Bjarnason, 2007; Cornwall et al. 1986; De Jong et al. 2001; Holdcroft, 2006; King & Hunt, 1972; Wilkes et al. 1986). The number of dimensions of religiosity varies depending on scholars. Allport and Ross (1967) identified aforementioned two basic dimensions, saying that "the extrinsically motivated person uses his religion, whereas the intrinsically motivated lives his religion" (p. 434). Lenski (1963), one of the earliest who attempted to specify a multidimensional approach, proposed four dimensions measuring religious orientation (i.e., doctrinal orthodoxy and devotionalism) and religious involvement (i.e., associational involvement and communal involvement).

Glock and Stock (1966) also identified four dimensions after dropping one—i.e., consequences—originally included in their Dimensions of Religious Commitment scale. They are religious belief (e.g., Do you believe Jesus will actually return to the earth some day?), ritual or activities (e.g., Have you been baptized?), experiences or feelings (e.g., Have you ever had any of religious experiences?), and knowledge (e.g., If you were

asked, do you think you could recite the Ten Commandments?). Glock and Stock's work has been influential in characterizing religious dimensions as some scholars have adopted or adapted their proposals (e.g., Fukuyama, 1961; Cornwall et al., 1986). Fukuyama's (1961) conceptualization of religious orientation is also comprised of similar four dimensions—i.e., cognitive, cultic, creedal, and devotional—whose nature parallels the essence of Glock and Stock's dimensions. Similarly, Cornwall et al.'s (1986) conceptual model builds on Glock and Stock's work as well as other theoretical frames. This model promotes a three-dimensional conceptualization, recognizing "the importance of making a distinction between knowing (cognition), feeling (affect), and doing (behavior)" (Cornwall et al., 1986, p. 227). Accordingly, their dimensions are labeled as belief, commitment, and behavioral.

In their comprehensive review of the literature on the relationships between religion and a diversity of mental and physical health conditions, Koenig et al. (2001) identified twelve major dimensions of religion: religious belief, religious affiliation/denomination, organizational religiosity, nonorganizational religiosity, subjective religiosity, religious commitment/motivation, religious quest, religious experience, religious well-being, religious coping, religious knowledge, and religious consequence. Of these dimensions, only five components—i.e., belief, organizational, nonorganizational, subjective religiosity, and commitment—seem relevant to this project of conceptualizing religiosity. Of the remaining five dimensions, organizational and nonorganizational religiosity can be collapsed into one dimension as they both indicate the behavioral aspect. Subjective religiosity and religious commitment may also converge into the affective aspect, given their mutual tendency to reflect degree of religiosity that

an individual feels or perceives. This reduction process, in which seemingly redundant elements have been combined, leaves us with three fundamental dimensions: religious belief, behavior, and commitment, which is identical to Cornwall et al.'s (1986) conceptualization model.

A primary limitation of the conceptualizations discussed thus far is that they are the product of understanding people's religiosity solely focusing on the Judeo-Christian religious tradition (Croucher, Turner, Anarbaeva, Oommen, & Borton, 2008; Koenig et al., 2001). The lack of the measures of religiosity entrenched in non-Christian religious traditions led Croucher et al. (2008, 2010) to develop an instrument for dealing with Muslim and non-Muslim subjects in France and Britain. Their 25-item Measure of Religiosity scale was generated with the intention of effectively measuring religiosity across different religions and cultures. A close inspection of this scale shows that it only covers the behavioral and affective aspects of religiosity apart from the fact that the 25 items loaded on one factor. In other words, Croucher et al.'s (2008) scale do not include items that can measure the belief or cognitive dimension of religiosity.

The above review of the literature warrants the invention of an organizational device capable of categorizing extant research on the interconnectedness of religion and communication/media. Two dimensions of the following typology are aligned with dimensionality of religiosity and source of religious tradition. Figure 1 illustrates this typology while organizing some of the authors identified in prior research visually.

		Source	
		Christianity	Non-Christianity
Dimensionality	Unidimensional	Calzo & Ward (2009)	Al-Menayes (1997)
	Multidimensional	Armfield & Holbert (2003) Bobkowski (2009) Golan & Day (2010) Hamilton & Rubin (1992) Punyanunt-Carter et al. (2010)	Croucher et al. (2008, 2010) Golan & Kiousis (2010) Sanaktekin et al. (2013)

Figure 1. Conceptualization of religiosity

Conceptual Definition

The foregoing account of the related literature across many different academic fields reveals that the debate about defining religiosity revolves around two distinct approaches as well as two different religious traditions. Based on this finding, empirical studies in communication research were classified into one of the four cells of the typology shown above. In this section, some of the definitions encountered in the literature search are presented before a tentative definition is suggested.

Alston (1975) contends that religiosity is the degree of one's acceptance of religious affiliation, participation in church attendance, as well as one's respect toward religious leaders. In a similar vein, Bjarnason (2007) argues that religiosity encompasses recognition of religious affiliation, participation in religious activities, and religious beliefs. Egbert et al. (2004) report it as "society-based beliefs and practices relating to God or a higher power commonly associated with a church or organized group" (p. 8). McDaniel and Burnett (1990) offer a broader definition regarding religiosity as a belief in God accompanied by a commitment to comply with principles believed to be laid down

by God. Finally, Shafranske and Malony (1990) understand the concept as the degree to which an individual accepts and perform beliefs and rituals of an established religious organization.

It is apparent that a review of the explicit definitions of religiosity proposed by various authors uncovered a major problem consistently arising. That is, these definitions do not fully mirror the essential three dimensions of the construct—i.e., cognitive, behavioral, and affective—while highlighting one aspect over another. Collectively, they put an emphasis on belief and practice omitting the affective or attitudinal dimension. However, all of them seem to take a proper position that religiosity should be defined as a multidimensional phenomenon. There is a need for putting the three aspects together into an inclusive definition. Thus, the following definition is proposed for this dissertation:

> Religiosity can be defined as the extent to which an individual believes in her religious doctrines, practices or participates in religious activities, and perceives the importance of her own religion in everyday life.

Once the conceptual definition of religiosity is presented, a very obvious question that can be raised is how this construct should be operationalized so that a communication scholar is able to take advantage of the fruit of this labor. An operationalization of the concept is the task to be accomplished in the next section.

Operational Definition

According to Babbie (2011), operationalization is the development of unambiguous research procedures that leads to empirical observations representing the

given concept in the real world. Thus, the range of variation regarding religiosity must be decided before advancing through the operationalization process. The nature of religiosity forces researchers to form Likert scales for the variables that indicate the three dimensions of the concept. The first set of measures examines the strength of one's acceptance of certain religious beliefs (e.g., belief in God, the divinity of Jesus Christ, Allah, Prophet Muhammad, or the doctrine of samsara). The second set of measures focuses on the extent to which one engage in religious practice (e.g., frequency of attendance at religious services or other rituals, frequency of prayer, or frequency of reading scriptures). The last set of operational measures concentrates on how much one perceives religion as an integral part of her life (e.g., I consult teachings from my religion when making important decisions; without religious faith my life would not have much meaning). Each dimension should be measured with multiple indicators because single indicators do not suffice for these dimensions. The use of composite measures should demonstrate satisfactory reliability as evidenced by many existing scales related to religiosity.

When it comes to validity issues, the selection of the sample items mentioned above appears to meet the face validity criterion given that the items in each set of measures represent different types of religiosity, that is, belief, behavior, and affect (or attitude). The validity of these three sets of measures will also be determined by the relationship between the scores people get on the scale and their actual religious commitment, in terms of criterion-related (or predictive) validity. To test construct validity of this scale, a researcher may need to have certain theoretical expectations about the way religiosity relates to other variables such as TV viewing and political

conservatism. If the scale relates to these variables in the predicted fashion, that can constitute evidence of its construct validity (Babbie, 2011).

Visual representation of operational definition of religiosity is presented in Figure 2.

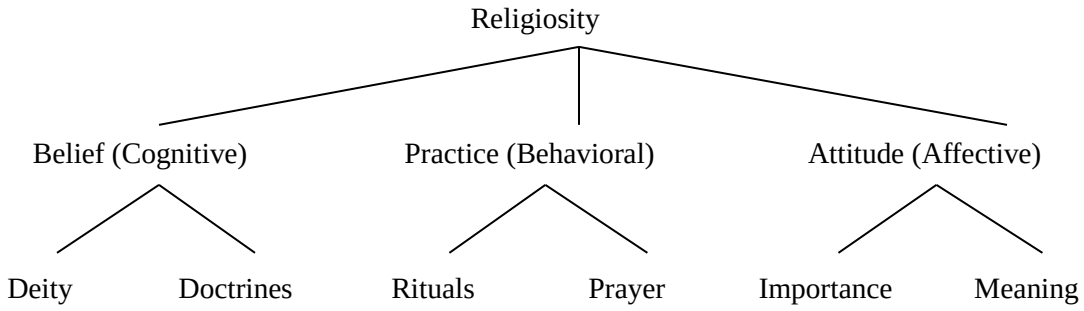

Figure 2. Operationalization of religiosity

Religion, Religiosity, and Public Opinion

Before concluding this chapter on religiosity, it is necessary to review the studies that have investigated the relations between this concept and other central variables considered in this dissertation. A body of scholarship on the sociology of religion has studied the influence of religious beliefs and institutions on social life, including social movements and politics (Barkan, 2014; Nisbet, Ostman, & Shanahan, 2008; Olson, Cadge, & Harrison, 2006; Putnam & Campbell, 2010; Sherkat & Ellison, 1999). Religious beliefs and commitments have a considerable impact on individuals' opinion about various issues such as abortion (Wilcox, 1992; Barkan, 2014), same-sex marriage (Olson et al., 2006, Putnam & Campbell, 2010, Whitehead, 2010), and Islam and

Muslims (Nisbet et al., 2008). According to Putnam and Campbell (2010), religiosity has a special connection to attitudes toward a narrow range of moral issues—i.e., homosexuality and abortion—despite myriad other factors affecting where people stand on these issues. Given that abortion and homosexuality stand in for a bundle of beliefs, or moral traditionalism, attitudes toward these two issues are unlikely to go through a wholesale change for those with high religiosity, which functions as an extentsion of their moral worldview.

Wilcox (1992) utilized the GSS survey data from the early 1970s through the 1980s to examine the intersection of religion, race, and region with regard to abortion attitudes and found the negative effects of religious variables, with racial gap in abortion attitudes closing over time. Religious variables were a major source of both white and black attitudes, and personal religiosity in particular had a larger impact on the attitudes of southern blacks and nonsouthern whites. Data from the 2012 GSS also presents supporting evidence that higher levels of religiosity are strongly related with lower support for abortion, suggesting "the association of religiosity with traditional position on moral issues" (Barkan, 2014, p. 942). Religiosity was identified as a suppressor variable that accounted for the null relationship between gender and abortion attitudes, in which women were not more likely than men to support legal abortion (Barkan, 2014).

Research on the relationship between religion and public opinion toward homosexuality has found a strong impact of religious affiliation with evangelical Protestants having the most conservative attitudes (Finlay & Walther, 2003; Kirkpatrick, 1993) and has identified religiosity as another predictor of individuals' opinions about same-sex marriage (Fisher, Derison, Polley, Cadman, & Johnston, 1994; Olson et al.,

2006). Although both religious affiliation and religiosity have a significant effect on public opinion about this issue, religiosity seems to exert a stronger effect as opinions of the religious, regardless of their specific affiliation, tend to converge on morally charged issues (Putnam & Campbell, 2010; Olson et al., 2006). For instance, church-attending Catholics and evangelicals have been allied for their common moral cause, forming "the coalition of the religious" (Putnam & Campbell, 2010, p. 376). That those with greater religiosity and with conservative attitudes on morality and secularism are more likely to oppose same-sex unions suggests how prioritization of moral values intertwines with opposition to gay marriage (Olson et al., 2006).

Theoretically, religiosity may serve as cognitive shortcuts or heuristics for individuals to form their opinions about an issue, especially in situations where religiosity mitigates or inhibit the likelihood of religious individuals learning about knowledge or facts about the topic at hand (Brossard, Scheufele, Kim, & Lewenstein, 2008; Nisbet et al., 2008; Scheufele, Nisbet, & Brossard, 2003). Research has shown that people are cognitive misers and use their own predispositions such as ideology and religiosity as mental cues to make judgments about a given issue (Popkin, 1994). Brossard et al. (2008) confirmed that religiosity functions as a perceptual filter in the process of opinion formation on emerging technologies (i.e., nanotechnology). Social networks may also contribute to the divide between the religious and the secular on the moral spectrum. For example, individuals whose friendship networks are deeply tied to a religious organization are less likely to be accepting of homosexuality (Petersen & Donnenwerth, 1998). The more congregational friends people have, the more likely they oppose same-sex marriage because their social networks help shape and affect sociopolitical outlook

(Olson et al., 2006). Participation in congregational life fosters one's psychological and emotional ties with religious friends, increasing the need to be congruent with the opinions of his or her congregation on social issues that are morally desirable.

In addition to the studies showing the impact of religious beliefs on the formation of public attitudes toward a variety of issues, there has been research that tested the potential role of religiosity (Epley, Converse, Delbosc, Monteleone, & Cacioppo, 2009) and other related concepts—e.g., conservation values (Amit, Roccas, & Meidan, 2010), ideology (Dvir-Gvirsman, 2015), and authoritarianism (Strube & Rahimi, 2006)—in the perception of public opinion. Amit et al. (2010) conceptualized conservation values as "the motivation to maintain the status quo and perceive the world in simple, known, terms," implying the motivation "to perceive clear distinctions between good and bad, right and wrong" (p. 932). Their findings identified the moderating role of conservation values on social projection in that the positive relationship between support for one's own positions and false consensus was greater for people who attributed more importance to these values. Given that religious people tend to favor conservation values (Saroglou, Delpierre, & Dernelle, 2004), it is reasonable to assume that religiosity may lead to greater misperceptions of public opinion. In a similar vein, Dvir-Gvirsman (2015) and Strube and Rahimi (2006) found the significant association between conservative ideology and overestimation of one's group size and between right-wing authoritarianism (featuring, for example, deference to authority, support for traditional values) and false consensus, respectively.

Epley and his colleagues (2009) were more specifically in the effects of religiosity on estimating God's opinions as well as other people's opinions concerning

such issues as abortion, same-sex marriage, death penalty, and legality of marijuana. They expected that false consensus would be greater when estimating a religious agent's (i.e., God's) attitudes than when estimating the attitudes of the general public or specific individuals (e.g., Bill Gates, George W. Bush). The reasoning behind their hypothesis was that because inferences about a religious agent's attitudes cannot be based on information directly from the agent an individual should rely on her own beliefs, which are presumed to reflect God's true beliefs. Their correlational, experimental, and neuroimaging studies provided supporting evidence to this hypothesis, confirming that believers demonstrated greater false consensus when thinking about God's attitudes. More important and relevant to this dissertation, the egocentric correlations with God's beliefs were significantly higher on both issue of abortion and same-sex marriage for believers than for nonbelievers, implying that religiosity would be a predictor of false consensus. The predictive role of religiosity in overestimating support for one's own attitudes can be indirectly supported by studies demonstrating a positive association between religiosity and socially desirable responding (Gervais & Norenzayan, 2012; Sedikides & Gebauer, 2010). Given that socially desirable responding has been considered as operationalization of self-enhancement (Sedikides & Gebauer, 2010), the positive relation between the aforementioned two variables suggests that religiosity may be in the service of self-enhancement—one of the motivational mechanisms underlying false consensus.

Religiosity and Trust in Media

Recent research on media credibility taking an audience-based approach has moved beyond demographic variables and has included such individual factors as media skepticism and religiosity (Carr et al., 2014; Golan & Day, 2010; Golan & Kiousis, 2010;

Tsfati & Cappella, 2003). For example, media skepticism, a subjective feeling of mistrust toward the news media, has especially gained interest over recent years in explaining decreased trust in the mainstream news media (Carr et al., 2014; Tsfati & Cappella, 2003). In their experiment embedded in a web-based survey, for example, Carr et al. (2014) showed the evidence that the assessments of credibility are conditional upon pre-existing levels of media skepticism. Golan and his colleagues, on the other hand, suggested that religiosity should be considered a predictor of media credibility (Golan & Day, 2010; Golan & Kiousis, 2010).

One of the perspectives adopted to explain the patterns of media use by religious audiences is secularization thesis, which became "the reigning dogma" among sociologists of religion by the early 1970s (Swatos & Christiano, 1999, p. 210). A basic tenet of this theory is that the separation of church and state in modern society results in erosion of religious beliefs and commitments (Berger, 2011; Stout, 2012; Warner, 1993). Mass media have been deemed a major factor that accelerates secularization as they provide people with competing information and knowledge that help weaken religious authorities and truth. Research showed that active church members tend to read news about religion (Buddenbaum, 1982) and family-focused content (Grunig, 1979), while people who have conservative religious beliefs are more likely to avoid sexually oriented television programs (Hamilton & Rubin, 1992).

Previous studies that have been carried on credibility perception by religious people generally indicated that religiosity has an inverse relationship with perceived media credibility (Ariyanto, Hornsey, & Gallois, 2007; Buddenbaum, 1996; Golan & Day, 2010; Golan & Kiousis, 2010; Westley & Severin, 1964). According to Westley and

Severin (1964), church members considered television a more accurate and truthful medium than newspapers and radio, and this tendency holds for those who attend church occasionally. In her study of the survey data of 987 Middletown residents, Buddenbaum (1996) pointed out that the respondents who hold orthodox beliefs and who identify themselves as born-again Christians are more likely than others to distrust newspapers.

In contrast, Golan and Kiousis's (2010) secondary analysis of a sample of 1,882 Arab youth identified a significant positive association between levels of religiosity and assessments of media credibility for both domestic and satellite media. This finding is somewhat contrary to What Golan and Day (2010) revealed in their study of college students in the southeast of the U.S., in which they found some supports for the negative correlation hypothesis concerning religiosity and credibility. Golan and Kiousis (2010) argue that differences in the two samples in terms of religious culture and media landscape should account for the mixed results. In their examination of how Muslims and Christians in Indonesia perceive media bias, Ariyanto, Hornsey, and Gallois (2007) found hostile media perception for both groups. Hostile media perception referred to the tendency of partisans to view the media as biased against them. In their experimental study, Ariyanto et al. (2007) found that strongly identified Muslims and Christians interpreted a balanced news article to be biased against their own group, while weakly identified Muslims and Christians did not.

Religiosity and Social Media

Social media has been defined as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). According

to the typology developed by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), there are six types of social media based on levels of social presence/media richness and possibility of self-presentation/self-disclosure: collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia), content communities (e.g., YouTube), virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft), blogs, social network sites (e.g., Facebook and Twitter), and virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life). Among these various kinds of social media, social network sites (SNSs) have become a topic of intense research interest because of the exponential growth in use of these sites in recent years. The enthusiasm for this new communication technology resulted in a media frenzy surrounding the popularity of SNSs as well as the fast growing number of research articles both utilizing data gathered from these sites and investigating the consequences of the use of SNSs (boyd & Ellision, 2008; Parmelee, & Bichard, 2011).

There is a dearth of research on the intersection of religiosity with the use of social media in the study of media and religion. Bobkowski and Pearce (2011) looked at how MySpace users engage in religious self-disclosure, which included religious identification and the overall number of comments that referenced religion or spirituality. Their findings show that more than 60 percent of the users self-disclosed their religious affiliation, and that more religious users tended to view institutional religion positively or be in like-minded religious friendship groups. Nyland and Near (2007) build on the uses and gratification theory to specifically investigate the effects of religiosity on the way social networking sites are used. The underlying assumptions of the uses and gratifications theory include that people driven by social and psychological factors are active and discriminating in their selection of media and messages that satisfy their needs and expectations (Rubin, 1993; Ruggiero, 2000). Their study revealed that one of the

needs the religious seek to meet when using SNSs is to keep in touch with existing relationships such as members of their congregation and family although they are just as likely to use SNSs to meet new people as their less religious counterparts. Another major finding includes the null relationship between individuals' religiosity and their activity on SNSs, suggesting that religiosity may not be a good predictor of overall exposure to SNSs.

One of the limitations of the aforementioned two studies is that they pay their attention only on the use of SNSs, which is one type of social media according to the typology constructed by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010). It is worth taking further their research on the relationship between religiosity and social media use by examining how the religious individuals use different types of social media and why.

Conclusion

Although the study of media and religion has attracted much attention from mass communication scholars since at least three decades ago, religiosity has not yet been thoroughly explicated as a concept. From this meaning analysis of the construct, multidimensional characteristics of religiosity has been confirmed, and three vital aspects—i.e., belief, practice, and affect—have been identified. The subsequent operationalization has demonstrated how this conceptualization of religiosity can be utilized in empirical research within the field of communication studies. Religiosity will, without doubt, remain a convoluted concept that defies a simple understanding as well as a superficial, undemanding investigation. Thus, it is to be hoped that this explication will contribute to a more methodical use of the concept in our collective effort to disentangle the underlying explanatory mechanisms related to public opinion, media, and religion.

CHAPTER 5

A CONCEPTUAL MODEL:

HYPOTHESES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Introduction

The previous chapters have attempted to conceptualize the four major concepts of this dissertation, that is, false consensus, media skepticism, religiosity, and alternative media use, while discussing the relationships among some of these concepts. The purpose of this chapter is twofold. On one hand, it provides fundamental assumptions on the nature of the audience and of the media sources, building on such theories as uses and gratifications, selective exposure, and motivated reasoning. On the other hand, it is an attempt to make all possible connections between the concepts in the form of hypotheses and research questions as well as of a visualized conceptual model. The model proposes that individual differences in religiosity and media skepticism directly influence perceptions of public opinion on sociopolitical issues, resulting in false consensus, and that, at the same time, use of alternative media sources (i.e., religious media and social media) mediates the influence of individual differences on false consensus. The proposed model presupposes two conditions. First, active and motivated audience members selectively expose themselves to non-mainstream media channels that offer attitude-consistent messages. Second, these media have reinforcing effects on the audience members, by which the likelihood of overestimation of public support for one's own

attitudes is increased. These two conditions are further divided into five assumptions and discussed in more detail in this chapter.

The chapter is organized into six sections. Five primary assumptions are presented in the next two sections: three postulates on the audience in one section and two postulates on the media sources in the other section, respectively. These assumptions offer the rationale behind the hypotheses and research questions, which are also grounded on empirical evidence found in various research fields such as social psychology, political communication, and social media. Established connections among the major concepts are presented in two different forms: one in written statements and one in visualized conceptual model in the remaining two sections. The last section highlights the significance of the conceptual model in advancing our understanding of the role of religious media and social media in perceptions of public opinion climate (i.e., false consensus)

Assumptions about the Audience

Assumption 1. Audience members are variably active users of the media.

The first postulate concerning the nature of the audience is mostly based on the central assumptions, in which a contemporary view of uses and gratifications (U&G) is grounded (McQuail, 2010; Rubin, 2009; Ruggiero, 2000). The basic assumptions of the U&G approach include that audience members are aware of "the media-related needs" which arise in their day-to-day living circumstances (McQuail, 2010, p. 424), and that they choose and use media sources to satisfy these needs (Rubin, 2009). To borrow from an earlier review of the literature, this communication behavior is concerned with:

> (1) the social and psychological origins of (2) needs, which generates (3) expectations of (4) the mass media or other sources, which lead to (5) differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in (6) need gratifications and (7) other consequences. (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973, p. 510).

This audience-centered approach sees individuals as "free agents" choosing media channels they will consume and generally using them for their own purposes (Webster, 1998, p. 194). The individual audience is deemed to have the upper hand over media in that the individual initiates the selection and use of the media sources (Rubin, 2009; Webster, 1998).

This concept of active audience has been established in an effort to restore audience members to their rightful place in the dynamic relation between media and consumers. The powerful media effects paradigm that dominated the field of media studies from the beginning thinks of people as being acted upon by the media, emphasizing their passivity and susceptibility to media influence (Reagan, 1996; Webster, 1998). By contrast, those who follow active audience perspectives, including U&G researchers, assume that people selectively use media to suit their needs and interests (Blumler, 1979; Reagan, 1996; Rubin, 1984). As new communication technologies offer a wider range of media channels and interactivity, the notion of active audience is gaining credibility with communication scholars (Ruggiero, 2000). Whether media audiences are active or passive, however, is not an either/or question (Blumler, 1979; Cooper & Tang, 2009; Rubin, 1984; Webster, 1998). For one thing, the level of activity may differ when

selecting and consuming media channels. Take, for example, three types of media use identified by Rubin (1984) and Abelman (1987), which are mentioned in Chapter 3. Ritualized media use (i.e., habitual use of a medium for diversionary reasons) will usually involves less activity on the part of the audience than instrumental (i.e., goal-oriented use of a medium) or reactionary (i.e., use of religious media as an alternative to secular fare) media use.

In addition, the level of activeness may differ at different points in time in terms of a temporally ordered sequence of communication behavior: before exposure, during consumption, and after the media experience (Blumler, 1979). For example, the audience member might be active prior to exposure when planning when and what to watch or read, and even more active during consumption by paying close attention to the media content. The same audience member, however, might not be considered as active after exposure if not talking about the experience with others or engaging it with other activities. Nabi's (2007) conceptualization of audience activity parallels Blumler's (1979) as she divided the activity into three phases: message selection, processing, and interpretation. Different levels of engagement in consuming media messages will have differing consequences on audience members.

And most of all, the term "activity" can carry a number of meanings. According to Blumler (1979), activity has a range of meanings, including utility, intentionality, selectivity, and imperviousness to influence. Research shows that there are different associations between motives for media use and dimensions of activity. For example, instrumental media use reflects utility, intentionality, and selectivity more than ritualized media use does (Rubin, 1984). Levy and Windahl (1984) also found a stronger

relationship between information motivation and intentionality (i.e., the purposive nature of media consumption) among TV viewers, compared to a weak association between entertainment motivation and intentionality. Thus, it is inconceivable to believe that people (or even the same person) are equally active in terms of variability in the multiple dimensions of activity. As such, a more reasonable approach is to postulate that "all audience members are not equally active at all times" (Ruggiero, 2000, p. 26). In other words, they are likely to be at varying degrees active and passive at different points when engaging in media consumption (Cooper & Tang, 2009). In any case, the central tenet of the U&G theory holds that audience members, although at varying degrees, use media that match their needs.

Assumption 2. Individuals selectively expose themselves to information sources that support rather than oppose their attitudes.

The selective exposure hypothesis posits that people tend to seek out consonant information on the assumption that rational people should have a general preference for beliefs, values, and attitudes that are logically consistent (D'Alessio & Allen, 2007; Frey, 1986; Smith, Fabrigar, & Norris, 2008). Especially, selective exposure is assumed to be strongest when motivational goals exist to process attitude-consistent information (Smith et al., 2008). Historically, research on selective exposure that came out of the theory of cognitive dissonance has shown mixed results in terms of its occurrences (D'Alessio & Allen, 2007; Freedman & Sears, 1965; Frey, 1986; Parmelee & Bichard, 2011; Taber, 2003). Initial optimism about the selective exposure phenomena was followed by pessimistic evaluations of the phenomena (Freedman & Sears, 1965; Sears & Freedman, 1967). Freedman and Sears (1965) concluded that although people tend to be exposed to

attitude-congruent messages (known as de facto selective exposure), they would not actively seek out such messages. For them, "there is no evidence for a psychological preference for supportive information" (Freedman & Sears, 1965, p. 91). However, a recent meta-analysis of the extant studies on this subject show that people routinely expose themselves to messages in accord with their existing attitudes (D'Alessio & Allen, 2007). Smith et al. (2008) also claimed that "the existence of selective exposure effects is no longer seriously questioned" after reviewing selective exposure studies over six decades.

Facing the age of digital and social media, there has been a great deal of interest over the past decade in selective exposure in communication, political science, psychology, and elsewhere (Hayes, 2013; Iyengar, & Hahn, 2009). Prior research done in the mass communication field, however, does not provide straightforward support for the selective exposure hypothesis although a number of studies indicate that online media contribute to reinforcing echo chambers, where people are exposed only to information consistent with their existing opinions (Adamic & Glance, 2005; Hargittai, Gallo, & Kane, 2008; Himelboim, Smith, & Shneiderman, 2013; Krebs, 2004; McPherson, Smith-Loving, & Cook, 2001). For instance, Adamic and Glance (2005) witnessed a divided blogosphere in which most of the links remain internal to either conservative or liberal communities, with conservative blogs connecting to each other more frequently and in a denser pattern. Focusing on the most popular political blogs, Hargittai, Gallo, and Kane (2008) noted that blogs are more likely to link to those with like-minded views, given that there are much more linkages to similar viewpoints than to opposing points-of-view. Politically divided communities are also found in Krebs's (2004) network analysis of

Amazon's lists of books that were "also bought" by people who bought selected political titles, as book buyers were split into conservative and liberals in terms of books they recommended.

By contrast, other scholars provide evidence that online media users do not avoid opinion-challenging information (Barberá, 2015; Garrett, 2009a; Messing & Westwood, 2012). After conducting a web-administered behavior-tracking study to investigate the influence of news content on readers' use of news items, Garrett (2009a) concluded that "there is little evidence that they will use the Internet to create echo chambers, devoid of other viewpoints" (p. 279). Under the assumption that social endorsements, which is social media's distinctive feature, fundamentally alter the way newsreaders consume online content, Messing and Westwood (2012) found evidence that social cues reduce partisan selective exposure. Barberá (2015) also argues that because social media facilitate the formation of weak ties with politically heterogeneous people, social media expose individuals to cross-ideological messages, thereby reducing political extremism. However, selective exposure and selective avoidance may not be two sides of the same coin. Frey (1986) and Garrett (2009b) maintained that the effect of selective avoidance is much weaker than selective exposure, and Garrett, Carnahan, and Lynch (2011) showed that use of Internet sites that are attitude-consistent is positively correlated with use of counterattitudinal web sources. Also, such features of social media as social endorsements and formation of weak ties may function as moderators or situational factors that might influence selective exposure (Smith et al., 2008).

Studies of homophily on social media corroborates the selective exposure theory. The notion of homophily holds that individuals' personal network are homogeneous with

respect to many different characteristics and that association is more likely between similar people than among dissimilar people (McPherson, Smith-Loving, & Cook, 2001). This idea that birds of a feather flock together initially came from the social network literature. The rapidly increasing popularity of Twitter has led to a boom in research on the homophily hypothesis as well as selective exposure (Choi, Park, & Park, 2011; Choi, Sang, Park, 2014; Himelboim, 2014; Himelboim, McCreery, & Smith, 2013; Himelboim, Smith, & Shneiderman, 2013). For example, Himbelboim and his colleagues repeatedly found evidence that supports the polarization of conservatives and liberals: key users within a given cluster tend to be associated with homogeneous key users in terms of political viewpoints (Himelboim, 2014); users can see messages from within their own cluster more easily than from across clusters (Himelboim, Smith, & Shneiderman, 2013); users' clusters are characterized by like-minded views and are linked to opinion-reinforcing information sources (Himelboim, McCreery, & Smith, 2013).

Assumption 3. Individuals are motivated reasoners.

The theory of motivated reasoning argues that individuals' motivations affect cognitive processes in a way that makes them arrive at their desired conclusion (Kunda, 1990; Lodge & Taber, 2000). All reasoning is motivated in that information processing is driven by specific motivations or goals. In other words, "people choose to believe what they want to believe, often regardless of evidence to the contrary" (Hollander, 2014, p. 3). Motivations here refers to "any wish, desire, or preference that concerns the outcome of a given reasoning task" (Kunda, 1990, p. 480). The notion that motivations affect people's perceptions and attitudes, thereby leading them to make self-serving attributions, dates back to Festinger (1957). This theory is gaining ground and recognition in political

science (e.g., Lodge & Taber, 2000; Nyhan & Reifler, 2010; Taber & Lodge, 2006), political communication (e.g., Meirick, 2013) as well as public opinion research (e.g., Druckman & Bolsen, 2011; Bolsen, Druckman, & Cook, 2014; Leeper & Slothuus, 2014; Nir, 2011; Strickland, Taber, & Lodge, 2011). Scholars who applying this theory to the dynamics of political decision-making processes have used the term "partisan motivated reasoning" (Bolsen et al., 2014; Leeper & Slothuus, 2014) or "motivated political reasoning" (Lodge & Taber, 2000; Taber & Lodge, 2006). These two terms are combined and called hereafter "political motivated reasoning" in this chapter. As this dissertation will deal with sociopolitical issues when measuring false consensus, narrowing down the focus on political motivated reasoning is in order.

Proposing a theory of political motivated reasoning, Lodge and Taber (2000) posits three subtheories: hot cognition, on-line processing, and a "how-do-I-feel" heuristic, which, working in tandem, offer a mechanism for our reasoning processes about political leaders, groups, and issues. According to the hot cognition hypothesis that all social information and concepts are affectively charged, all political actors and issues an individual has evaluated in the past are now affect laden (e.g., strongly or weakly, positively or negatively). The on-line processing hypothesis holds that when people form or revise an overall impression of a political issue or person, they "automatically" take out the affective value of the political object and then "spontaneously" revise their summary assessment of it (Lodge & Taber, 2000; p. 184). Finally, when people are asked to evaluate a political object a "how-do-I-feel" heuristic captures the affective value attached to the target, moves this affective tally into working memory, and tells them "at the moment of recognition" how much they like or dislike the object (Lodge & Taber,

2000, p. 184). Working together, the tripartite model of political motivated reasoning unitizes cognition and affect, suggesting that the two are stored as a single piece of information in long-term memory and are extracted as such in the reasoning process. Based on this theory of political motivated reasoning, Lodge and Taber (2000) claimed that most, if not all, people are "biased reasoners," finding it almost impossible to appraise any new political or social information in an evenhanded way (p. 184).

In this sense, that individuals are motivated reasoners means that they are biased reasoners. Taber and Lodge (2006) conducted two experiment studies to explore how people evaluate arguments about two domestic policy issues (i.e., gun control and affirmative action). Their findings provided support for the motivated reasoning hypothesis. When reading pro and con arguments, participants counterargued counter-attitudinal arguments while uncritically accepting attitude-consonant arguments (evidence of a disconfirmation bias). They also tended to seek out confirmatory evidence when free to choose the source of the arguments they read (evidence of a confirmation bias). Taber and Lodge (2006) concluded that although tension exists between "the drives for accuracy and belief perseverance" people are motivated to apply their reasoning power in favor of their prior, favored conclusion, when focusing on reasoning about sociopolitical issues (p. 756).

According to Lode and Taber (2000), an individual's goas or motives fall into two broad categories: accuracy and directional (or partisan) goals. Accuracy goals refer to the need to be accurate about a given issue while directional goals refer to the need to maintain a desirable conclusion and reject disagreeable information. Research on motivated reasoning provides substantial evidence that directional goals affect reasoning

in such a way that people are more likely to seek instances that are consistent with their preferred position on a task at hand (Gvirsman, 2015; Meirick, 2013; Nir, 2011; Strickland, Taber, & Lodge, 2011). For example, Nir (2011) employed Lodge and Taber's (2000) motivated-reasoning goals typology to determine if and to what extent individuals' perceptions of aggregate opinions are swayed by the relative mix of accuracy and directional goals. It was found that directional goals lead the respondents to overestimate support for their favored presidential candidate as well as their own ideological leaning. In contrast, accuracy goals increased respondents' ability to reason opposite points of view and lead to relative underestimates of support. Meirick (2013) also found empirical support for his hypothesis that Republicans were more likely than non-Republicans to hold the misperception that health care reform would create so-called death panels, which is consistent the motivated reasoning argument. Gvirsman (2015)'s study on false consensus in the context of Israeli society showed that political knowledge did not reduce the misperception of public opinion and that rather it increased false consensus among moderates. Gvirsman's (2015) concluded that her findings offered support for the motivated reasoning theory.

The motivated reasoning model has in common with the logical information processing model that active reasoning processes underlie one's perceptions of public opinion climate. However, it does not derive from attribution theory—i.e., the idea that the attribution of the cause of one's own behavior to situational factors influences assumptions about the commonness of that behavior—as the logical information processing argument does (Marks & Miller, 1987; Spears & Manstead, 1990). The motivated reasoning does not concern whether people attribute their behavior to

situational factors. Nor does it assume that situational forces will affect perceivers and others similarly, thereby overriding individual differences.

Assumptions about the Media

Assumption 4. There are two types of media: mainstream vs. alternative media.

This may not be thought of as an assumption per se in a strict sense as there are many more types of media one can imagine. Let us assume for now, however, that there are these two types of media: mainstream and alternative media sources because a binary approach to understanding the media landscape is appropriate for the purposes of this dissertation. Scholarly discussion surrounding how to define alternative media relative to mainstream media has been presented in Chapter 3. To recapitulate various conceptions of alternative media, the major difference is the way the two types of media relate to power, whether corporate, political, or ideological. Alternative media serve as communication back channels that offer news and opinions, which are rarely propagated by mainstream media. The existence of such media implies how people "translate their resistance to or frustration with" the products of the mainstream media, which serve the ideology and establishment of the powerful (Deuze, 2006, p. 267). Another difference is that alternative media are more likely than their mainstream counterparts to have balanced, horizontal organizational structures, to involve ordinary people in their process of production, and thus to be attentive to their voices. Although scholars increasingly challenge the notion of binary opposition between the two types of media (Atton, 2002; Downing, 2001; Harcup, 2005; Kenix, 2011), it is entirely possible that audience members perceive the distinction between mainstream and non-mainstream media. These

two types of media can be seen as “mutually exclusive entities” from the audience’s perspective (Kenix, 2011, p. 18).

There is now a subsidiary assumption that social media and religious media constitute the alternative media. Mainstream media may consist of national and local television and radio stations, cable news networks such as CNN, MSNBC, or FOX, and daily newspapers (Tsfati, 2002). Of course, some mainstream media sources might encourage the participation of ordinary audience members, and dedicate space to materials dealing with media-related issues (Tsfati, 2002). The democratic process of production in terms of form and content, however, is a defining characteristic of alternative media. Historically, there have been many forms of alternative media, ranging from partisan newspapers, cable channels, political talk radio, to political information on the Internet. The focus here is on social media and religious media.

The very nature of social media contributes to the participation, sharing, and collaboration on the part of the audience, which is best represented by social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook. To the extent that social media provide platforms with which to produce one’s own media content, disseminate underreported information, and generate alternative discourses challenging the dominant ideology of the time, they can be seen as alternatives to mainstream news media. The use of social media as alternative sources of information has been studied for blogs (Bailey, Cammaerts, & Carpentier, 2008), podcasts (Florini, 2015; Koo, Chung, & Kim, 2015), Twitter (Petrovic, Osborne, McCreadie, Macdonald, & Ounis, 2013; Poell & Borra, 2012), and Facebook (Harlow, 2012; Iskander, 2011).

When it comes to religious media as purveyors of religious messages, research shows that an increasing number of religious media provide political and social content blended with traditional moral values or a Christian perspective (Abelman & Pettey, 1988; Frankl, 1998; Vinson, 2009). Theoretically, the secularization thesis has been used as the rationale behind the media behavior of religious audiences, who select religious programming as alternative information sources because of their negative perception of secular fare. The tenet of this thesis that mass media are a major force that accelerates erosion of religious beliefs and commitments is supported by the studies in the uses and gratifications approach (Abelman, 1987, 1988; Hamiltion & Rubin, 1992; Laney, 2005). For example, Laney (2005) reported the results of factor analysis that showed faith factor driving religious website use. His finding is consistent with Abelman's (1988) that reported faith as an underlying motive for religious television use.

Assumption 5. The media have effects that reinforce preexisting attitudes of the audience.

Empirical evidence for the last assumption dates back to one of the milestones in mass communication research in the 1940s. In order to study conditions that factor into the political behavior of people, Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1944) conducted a research project on the 1940 presidential election, whose results were reported in a small book titled *The People's Choice: How the Voter Makes Up His Mind in a Presidential Campaign*. One of their major findings was that the media campaign provided already-decided voters with a continuing flow of information (i.e., arguments and justifications) for them to remain in their position. From the minimal effects perspective, Lazarsfeld et al. (1944) claimed that media alone do not cause individuals to change their attitudes and opinions, but do reinforce their preexisting attitudes. Although the reinforcement effect of

the media seems less dramatic than other media effects (e.g., persuasion, agenda-setting, or framing), it may be seen as more important given such a large proportion of the voters involved (Lowery & DeFleur, 1995). Proportion of the voters who have already made up their minds before the campaign begins were more than half of the sample in Lazarsfeld et al.'s (1944) study and are roughly two-thirds of the voters these days in Dominick's (2009) estimation.

Klapper's (1960) work *The Effects of Mass Communication* is another cornerstone of the minimal effects perspective in general and the reinforcement effect in particular. Klapper (1960) maintained that the media's effect that reinforces the status quo may result in the underestimation of the total mass communication effects. For him, mass media are more likely to reinforce than to change the existing conditions, regardless of the condition under investigation (e.g., people's vote intentions, tendency toward antisocial behavior, or general orientation toward life). Drawing heavily on cognitive dissonance theory, Klapper (1960) saw people as active audience members, who engage not only in selective exposure, but also in selective perception (i.e., interpreting messages as supporting their attitudes) and selective retention (i.e., retaining consonant information better than dissonant one) in order to protect their preferred belief system. From the U&G perspective, Blumler (1979) also argued that when media are used to add to something important in their own life or situation, people tend to seek a reinforcement of what they stand for. In other words, "involvement in media materials for personal identity reasons is likely to promote reinforcement effects" (Blumler, 1979, p. 19). When facing situations that require some change in their outlooks or ways of life, people are more likely to turn to interpersonal sources (e.g., family members, friends, and peers) than to media

materials, which can hardly address the specifics of their problems or predicaments (Blumler, 1979).

Additional empirical evidence supporting the reinforcement effects comes from more recent studies (Feldman, Myers, Hmielowski, & Leiserowitz, 2014; Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2011; Slater, 2007, 2015; Stroud, 2010). With the aim of investigating how selective exposure bolsters audience members' preexisting attitudes and their self-concept, Knobloch-Westerwick and Meng (2011) conducted a two-session experiment. In the first session, participants filled out a computerized questionnaire that included measures for political issue attitudes, political self-concept, news use habits. In the second session (about 4 weeks later), they were asked to browse through an online news magazine featuring four policy issues covered by the eight articles (i.e., two articles per policy with opposing views). They then completed a questionnaire that repeated questions measuring attitudes and self-concept. Reinforcement was operationalized as greater accessibility of preexisting attitudes and of political self-concept (defined as political partisanship). The rationale behind this operationalization was that cognitive consistency motivations will lead to selective exposure, which in turn will foster attitude strength and reinforce one's political self-concept. Accessibility was derived from response times for indicated support for each political issue for the attitude measures, and from averaged response time for the four target adjectives (i.e., conservative, liberal, Republican, and Democrat). Despite inconsistent effect patterns for their hypothesis concerning attitudes, Knobloch-Westerwick and Meng (2011) found support for the hypothesis that selective exposure to attitude-consistent messages increases accessibility

of the political self-concept, which can be thought of as "a much broader attitude regarding the self" (p. 364).

Slater's (2007, 2015) reinforcing spirals model also corroborates the reinforcement perspective. The basic tenet of this model is that the use of a specific media source or content is likely to strengthen the values, preferences, and attitudes that have led to its use in the first place, suggesting "the particular importance of the maintenance of social identity through media use" (Slater, 2007, p. 299). That is, this framework helps explain the influence of use of group-specific media on development and maintenance of political or political identity. For example, the long-standing hostility of conservative Christians to mainstream media have caused them to develop and utilize religious media sources, which in turn add to their outlook and belief (Laney, 2005). For them, religious alternatives to the mainstream media not only provide information consonant with their attitudes but also refine media frames in a way that are consistent with their values (Slater, 2007). Another contribution of the reinforcing spirals model to a conceptual model proposed in this chapter is that it confirms the role of media use as an intervening one in the process of media selectivity and effects. From a methodological point of view, media use variables (e.g., use of alternative sources such as religious media and social media) should "mediate or partially mediate" the influence of individual difference variables (e.g., religiosity and media skepticism) on cognitive, affective, or behavioral outcomes (e.g., false consensus). The mediating role of media use was also identified as early as in the 1950s, where Klapper (1960) cited research findings that media campaign generally reinforced preexisting attitudes, and that increased exposure to the campaign resulted in selective exposure to attitude-consistent messages.

Feldman et al. (2014) tested the reinforcing spirals model in the context of global warming employing a two-wave, nationally representative, within-subjects panel survey through Knowledge Networks, which recruits 50,000 participants using probability sampling methods. Their findings provided strong support for the reinforcing spirals framework. Structural equation modeling (SEM) analyses revealed that media use affects beliefs and that these beliefs influence subsequent media use, which in turn, strengthens beliefs. More specifically, use of conservative media (i.e., Fox News and Rush Limbaugh) and use of nonconservative media (i.e., CNN, MSNBC, NPR, and network TV news) at Wave 1 increased Wave 2 use of conservative media and use of nonconservative media, respectively, due to indirect effects via global warming belief certainty and support for government mitigation policies. In addition, belief certainty and policy support at Wave 1 were reinforced at Wave 2 as a result of indirect effects via use of conservative and nonconservative media. Another empirical support for this framework comes from Stroud's (2010) over-time analyses that investigated whether partisan selective exposure is related to polarization. It is worth noting that her conceptualization of polarization is analogous to the conceptual definition of reinforcement discussed earlier in this section, as she sees polarization as "the strengthening of one's original position or attitude" (Stroud, 2010, p. 557). The results of her study showed that use of like-minded media lead to higher political polarization, and that greater polarization contributes to greater use of congenial media, suggesting interactions between partisan media use and ideology on polarization.

Hypotheses and Research Questions

The theory of motivated reasoning and the motivational perspective provide a theoretical framework for expecting the influence of an individual's predispositions or pre-existing attitudes on perception of public opinion. According to Marks and Miller (1987), one's prior commitment to a position contributes to false consensus. For example, when one shows a favorable attitude toward abortion, for example, this prior commitment may motivate perceived consensus by triggering the need to appear normal or appropriate. As pointed out when discussing Assumption 3, all reasoning is motivated, suggesting that in the context of false consensus, individuals are likely to arrive at conclusion that they enjoy more public support for their own attitude toward a given issue more than those who have the opposite attitude. Especially, the theory of political motivated reasoning argues that "individuals interpret information through the lens of their party commitment" (Bolsen et al., p. 235). When an issue at hand concerns their political, religious, social identity, directional goals may drive people's reasoning processes, leading to overestimation of support for their own attitudes toward the issue. It is reasonable to assume that religious people and media skeptics maintain relatively distinct religious or political identities, respectively. Also, there have been empirical evidence supporting positive relationship between media skepticism and false consensus (Ladd, 2011; Tsfati, 2003) and between religiosity and false consensus (Buunk, Kluwer, Schuurman, & Siero, 2000). Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Religiosity will be positively associated with overestimation of public support for one's own attitudes toward societal and ethical issues, controlling for

religious media use.

H2: Media skepticism will be positively associated with overestimation of public support for one's own attitudes toward societal and political issues, controlling for social media use.

The next two sets of hypotheses are primarily based on the studies of selective exposure and reinforcement effect. The tenet of the selective exposure theory is that people selectively expose themselves to information that are consistent with their pre-existing beliefs, values, and attitudes. Selective exposure is likely to be strongest when individuals have motivational or directional goals to process attitude-consonant information (Smith et al., 2008). Given their distinct religious or political identities, it is very likely that the religious and media skeptics will possess motivations to protect their identities when perceiving the climate of public opinion regarding issues important to them. As a necessary corollary, they will selectively expose themselves to alternative media channels that provide attitude-consistent information; religious people will be exposed to religious media and media skeptics to social media. Research reveals that faith or religiosity factor is the major driving force for using religious media (Abelman, 1988; Gaddy, 1984; Laney, 2005). Johnson and Kaye (2004, 2008) showed that those who have skeptical attitudes toward mainstream media turn to social media (blogs in this case). Thus, the following hypotheses are posed:

H3: Religiosity will have positive relationship with religious media use.

H4: Media skepticism will have positive relationship with social media use.

The notion that when audience members are exposed to consonant media sources these sources strengthen their opinions enjoys strong support from Slater's (2007, 2015) reinforcing spirals model as well as studies on the reinforcement effect (Klapper, 1960; Feldman et al, 2014; Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2011; Stroud, 2010). Religious media not only offer attitude-consistent information but also refine media frames from a traditional moral-religious perspective (Slater, 2007). When it comes to social media, an increasing number of people began to capitalize on such social media platforms as blogs, podcasts, YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook, as alternative sources of information. These social media provide news and opinions that are neglected or skewed by the mainstream media (Bailey, Cammaerts, & Carpentier, 2007; Hermida, Lewis, & Zamith, 2014; Vis, 2013). Exposure to alternative media will reinforce individuals' perceptions of public support for their own positions especially when issues in question are concerned with their outlook, value, and identity. Thus, the following hypotheses are presented:

H5: Use of religious media will be positively related to overestimation of public support for one's own attitudes toward societal and ethical issues.

H6: Use of social media will be positively related to overestimation of public support for one's own attitudes toward societal and political issues.

Secularization thesis and uses and gratification studies on reactionary viewing motivation provide theoretical explanations for an inverse relationship between religiosity and trust in mainstream media. The secularization thesis claims that exposure

to the media weakens religious commitment (Berger, 2011; Stout, 2012; Warner, 1993). From a U&G perspective, Abelman (1987, 1988) found that religious people select religious programming as alternatives to secular media content and called this viewing pattern as reactionary media use. Also, there has been empirical evidence that supports religiosity's negative association with perceived credibility of mass media (Buddenbaum, 1996; Golan & Day, 2010; Westley & Severin, 1964). Conservative Christians tend to distrust newspapers and radio (Buddenbaum, 1996; Westley & Severin, 1964) and avoid secular television (Abelman, 1987). When it comes to Internet credibility, however, no consistent relationships were found between religiosity and the perception of Internet news (Golan & Day, 2010). Distrust in mainstream mass media is the key defining character of media skepticism. Thus, the following hypothesis is offered:

H7: Religiosity will be positively associated with media skepticism.

There have been relatively few studies that explored how religiosity relates to use of social media. Building on the U&G theory, Nyland and Near (2007) examined the effects of religiosity on how social networking sites (SNSs) are used. Their findings suggested that religiosity may not be a good predictor of overall exposure to SNSs given the null relationship between levels of individuals' religiosity and their activities on SNS. Bobkowski and Pearce (2011)'s study on MySpace users' engagement in religious self-disclorsure showed that religious users tend to be in like-minded religious friendship groups. Laney's (2005) study on motives for Christian web users indicated that they utilize religious websites "as a method of reinforcement of faith" (p. 175). Abelman

(1988) also identified the faith factor as a motivation for consuming religious fare. Thus, it may be that the faith factor is one of the driving forces that motivate religious people to use social media. There is much to be known about ways in which religiosity interacts with social media use in terms of motivations as well as exposure. Thus, the following research question is raised:

RQ1: What is the relationship between religiosity and social media use?

The primary purpose of many religious media is to propagate religious messages and worldview. Nevertheless, an increasing number of religious media are offering social and political content (Abelman & Pettey, 1988; Frankl, 1998; Vinson, 2009). They provide information on important social issues and especially ethical issues blended with tradition moral values (Frankl, 1998; Lesage, 1998). Religious people in general and conservative Christians in particular turn to these religious media to bolster their beliefs and thus show media consumption pattern that are different from that of their secular counterparts (Rossman, 2009). Although it is hypothesized that religiosity will have positive association with media skepticism, it is not certain how media skepticism will be related to religious media use after controlling for the effect of religiosity. Thus, the following research question is suggested:

RQ2: What is the relationship between media skepticism and religious media use?

A Conceptual Model

Figure 3 below illustrates a path model proposed in this study, in which use of alternative media mediates the effects of individuals' predispositions—i.e., religiosity and media skepticism—on misperceptions of public opinion.

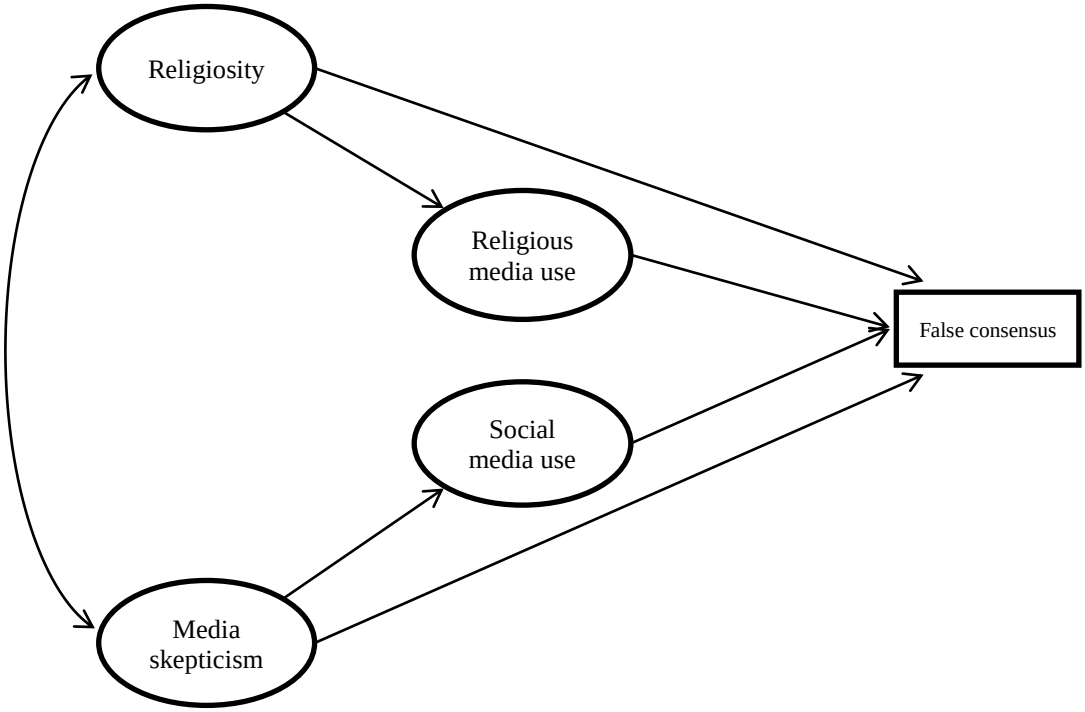

Figure 3. Conceptual model.

Note. Only links that have directionality are shown in this figure. That is, relationships expressed in the two research questions that have no directionality are not visualized.

Conclusion

This chapter is an effort to establish a conceptual framework by bridging major concepts (i.e., religiosity, media skepticism, alternative media use, and false consensus) and integrating relevant theories such as uses and gratifications, motivated reasoning, and selective exposure. Such an effort will contribute to advancing our understanding of how reinforcing process of media selectivity and effects affects individuals' perceptions of public opinion surrounding various key issues (e.g., abortion, same-sex marriage, immigration, gun control, climate change, etc.) in democratic society. Specifically, it is hypothesized that individual differences in religiosity and media skepticism will directly influence overestimation of public support for one's own attitudes toward these issues and indirectly influence false consensus through selective exposure to religious media and social media that provide attitude-consistent messages. Researchers began to investigate the reinforcing effect of mass media on social or political identity, attitudes, and behaviors of individuals (Feldman et al., 2014; Slater, 2007, 2015; Stroud, 2010). However, the reinforcement effect has rarely been studied with regard to social media and religious media in the context of perception of public opinion climate. Filling this research gap will help identify a theoretical mechanism and factors that underlie false consensus.

CHAPTER 6

METHOD

Introduction

In the previous five chapters, the major concepts of this dissertation (i.e., false consensus, media skepticism, alternative media use, and religiosity) were explicated and the relationships among these concepts were predicted in the form of hypotheses and research questions. The main focus of this chapter will be on how to empirically test the conceptual model presented in Chapter 5 using survey data. Structural equation modeling (SEM) will be used for statistical analyses given its advantages over path analysis based on multiple regression approach (Meyers, Gamst, & Guarino, 2013; Wolf, Harrington, Clark, & Miller, 2013). For example, the overall fit of a proposed model shows how well the model explains the data, which is "an outcome not available in multiple regression" (Meyers et al., 2013, p. 937). In addition, because there are multiple measured variables as indicators of the latent construct in SEM, it is possible to estimate error variance (or the variance that is not common to the indicators) and thus to better determine the effect of the latent variable in the model.

The organization of this chapter is as follows. First, it begins with validation of using samples drawn from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) for survey-based or observational studies in social science and public opinion research because this dissertation utilized this avenue for collecting its survey data. Next, a multi-stage sampling method is explained as it ensures obtaining a heterogeneous sample with

enough religious respondents. The introduction of this multi-stage survey approach is followed by the detailed description of a data collection procedure implemented. The next two sections describe how to measure our major concepts, that is, the two exogenous variables (media skepticism and religiosity) and the two endogenous variables (media use and false consensus). In the case of false consensus, five moral, ethical issues (i.e., abortion, same-sex marriage, LGBT adoption rights, marijuana, death penalty) and five social, political issues (i.e., gun control, affirmative action, global warming, aid to the poor, presidential job approval) were selected to measure the construct. The final section summarizes and concludes the chapter. Survey instrument is presented in the Appendix A.

Validity of Samples Drawn from MTurk

To test the hypotheses and answer the research questions, an online survey was employed with a questionnaire of 71 items presented to Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) respondents. MTurk is an open online marketplace that brings together people and tools to allow task creation, participant recruitment, data collection, and compensation. The website boasts the rapid recruitment of a large, diverse sample of subjects consisting of about 500,000 registered workers worldwide at a lower cost than professional panel vendors (e.g., GfK, or formerly Knowledge Networks, and Survey Sampling International) for online surveys (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011; Hitlin, 2016). The increasing popularity of this Internet-based resource among researchers has been due especially to its convenience and low cost of collecting data. To conduct a survey research through MTurk, one needs "only a computer with Internet access and enough technical knowledge to use a simple website" (Springer, Martini, & Richardson, 2016, p. 36). No additional training or programs are required to engage in the research.

When it comes to cost effectiveness, most panel survey companies require at least $10 per completed survey for a representative sample of the U.S. adults (Craig, Hays, Pickard, Cella, Revicki, & Reeve, 2013). By contrast, a typical amount of compensation for completing a 20-minute or even 30-minute task on the site is no more than one dollar (Buhrmester et al., 2011). In fact, MTurk community standards for worker pay is at least $6 per hour, or 10 cent per minute (Springer et al., 2016).

Despite a lot of advantages offered by MTurk, many raised concerns about legitimacy of using MTurk data for social science studies, including public opinion research, and attempted to address these concerns (Buhrmester et al., 2011; Clifford, Jewell, & Waggoner, 2015; Huff & Tingley, 2015; Levay, Freese, & Druckman, 2016). Prior studies revealed that MTurk workers are more representative of the national adult population than other types of convenience samples although they do not provide a wholesale substitute for national probability samples (Berinsky, Huber, & Lenz, 2012; Buhrmester et al., 2011; Levay et al., 2016). Researchers consistently found that these workers are younger, more liberal, less racially diverse, and less religious than population-based samples (Clifford et al., 2015; Huff & Tingley, 2015; Lewis et al., 2015). Nevertheless, extant research appears to validate MTurk samples for building and advancing research programs. Buhrmester et al. (2011) reported that MTurk data met acceptable psychometric standards (e.g., the MTurk alphas in the good to excellent range across all scales measured; very high test-retest reliabilitites), suggesting that MTurk samples have "the necessary elements to successfully complete a research project from start to finish (p. 5). Berinsky et al.'s (2012) study was also among the first studies that explored the validity of experiments completed using MTurk. Comparing MTurk subjects,

other convenience samples, and 2008-09 ANES Panel Study, Berinsky et al. (2012) concluded that MTurk data are "no worse than convenience samples used by other researchers in political science" when conducting experimental studies (p. 366).

Other scholars attested to the acceptability of survey-based or observational studies in social science and public opinion research that are performed by administering their questionnaires to MTurk respondents (Clifford et al., 2015; Huff & Tingley, 2015; Levay et al., 2016). For instance, Huff and Tingley (2015) compared the characteristics of respondents on MTurk and the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCESS), a nationally stratified sample survey. They demonstrated that in general the difference between MTurk and CCES decreased for younger respondents in terms of commonly used political variables (e.g., ideology, news interest, party identification, and voter intentions) and that the occupational distribution of the MTurk workers are comparable to that of the CCES respondents. Focusing on the relationship between personality, values, and political ideology, Clifford et al. (2015) showed that both the 2012 ANES and MTurk samples generated virtually the same results, suggesting that "the same values and personality traits that motivate ideological differences in the mass public also divide liberals and conservatives on MTurk" (p. 7). Although liberals on MTurk appear to have more liberal dispositions than their counterparts in the national samples, Clifford et al. (2015) study provide another evidence for the legitimacy of psychological research done using data drawn from MTurk.

Based on their comparison of the 2012 ANES Time Series Study and MTurk sample, Levay et al. (2016) confirmed demographic differences found in prior work (e.g., younger, less diverse, and less religious MTurk respondents than their peers in the ANES

sample). One of the most significant findings, however, is that the MTurk respondents "diverge much less from" the respondents in the nationally representative sample on most socio-demographic and political variables once basic demographic covariates are accounted for (Levay et al. 2016, p. 9). In other words, the influence of being an MTurk worker is considerably reduced when controlling for basic variables such as income, education, and religious identity. Accordingly, Levay et al. (2016) recommend that at least the following nine covariates be measured and when necessary, used for developing sample weights: gender, age, race and ethnicity, education, income, marital status, religion, ideology, and partisanship.

Multi-Stage Survey Approach

Before describing a data collection procedure in detail, it is necessary to explain why a multi-stage sampling method is required. MTurk workers are known to be more secular and less religious than the general population in terms of religious composition (Berinsky et al., 2012; Levay et al., 2016; Lewis et al., 2015). Research consistently show that those who report no religious affiliation (e.g., atheist or agnostic) account for over 40% of the MTurk respondents, which is more than double what it is in the U.S. adult population (Berinsky et al., 2012; Levay et al., 2016). In their comparisons of religious affiliations between the 2012 GSS and five MTurk samples consisting of 7,726 respondents, Lewis et al. (2015) also found that the MTurk samples had fewer religious respondents and more than twice as many secular respondents as the GSS. For example, evangelicals made up 10-14 percent of the five MTurk samples and Catholics accounted for 13-17 percent of the samples. In the GSS sample, however, evangelicals and Catholics accounted for 24 percent and 25 percent, respectively. Moreover, the

percentage of those who are not affiliated with any religion ranged from 45 to 54 percent in the MTurk samples, which is far greater than the GSS (22 percent). The good news, though, is that the religious respondents on MTurk appears to bear similar characteristics of their peers in the nationally representative sample (Lewis et al., 2015). Although MTurk evangelicals and Catholics had slightly lower levels of religiosity than their GSS counterparts in terms of religious attendance and traditional view of the Bible, the religious individuals on MTurk were very similar in their politics to their peers in the GSS. For instance, the effects of attendance and evangelical identity on partisanship in the MTurk samples and the GSS were largely compatible. Given a nonreligious bias on MTurk, Lewis et al. (2015) recommend that sample sizes should be increased to capture enough religious individuals to allow for appropriate statistical power.

With the purpose of obtaining a heterogeneous sample with enough religious respondents, this dissertation implemented a two-stage sampling procedure. This sampling method comprises two surveys: a screening survey and a primary in-depth survey (Gay, Hochschild, & White, 2016; Huff & Tingley, 2015; Springer et al., 2016). Because MTurk assigns a unique identification number to every MTurk worker, researchers can develop survey pools by recontacting their prior respondents (Huff & Tingley, 2015). One of the multi-stage sampling methods is to first create a task (called Human Intelligence Task or HIT on MTurk) to oversample respondents and ask basic questions (e.g., gender, age, race, political orientation, or religious identity) by which the sample are stratified (Huff & Tingley, 2015; Springer et al., 2016). The HIT for the screening survey can be posted once (called Batch) or multiple times with each batch screening a prespecified number of MTurk workers (e.g., 300 or 500). Then, this pool—

whether single or combined samples—are used in the primary survey to recontact prior respondents who self-identify as members of the target population (e.g., African Americans). The open-source R package MTurkR developed by Leeper (2013) are often utilized for recontact. However, TurkPrime—a platform for performing crowdsourced research—was used for recontact in our work. The long, in-depth primary survey are administered to those MTurk workers that possess the desired attributes of interest (e.g., religious identity).

This type of two-stage survey approach has several strengths. It not only allows a researcher to build up a pool of satisfactory sample size for the population of interest, but also enables rapid collection of a large amount of data (Huff & Tingley, 2015). From a statistical standpoint, this approach can deal with two common issues related to crowdsourcing data: misrepresentation and selection bias (Springer et al., 2016). When a researcher invites members of a particular community to participate in a survey on MTurk, this HIT may "attract respondents who feign membership" in that community (Springer et al., 2016, p. 33). Besides, indicating a target population in the title of the survey may also result in recruiting some members of that population that happen to be homogeneous in nature or in attributes of interest (Springer et al., 2016). The two-stage sampling method has potential to decrease or minimize the effects of self-selection bias and misrepresentation. Gay et al. (2016) used this sampling method to obtain enough non-White MTurk respondents (i.e. Black, Hispanic, and Asian respondents), while Springer et al. (2016) relied on the same procedure to recruit U.S. participants who identified themselves as a Muslim on MTurk to explore their experiences in the country as both Muslims and Americans.

Data Collection Procedure

In order to capture enough religious respondents, 3,000 MTurk workers were invited to participate in a screening survey that asks a small battery of the nine demographic questions (i.e., gender, age, race and ethnicity, education, income, marital status, religion, ideology, and partisanship) as suggested by Levay et al. (2016). The screening survey were used to identify workers who are religiously affiliated without alerting them to either the focus of research or the population of interest (Springer et al., 2016). Also, the initial survey had a generic title (i.e., Take a quick survey.) in the hope that it would minimize misrepresentation and selection bias. As discussed in the preceding paragraph, specifying a target population in the language of HITS may attract people who pretend to be members of the target population and/or a specific segment of that population (Springer et al., 2016). Many researchers recruit MTurk workers with certain criteria, the most common being a HIT approval rate greater than 90% or 95%(e.g., Clifford et al., 2015; Gay et al., 2016; Levay et al., 3016). Limiting a HIT to experienced workers (called Master Workers), however, may result in "the potential increase of homogeneity," which in turn can affect the "outcomes of the woker population as a whole (compromising its generalizability to the general public)" (Springer et al., 2016, p. 34). Thus, the initial survey was open to any worker regardless of their acceptance rate or number of task completed. The only qualification was that their IP address needs to be based in the United States because this dissertation tests its model on U.S. population samples.

A primary in-depth survey was administered to a pool created by the first stage. From the 3,000 respondents from the initial screening survey, a sample of 1,394 adults

was obtained in the primary survey. In other words, the researcher stratified on self-described religious identify of the initial respondents, given the centrality of the variable religiosity as predictor of media use and false consensus. According to Pew Research Center (2015), Christians accounted for 70.6% of the adult population, non-Christian faiths 5.9%, and the unaffiliated 22.8% as of 2014. Compared to the survey conducted in 2007 by Pew Research Center (2015), there has been a 7.8% drop in the Christian share of the population driven largely by declines among Catholics and mainline Protestants. By comparison, the share of non-Christian faiths and of the unaffiliated increased by 1.2% and 6.7%, respectively. A similar report has been published of the religious makeup of the American adults in the 2012 *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, a comprehensive summary of statistics on social, economic, and political organization of Americans (United States Census Bureau, 2012). This report showed that Christians made up 75.9% of the population, other religions 3.8%, and the unaffiliated 14.9%.

More specifically, Pew Research Center (2015) reported that evangelicals made up 25.4% of the population, mainline Protestants 14.7%, historically Black 6.5%, other Christians 3.3%, Catholics 20.8%, non-Christians 5.9%, the unaffiliated 22.8%, and don't knows and refusals 0.6%. Previous studies that used the two-stage sampling method showed that the response rate of those respondents who had been recontacted were between 70% and 75% (Gay et al., 2016; Springer et al., 2016). These benchmark studies were utilized for a comparison of our sample with them in terms of religious makeup of respondents.

Exogenous Variables

Media Skepticism

Because survey measures used to tap into media skepticism have included media credibility items (Cozzens & Contractor, 1987; Gunther, 1992; Tsfati, 2003), it is necessary to examine how media credibility has been operationalized. In general, media credibility is thought of as believability when measured as a single dimension (Bucy, 2003; Westley & Severin, 1964). According to Gaziano and McGrath (1986), a factor analysis of 16 items measuring attitudes toward traditional media (i.e., newspapers and television) on various dimensions showed that 12 of the items converged on what they call a credibility factor. This result led them to adopt a 12-item index that was focused on the believability element. Meyer (1988) suggested that a 5-item credibility index would suffice while pointing out the bulkiness of the Gaziano-McGrath items. Meyer's (1988) index include "fair-unfair," "unbiased-biased," "accurate-inaccurate," "can be trusted-can't be trusted," and "tells the whole story-doesn't tell the whole story." In addition, national survey studies such as the General Social Survey (GSS) and the National Annenberg Election Survey (NAES) contain questions about how much confidence or belief people have in the news media. For example, the NAES asks respondents to rate how much they believe what news media outlets (e.g., national newspapers and broadcast TV) say on a four-point scale, and the GSS asks participants to what extent they have confidence in the press or television on a three-point scale.

Another operationalization of media skepticism has been derived from the political disaffection literature (Pinkleton, Austin, Zhou, Willoughby, & Reiser, 2012; Hutchens, Hmielowski, Pinkleton, & Beam, 2016; Yamamoto & Kushin, 2014). Seeing

skepticism as assessing "individual's critical evaluation of public affairs information sources," Pinkleton and colleagues (2012) measured the construct by employing five items including "I think about news stories before I accept them as believable," "It's important to critically evaluate what news stories say," and "I always think twice about statements made in news stories" (p. 28). Pinkleton et al (2012) also measured media satisfaction by asking respondents to indicate how much they agree or disagree with the statements such as "News coverage of the elections has told me all I need to know about the candidates." These measures were 7-point Likert-type scales anchored with strongly disagree (1) and strongly agree (7). It is worth mentioning how Cappella and Jamieson (1997) attempted to measure media cynicism because one of their items were adapted to Tsfati's (2002, 2003) media skepticism measure. For example, Cappella and Jamieson (1997) asked participants to assess to what extent they agree with the following statement in order to deal with cynicism about the news media: "Being first with a news story is more important to reporters than being accurate" (p. 317).

Four studies are especially noteworthy in terms of operationalization of media skepticism (Carr, Barnidge, Lee, & Tsang, 2014; Cozzens & Contractor, 1987; Gunther, 1992; Tsfati, 2003). Dissenting from the view that sees media skepticism as resulting from an individual's skeptical disposition or trait, Gunter (1992) argued that skepticism toward media could be "better understood as a relational variable—an audience response to media content" (p. 147). To measure this relational variable, Gunter (1992) asked respondents to answer five Likert-scaled items (e.g., "News reporters usually try to be as objective as they possibly can be," "The news media give more coverage to stories that support their own point of view than to those that don't) and one paired-choice item (i.e.,

"Most news media are careful to separate fact from opinion" or "Most news media don't do a very good job of letting people know what is fact and what is opinion."). One of his items will be adapted into our measure of media skepticism in the hopes of improving its content validity.

Cozzens and Contractor (1987) developed their own media skepticism scale along two dimensions: belief (5 items) and behavioral intention (5 items) because their purpose was to investigate how nonmediated personal experience affects media skepticism when it runs counter to the information presented in the news media. Items measuring the belief dimension was concerned with accuracy, fairness, and distortion, whereas items tapping the behavioral intention dimension was related to perceived importance and intended action. The latter dimension is not of concern for two reasons. First, the behavioral dimension scale did not result in different levels of intentions between experimental groups and control groups. Second, it was designed to ask respondents for their intentions to do something about a specific media program or news story, whereas our media skepticism scale is designed to gauge the extent to which audience members are critical of the mainstream news media as a whole.

Tsfati's (2003) 9-item measure of media skepticism can be thought as a combination of media credibility, trust, and cynicism items. It includes four of Gaziano and McGrath's (1986) News Credibility Scale items (i.e., whether the news media are fair, tell the whole story, are accurate, and can be trusted) as well as a general question about media trust (i.e., how much confidence respondents have in the media institutions). Cappella and Jamieson's (1997) items are also included in his scale of media skepticism (e.g., whether the media help society or get in the way of society solving its problems).

The reliability of Tsfati's (2003) scale met the 90% agreement level. The results of the discriminant validity test showed that media skepticism is "not simply a function of one's political position or interpersonal trust," given the low correlation between skepticism and ideology or interpersonal trust (Tsfati, 2003, p. 73). Carr et al. (2014) borrowed their conceptual definition of media skepticism from Tsfati's (2003) article but their measure was not identical with that used by Tsfati (2002, 3003). Carr et al.'s (2014) measure of media skepticism was constructed by asking respondents to rate how much they agree or disagree on a eleven-point scale with the statements, including "the media provide accurate and trustworthy information," "the media deal fairly with all sides," and "the information provided needs to be confirmed" (p. 459).

A review of the various operationalizations of media skepticism shows that they put an emphasis on the thought process of an audience member regarding how to come to terms with the current state of the news media. For example, both Pinkleton et al.'s (2012) index of skepticism and Cozzens and Contractor's (1987) belief scale include items that ask respondents to indicate the degree to which they agree or disagree with statements starting with "I think" or "I always think." The question wording of the items in Tsfati's (2003) scale also was deliberately constructed by first drawing the attention of respondents to the news media in general (e.g., "Thinking about the news media—national television news, the daily newspaper you are most familiar with and news magazines"). Carr et al.'s (2014) measure of media skepticism also puts an emphasis on how critically audience members evaluate the information provided by the news media.

Building on the previous studies, a 6-item scale of media skepticism were developed, with each item anchored to a 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly

disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). Our scale includes three of Gaziano and McGrath's (1986) News Credibility Scale items (i.e., whether the news media are accurate, are fair, and tell the whole story), two of Pincleton et al.'s (2012) Skepticism items (i.e., "I think about news stories before I accept them as believable," "It's important to critically evaluate what news stories say."), and one of Gunther's (1992) Skepticism toward Media items (i.e., "News reporters usually try to be as objective as they possibly can be."). Cappella and Jamieson's (1997) measure of media cynicism are not used for our measure of media skepticism as it is considered to tap a different construct. There is a need to validate this news combination of media skepticism items. This measure appears to be content valid in that it covers the range of relevant indicators of the unidimensional construct. Also, political ideology and partisanship may be utilized to test construct validity, given the positive relationship between media skepticism and conservative Republicans.

Religiosity

The conceptual definition of religiosity put forth for this dissertation in Chapter 4 was the extent to which an individual believes in her religious doctrines, practices or participates in religious activities, and perceives the importance of her own religion in everyday live. It is based on the three essential dimensions emerged from the review of the literature on religiosity: cognitive, behavioral, and affective. In Cornwall et al.'s (1986) term, these dimensions are regarded as knowing (cognition), doing (behavior), and feeling (affect). They can also be described as "the three Bs of religiosity," consisting of religious believing, behaving, and belonging (Putnam & Campbell, 2010, p. 7). The operationalization of this construct in Chapter 4 attempted to tap these three dimensions

through different sets of measures, that is, two items on each dimension. In other words, the following six questions were used to measure religiosity:

• How strong is your belief in God?

• How strong is your belief in the teachings of your religion?

• How frequently do you attend religious service?

• How frequently do you pray?

• How important is your religion in your daily life?

• How meaningful is your religion in your life?

These questions were combined into a single measure called the religiosity scale. Taken together, they run the gamut of levels of religious intensity in that the six items address all the critical components of religiosity. For example, the first two questions deal with the cognitive component, the next two the behavioral component, and the last two the affective component. Fowler (1995) advised that a survey question be worded so that "every respondent is answering the same question" (p. 103). What this means in the context of asking religious questions is that survey items should apply to all religious traditions. As already discussed in Chapter 4, a large number of measure of religiosity developed in the U.S. suffer from parochialism as they are composed of questions that are "normative within Protestantism, specifically for evangelicals" (Putnam & Campbell, 2010, p. 20). To avoid this problem, the wording of the questions in our religiosity scale is deliberately broad. Although the scale does not include any language that alludes to

evangelical Protestantism, it is completely unavoidable that some may raise a concern about its bias toward conservative Protestantism or other religious tradition.

The validity of the religiosity scale as a generic measure is bolstered when it does not favor one religious tradition over other traditions. In other words, if members of a specific religious tradition score more highly on the scale than members of other traditions, the religiosity scale may be seen as being biased toward that tradition. It is possible, however, some members from different religious backgrounds rank high on the scale when compared to their peers from the same religious traditions. Putnam and Campbell's (2010) religiosity index is a case in point. They found that both evangelicals, Black Protestants, Mormons in the U.S. and Muslims in Britain scored more highly on their index, which is comparable in composition with our religiosity scale (Putnam & Campbell, 2010). When it comes to the criterion-related validity of the scale, the use of religious media will be a good candidate for testing predictive validity. Religiosity had a positive relationship with this variable as expected. Thus, our measure of religiosity is considered valid and more discussion on reliability and validity is presented in the next chapter (Hayes, 2005).

Endogenous Variables

Media Use

When conceptualizing media use in Chapter 3, it is suggested that various dimensions of the concept should be captured because there is additional variance of the outcome variables (e.g., political knowledge or participation) for which dimensions other than simple exposure can account. For that reason, scholars attempted to develop their own measures of media use by combining exposure and attention (Eveland, Hutchens, &

Shen, 2009), or reliance, exposure, and attention (Becker & Whitney, 1980), or exposure, reliance, attention, and gratifications sought (McLeod & McDonald, 1985). Interestingly, Jackob (2010) employed different measures of media use when measuring mainstream media and alternative media in order to explore the relationship between trust in media, media dependency, and use of alternative information sources. To answer the research questions, Jackob (2010) used measures of frequency for television, newspapers, and Internet use, while using reliance measures for alternative information sources. Our measures of media use will combine frequency, attention, and reliance as they are supposed to tap distinct dimensions of the concept, that is, behavioral, cognitive, and attitudinal or affective dimension, respectively.

Frequency of media use has typically been measured by asking such questions as "how many days in the past week you read a newspaper?" or "On the average day, how many hours do you spend watching television?" (e.g., Jackob, 2010; Rimmer & Weaver, 1987; Wanta & Hu, 1994). In other words, frequency or exposure is assessed as "time spent with a given medium. Media reliance measures are represented by what is called a Roper-type question "I'd like to ask you where you usually get most of your news about what's going on in the world today?" Another form of reliance question is to ask respondents how much they agree or disagree with the statement such as "I rely on TV news for information about politics and important issues." (e.g., Jackob, 2010; Greenberg, 1966; Rimmer & Weaver, 1987; Wanta & Hu, 1994). Measures of media attention include "How much attention do you pay to news stories about the federal government (or the Georgia state government) when you read the newspaper (or see them on television news, or listen to radio news)?" (Drew & Weaver, 1990) or "How much attention have you paid

to national news on television (or in the newspaper)?" (Chaffee & Schleuder, 1986). As Chaffee and Schleuder (1986) have aptly observed, attention always involves "a relationship between the person and something else" (p. 81). In the context of media use, candidates for something else may be particular news events (e.g., a political campaign), specific content (e.g., world news), or the medium itself (e.g., television) (Chaffee & Schleuder, 1986).

Our measures of media use were comprised of twelve items tapping exposure to, reliance on, and attention to three different sets of information sources (i.e., traditional religious media, religious websites, relationship-oriented social media, and content-oriented social media). Exposure was measured by asking respondents to indicate how may days in a typical week they use religious media for information, news, and opinions; how many days in a typical week they use social networking sites (SNSs) such as Facebook and Twitter for information, news, and opinions; how many days in a typical week they use such social media as blogs, YouTube, podcasts, and Wikipedia for information, news, and opinions. "In a typical week" is used instead of "in the past week" when constructing the wording of the exposure items because media use involves "a regular behavioral pattern for most people" (Chang & Krosnick, 2003, p. 77). In other words, when measuring the frequency of regular behaviors such as media exposure, the typical week questions are superior to the past week questions in terms of predictive validity (Chang & Krosnick, 2003). Reliance was assessed by asking respondents to indicate to what extent they agree or disagree on a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) with the following statements: "I rely on religious media for information, news, and opinions," "I rely on social networking sites (SNSs) such as

Facebook and Twitter for information, news, and opinions," "I rely on such social media as blogs, YouTube, podcasts, and Wikipedia for information, news, and opinions." Attention was assessed with items asking respondents to indicate how much attention do they pay to each information source using a 5-point scale ranging from "not at all" to "a great deal."

False Consensus

Researchers have offered a variety of ways of operationalizing false consensus, or overestimation of public support for one's own view, since Ross, Green, and House's (1977) demonstrated the commonness of this phenomenon through their studies. In one of their studies, Ross et al. (1977) first asked respondents to estimate the percentage of their peers who would choose each of the two response alternatives available for each of four stories (e.g., "what percentage of your peers do you estimate would vote for the proposed allocation of funds for space exploration?" and "what percentage of would vote against it?"). The respondents were then required to state their own choice for the same issues. If the estimated percentage of respondents who would choose the same response category as the rater's own choice is significantly larger than the percentage of those respondents who chose that response category, false consensus is at work. In another study, Ross et al. (1977) asked half of the respondents to categorize themselves with regard to the 35 items (e.g., personal traits and views such as "shy (not shy)" and "competitive (not)," political expectations such as "removal of Nixon from office? yes (no)" and "discovery of extraterrestrial life by year 2000? yes (no)"). The respondents then proceeded to estimate the percentage of their peers who fit into each category. The remaining half answered these questions in reverse order. In this case, differences are

computed by subtracting the mean estimates by raters placing themselves in the second category from the mean estimates by raters placing themselves in the first category. If the difference is in the positive direction and statistically significant, then there is false consensus.

Some scholars have followed Ross et al.'s (1977) example by asking respondents to fill in a percentage for consensus estimates on various issues ranging from the division of household tasks between women and men (Buunk et al., 2000), to phasing out nuclear power (Spears & Manstead, 1990), to presidential preferences (Brown, 1982). For instance, Fabrigar and Krosnick (1995) required subjects to report their own attitudes on such political issues as abortion, defense spending, gun control, and their estimates of the percentage of their fellow citizens who would favor a particular position on those issues. Then, they regressed respondents' estimates on their own attitudes, which is the only difference between their method and Ross et al.'s (1977) method. A significant, positive regression coefficient for respondents' own attitudes demonstrates the existence of false consensus. Other scholars examined Pearson correlations between respondents' own attitudes and prevalence estimates (or estimates of public support for their own attitudes), in which statistically significant correlations indicate that the respondents exhibit false consensus (Hoch, 1987; Sherman et al., 1983).

More recent studies by Wojcieszak (2008, 2011) adopted a different measurement method in assessing false consensus, which he asserts has advantages over the traditional approaches. In his method, Wojcieszak (2008, 2011) ask participants to estimate the percentage of the general public who would agree with each of the two opposite statements regarding social issues (e.g., "In your opinion what percent of the

American population agrees that we have gone too far in pushing equal rights in this country?" and "that we haven't gone too far in pushing equal rights?" These questions were adapted from Pew Research Center, which provided the factual public opinion distributions (44 % agreeing that we have gone too far and 55% disagreeing in this case). His final measure of false consensus is constructed by subtracting the factual public opinion distributions from respondents' estimates. The greater the difference in the positive direction, the greater the false consensus. This final measure is then regressed on the independent variable under investigation (e.g., ideological extremism, participation in radical and homogeneous online groups, and exposure to dissimilar news sources). According to Wojcieszak (2011), this operationalization method could reveal how much respondents' estimates deviate from reality, which is often overlooked by measures that "assess the difference between own and perceived opinions" (p. 534). In a similar vein, researchers who are interested in accuracy of public opinion perception (i.e., perceptual accuracy) tend to calculate the difference between respondents' estimates of the percentage of the general public supporting one's own view and the actual percentage of the public supporting the same view (e.g., Gvirsman, 2015a, 2015b).

In this dissertation, the major outcome variable, false consensus, was assessed with two methods described above, that is, Ross et al.'s (1977) traditional method and Wojcieszak's (2008, 2011) method. When using the former traditional method, two central measures are respondent's personal support for ten public issues (i.e., five ethical, moral issues and five social, political issues) and their perceived public support for each issue. The five ethical, moral issues include abortion, same-sex marriage, LGBT adoption rights, marijuana, death penalty, and the five social, political issues include gun control,

affirmative action, global warming, aid to the poor, presidential job approval. Most of the items asking respondents' opinions on these issues are drawn mostly from the 2016 American National Elections Studies (ANES) for comparison of the two methods. The final measure of false consensus was calculated by comparing the actual distributions of attitudes toward these issues with the perceived distribution of attitudes about the same issues. That is, the difference between the two distributions is a measure of false consensus. When using the more recent Wojcieszak's (2008, 2011) method, the final measure was created by subtracting the factual public opinion distributions from respondents' estimates. Comparison of the two different operationalization methods will advance methodological knowledge in measuring false consensus.

Conclusion

In summary, the conceptual model proposed in Chapter 5 was tested using the data obtained from the Amazon MTurk as well as structural equation modeling for statistical analyses. The measures of the major constructs (i.e., false consensus, media use, media skepticism, and religiosity) were adapted from the relavant studies. And yet, they are considered somewhat innovative approaches in that most of them are developed to advance the current body of research by filling the gap described in the literature. In the case of the measures of false consensus, a comparison of the traditional and more recent methods will demonstrate the pros and cons of each method. As such, the results of this dissertation will contribute not only to understanding the role of individual predispositions (i.e., media skepticism and religiosity) and media consumption behavior (i.e., use of alternative media sources) as predictors of false consensus, but also to improving the measurement models for these concepts.

CHAPTER 7

RESULTS

Introduction

The preceding two chapters laid the ground for a conceptual model proposed in the present study and detailed the methodological procedures necessary for the test of this model, including a multi-stage survey approach. This chapter reports our findings in the following order. First, descriptive statistics of demographic variables are presented and compared with two national samples (e.g., the 2016 GSS and the 2016 ANES data) to see to what extent our data are comparable to the nationally representative samples. Next, after providing a statistical description of major variables (e.g., religiosity, media skepticism, social media use), we report the results of reliability and validity assessment as well as measurement model analysis. The following two sections describe a two-step modelling approach and offer the results of structural model analysis, respectively. Finally, this chapter ends with the results of hypothesis testing, followed by a supplementary analysis based on Ross et al.' (1977) method of measuring false consensus.

Descriptive Statistics of Demographic Variables

Basic Demographics

A comparison of demographic variables in the current dataset from different sources (e.g., the 2016 GSS and ANES datasets) demonstrates similar patterns in many cases (See Table 1). This suggests that the MTurk data reflect diverse groups of the U.S. population, albeit not representative of the population. Age was measured as a continuous

variable ($M = 40.34,\ SD = 12.98$). Gender was a dichotomous variable with male coded as '1' and female '2' (Male = 37.4%, Female = 62.6%). Race was measured as a categorical variable (white coded as '1', black '2', Asian '3', and other '4'). Whites account for a majority of the sample (81.1%), followed by African Americans (7.7%), Asian or Asian Americans (6.3%), and other races (4.8%). Education was an ordinal variable measured using eight categories, ranging from 'Less than high school' (coded '1') to 'Postgraduate or professional degree, including master's, doctorate, medical or law degree (coded '8). The sample median for education was '6', indicating 'Four-year college or university degree/bachelor's degree' ($SD = 1.50$). Total family income was measured using twelve categories, ranging from 'Less than $10,000' (coded '1') to 'More than $150,000' (coded '12'). The sample median was '6', indicating the $50,000 - $59,999 ($SD = 3.13$).

Compared to population-based samples such as the 2016 GSS and the 2016 ANES data, the present MTurk sample shows that our respondents are younger and less racially diverse and its sex ratio is more female biased (See Table 1). However, the total family income is comparable to the other nationally representative samples, while the education attainment level is slightly higher than those samples. The descriptive statistics presented here are consistent with the previous findings (Clifford et al., 2015; Huff & Tingley, 2015; Lewis et al., 2015), suggesting that MTurk workers represent more varied groups of people than other types of convenience samples.

Religious Breakdown

A multi-stage survey method helped the religious makeup of the current data resemble the 2014 Religious Landscape Study, a nationally representative study

conducted by Pew Research Center (See Table 2). Christians account for 67% of the MTurk sample while they make up 70.6% of the Pew data. Specifically, 36.6% of the current data represents Protestants, which is 9.9% less than the Pew study sample. Other Christian faiths account for 8.1% of the present data and thereby make up for the discrepancy between the two samples in terms of the Protestant population. 28.3% of the respondents identified themselves as unaffiliated, suggesting that our MTurk sample is less religious than national probability samples as evidenced in other research studies (Huff & Tingley, 2015; Lewis et al., 2015).

Descriptive Statistics of Major Variables

Covariates: Political Ideology and Mainstream Media Exposure

In addition to the demographic variables mentioned above, political ideology and mainstream media exposure were included as controls in our analyses. Respondents consider themselves, on average, slightly liberal or moderate (M = 3.78, SD = 1.76). Mainstream media exposure was measured by using three different items asking respondents to indicate on an average weekday how much time in total they generally spend watching television (M = 2.97, SD = 1.61), listening to radio (M = 2.28, SD = 1.50), and reading the newspapers (M = 2.63, SD = 1.20) about politics and current affairs. Overall, they spend 30 minutes to 1 hour using each medium. These three items were combined in the analyses and the mean and alpha value of this measure is shown (M = 8.33, SD = 3.25, α = .68) in Table 3.

Religiosity and Media Skepticism

The mean of combined measure of religiosity is presented (M = 22.39, SD = 11.41) in Table 3 even though six standardized items were employed to construct the

scale of religiosity in the analyses. The reliability of this scale was excellent (α = .94). Respondents tend to somewhat agree with the media skepticism items as the mean of this construct scale was 4.66 (*SD* = 1.01). The reliability of the media skepticism scale was also satisfactory (α = .79).

Use of Alternative Media: Religious Media and Social Media

To assess the use of alternative media sources, items tapping exposure (range, 1 – 8), attention (range, 1 – 5), and reliance (range, 1 – 7) for four different news sources were employed. These four news sources are traditional religious media (i.e., religious television, newspapers, radio programs, and periodicals), religious websites, social networking sites (SNSs), and other content-oriented social media (e.g., blogs, YouTube, and podcasts). Overall, 177 respondents answered all six questions regarding religious media use, while 657 respondents responded to the six items measuring social media use. See Table 4 for the mean and standard deviation for each item on alternative media use. Those who expose themselves to religious media use traditional religious media or religious website less than two days, on average, to get information, news, and opinions (*M* = 1.69 and 1.54, *SD* = 1.59 and 1.31). They tend not to put much reliance on religious media as information channels (*M* = 1.95 and 1.92, *SD* = 1.53 and 1.49).

However, the frequency of social media use on average ranges from 3.75 days (*SD* = 2.39) for content-oriented social media to 4.74 days (*SD* = 2.77) for relationship-oriented social media. Social media users rely more on these information sources (*M* = 3.68 and 3.61, *SD* = 1.86 and 1.83), compared to the level of reliance on religious information sources by religious media users. In any event, overall level of reliance on these alternative information sources is not considered very high, given the range of 1 – 7

(where 1 denotes strongly disagree and 7 strongly agree). When it comes to attention, they all tend to pay a moderate amount of attention to their respective information sources with the means ranging from 3.28 (*SD* = 1.08) for traditional religious media to 3.36 (*SD* = .89) for content-oriented social media.

In designing a measure of the use of alternative information sources, heavy users are conceptually to be higher in all three dimensions (i.e., frequency, attention, reliance) then light users. Also, frequency should be given more weight as no exposure makes it meaningless to assess attention in the first place. Thus, these composite media use measures were created by giving the greatest weight to the exposure (i.e., frequency) items. This means that a change in the exposure dimension has the greatest impact on the change of the overall measure.

False Consensus

False consensus was calculated as the difference between respondents' estimate of the percentage supporting one side of a given issue and the factual percentage supporting that side. In other words, this major dependent variable was created by subtracting the actual public opinion distribution from respondents' estimates. Overall, eight public issues were employed to construct the measure of false consensus (See Table 5 for these issues and the mean of false consensus on each issue). For example, respondents were asked, "In your opinion, what percentage of the American population agrees that abortions should be illegal in all circumstances?" Then, their estimates were compared with the benchmark, which is a nationally representative survey conducted June 8-18, 2017 by the Pew Research Center in this case, to obtain the false consensus measure. This particular variable ranges from -40, underestimating the support for

abortions made illegal by 40%, to +55 overestimating the support by 55% (*M* = 1.08, *SD* = 15.56).

Two other issues (i.e., global warming, aid to the poor) were excluded as the response categories for them are not dichotomous in the benchmark national surveys. It is feasible to compute our final measure for false consensus when the response categories are dichotomous (e.g., yes or no). However, questions on these two issues have more than three response categories. For example, the survey item in the 2016 ANES data on aid to the poor has three categories (i.e., increased, decreased, and kept the same), which makes public opinion fall into three different positions. Because our participants estimate the percentage of public support for one of the two sides calculating false consensus measures for such issues with more than three response categories is not possible.

In an effort to reflect the most recent real-world sources for public opinion distribution a variety of national surveys were used for the eight issues. They include the Summer 2017 Political Landscape Survey conducted by the Pew Research Center (for FC1, FC2), a survey conducted October 25-30, 2017 by the Pew Research Center (for FC4), a study done August 23-September 2, 2016 (for FC5) and another survey conducted August 15-21, 2017 by the same institution (for FC7). For FC3, the American National Election Studies (ANES) 2016 data were used, whereas a Quinnipiac University National Poll was utilized for FC6 as this survey was conducted nearly at the same time (i.e., February 20, 2018) when the data were being collected for the present study (i.e., March 2018). For FC10, aggregate data of the same time period (i.e., March 10-16, 2018) by RealClearPlitics were used as they provide presidential job approval ratings by averaging all relevant polling data.

Reliability and Validity

As shown in the preceding section, the reliability of each major variable (i.e., religiosity, media skepticism, religious media use, social media use) is considered good as determined by Cronbach's coefficient alpha (See Table 3; Allen & Yen, 2001; Cortina, 1993; Kaplan & Saccuzzo, 2017). Basic SEM assumptions also were checked and verified prior to the main analyses, including multicollinearity, multivariate normality, and linearity (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson 2010; Kline, 2011). Measurement model and structural model analyses were conducted after imputing the variable of religious media use as it has 177 observations in the original dataset. A multiple imputation method was employed as it is a better approach than simple mean substitution (Meyers et al., 2013). No significant differences emerged (except for the association between religious media use and social media use) between the complete and imputed datasets in terms of correlation tests (See Table 6).

Zero-order correlations of five major variables were performed on the original and the imputed datasets and displayed in Table 6. Three out of the four independent variables (i.e., religiosity, media skepticism, religious media use) have positive associations with the dependent variable, false consensus. These relationships turn out to be statistically significant at the .01 level. However, social media use does not have a significant association with false consensus. The difference between the two datasets for the correlation between religious media use and social media use is not a matter of concern in this study as it is not a relationship under investigation.

Our major dependent variable, false consensus, comprises eight formative indicators, which requires a different approach to validation. The reliability and validity

of formative constructs cannot be evaluated by traditional statistical techniques (e.g., coefficient alpha and confirmatory factor analysis) designed for reflective constructs (Bagozzi, 1994; Cohen, Cohen, Teresi, Marchi, & Velez, 1990; Diamantopoulos, Riefler, & Roth, 2008). Givent that the correlations between formative indicators may be significant or non-significant as well as positive or negative, "reliability in an internal consistency sense is not meaningful" for these indicators (Diamantopoulos et al., 2008, p. 1215). Bagozzi (1994) also notes that "construct validity in terms of convergent and discriminant validity are not meaningful when indexes are formed as a linear sum of measurements" (p. 333).

There are other issues that need to be addressed when it comes to formative constructs: content validity and multicollinearity (Collier & Bienstock, 2006). Unlike reflective constructs that causes their indicators, formative constructs are caused by their indicators. Our false consensus measure is the sum of eight formative indicators, which directly assess respondents' perception of public opinion on different issues in the form of percentage values. Thus, its content validity is considered satisfactory. Multicollinearity may become an issue with formative indicators as high multicollinearity among them "could make it difficult to determine the impact of each indicator on the latent construct" (Collier & Bienstock, 2006).

See Table 7 for correlations among our false consensus indicators. For the most part, we found low correlations among these formative indicators. This is a good sign as low correlations imply that each item represents a different or unique facet of the construct (Diamantopoulos & Siguaw, 2006; Edwards, 2011). Given that formative measures are not expected to show internal consistency, the low correlations found in our

data do not necessarily affect the interpretation of our index of false consensus. A high correlation between FC2 and FC3 (both related to same-sex couples) does not necessarily lead to the same results although it does in many cases, as shown in Table 12 and 14. In addition, we conducted additional tests that did not rely on this index. In any case, research shows that composite measures of formative constructs have been used in various statistical analyses, including an additive index of corporate reputation in regression model (Dowling, 2004), additive indices of e-service process quality in SEM (Collier & Bienstock, 2006), and a multiplicative measure of service orientation in causal modeling (Homburg et al. 2002).

Prior to validity tests on the measurement model, a confirmatory factor analysis was performed for the four latent variables (i.e., religiosity, media skepticism, religious media use, and social media use). The model fit was assessed with the following fit measures: chi-square (χ^2), the goodness-of-fit index (GFI), the comparative fit index (CFI), the normed fit index (NFI), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) (Meyers et al., 2013). For religiosity, all but two measures show that the model is a good fit for the data (See Table 8). The GFI, the CFI, and the NFI values are all over .95 and SRMR is less than .08 although the χ^2 and RMSEA results are not satisfactory. The squared multiple correlations (SMC) are over .40 for all indicators of religiosity, suggesting that the variance in each of the six items is well explained by its latent factor, or religiosity (See Table 9).

The model fit of media skepticism was not acceptable due to the two indicators' squared multiple correlations (See Table 8 and 9). SMC values were very low for items

asking respondents about whether they think about news story before accepting it as believable (.000) and whether they evaluate what news stories say (.014). The CFI and NFI values are less than .09 whereas the GFI is .908. RMSEA is .197 and SRMR .117, revealing an unacceptable model fit. To improve the model the indicator on believability was removed and another CFA was performed. While SMC remain the same the results indicate a better model fit (See Table 8 and 9). The GFI, NFI, and CFI are all above .95 and RMSEA is below .05. SRMR also is within acceptable range (.016).

When it comes to religious media use, one item on attention to traditional religious media was deleted to improve model fit, based on its low SMC (See Table 9). The NFI (.904), CFI (.905), and SRMR (.058) demonstrate a good fit for this final model with the GFI (.895) approaching the cut-off value (See Table 8). In the case of social media use, the indicator on attention to content-related social media was deleted for a better fit. Although two items on exposure has lower SMC (.284, .266) than this indicator (.362), removing exposure items would be unjustifiable given their essential role in constructing media use measures (See Table 9). The GFI (.922) and SRMR (.076) reveal a good fit for the final model of social media use while the NFI (.839), CFI (.842), and RMSEA (.221) do not (See Table 8).

Measurement Model Analysis

A measurement model in Figure 4 had been assessed before structural models were estimated because true meaning of the latent factors would not be understandable without a valid measurement model (Hair et al., 2010). In other words, simultaneous estimation of the measurement and structural submodels would result in “interpretational

confounding," the assignment of empirically defined meaning to a latent variable other than the meaning assigned to it by a researcher (Anderson & Gerbing, p. 418).

As with CFA on the latent variables, six criteria were employed to assess the measurement model. Although all of the fit measures except χ^2 test revealed a good fit, one item on media skepticism had an extremely low SMC value of .014. Another test of the respecified model was performed after removing this indicator. The chi-square test is statistically significant, $\chi^2(164, N = 657) = 959.527$, $p = .000$, suggesting that the model failed to fit the data. However, the significance of the chi-square may be caused by the large sample size in this study. Although the goodness-of-fit index (GFI) is marginal at a value of .877, the other fit measures indicate an excellent model fit to the data. The normed fit index (NFI) and the comparative fit index (CFI) are .906 and .920, respectively. The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is .086 with a 90% confidence interval of .081 to .091. The standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) is within acceptable range with a value of .065. All coefficients achieve statistical significance ($p < .05$). All but one item (i.e., exposure to content-oriented social media, SMC = .183) achieve practical significance with their SMC values above .30. Thus, no further modifications were conducted to improve the measurement model.

Finally, discriminant and convergent validity were evaluated for all constructs and items in the measurement model. The correlations among the factors ranged from -.01 to .61, indicating that there is sufficient discriminant validity among the latent constructs (Bollen, 1989; Kline, 2011). Given a relatively strong correlation between religiosity and religious media use (.61), a chi-square difference test was performed for

this pair (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). The difference result was significant ($p < .001$), which means that the two constructs present discriminant validity.

Convergent validity was assessed by examining if each indicator is significantly loaded to its posited underlying factor (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). It is recommended that each indicator's pattern coefficient on its intended factor be greater than .40 for the item to be considered to load on that particular factor (Meyers et al., 2013). As demonstrated in Figure 4, the standardized regression coefficients are all statistically significant ($p < .001$) and range from .43 to .94. Therefore, the measured variables are all good indicators of their respective factors.

Two-Step Modelling Approach

Estimations and comparisons of alternative models were performed to assess the structural model under Anderson and Gerbing's (1988) two-step approach. A series of nested structural models were estimated and compared with sequential χ^2 difference tests (SCDTs) by obtaining likelihood ratio χ^2 statistic value for each model (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). Although χ^2 is less informative as an assessment of a single model, it is useful in comparing nested models. If a model, M_2, can be derived from another model, M_1, by imposing some constraints, the resulting model (M_2) is said to be nested in the other model (M_1). That is, when one or more parameters that are freely estimated in M_1 are constrained in M_2, the latter is said to be nested within the former. This can be denoted $M_2 < M_1$. The model with the lower χ^2 value is deemed the preferred model.

Under a two-step approach, the first step is to conduct a pseudo chi-square test using χ^2 value from the saturated model (M_s) and degrees of freedom from null model (M_n). In the saturated model, all parameters relating constructs to one another are

estimated. All parameters relating constructs to one another are fixed at zero in the null model. If a pseudo chi-square test statistic is significant, that indicates that there would be no acceptable structural model because "it would have a chi-square value greater than or equal to the value for M_s with fewer degrees of freedom than for M_n" (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988, p. 418). In other words, the significant difference in χ^2 value between M_n and M_s is an indication of a significant improvement in fit from the null model to the saturated model, allowing the proposed model to be tested in the next step (Kim et al., 2008).

The second step in the two-step approach is to conduct SCDTs, which posits that there is no significant difference between two nested structural models. To test the null hypothesis a χ^2 test statistic value is calculated for the saturated, theoretical, constrained, and unconstrained models. According to Anderson and Gerbing's (1988) decision-tree framework, a theoretical model, M_t, represents a proposed model hypothesized by a researcher. Other structural submodels include the next most likely constrained alternative, M_c, and the next most likely unconstrained alterative, M_u, to M_t from a theoretical standpoint. In other words, one or more parameters estimated in M_t are constrained in M_c, whereas one or more parameters constrained in M_t are estimated in M_u. Thus, this set of five structural submodels is nested in the following sequence: $M_n < M_c < M_t < M_u < M_s$. A series of SCDTs compare these models to one another in sequence starting with a comparison of M_s with M_t. If we find a non-significant reduction in fit with this comparison, then we move on to compare M_t with M_u. With a non-significant reduction in fit in this test, we continue a series of χ^2 difference test of M_t with more constrained models.

Structural Model Analysis: Comparisons of Competing Models

Structural models that were tested are presented in Figure 3. Prior to structural model analysis, the error terms of religious media use and social media use were connected to check if this respecification results in a better model fit. The respecification was made based on the significant positive correlation between religious media use and social media use (shown in Table 6). Conceptually, it makes sense that those who use religious media, including religious websites, for information would also take advantage of social media platforms to seek information to bolster their beliefs. Goodness-of-fit indices were almost identical between our model (i.e., M_u in Table 10) and the respecified model. χ^2 (1047.46, *df* = 215) and SRMR (.062) were slightly smaller for the respecified model. Other fit indices such as GFI, NFI, CFI, and RMSEA remain the same. Thus, we proceeded with the original model.

A comparison of M_s and M_n was conducted to see if the proposed model is theoretically meaningful with the significant difference in χ^2 value between the two models. Chi-sqaure for the saturated model (M_s) and the independence model (M_n) was 1,049.23 (*df* = 215) and 10,602.73 (*df* = 253), respectively. The χ^2 difference, 9,553.50, was absolutely larger than the critical χ^2 value (i.e., 61.16) with 38 degrees of freedom difference at the *p* level of .01. This result indicates that the proposed model is theoretically meaningful enough to proceed with the second step of SCDTs. Table 10 presents the comparisons of competing models with their goodness-of-fit indices.

M_u is the hypothesized model initially proposed by the researcher, in which every theoretically justifiable path is included. Thus, it is the most unconstrained model in Table 10. M_t excludes H2 (i.e., the path from media skepticism to false consensus)

and represents the best model. In the M_c1 model, a correlation between religiosity and media skepticism (H7) was removed while other parameters remain the same as M_t. M_c2 excludes H1 (i.e., the path from religiosity to false consensus) instead of H2. M_c3 represents the full mediation model in which the direct effects of religiosity (H1) and media skepticism (H2) are not expected. For all alternative models the mediation effect of social media use was kept intact, given the role of highly personalized use of this information source. M_t and M_c2 are non-nested while all four models are nested in the M_u model. M_c1 and M_c3 are also nested in M_t.

M_t represents the best model when compared with other alternative models as demonstrated in Table 10. A comparison of M_t and M_c1 was executed prior to a comparison of M_t with M_u, according to the decision-tree framework proposed by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). The test reveals significant reduction in fit at the p-value level of .01, indicating that M_t is a better fit. However, there is no significant difference between M_t and M_u in terms of chi-square difference test, suggesting that M_t is a better model when accounting for parsimony. Given that M_t and M_c2 are non-nested, AIC (1171.5 for M_t and 1175.3 for M_c2) and BIC (1440.8 for M_t and 1444.6 for M_c2) were compared. The differences are pretty close, but both criteria suggest that M_t is slightly better because a lower AIC or BIC value indicates a better fit. A comparison of M_t and M_c3 results in significant reduction in fit at the p-value level of .05, also suggesting that M_t is better.

In conclusion, SCDTs, AIC and BIC reveal that the M_t model is the best model of all alternatives as it represents not only the most theoretically sound alternative but also the most unconstrained model. Even though the M_u model has a model fit

analogous to that of the M_t model, M_t is considered a better model because a more parsimonious alternative is preferred (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). It should be pointed out that the χ^2 values may not fit the data well in absolute terms, including that of our best model, M_t. However, χ^2 statistic tends to reject correct models when sample sizes exceed 200 (Hair et al., 2010; Kim et al., 2008). Given the large sample size of the dataset used to test our model (N = 657), the M_t model best account for the false consensus process compared with other competing models. This final model de-emphasizes the direct role of media skepticism in influencing false consensus.

Test of Hypotheses and Research Questions

Results of the test of hypotheses provide partial support for the final model (i.e., M_t). **Hypothesis 1 stated that religiosity will be positively associated with overestimation of public support for one's own attitudes toward societal and ethical issues, controlling for religious media use.** Generally, false consensus is influenced by the direct effect of religiosity (H1 supported). **Hypothesis 2 proposed that media skepticism will be positively associated with overestimation of public support for one's own attitudes toward societal and political issues, controlling for social media use.** The direct effect of media skepticism on false consensus is not significant (H2 not supported). **Hypothesis 5 suggested that use of religious media will be positively related to overestimation of public support for one's own attitudes toward societal and ethical issues.** Indirect effects on false consensus from religiosity mediated by religious media use are not significant (H5 not supported). **Hypothesis 6 stated that use of social media will be positively related to overestimation of public support for one's own attitudes toward social and political issues.** Indirect effects on false

consensus from media skepticism mediated by social media use are not significant (H6 not supported).

Hypothesis 3 proposed that religiosity will have positive relationship with religious media use. Religiosity positively predicts religious media use (H3 supported). **Hypothesis 4 suggested that media skepticism will have positive relationship with social media use.** Media skepticism has a negative association with social media use (H4 not supported). Our findings indicate that the more skeptical participants are of mainstream media, the less they use social media. **Hypothesis 7 proposed that religiosity will be positively associated with media skepticism.** There is a positive correlation between religiosity and media skepticism (H7 supported). All coefficients except for H2, H5, and H6 are significant (H1 and H4 at .05; H3, H7 at .01) after controlling for political ideology and mainstream media exposure, and are presented in Table 11. One of the covariates, ideology, turns out to predict false consensus ($p < .01$), while mainstream media exposure does not. Figure 5 also shows the final model and its coefficients.

When these two covariates were not controlled for, the indirect effect of religiosity mediated by religious media use (H5) and the direct effect of media skepticism (H2) were supported. However, addition of the control variables (i.e., ideology and mainstream media skepticism) into the proposed model as demonstrated in M_t suggested that both H5 and H2 are spurious relationshps. In other words, the presence of a third factor (or ideology in this case) in the model revealed that these paths from religious media use to false consensus (H5) and from media skepticism (H2) to false consensus are not causally related to each other. As far as H5 (i.e., mediation effect of

religious media use) is concerned, religiosity seems to function as a confounding variable as removing this variable makes the path from religious media use to false consensus significant as shown in M_c2 and M_c3 in Table 11.

Two additional paths were added to competing models from religiosity to social media use and from media skepticism to religious media use to answer the two research questions. The model fit for each model remained the same, and the coefficients for these two paths are presented in Table 11. **RQ1 asked what the relationship is between religiosity and social media use.** The results demonstrate that religiosity has a positive association with social media use although the association is not significant. **RQ2 asked what the relationship is between media skepticism and religious media use.** Media skepticism has a significant negative relationship with religious media use ($p < .01$). These test results were also obtained after controlling for ideology and mainstream media exposure.

Tests of Hypotheses on Individual False Consensus Measures

After we obtained the best model M_t, individual false consensus measures were employed as the main dependent variable one by one in this model to see if there is any change in path coefficients. For FC2 and F4, however, the initially proposed model (i.e., M_u) was tested as the path from media skepticism to false consensus is significant in these two cases ($p < .05$ for FC2; $p < .01$ for FC4). Table 12 shows the results of eight different tests as there are eight false consensus indicators (i.e., FC1: Abortion should be illegal; FC2: Same-sex marriage should not be recognized by the law; FC3: Gay/lesbian couples should not be permitted to adopt children; FC4: The use of marijuana should be illegal; FC5: Favoring the death penalty for persons convicted of murder; FC6: Opposing

stricter gun control; FC7: Opposing affirmative action; FC8: Approval of presidential job performance).

H1 is supported for FC1, FC2, and FC3, meaning that religiosity predicts participants' overestimation of public support for their own positions on such issues as abortion, same-sex marriage, and marijuana. Tests of H2 demonstrate different results for FC2 and FC4. Media skepticism positively predicts false consensus on same-sex marriage, but it negatively predicts false consensus on marijuana. Religiosity has a significant positive effect on religious media use whereas media skepticism has a significant negative effect on social media use across all cases. Thus, H3 is supported while H4 is not in all tests.

Religious media use positively predicts false consensus on the marijuana issue (FC4), but negatively predicts the dependent variable on the affirmative action issue (FC7). A full mediation effect is found for FC4 and FC7 ($p < .05$), indicating that there is only an indirect effect from religiosity mediated by religious media use on false consensus on marijuana legalization and affirmative action. Thus, H5 is supported when the false consensus measure asks people about the use of marijuana being illegal or about favoring affirmative action.

H6 is supported for FC8 despite the low coefficient (.08, $p < .05$), which suggests that increased use of social media is positively related to overestimation of public approval of presidential job performance. In the case of FC6 on gun control, social media use has a significant negative association with false consensus (-.08, $p < .05$). H7 is supported given that religiosity is in positive association with media skepticism as predicted in all tests. There is no relationship between religiosity and social media use,

while media skepticism has a significant negative association with religious media use (-.10, $p < .01$) for all cases. These results were all obtained after controlling for ideology and mainstream media exposure.

Tests of Hypotheses Using Different Types of Social Media Use

Additional test of hypotheses was executed to see a difference in results, if any, when breaking down social media use into the two types measured in the present study (i.e., relationship-oriented and content-oriented). Table 13 presents the results of this test, which suggest that the use of relationship-oriented social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter) account for the significance of the relationships between other variables and social media use as a whole found in the previous analyses. In other words, the relationships of the use of content-oriented social media (e.g., blogs, YouTube, podcasts) with such variables as media skepticism and religiosity are not significant. Another finding to note is that religiosity has a significant positive association with relationship-oriented social media use, while having no relationship with content-oriented social media use. That is, the more religious participants are, the more they use SNSs for information, news, and opinions.

Table 14 compares the results of hypothesis testing on individual false consensus measures when employing different types of social media use. This comparison reveals findings that one could not have detected if social media use had not been broken down into the two types. A significant negative relationship between media skepticism and social media use was found in all of the tests on model 1, but was not found on model 2. The same can be said of the significant positive association between religiosity and social media use because this relationship was found only in the tests on model 1.

As far as the effect of social media use on false consensus is concerned, tests of hypotheses using one type of social media use paint a somewhat different picture than do tests employing a combined measure of social media use. When tested with the combined measure, our findings indicated that social media use affects false consensus about FC6 (on gun control) and FC8 (on presidential job approval) as shown in Table 12. However, our findings in Table 14 demonstrate that the use of content-oriented social media influence false consensus about FC2 (on same-sex marriage). The more people use such social media as blogs, podcasts, and YouTube, the less likely they are to overestimate public support for their opinion opposing same-sex marriage. In other words, the more people use content-oriented social media, the more likely they are to overestimate public support for their view favoring same-sex marriage ($\beta = .10$, $p < .05$). A negative effect of social media use on false consensus on FC6 (i.e., opposing stricter gun control) is accounted for by the use of SNSs. Conversely, there is a positive association between the use of relationship-oriented social media and false consensus on the view supporting stricter gun control ($\beta = .09$, $p < .05$). When it comes to FC8 (on presidential job approval), neither type of social media use affects false consensus alone. Social media use influences overestimation of public support for the opinion approving President Trump handling his job only when the combined measure is employed.

A Supplementary Analysis

Another set of structural model analysis and hypothesis tests was conducted employing false consensus variables measured with Ross et al.'s (1977) method. The dependent variables here were calculated as the difference between respondents' estimate of the percentage supporting the same stance on the same eight issues and the actual

percentage supporting that position within the same survey (i.e., our main survey). In this case, the final measures have no direct bearing on whether participants overestimate or underestimate the factual public consensus for their own behavior because there are no benchmark national surveys against which subjects' estimates are compared (Mullen & Hu, 1988). They only reveal how participants misperceive the actual distribution of opinions in our survey.

Comparisons of competing models still reveal that M_t represents the best model when compared with other alternatives as demonstrated in Table 15. A comparison of M_t and M_c1 shows significant reduction in fit at the p-value level of .01, suggesting that M_t is a better fit. Although there is no significant difference between M_t and M_u in terms of chi-square difference test, M_t can be seen as a better model when accounting for parsimony. Given that M_t and M_c2 are non-nested, AIC (1171.4 for M_t and 1175.2 for M_c2) and BIC (1440.7 for M_t and 1444.5 for M_c2) were compared. The differences are again pretty close, but both criteria suggest that M_t is slightly better than M_c2. A comparison of M_t and M_c3 results in significant reduction in fit at the p-value level of .05, also indicating that M_t is better.

Results of hypothesis testing with the dependent variable (i.e., false consensus) measured with Ross et al.'s method (see Table 16) are comparable to the results presented in the previous section (see Table 11). When we control for ideology and mainstream media exposure the direct effect of religiosity on false consensus is significant ($p < .05$), thereby supporting H1. Other exogenous variables (i.e., media skepticism, religious media use, and social media use) do not influence false consensus. Thus, H2, H5, and H6 are not supported. Religiosity positively predicts religious media use ($p < .01$) whereas

media skepticism negatively predicts social media use ($p < .05$). H3 is supported and H4 is not. Religiosity has a positive association with media skepticism as predicted ($p < .01$), supporting H7. Religiosity has no relationship with social media use (RQ1) while media skepticism has a negative relationship with religious media use (RQ2) ($p < .01$).

Tests of individual false consensus models using the dependent variable measured with Ross et al.'s method also paint a similar picture (See Table 17). Religiosity predicts false consensus (H1) when the issues concern abortion (FC1), same-sex marriage (FC2), and gay and lesbian adoption (FC3). Media skepticism positively predicts false consensus (H2) for FC2, but negatively predicts the dependent variable for FC4 on the marijuana issue. Religious media use positively mediates the relationship between religiosity and false consensus (H5) for FC4, but negatively mediates for FC7 on the affirmative action issue. Social media use positively mediates the effect of media skepticism on false consensus (H5) for FC8 on presidential job approval, but negatively mediates for FC6 on the gun control issue. Coefficients and significance levels remain the same for H3, H4, H7, RQ1, and RQ2. These results suggest that the patterns of actual opinion distribution in our survey resemble the patterns of factual public opinion distribution that are shown in the national representative surveys.

CHAPTER 8

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The present study aimed to offer a conceptual model that describes how individuals' characteristics and media behaviors influence their perception of public opinion on various societal issues. Our model predicted that religiosity and media skepticism will predict false consensus (i.e., overestimation of public support for one's own attitudes toward social issues), and that use of alternative information sources such as religious media and social media will mediate the effects of individual attributes on false consensus. This conceptual model was based on key assumptions about active and motivated audience members and reinforcing effects of selective exposure on them. Our SEM analyses supported some of the hypotheses and failed to support others.

The present study contributes to the field in the following ways. First, it reveals new individual attributes that may lead to false consensus, thereby adding a theoretically relevant independent variables to the literature. Religiosity, media skepticism, religious media use, and social media use all influence overestimation of public support for one's own attitudes, albeit on different issues. Second, the current study advances our understanding of the difference between two types of social media (i.e., relationship-oriented vs. content-oriented) by testing prior findings in a new communication context. The consequences and determinants of the two types of social media use are dissimilar in terms of false consensus, religiosity, and media skepticism. A third contribution of our

study is the finding of a full mediation effect of religious media use on the relationship between religiosity and false consensus. Social science theory is for the most part concerned with explanation, which assumes a causal process (Reynolds, 2015; Slater & Gleason, 2012). Detecting intervening process is a primary way of explaining mechanism behind the process. We found that religious media use fully mediates the effect of religiosity on false consensus about marijuana use and affirmative action. Another contribution of this dissertation is the development of refined measures of media use to better capture various dimensions of this popular concept. In fact, we found that the variance of reliance is better explained by the construct of media use than that of exposure or attention.

This chapter is organized as follows. The results of our study are briefly summarized in terms of hypotheses and research questions and are interpreted in the next two sections. The section on the interpretation of findings integrates our results with relevant literature and discusses their implications. It has four subsections: Individual attributes and false consensus; Media behavior and false consensus; Determinants of alternative media consumption; and Religiosity and media skepticism. The following two sections describe limitations of our study that might affect the interpretation of our results and provide recommendation and specific guidance for future research, respectively.

Summary of Findings

Before discussing the implications of the results our findings need to be summarized in light of the hypotheses and research questions. H1 predicted that religiosity will be positively associated with overestimation of public support for one's own attitudes toward societal (and ethical) issues, controlling for religious media use.

This hypothesis was partially supported as people tend to overestimate support for their stance when the issues are related to abortion, same-sex marriage, and same-sex couples adopting children. All these associations, however, were somewhat weak as beta weights range between .12 and .16. More specifically, religious people misperceive public opinion on these issues thinking that there would be more consensus for their beliefs that abortion should be illegal, that same-sex marriage should not be recognized by the law, and that gay and lesbian couples should not be permitted to adopt children. Religiosity had no significant effect on false consensus for other ethical (i.e., the use of marijuana being made illegal; favoring the death penalty for persons convicted of murder) and political issues (i.e., opposing stricter gun control; opposing affirmative action; approval of presidential job performance).

H2 proposed that media skepticism will be positively associated with overestimation of public support for one's own attitudes toward societal (and political issues), controlling for social media use. Tests of this hypothesis showed mixed results. When the combined measure of false consensus was used as dependent variable, media skepticism was not associated with false consensus. When individual false consensus measures were entered into the equation, however, it was positively correlated with false consensus on same-sex marriage, and negatively on the use of marijuana. These two associations were somewhat weak with beta weight being .09 and -.13, respectively. There was no relationship between media skepticism and false consensus for the remaining six issues.

H3 suggested that religiosity will have positive relationship with religious media use. This hypothesis was supported. The strength of this association was moderate with

beta weight of .55. The more religious people are, the more likely they are to turn to religious media for information, news, and opinion. H4 proposed that media skepticism will have positive relationship with social media use. This hypothesis was not supported because media skepticism negatively predicted social media use with beta weight of -.11. The finding suggests that mainstream media skeptics are less likely than non-skeptics to turn to social media channels as information sources. The breakdown of social media use by type revealed that only relationship-oriented social media use has this negative relationship with media skepticism.

H5 stated that religious media use will be positively related to overestimation of public support for one's own attitudes toward ethical issues. When the combined measure of false consensus was employed, religious media use had no relationship with the dependent variable. Religiosity even seemed to confound the relationship between religious media use and false consensus, given that removing religiosity made this relationship statistically significant. However, tests of H5 on individual false consensus measures paint different pictures. The hypothesis was supported for only one issue, which is the use of marijuana being made illegal. The effect of religiosity on false consensus in this case was fully mediated by the use of religious media. Interestingly, religious media use was negatively associated with false consensus in the case of affirmative action. The more people use religious media as alternative information sources, the less likely they are to overestimate public support for their own position on this issue (i.e., opposing affirmation action). Conversely, the more people use religious media, the more likely they are to overestimate public support for the view favoring affirmation action. These

significant associations between religious media use and false consensus were all weak in strength with beta weight ranging from .11 to .14.

H6 predicted that social media use will be positively related to overestimation of public support for one's own attitudes toward political issues. The hypothesis was also supported for only one issue, that is, approving of the way Donald Trump is handling his job as president. On the issue of gun control social media use was negatively correlated with false consensus. The more people use social media as alternative information channels, the less likely they are to overestimate public support for their belief (i.e., opposing stricter gun control). Conversely, the more people use social media, the more likely they are to overestimate public support for the view supporting stricter gun control. The strength of these associations was rather weak with beta weight of .08. The effect of social media use on false consensus on gun control was accounted for by relationship-oriented social media. On the other hand, the use of content-oriented social media has a significant, albeit weak, association with false consensus on same-sex marriage. The more people use such social media as blogs, podcasts, and YouTube, the more likely they are to overestimate public support for the opinion that such unions should be recognized by the law.

H7 stated that religiosity will be positively associated with media skepticism, and it was supported. The strength of this association was weak with beta weight of .11. The more religious people are, the more skeptical they are about the mainstream news media. RQ1 asked about the relationship between religiosity and social media use, while RQ2 about the relationship between media skepticism and religious media use. Our findings showed no significant association for RQ1 and a significant negative correlation for RQ2

with beta weight of -.10. Mainstream media skeptics are less likely to use religious media for information, news, and opinion. Or those how use religious media as information sources tend not to be skeptical of the mainstream media. One of the two control variables, political ideology, also positively predicted false consensus on five out of the eight public issues. They include same-sex marriage, same-sex couples adoption, marijuana use, gun control, and presidential approval ratings. The more conservative people are, the more likely they are to overestimate public support for their attitudes toward these issues.

Interpretation and Implications of Findings

Religiosity and False Consensus

As mentioned in the previous section, religiosity has an impact on how people perceive public opinion on such issues as abortion, same-sex marriage, and same-sex couple adoption rights, but not on other ethical issues including marijuana use and death penalty. This finding coincides with Putnam and Campbell's (2010) argument that "religiosity has a tight connection to attitudes regarding abortion and gay marriage" (p. 384). In the 2006 Faith Matters study, they tested how religiosity affects people's attitudes toward a wide range of issues and found that this factor matters a lot for same-sex marriage and abortion. That is, the more religious people are, the more likely they are to object to abortion and same-sex marriage. Although they did not deal with perception of public opinion (or false consensus) on these issues per se, their empirical evidence makes a case for the strong influence of religiosity on these two issues.

Our finding supports their report in that religiosity predicts overestimation of public support for one's own position only on issues related to abortion and same-sex couples. The reason that there exists a tie between religiosity and the sex and family issues may be partially explained by moral traditionalism, a set of beliefs against postmaterialistic values such as secularism and moral relativism (Knuckey, 2005). Moral traditionalism has been viewed as being at the root of cultural conflict (Barone, 1997), related to Christion religiosity or religious orthodoxy (De Koster & Van der Waal, 2007), and deepening "a cultural values-based realignment of the American electorate" (Knuckey, 2005, p. 645). Abortion and same-sex issues are in a sense symbolic issues that stand in for moral traditionalism, and that touch an emotional chord for those who honor traditional mores (Putnam & Campbell, 2010). Moral traditionalism and these sex and family issues have served as a test of partisan divide in the U.S., with those opposing abortion and same-sex couple's legal rights aligned with the Republican Party (Knuckey, 2005; Putnam & Campbell, 2010). In light of cultural and political divide along these moral issues, it is no surprise to find that ideology also predicts false consensus on the two issues concerning same-sex couple's rights in our study (See Table 12).

The positive relationship between religiosity and false consensus on abortion and same-sex couples' rights found in our study also supports Amit et al.'s (2010) finding that conservative values play a moderating role in social projection. Here conservative values are conceptualized as the motivation to maintain the status quo and perceive clear distinctions between right and wrong. Amit and colleagues (2010) found that false consensus was greater for those who attribute more importance to conservative values, which religious people are more likely than their secular counterparts to favor (Saroglou

et al., 2004). In addition, a positive association between ideology and false consensus found in our study supports Dvir-Gvirsman's (2015) study that revealed the significant relationship between conservative ideology and overestimation of one's group size.

Media Skepticism and False Consensus

The role of media skepticism in perception of public opinion seems less clear. As one of the consequences of media distrust mainstream media skepticism was hypothesized to enhance the false consensus phenomenon. Skeptics are, by definition, predisposed to disagree with the news media's presentation of public opinion (or the factual public opinion distribution) and thus to exhibit false consensus bias. However, our results show that skepticism has no bearing on the overestimation of public support for one's own positions except for on the following two issues: same-sex marriage and marijuana use. Thus, we may conclude that for the most part media skepticism does not influence false consensus when taking the effect of ideology into account.

For such issues as same-sex marriage and marijuana use, however, it has a positive relationship with false consensus on the former, and a negative relationship on the latter. Skeptics are more likely than non-skeptics to overestimate public support for their stance that same-sex marriage should not be recognized by the law, while less likely to overestimate support for their position that the use of marijuana should be illegal. For same-sex marriage, both media skepticism and ideology positively predict false consensus. Given the positive correlation between religiosity and media skepticism, these results may be explained in part by moral traditionalism.

For marijuana use, on the other hand, we can interpret the finding to suggest that media skeptics are likely to overestimate public support for the view that the use of marijuana should be legal. In fact, a test of this hypothesis revealed a positive association between media skepticism and false consensus on the use of marijuana being made legal (β = .14, p < .01). In this case, ideology was negatively associated with false consensus (β = -.12, p < .05). The more conservative people are, the less likely they are to overestimate public consensus on favoring marijuana use.

Recent years have witnessed dramatic shifts in public opinion toward support for both same-sex marriage and marijuana legalization (Doherty, Kiley, & O'Hea, 2018). One explanation for the shifts is generational differences with younger Americans in favor of the legalization of gay marriage and of marijuana. The support among young age groups for same-sex marriage and marijuana use makes it seem inexorable that the trend in favor of same-sex marriage and marijuana legalization might endure. It also may suggest that false consensus is greater among young age groups in relation to these issues. In any case, one of our contributions to the literature on media distrust is the finding that false consensus on the two issues might be explained as one of the consequences of media skepticism, a largely ignored topic in scholarship on media trust (Tsfati, 2003).

Religious Media Use and False Consensus

Religious media use fully mediates the effect of religiosity on false consensus regarding the two issues: marijuana and affirmative action. Assuming a causal model, this means that religiosity may increase the chance of overestimating public support for the position that the use of marijuana should be illegal, but only through the use of religious media. Religious media were conceptualized and operationalized as media channels

utilized as purveyors of religious messages by religious actors (e.g., religious denominations, leaders, and their agents). Other media sources, including secular media, that might serve religious purposes such as fantasy movies and mythic video games were not considered religious media in our study. Not all religious people display false consensus on marijuana being illegal. Only those who turn to religious media as alternative information sources tend to overestimate support for their stance on this issue.

It is not religiosity per se that affects religious people's views about marijuana. This finding somewhat supports Krystosek's (2016) study demonstrating that religiousness (i.e., the extent to which people consider themselves to be religious) was not a significant predictor of their views on the marijuana issue. Krystosek (2016) found that religious fundamentalism (as measured by attitudes toward the Bible) had a negative association with support for the legalization of marijuana. Complex relationships between religiosity and marijuana use/legalization cannot be "so easily characterized by secular support and religious opposition" (Krystosek, 2016, p. 59). Nor they can be easily pigeonholed as opposition by all religious people.

To unravel the complete mediation of religiosity on false consensus concerning marijuana, we need to know how religious media have reported and framed the issue of marijuana use and legalization. However, there is few, if any, research on religious media's coverage of this issue. It is very likely that marijuana use and legalization are negatively covered by religious media as no prominent Christian leader or denomination support the legalization of marijuana or its common usage (Schwarzwalder, 2014). If that is the case, the reinforcement effect might be at play such that people who use religious media misperceive public support for their stance on this issue, relative to those who do

not. More in-depth research should be undertaken to identify underlying factors or mechanisms behind the false consensus phenomenon about the issue on the part of people relying on religious media channels.

We also found that religious media use is a negative predictor of false consensus about opposing affirmative action. Those who use religious media are less likely than those who do not to overestimate support for their belief that universities should not increase the number of black students by considering race (i.e., opposition to affirmative action). However, religious media use positively predicts false consensus when favoring affirmative action was used as dependent variable ($\beta = .14$, $p < .05$). In other words, those who use religious media tend to overestimate public support for supporting affirmative action. A full mediation effect was found ($p < .05$) in this case suggesting that religiosity affects false consensus on favoring affirmative action, but only through religious media use. Thus, it may be assumed that religious media report on affirmative action in a positive light, thereby strengthening the already positive view held by religious people. Such a hypothesis also needs an empirical test to be confirmed using a multiple-method approach that combines content analysis and experiment.

Social Media Use and False Consensus

We found that social media use influence people's perception of public opinion on such issues as same-sex marriage, gun control, and presidential job approval rating. What is interesting is that this influence of social media use depends on the type of social media utilized by users. We measured social media use as a whole by combing relationship-oriented social media and content-oriented social media. The former type (i.e., relationship-oriented) includes Facebook and Twitter and the latter (i.e., content-

oriented) blogs, podcasts, YouTube, and Wikipedia. Content-oriented social media use positively predicts the overestimation of public support for one's own position supporting same-sex marriage being recognized. Relationship-oriented social media use does not have significant relationship with false consensus on this issue.

Relationship-oriented social media use, on the other hand, has a significant association with false consensus on gun control, while content-oriented social media use does not. The more people use such social media as Twitter and Facebook, the more likely they tend to overestimate public support for their own view supporting stricter gun control. In the case of the job approval ratings of President Donald Trump, however, neither type of social media use has a significant effect on false consensus alone. Only the combined use of both types of social media positively predicts overestimation of public support for approving of the way he conducts himself as president.

These findings suggest that the two types of social media play a different role in influencing people's perception of public opinion on some societal issues. The full point average difference between the two types found in Table 12 is another indication that relationship- and content-oriented social media are qualitative different. Researchers attempted to develop typologies of social media, categorizing them into six (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) or seven types (Kietzmann et al., 2011) depending on their pre-determined functionalities. The present study reorganized these typologies into a simpler one by regrouping different social media into two essential types: relationship-oriented vs. content-oriented.

There is empirical evidence that supports this classification scheme, suggesting these two types or dimensions as two key elements of social media (Ellonen & Kosonen,

2010; Jiao et al., 2017; Zhang & Wang, 2010). Our findings contribute to an ongoing stream of research investigating the role of different kinds of social media in various settings. Our study examined the differing effects of the two types of social media on public opinion perception, while previous research has been conducted in the context of marketing, psychology, or sociology. In other words, the current study is one of the first that has empirically examined the difference between relationship- and content-oriented social media in the field of communication in general and public opinion in particular. It seems clear that not all social media are created equal. This point is further discussed in the following two subsections.

Religiosity and Alternative Media Use

To examine the relationships between individual characteristics and alternative media use, we tested two hypotheses (i.e., H3 and H4) and two research questions. Not surprisingly, the strongest association of all was the one between religiosity and religious media use. The more religious people are, the more they are to utilize religious media for seeking information, news, and opinion. Given the positive association between religiosity and media skepticism, it is logical and reasonable to conclude that religious audiences resort to information sources of their own, which may not be presented or distorted in the mainstream news media.

When it comes to social media use, religiosity has different association with the two types of social media. It has a significant positive relationship with relationship-oriented social media use, whereas it has a negative, albeit non-significant, relationship with content-oriented social media use. The more religious people are, the more they use such social media as Facebook and Twitter for information. This finding further

strengthens our conclusion that the two types of social media are qualitative different. It also suggests that religious people tend to seek out information from their friends on social media rather than from unknown or unfamiliar blogs, podcasts, and YouTube videos.

Media Skepticism and Alternative Media Use

Media skepticism did have a significant relationship with social media use, albeit a negative one. We hypothesized that mainstream media skeptics will turn to social media as one of the alternative information sources, but they do not. In fact, the more skeptical people are about the mainstream media, the less they are to use social media. There may be several reasons why this is the case. It is worth mentioning, prior to suggesting possible explanations, that we clearly asked respondents to think about "information sources other than the news media in general—that is, national television news, the daily newspapers, and news magazines" when answering the questions about their use of social media. Thus, it is unlikely that they had the mainstream media in mind when thinking of social media.

That said, one of the reasons for media skepticism being a negative predictor of social media use may be that skeptics distrust not only the mainstream media but also other forms of media in general, including social media. A study by Pew Research Center revealed that Americans have even lower trust in social media than national news organizations even though two-thirds (67%) of them get news from social media (Bialik & Matsa, 2017). It is hard to imagine that someone who does not trust the mainstream news media would turn to much less trusted sources.

Another related explanation concerns the measurement issue. Our combined measure of social media use includes three dimensions: exposure, attention, and reliance. Given the results of the 2017 Pew Research Center study (Bialik & Matsa, 2017), media skepticism may have different relationships with social media use depending on its dimension. A correlation analysis showed that this is the case (See Table 18). Attention to and reliance on SNSs are negatively correlated with media skepticism at .01 and .05 level, respectively. The remaining relationships are not significant despite a positive association between exposure to SNSs and media skepticism. It seems, therefore, that media skeptics from out sample tend not to pay much attention to SNSs, and nor they rely much on this type of social media.

A breakdown of social media type adds insight into our discussion of media skepticism and social media. Mainstream media skepticism only has a significant association with relationship-oriented social media. That is, skeptics are less likely than non-skeptics to use Facebook and Twitter as alternative information sources. Being skeptics has nothing to do with the level of content-oriented social media use. All things considered, skeptics may turn to blogs, YouTube, and podcasts for information along with non-skeptics, but may not resort to Twitter and Facebook to get information as much as non-skeptics do. In any case, this finding also indicates that the two types of social media are totally different animals in terms of their determinants.

A negative relationship between media skepticism and religious media use may be explained in a similar way. According to the 2017 Pew Research Center study (Bialik & Matsa, 2017), Americans express only moderate trust in most types of news sources, including friends and family. Skeptics may display even more distrust in most news

source types, including religious media, although there is no direct evidence to support this claim.

Religiosity and Media Skepticism

A positive correlation between religiosity and media skepticism is in agreement with previous studies (e.g., Ariyanto et al., 2007; Buddenbaum, 1998). Ariyanto et al. (2007) demonstrated hostile media perception (i.e., a tendency to view media report of intergroup conflicts as biased against their own group) among strongly identified Christians and Muslims in Indonesia. Buddenbaum (1998) also showed that those who take their religion seriously, share their beliefs, and participate in religious activities tend not to use newspapers for political information. Another Buddenbaum's (1996) study and Golan and Kiousis's (2010) secondary analysis provided support for the negative relationship between religion-related variables and news media trust.

A contribution of our work is that the positive association between religiosity and media skepticism suggests a negative perception of the news media in general on the part of religious audiences. Previous research has primarily focused on how religious variables (e.g., religious fundamentalism and attendance) relate to specific media sources (e.g., newspapers, television, or the Internet), except for Golan and Kiousis's (2010) study. Even their media credibility indices only include domestic TV and newspapers within Egypt and Saudi Arabia and satellite TV and the Internet because they employed secondary data collected in these Arab countries. Thus, our work is one of the first that tested the relationship between religiosity and perception of the news media as a whole in the context of the U.S. Religious people tend to be skeptical about the mainstream media as an institution.

Measurement of Media Use

Media use has been one of the most researched concepts in quantitative communication science and particularly in the media effect literature. On the one hand, a more sensitive measure of this construct enables the identification of more subtle media effects (Becker & Whitney, 1980; Chaffee & Schleuder, 1986). Considerable debate, on the other hand, has continued over reliability and validity of self-reported measures of media use (Coromina & Saris, 2009; de Vreese & Neijens, 2016; Eveland et al., 2009; Niedereppe, 2016; Prior, 2009). A review of the literature reveals that there is no way to tell whether self-reported media use measures overreports or even underreports actual levels of media use without additional data obtained from passive data collection methods (Jerit et al., 2016; Scharkow, 2016).

However, there are several ways to improve both validity and reliability of self-reported measures of media use. First, it is preferable to use clearer response categories and possibly numerical categories rather than vague frequency categories (Coromina & Saris, 2009). Second, measures asking about specific domains or types of media are better than generic measures (Newton, 2000; Eveleand et al., 2009). Third, when measuring the frequency of regular behaviors such as media exposure, the typical week questions are superior to the past week questions in terms of predictive validity (Chang & Krosnick, 2003). Finally, measures combining exposure, attention, and reliance are preferable to simple exposure measures to achieve construct validity in that the former work better in accounting for the variance of the dependent variables (Becker & Whitney, 1980; Eveland et al., 2009).

Another contribution of this dissertation will be the development of a refined measure of media use, building on these recommendations. As pointed out above, an increasing number of scholars argue that adding essential dimensions of the construct (e.g., attention, reliance) to exposure should more adequately reflect an individual's use of media. Thus, we developed measures of media use asking about specific domains (i.e., information, news, and opinion) and specific types of media (i.e., two types of religious media and two types of social media) and combined exposure, attention, and reliance to better capture various dimensions of the construct.

Our measures demonstrated acceptable internal consistency (.79 for religious media use; .76 for social media use; see Table 3). Confirmatory factor analysis revealed that media use explains better the variance of reliance than that of exposure for religious media use, and the variance of reliance or attention than that of exposure (See Table 9). Furthermore, our measurement model in Figure 4 shows that our measures of media use have good convergent and discriminant validity. The standardized regression weights are all significant ($p < .001$) and range from .43 (indicative of a modest strength) to .94 (indicative of substantial strength). Therefore, we recommend that researchers consider combining exposure, attention, and reliance and use specific media sources or content when measuring and testing the effect of media use.

Limitations

This study is not without limitations. First, our findings may not be generalizable to the U.S. adult population at large given the characteristics of non-representative Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) samples. As with other MTurk workers (Clifford et al., 2015; Huff & Tingley, 2015; Lewis et al., 2015), our sample is younger, less racially

diverse, and more educated (See Table 1). To ensure high data quality, however, we utilized a multi-stage survey approach. An initial survey screened 3,000 respondents based on their self-identified religious affiliation and 1,400 participants were recontacted to complete a main survey. 676 of them participated in the main survey resulting in a response rate of 48%. 700 more respondents were added by capitalizing on the panel provided by TurkPrime, a third-party platform that helps crowdsourced research using Amazon MTurk. This two -stage sampling method rendered the religious composition of our data comparable to that of nationally representative samples such as the 2014 Religious Landscape study by Pew Research Center.

To add further quality control to the data, three attention check questions were embedded in the main survey. These questions were included to check if respondents were paying attention and not simply clicking through to earn their payment. A review of their answers to the attention check items revealed that some of them did not pay much attention to the survey, who were eventually excluded from the current study. This procedure left 1,001 participants who were included in the final sample for analysis.

A second limitation arises from missing values that were largely outside the control of the researcher. 177 participants responded to all six questions related to religious media use, while 657 answered all six items measuring social media use. To handle missing data, a multiple imputation procedure was implemented, in which the missing values are imputed for several times. We created 20 separate imputed datasets to achieve sufficient statistical power for a valid statistical analysis (Enders, 2010; Graham, Olchowski, & Gilreath, 2007). Following the recommendation when using a missing value imputation process (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007; Meyers et al., 2013), we then

compared the statistical analysis (i.e., zero-order correlations in this case) with cases with and without missing values. As demonstrated in Table 6, no differences emerged between original versus imputed datasets, suggesting that the missing value intervention reflects statistical reality. The difference found for religious media use and social media use between the two datasets is not of major concern because we are not interested in this particular relationship in the present study.

Another limitation concerns the use of formative indicators for constructing the measure of false consensus. The reliability and validity of formative constructs cannot be evaluated by conventional statistical techniques (e.g., coefficient alpha and confirmatory factor analysis) designed for reflective constructs (Bagozzi, 1994; Cohen, Cohen, Teresi, Marchi, & Velez, 1990; Diamantopoulos, Riefler, & Roth, 2008). Content validity and multicollinearity are another issue that needs to be addressed when dealing with formative constructs: (Collier & Bienstock, 2006). Our combined measure of false consensus is the sum of eight formative indicators, which directly assess respondents' perception of public opinion on different issues in the form of percentage values. Thus, its content validity is considered satisfactory. It is recommended that at least two reflective indicators have paths from the formative construct for model identification (Jarvis et al., 2003; Wang et al., 2015). We have not found reflective indicators of false consensus from the literature. Nor do we believe that there can be a better measure of false consensus than directly asking about people's opinion and their estimates of opinion distribution about the issue under investigation. In fact, most studies, if not all, in the false consensus literature use this method to measure false consensus.

Multicollinearity may become an issue with formative indicators as high multicollinearity among them "could make it difficult to determine the impact of each indicator on the latent construct" (Collier & Bienstock, 2006). For the most part, correlations among our false consensus indicators are weak except for the one between FC2 and FC3, which are both on same-sex couples (See Table 7). This is a good sign as low correlations imply that each item represents a different or unique facet of the construct (Diamantopoulos & Siguaw, 2006; Edwards, 2011). Given that formative measures are not expected to show internal consistency, the low correlations found in our data do not necessarily affect the interpretation of our index of false consensus. In addition, we conducted additional tests that did not rely on this index. That is, we tested our model on individual false consensus measures one by one, and mainly discussed the results of these individual analyses and their implications in this chapter.

There might be concerns regarding the measurement used to capture respondents' religiosity in the current study. For example, criticism that religiosity best represents Protestant Christians or more broadly Christians is a legitimate concern. In fact, almost all the measures of religiosity developed in the United States, including our measures, face such criticism that they are deeply rooted in the Judeo-Christian religious tradition. However, Putnam and Campbell's (2010) measures of religiosity, which is comparable to ours, demonstrated that they can capture highly religious members of different traditions (e.g., Christians and Muslims).

We also argue that religiosity remains a useful concept when studying religion scientifically. Scientific study of religion means that we are studying religion from psychological, behavioral, and sociological perspectives, instead of asking philosophical

or theological questions. That is, as social scientists, we are not studying religion per se but human considerations such as religious beliefs, behavior, motivations, and perception (Spilka et al., 2011). Our goal was to investigate how people's religious faith operates in their cultural, social, political, and media context.

We admit that religiosity in our study is closely tied to institutionalized religion even though it touches on personal nature of spirituality. For example, the affective dimension of religiosity has something in common with spirituality. Hill et al. (2000, 2003) indicate that scholarly understanding of spirituality as the individual, subjective experience and of religiosity as the institutional, doctrinal experience reflects lay people's understanding of the difference between the two constructs. Thus, it is not unlikely that spiritual but not religious individuals will show different patterns with regards to some of the key variables of the present study when compared with religious individuals captured by the religiosity scale.

Recommendations for Future Research

From our study, it becomes clear that more research is needed on religious media. For example, we found the mediating role of religious media use in the relationship between religiosity and false consensus on such issues as marijuana legalization and affirmative action. There should be some aspects of religious media that account for this mediation effect. However, due to the lack of empirical studies in this area we may risk being lost in conjecture. A content analysis of how religious media cover public issues including the aforementioned two issues is deemed essential. McGinty et al.' (2016) analysis of news media coverage on state legalization of marijuana offers insights into how to go about conducting such a study. For instance, one could analyze a random

sample of the content on select issues (e.g., marijuana use, affirmative action) found in religious television, newspapers, and websites during the time period of interest. An experimental investigation of religious media exposure and public opinion perception should also help justify the causal relationship between these two variables.

Our major findings include the negative associations of media skepticism and the use of alternative media sources such as social media and religious media. Why mainstream media skeptics do not turn to social media sources, for example, awaits further work. There are a wide variety of social media channels as demonstrated by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010). Our operationalization of social media use specified social networking sites (i.e., Facebook and Twitter), blogs, YouTube, podcasts, and Wikipedia. It is entirely possible that our respondents had other types of social media in mind, which our measures did not capture in assessing their use of social media. Measurement issues aside, there may be other reasons for media skepticism being a negative predictor of social media use. There also may be other information sources that skeptics employ when making decisions about the world around them. Extant literature shows that skeptics tend to give more credit to citizen journalists (Carr et al., 2014), nonmainstream news sites (Tsfati, 2010), and independent web-based newspapers (Kim & Johnson, 2009). Including these types of alternative information sources into an analysis of media skepticism and false consensus may provide different results than those found in the current study.

The independent variables tested in our model (i.e., religiosity, media skepticism, religious media use, social media use) influence false consensus albeit on different issues in some cases. This mediation model was tested using cross-sectional data, which may

obscure the interpretation of the causal process hypothesized in the model. The lack of temporal order inherent in our study design is considered another limitation, and we recommend researchers use longitudinal data to assess questions of the causal order of their interest. When utilizing such data researchers are encouraged to test alternative (i.e., theoretically plausible yet competing) models to further strengthen their hypotheses or compare alternate theoretical arguments.

In our case, a supplementary analysis was conducted to compare our model with alternative causal model, in which both religious media use and social media use were specified as exogenous variables while religiosity and media skepticism intervening variables. A comparison of model fit indices shows that our model (χ^2/df = 1049.231/215; AIC = 1171.231; BIC = 1444.980) is better than the alternative causal mode (χ^2/df = 1141.204/215; AIC = 1259.204; BIC = 1523.978). The results suggest that it may be more appropriate to understand that alternative media use mediates the influence of individual attributes (i.e., religiosity and media skepticism) on false consensus than the other way around.

Conclusion

Despite the limitations mentioned above, we consider the present study a valuable consideration to a better understanding of individual-level predictors of misperception of public opinion and of differing roles of social media based on types (i.e., relationship-oriented vs. content-oriented). Our findings about the mediating effect of religious media use on the relationship between religiosity and false consensus can be considered another contribution to the relevant literature, given the paucity of empirical studies that investigated the role of religion in communication phenomena, including

false consensus, and in formulating theoretical frameworks in the communication field. Our recommendations for future researchers include employing a nationally representative sample, longitudinal data, and a triangulation method combining content analysis and experiment to replicate some of the work reported in our study.

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APPENDICES

A. SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Introduction to Survey

This survey seeks to understand your media consumption behaviors and opinions about various public issues. Please answer ALL questions as honestly as possible. Your answers will be kept confidential and anonymous. Thank you.

Mainstream Media Exposure

• On an average weekday, how much time in total do you generally spend watching television?

No time at all; Less than ½ hour; ½ hour to 1 hour; More than 1 hour, up to 1 ½ hours; More than 1 ½ hours, up to 2 hours; More than 2 hours, up to 2 ½ hours; More than 2 ½ hours, up to 3 hours; More than 3 hours; Don't know

• And again on an average weekday, how much of your time watching television is generally spent watching news or programs about politics and current affairs?

No time at all; Less than ½ hour; ½ hour to 1 hour; More than 1 hour, up to 1 ½ hours; More than 1 ½ hours, up to 2 hours; More than 2 hours, up to 2 ½ hours; More than 2 ½ hours, up to 3 hours; More than 3 hours; Don't know

• On an average weekday, how much time in total do you generally spend listening to the radio?

No time at all; Less than ½ hour; ½ hour to 1 hour; More than 1 hour, up to 1 ½ hours; More than 1 ½ hours, up to 2 hours; More than 2 hours, up to 2 ½ hours; More than 2 ½

hours, up to 3 hours; More than 3 hours; Don't know

• And again on an average weekday, how much of your time listening to the radio is generally spent listening to news or programs about politics and current affairs?

No time at all; Less than ½ hour; ½ hour to 1 hour; More than 1 hour, up to 1 ½ hours; More than 1 ½ hours, up to 2 hours; More than 2 hours, up to 2 ½ hours; More than 2 ½ hours, up to 3 hours; More than 3 hours; Don't know

• On an average weekday, how much time in total do you generally spend reading the newspapers?

No time at all; Less than ½ hour; ½ hour to 1 hour; More than 1 hour, up to 1 ½ hours; More than 1 ½ hours, up to 2 hours; More than 2 hours, up to 2 ½ hours; More than 2 ½ hours, up to 3 hours; More than 3 hours; Don't know

• And how much of this time is generally spent reading about politics and current affairs?

No time at all; Less than ½ hour; ½ hour to 1 hour; More than 1 hour, up to 1 ½ hours; More than 1 ½ hours, up to 2 hours; More than 2 hours, up to 2 ½ hours; More than 2 ½ hours, up to 3 hours; More than 3 hours; Don't know

• On an average weekday, how much time in total do you generally spend on the Internet for private use?

No time at all; Less than ½ hour; ½ hour to 1 hour; More than 1 hour, up to 1 ½ hours; More than 1 ½ hours, up to 2 hours; More than 2 hours, up to 2 ½ hours; More than 2 ½ hours, up to 3 hours; More than 3 hours; Don't know

• And how much of this time is generally spent online for getting information about politics and current affairs?

No time at all; Less than ½ hour; ½ hour to 1 hour; More than 1 hour, up to 1 ½ hours;

More than 1 ½ hours, up to 2 hours; More than 2 hours, up to 2 ½ hours; More than 2 ½ hours, up to 3 hours; More than 3 hours; Don't know

Media Skepticism

Thinking about the news media in general—that is, national television news, the daily newspapers you are most familiar with, and news magazines—please indicate the extent to which you agree with each of the following statements:

• I think they are accurate.

Strongly disagree; Disagree; Somewhat disagree; Neither agree or disagree; Somewhat agree; Agree; Strongly agree

• I think they are fair.

Strongly disagree; Disagree; Somewhat disagree; Neither agree or disagree; Somewhat agree; Agree; Strongly agree

• I think they are tell the whole story.

Strongly disagree; Disagree; Somewhat disagree; Neither agree or disagree; Somewhat agree; Agree; Strongly agree

• I think about news stories before I accept them as believable.

Strongly disagree; Disagree; Somewhat disagree; Neither agree or disagree; Somewhat agree; Agree; Strongly agree

• It is important to critically evaluate what news stories say.

Strongly disagree; Disagree; Somewhat disagree; Neither agree or disagree; Somewhat agree; Agree; Strongly agree

• I think news reporters usually try to be as objective as they possibly can be.

Strongly disagree; Disagree; Somewhat disagree; Neither agree or disagree; Somewhat

agree; Agree; Strongly agree

Religiosity

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with each of the following statements:

• I am a strong believer in God.

Strongly disagree; Disagree; Somewhat disagree; Neither agree or disagree; Somewhat agree; Agree; Strongly agree

• Without religious faith, the rest of my life would not have much meaning.

Strongly disagree; Disagree; Somewhat disagree; Neither agree or disagree; Somewhat agree; Agree; Strongly agree

• I refer to teachings from my religion when making important decisions in my life.

Strongly disagree; Disagree; Somewhat disagree; Neither agree or disagree; Somewhat agree; Agree; Strongly agree

Please answer the following questions by choosing from response options available:

• How often do you attend religious services?

Several times a week; Every week; Nearly every week; 2-3 times a month; About once a month; Several times a year; About once or twice a year, Less than once a year; Never

• How often do you pray outside of religious services?

Several times a day; Roughly once a day; A few times a week; Roughly once a week; Occasionally; Never

• How important is religion in your daily life?

Extremely important; Very important; Moderately important; Slightly important; Not at all important

Media Use

Exposure

People get information, news, opinions from a variety of media sources these days. Thinking about information sources other than the news media in general—that is, national television news, the daily newspapers you are most familiar with, and news magazines—please indicate how often do you use the following sources:

• How many days in a typical week do you use traditional religious media (that is, religious television, religious newspapers, religious radio programs, religious periodicals) for information, news, and opinions?

• How many days in a typical week do you use religious websites for information, news, and opinions?

• How many days in a typical week do you use social networking sites (SNSs) such as Facebook and Twitter for information, news, and opinions?

• How many days in a typical week do you use such social media as blogs, YouTube, podcasts, and Wikipedia for information, news, and opinions?

Reliance

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with each of the following statements:

• I rely on traditional religious media (that is, religious television, religious newspapers, religious radio programs, religious periodicals) for information, news, and opinions.

Strongly disagree; Disagree; Somewhat disagree; Neither agree or disagree; Somewhat agree; Agree; Strongly agree

• I rely on traditional religious websites for information, news, and opinions.

Strongly disagree; Disagree; Somewhat disagree; Neither agree or disagree; Somewhat agree; Agree; Strongly agree

• I rely on social networking sites (SNSs) such as Facebook and Twitter for information, news, and opinions.

Strongly disagree; Disagree; Somewhat disagree; Neither agree or disagree; Somewhat agree; Agree; Strongly agree

• I rely on such social media as blogs, YouTube, podcasts, and Wikipedia for information, news, and opinions.

Strongly disagree; Disagree; Somewhat disagree; Neither agree or disagree; Somewhat agree; Agree; Strongly agree

Attention

Please indicate how much attention do you pay to the following information sources when you use them for information, news, and opinions:

• How much attention do you pay to traditional religious media (that is, religious television, religious newspapers, religious radio programs, religious periodicals) when you use them for information, news, and opinions?

Not at all; A little; A moderate amount; A lot, A great deal

• How much attention do you pay to religious websites when you use them for information, news, and opinions?

Not at all; A little; A moderate amount; A lot, A great deal

• How much attention do you pay to social networking sites (SNSs) such as Facebook and Twitter when you use them for information, news, and opinions?

Not at all; Rarely; Occasionally; A moderate amount; A great deal

• How much attention do you pay to such social media as blogs, YouTube, podcasts, and Wikipedia when you use them for information, news, and opinions?

Not at all; Rarely; Occasionally; A moderate amount; A great deal

False Consensus

Abortion

• Do you think abortions should be illegal in all circumstances?

Yes or No

• Do you think abortions should be legal under any circumstances?

Yes or No

• In your opinion, what percentage of the American population agrees that abortions should be illegal in all circumstances?

• In your opinion, what percentage of the American population agrees that abortions should be legal under any circumstances?

Same-sex Marriage

• Do you think marriages between homosexuals should be recognized by the law as valid, with the same rights as traditional marriages?

Yes or No

• Do you think marriages between homosexuals should be not recognized by the law as valid, with the same rights as traditional marriages?

• In your opinion, what percentage of the American population agrees that marriages between homosexuals should be recognized by the law as valid, with the same rights as traditional marriages?

• In your opinion, what percentage of the American population agrees that marriages between homosexuals should not be recognized by the law as valid, with the same rights as traditional marriages?

LGBT Adoption Rights

• Do you think gay or lesbian couples should be legally permitted to adopt children?

Yes or No

• Do you think gay or lesbian couples should not be legally permitted to adopt children?

Yes or No

• In your opinion, what percentage of the American population agrees that gay or lesbian couples should be legally permitted to adopt children?

• In your opinion, what percentage of the American population agrees that gay or lesbian couples should not be legally permitted to adopt children?

Marijuana

• Do you favor the use of marijuana being legal?

Yes or No

• In your opinion, what percentage of the American population favors the use of marijuana being legal?

• In your opinion, what percentage of the American population opposes the use of marijuana being legal?

Death Penalty

• Do you favor the death penalty for persons convicted of murder?

Yes or No

• Do you oppose the death penalty for persons convicted of murder?

Yes or No

• In your opinion, what percentage of the American population favors the death penalty for persons convicted of murder?

• In your opinion, what percentage of the American population opposes the death penalty for persons convicted of murder?

Gun Control

• Do you think the federal government should make it more difficult for people to buy a gun than it is now?

Yes or No

• Do you think the federal government should make it easier for people to buy a gun than it is now?

Yes or No

• In your opinion, what percentage of the American population agrees that the federal government should make it more difficult for people to buy a gun than it is now?

• In your opinion, what percentage of the American population agrees that the federal government should make it easier for people to buy a gun than it is now?

Affirmative Action

• Do you favor allowing universities to increase the number of black students studying at their schools by considering race along with other factors when choosing students?

Yes or No

• Do you oppose allowing universities to increase the number of black students studying at their schools by considering race along with other factors when choosing students?

• In your opinion, what percentage of the American population favors allowing universities to increase the number of black students studying at their schools by considering race along with other factors when choosing students?

• In your opinion, what percentage of the American population opposes allowing

universities to increase the number of black students studying at their schools by considering race along with other factors when choosing students?

Global Warming

• Assuming it's happening, do you think a rise in the world's temperatures would be caused mostly by human activity?

Yes or No

• Assuming it's happening, do you think a rise in the world's temperatures would be caused mostly by natural causes?

Yes or No

• In your opinion, what percentage of the American population agrees that a rise in the world's temperatures would be caused mostly by human activity?

• In your opinion, what percentage of the American population agrees that a rise in the world's temperatures would be caused mostly by natural causes?

Aid to the Poor

• Do you think federal spending on aid to the poor should be increased?

Yes or No

• Do you think federal spending on aid to the poor should be decreased?

Yes or No

• In your opinion, what percentage of the American population agrees that federal spending on aid to the poor should be increased?

• In your opinion, what percentage of the American population agrees that federal spending on aid to the poor should be decreased?

Presidential Job Approval

• Do you approve of the way Donald Trump is handling his job as president?

Yes or No

• Do you disapprove of the way Donald Trump is handling his job as president?

• In your opinion, what percentage of the American population approves of the way Donald Trump is handling his job as president?

• In your opinion, what percentage of the American population disapproves of the way Donald Trump is handling his job as president?

Age

• How old were you on your last birthday?

Gender

• Are you male or female?

Male; Female; Other; Don't know/Refused

Race and Ethnic Background

• Are you of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin, such as Mexican, Puerto Rican or Cuban?

• Which of the following describes your race?

White; Black or African American; Asian or Asian American; some other race; Don't know/Refused

Marital Status

• Are you currently married, widowed, divorced, separated, or have you never been married?

Education

• What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

Less than high school (Grades 1-8 or no formal schooling)

High school incomplete (Grades 9-11 or Grade 12 with NO diploma)

High school graduate (Grade 12 with diploma or GED certificate)

Some college, no degree (includes community college)

Two year associate degree from a college or university

Four year college or university degree/Bachelor's degree (e.g. BS, BA, AB)

Some postgraduate or professional school, no postgraduate degree (e.g. some graduate school)

Postgraduate or professional degree, including master's doctorate, medical or law degree (e.g., MA, MS, PhD, MD, JD, graduate school)

Don't know/Refused

Income

• Last year, that is in 2016, what was your total family income from all sources, before taxes?

Less than $10,000; 10 to under $20,000; 20 to under $30,000; 30 to under $40,000; 40 to under

$50,000; 50 to under $75,000; 75 to under $100,000; 100 to under $150,000; $150,000 or More; Don't know/Refused

Party Identification

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

Strong Democrat; Not very strong Democrat; Independent, close to Democrat; Independent; Independent, close to Republican; Not very strong Republican; Strong Republican; Other party; Don't know/Refused

Political Ideology

• We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. In general, would you describe your political views as...

Extremely liberal; liberal; slightly liberal; moderate or middle-of-the-road; slightly conservative; conservative; extremely conservative; Don't know/Refused

Religion

• What is your present religion, if any?

Protestant (Baptist, Methodist, non-denominational Lutheran, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, Episcopalian...etc.); Roman Catholic (Catholic); Mormon (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or LDS); Orthodox (Greek, Russian, or some other Orthodox church); Jewish (Judaism); Muslim (Islam); Buddhist; Hindu; Atheist (do not believe in God); Agnostic (not sure if there is a God); Something else (SPECIFY); Nothing in particular; Don't know/Refused

• If Protestant,

As far as your present religion, what denomination or church, if any, do you identify with most closely?

Baptist; Methodist; Lutheran; Presbyterian; Pentecostal (Assemblies of God, Four-Square Gospel)

Episcopalian (uh-pisk-uh-PALE-yun) or Anglican; Church of Christ, or Disciples of Christ (Christian Church); Congregational or United Church of Christ; Holiness

(Nazarenes, Wesleyan Church, Salvation Army); Reformed (include Reformed Church in America; Christian Reformed); Church of God; Nondenominational or Independent Church; Something else (SPECIFY); Or none in particular; Don’t know/Refused

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Table 1. A Comparison of Demographic Variables

Dataset Variable	The Present Data (N = 1,001)	The 2016 GSS (N = 2,869)	The 2016 ANES (N = 4,271)
Age (Mean)	40.34 ($SD = 12.98$)	49.16 ($SD = 17.69$)	47.92 ($SD = 19.87$)
Gender (Female)	62.6%	55.5%	52.3%
Race (White)	81.1%	73.2%	71.9%
Education (Median)	Four-year college ($SD = 1.50$)	High school graduate ($SD = 2.96$)	Associate degree ($SD = 2.32$)
Income (Median)	\$50,000 – 59,999 ($SD = 3.13$)	\$50,000 – 59,999 ($SD = 5.83$)	\$55,000 – 59,999 ($SD = 8.08$)

Note. Income refers to total household income.

Table 2. A Comparison of Religious Composition

	The Present Data (N = 1,001)	The 2014 Pew Data (N = 35,071)
Christian	*67.9*	*70.6*
Protestant	36.6	46.5
Catholic	20.4	20.8
Mormon	1.7	1.6
Orthodox	1.1	.5
Other Christian	8.1	1.2
Non-Christian faiths	*3.7*	*5.9*
Jewish	1.6	1.9
Muslim	.4	.9
Buddhist	.3	.7
Hindu	.6	.7
Other non-Christian	.8	1.8
Unaffiliated	*28.3*	*22.8*
Atheist	7.9	3.1
Agnostic	8.5	4.0
Nothing in particular	11.9	15.8
Don't know/Refused	*.2*	*.6*

Note. All numbers are in percentage (%).

Table 3. Means and Alpha Coefficients for Major Variables

	Min – Max	*Mean*	*SD*	*α*
Control variables				
Political ideology (Extremely liberal – Extremely conservative)	1 – 7	3.78	1.76	
Mainstream media exposure (TV + Radio + Newspaper)	3 – 24	8.33	3.25	.68
Exogenous variables				
Religiosity	6 – 41	22.39	11.41	.94
Media skepticism	1 – 7	4.66	1.01	.79
Endogenous variables				
Religious media use (Exposure × Attention × Reliance)				.79
Social media use (Exposure × Attention × Reliance)				.76

Note. Standardized variables were used for religiosity due to different scales. See Tables 4 and 5 for the mean of each item concerning the use of alternative media and false consensus, respectively.

Table 4. Means and Standard Deviations for Alternative Media Use Items

	Min – Max	*Mean*	*SD*
Exposure	*1 – 8*		
Traditional religious media (RM1)		1.69	1.59
Religious websites (RM2)		1.54	1.31
Relationship-oriented social media (SM1)		4.74	2.77
Content-oriented social media (SM2)		3.75	2.39
Attention	*1 – 5*		
RM1		3.28	1.08
RM2		3.37	1.05
SM1		3.29	.95
SM2		3.36	.89
Reliance	*1 – 7*		
RM1		1.95	1.53
RM2		1.92	1.49
SM1		3.68	1.86
SM2		3.61	1.83

Table 5. Means and Standard Deviations for False Consensus Items

	Min – Max	*Mean*	*SD*
Abortion should be illegal. (FC1)	-40 – 55	1.08	15.56
Same-sex marriage should not be recognized by the law. (FC2)	-32 – 66	11.58	18.49
Gay/lesbian couples should not be permitted to adopt children. (FC3)	-26 – 74	19.68	19.28
The use of marijuana should be illegal. (FC4)	-37 – 63	1.44	17.71
Favoring the death penalty for persons convicted of murder (FC5)	-48 – 46	4.83	16.62
Opposing stricter gun control (FC6)	-31 – 68	8.37	17.25
Opposing affirmative action (FC7)	-22 – 78	32.53	17.88
Approval of presidential job performance (FC8)	-44 – 55	-5.59	17.06

Note. Standardized variables were summated to form the formative measure of false consensus in main analyses due to different scales.

Table 6. Correlations of Major Variables

	RE	MS	RM	SM	FC
Religiosity (RE)	-				
Media Skepticism (MS)	.10** (.11**)	-			
Religious Media Use (RM)	.44** (.43**)	-.03 (-.005)	-		
Social Media Use (SM)	.02 (-.004)	-.04 (-.02)	.21** (.08*)	-	
SM1	.05 (.05)	-.04 (-.04)	.19* (.19*)	-	.01 (.01)
SM2	-.02 (-.02)	-.04 (-.04)	.21** (.21**)	-	.003 (.003)
False Consensus (FC)	.24** (.24**)	.16** (.16**)	.20** (.19**)	.01 (.003)	-

Note. Results based on the original dataset; Numbers in parentheses based on the imputed dataset; SM1 denotes relationship-oriented social media; SM2 content-oriented social media; Correlation between SM1 and SM2 is .52**; ** significant at the .01 level; * significant at the .05 level

Table 7. Correlations of Formative Indicators for False Consensus

	FC1	FC2	FC3	FC4	FC5	FC6	FC7	FC8
FC1	-							
FC2	.19**	-						
FC3	.19**	.67**	-					
FC4	.12**	.29**	.26**	-				
FC5	.04	.02	.03	-.07*	-			
FC6	.11**	.23**	.23**	.19**	.03	-		
FC7	-.01	.16**	.17**	.11**	.07*	.15**	-	
FC8	.17**	.21**	.20**	.09**	.09**	.26**	.04	-

Note. FC1: Abortion should be illegal; FC2: Same-sex marriage should not be recognized by the law; FC3: Gay/lesbian couples should not be permitted to adopt children; FC4: The use of marijuana should be illegal; FC5: Favoring the death penalty for persons convicted of murder; FC6: Opposing stricter gun control; FC7: Opposing affirmative action; FC8: Approval of presidential job performance; ** significant at the .01 level; * significant at the .05 level

Table 8. Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis on Major Variables

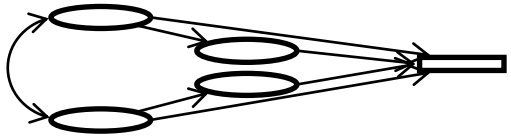
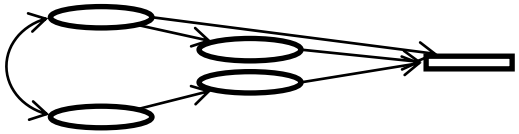
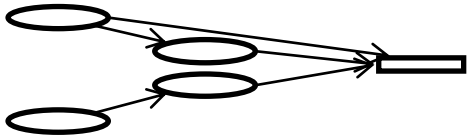
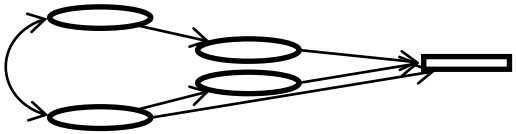
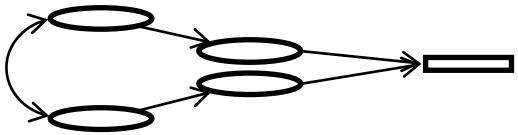
Measure		Number of Items	x^2	p	CMIN/ DF	GFI	CFI	NFI	RMSEA	SRMR
Religiosity		6	89.505	.000	9.945	.953	.980	.978	.117	.020
Media Skepticism	Original	6	236.989	.000	26.232	.908	.897	.893	.197	.117
	Final	5	11.883	.036	2.377	.993	.997	.994	.046	.016
Religious Media Use	Original	6	612.548	.000	68.061	.798	.792	.790	.320	.102
	Final	5	222.698	.000	44.540	.895	.905	.904	.258	.058
Social Media Use	Original	6	353.866	.000	39.318	.862	.754	.750	.242	.088
	Final	5	164.816	.000	32.963	.922	.842	.839	.221	.077

Table 9. Squared Multiple Correlations of the Items of Latent Variables

Construct		Squared Multiple Correlations					
Religiosity	Indicators	Belief in God	Referring to Teachings	Meaningful	Important	Attendance	Prayer
		.747	.888	.841	.866	.521	.709
Media Skepticism	Indicators	Accuracy	Fairness	Telling the whole story	Believability	Evaluate	Objectivity
	Original	.742	.857	.730	.000	.014	.659
	Final	.742	.857	.730	-	.014	.659
Religious Media Use	Indicators	Exposure 1	Attention 1	Reliance 1	Exposure 2	Attention 2	Reliance 2
	Original	.552	.315	.849	.556	.370	.861
	Final	.537	-	.846	.550	.340	.886
Social Media Use	Indicators	Exposure 3	Attention 3	Reliance 3	Exposure 4	Attention 4	Reliance 4
	Original	.284	.492	.622	.266	.362	.471
	Final	.305	.470	.780	.185	-	.395

Note. Exposure 1, attention 1, and reliance 1 are for traditional religious media; Exposure 2, attention 2, and reliance 2 for religious websites; Exposure 3, attention 3, and reliance 3 for SNSs; Exposure 4, attention 4, and reliance 4 for content-oriented social media.

Table 10. Competing Models and Goodness-of-Fit Measures

Model	Paths Excluded	Tested Model	$\chi^2(df)$	GFI	NFI	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR
$\boldsymbol{M_u}$	None		1049.231 (215)	.882	.901	.919	.077	.064
$\boldsymbol{M_t}$	H2		1051.522 (216)	.882	.901	.919	.077	.064
$\boldsymbol{M_c1}$	H2, H7		1059.165 (217)	.881	.900	.919	.077	.068
$\boldsymbol{M_c2}$	H1		1055.305 (216)	.881	.900	.919	.077	.064
$\boldsymbol{M_c3}$	H1, H2		1057.802 (217)	.881	.900	.919	.077	.064

Note. M_u represents the proposed model and M_t the best model. M_c1, M_c2, M_c3 are a series of nested models within M_u; GFI = goodness-of-fit index; NFI = normed fit index; CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; SRMR = standardized root mean square residual

Table 11. Standardized Coefficients in Competing Models

Hypothesis	Exogenous	Endogenous	M_t	M_c1	M_c2	M_c3	M_u
1	Religiosity	False consensus	.13*	.13*	-	-	.13*
2	Media skepticism	False consensus	-	-	.07	-	.06
3	Religiosity	Religious media use	.55**	.55**	.55**	.55**	.55**
4	Media skepticism	Social media use	-.11*	-.11*	-.11*	-.11*	-.11*
5	Religious media use	False consensus	.06	.06	.15**	.14**	.07
6	Social media use	False consensus	-.01	-.01	-.01	-.01	-.01
7***	Religiosity	Media skepticism	.11**	-	.11**	.11**	.11**
RQ1	Religiosity	Social media use	.08	.08	.08	.08	.08
RQ2	Media skepticism	Religious media use	-.10**	-.10**	-.10**	-.10**	-.10**
Covariate	Ideology	False consensus	.25**	.24**	.24**	.27**	.22**
	Mainstream media exposure	False consensus	.02	.02	.01	.01	.02

Note. * significant at .05; ** significant at .01; *** Hypothesis 7 tests the correlation between religiosity and media skepticism.

Table 12. Tests of Individual False Consensus Models and Their Standardized Coefficients

Hypothesis	Exogenous	Endogenous	FC1	FC2	FC3	FC4	FC5	FC6	FC7	FC8
1	Religiosity	False consensus	.12*	.13*	.16**	.01	.06	-.07	.08	.03
2	Media skepticism	False consensus	-	.09*	-	-.13**	-	-	-	-
3	Religiosity	Religious media use	.55**	.55**	.55**	.55**	.55**	.55**	.55**	.55**
4	Media skepticism	Social media use	-.11*	-.11*	-.11*	-.11*	-.11*	-.11*	-.11*	-.11*
5	Religious media use	False consensus	.06	.10	.06	.11*	-.10	.10	-.15*	.07
6	Social media use	False consensus	.05	-.07	-.04	-.04	.07	-.08*	-.02	.08*
7***	Religiosity	Media skepticism	.11**	.11**	.11**	.11**	.11**	.11**	.11**	.11**
RQ1	Religiosity	Social media use	.08	.08	.08	.08	.08	.08	.08	.08
RQ2	Media skepticism	Religious media use	-.10**	-.10**	-.10**	-.10**	-.10**	-.10**	-.10**	-.10**
Covariate	Ideology	False consensus	.01	.11*	.10*	.16*	.03	.18**	.08	.37**
	Mainstream media exposure	False consensus	.05	-.003	.01	.01	-.03	-.01	-.01	.06

Note. FC1: Abortion should be illegal; FC2: Same-sex marriage should not be recognized by the law; FC3: Gay/lesbian couples should not be permitted to adopt children; FC4: The use of marijuana should be illegal; FC5: Favoring the death penalty for persons convicted of murder; FC6: Opposing stricter gun control; FC7: Opposing affirmative action; FC8: Approval of presidential job performance; * significant at the .05 level; ** significant at the .01 level; *** denotes correlation coefficients

Table 13. A Comparison of Models with Different Types of Social Media Use

Hypothesis	Exogenous	Endogenous	Model 1	Model 2
1	Religiosity	False consensus	.13*	.13*
2	Media skepticism	False consensus	-	-
3	Religiosity	Religious media use	.55**	.55**
4	Media skepticism	Social media use	-.11*	-.07
5	Religious media use	False consensus	.06	.06
6	Social media use	False consensus	-.01	.003
7***	Religiosity	Media skepticism	.11**	.11**
RQ1	Religiosity	Social media use	.10*	-.03
RQ2	Media skepticism	Religious media use	-.10**	-.10
Covariate	Ideology	False consensus	.25**	.25**
	Mainstream media exposure	False consensus	.02	.02

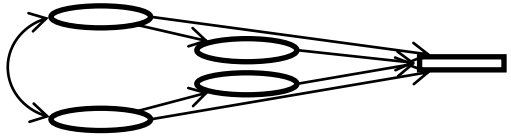
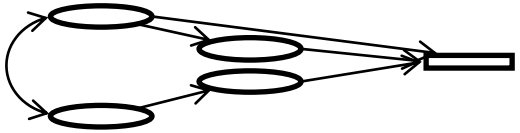
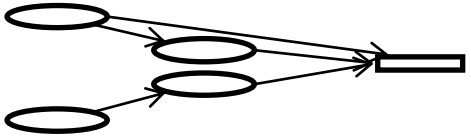
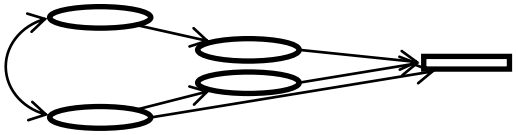
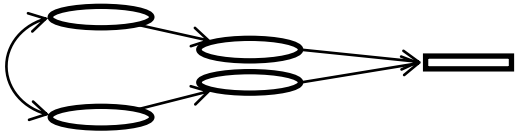
Note. Model 1 includes the use of relationship-oriented social media; Model 2 the use of content-oriented social media; * significant at .05; ** significant at .01; *** Hypothesis 7 tests the correlation between religiosity and media skepticism.

Table 14. Tests of Individual False Consensus Models with Different Types of Social Media Use

Model	Hypothesis	Exogenous	Endogenous	FC1	FC2	FC3	FC4	FC5	FC6	FC7	FC8
1	4	Media skepticism	Social media use	-.11*	-.11*	-.11*	-.11*	-.11*	-.11*	-.11*	-.11*
	6	Social media use	False consensus	.06	-.06	-.04	-.03	.07	-.09*	-.01	.07
	RQ1	Religiosity	Social media use	.10*	.10*	.10*	.10*	.10*	.10*	.10*	.10*
2	4	Media skepticism	Social media use	-.07	-.07	-.07	-.07	-.07	-.07	-.07	-.07
	6	Social media use	False consensus	.03	-.09*	-.03	.02	.03	-.01	.00	.08
	RQ1	Religiosity	Social media use	-.03	-.03	-.03	-.03	-.03	-.03	-.03	-.03

Note. Model 1 includes the use of relationship-oriented social media; Model 2 the use of content-oriented social media; FC1: Abortion should be illegal; FC2: Same-sex marriage should not be recognized by the law; FC3: Gay/lesbian couples should not be permitted to adopt children; FC4: The use of marijuana should be illegal; FC5: Favoring the death penalty for persons convicted of murder; FC6: Opposing stricter gun control; FC7: Opposing affirmative action; FC8: Approval of presidential job performance; * significant at .05; ** significant at .01

Table 15. Competing Models and Goodness-of-Fit Measures with Ross et al.'s False Consensus Measure

Model	Paths Excluded	Tested Model	$\chi^2(df)$	GFI	NFI	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR
$\boldsymbol{M_u}$	None		1049.139 (215)	.882	.901	.919	.077	.064
$\boldsymbol{M_t}$	H2		1051.422 (216)	.882	.901	.919	.077	.064
$\boldsymbol{M_c1}$	H2, H7		1059.065 (217)	.881	.900	.919	.077	.068
$\boldsymbol{M_c2}$	H1		1055.204 (216)	.881	.900	.919	.077	.064
$\boldsymbol{M_c3}$	H1, H2		1057.693 (217)	.881	.900	.919	.077	.064

Note. M_u represents the proposed model and M_t the best model. M_c1, M_c2, M_c3 are a series of nested models within M_u; GFI = goodness-of-fit index; NFI = normed fit index; CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; SRMR = standardized root mean square residual

Table 16. Standardized Coefficients in Competing Models with Ross et al.'s False Consensus Measure

Hypothesis	Exogenous	Endogenous	M_t	M_c1	M_c2	M_c3	M_u
1	Religiosity	False consensus	.13*	.13*	-	-	.13*
2	Media skepticism	False consensus	-	-	.07	-	.06
3	Religiosity	Religious media use	.55**	.55**	.55**	.55**	.55**
4	Media skepticism	Social media use	-.11*	-.11*	-.11*	-.11*	-.11*
5	Religious media use	False consensus	.06	.06	.15**	.14**	.07
6	Social media use	False consensus	-.01	-.01	-.01	-.01	-.01
7***	Religiosity	Media skepticism	.11**	-	.11**	.11**	.11**
RQ1	Religiosity	Social media use	.08	.08	.08	.08	.08
RQ2	Media skepticism	Religious media use	-.10**	-.10**	-.10**	-.10**	-.10**
Covariate	Ideology	False consensus	.24**	.24**	.24**	.27**	.22**
	Mainstream media exposure	False consensus	.02	.02	.01	.01	.02

Note. * significant at .05; ** significant at .01; *** Hypothesis 7 tests the correlation between religiosity and media skepticism.

Table 17. Tests of Individual False Consensus Models with Ross et al.'s False Consensus Measure

Hypothesis	Exogenous	Endogenous	FC1	FC2	FC3	FC4	FC5	FC6	FC7	FC8
1	Religiosity	False consensus	.12*	.13*	.16**	.01	.06	-.07	.08	.03
2	Media skepticism	False consensus	-	.09*	-	-.13**	-	-	-	-
3	Religiosity	Religious media use	.55**	.55*	.55**	.55**	.55**	.55**	.55**	.55**
4	Media skepticism	Social media use	-.11*	-.11*	-.11*	-.11*	-.11*	-.11*	-.11*	-.11*
5	Religious media use	False consensus	.06	.10	.06	.11*	-.10	.10	-.15**	.07
6	Social media use	False consensus	.05	-.07	-.04	-.04	.07	-.08*	-.02	.08*
7***	Religiosity	Media skepticism	.11**	.11**	.11**	.11**	.11**	.11**	.11**	.11**
RQ1	Religiosity	Social media use	.08	.08	.08	.08	.08	.08	.08	.08
RQ2	Media skepticism	Religious media use	-.10**	-10**	-.10**	-10**	-.10**	-.10**	-.10**	-.10**
	Ideology	False consensus	.01	.11*	.10*	.12*	.03	.18**	.08	.37**
Covariate	Mainstream media exposure	False consensus	.05	-.003	.01	.01	-.03	-.01	-.01	.06

Note. FC1: Abortion should be illegal; FC2: Same-sex marriage should not be recognized by the law; FC3: Gay/lesbian couples should not be permitted to adopt children; FC4: The use of marijuana should be illegal; FC5: Favoring the death penalty for persons convicted of murder; FC6: Opposing stricter gun control; FC7: Opposing affirmative action; FC8: Approval of presidential job performance; * significant at the .05 level; ** significant at the .01 level; *** denotes correlation coefficients

Table 18. Correlations between media skepticism and indicators of social media use

	Exposure 1	Attention 1	Reliance 1	Exposure 2	Attention 2	Reliance 2
Media skepticism	.02	-.10**	-.08*	-.01	-.05	-.04

Note. Exposure 1, Attention 1, Reliance 1 are about SNSs such as Facebook and Twitter; Exposure 2, Attention 2, Reliance 2 are related to content-oriented social media such as YouTube and blogs; * significant at .05; ** significant at .01

LIST OF FIGURES

Dimensionality	Source: Christianity	Source: Non-Christianity
Unidimensional	Calzo & Ward (2009)	Al-Menayes (1997)
Multidimensional	Armfield & Holbert (2003) Bobkowski (2009) Golan & Day (2010) Hamilton & Rubin (1992) Punyanunt-Carter et al. (2010)	Croucher et al. (2008, 2010) Golan & Kiousis (2010) Sanaktekin et al. (2013)

Figure 1. Conceptualization of religiosity

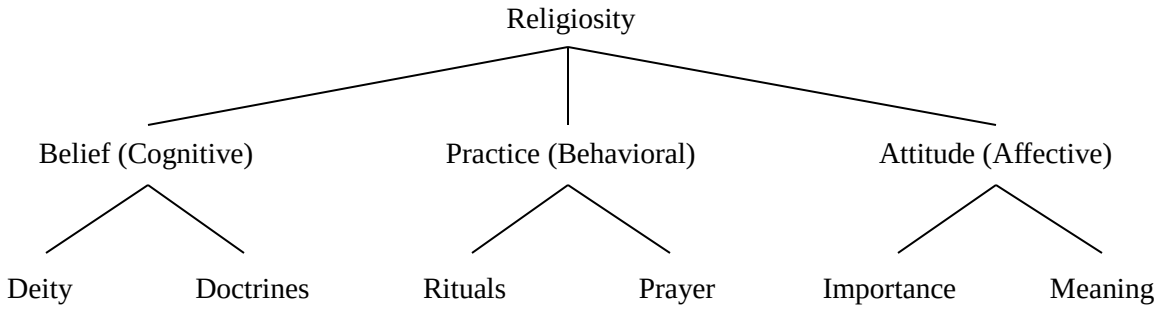


Figure 2. Operationalization of religiosity

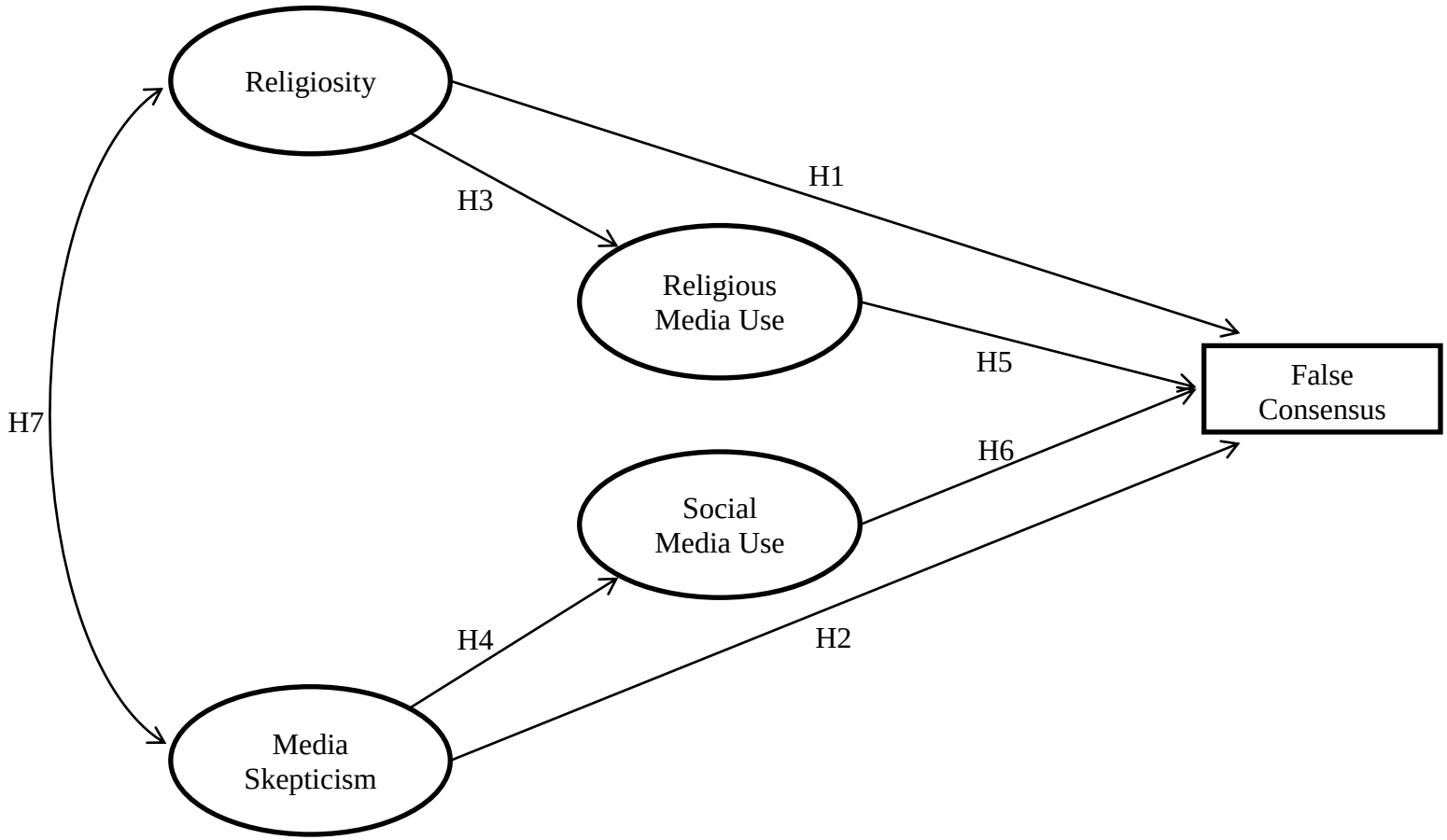


Figure 3. The Proposed Model and Hypothesized Paths

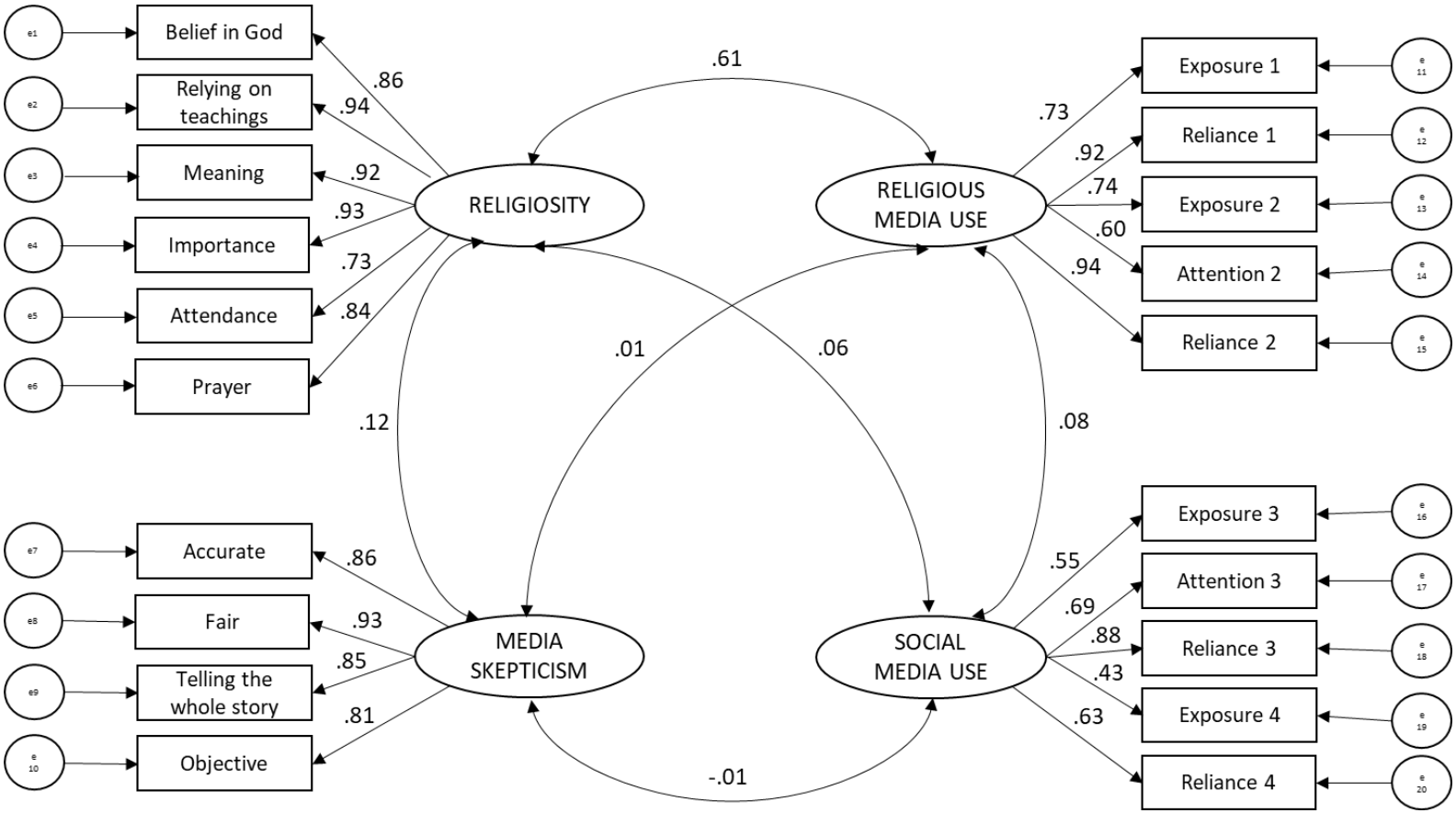


Figure 4. The Measurement Model

Note. The parameters among the latent variables refer to the correlations between the pairs of factors, while the coefficients between the indicators and factors the standardized regression weights; Exposure 1 and reliance 1 are for traditional religious media; Exposure 2, attention 2, and reliance 2 for religious websites; Exposure 3, attention 3, and reliance 3 for SNSs; Exposure 4 and reliance 4 for content-oriented social media.

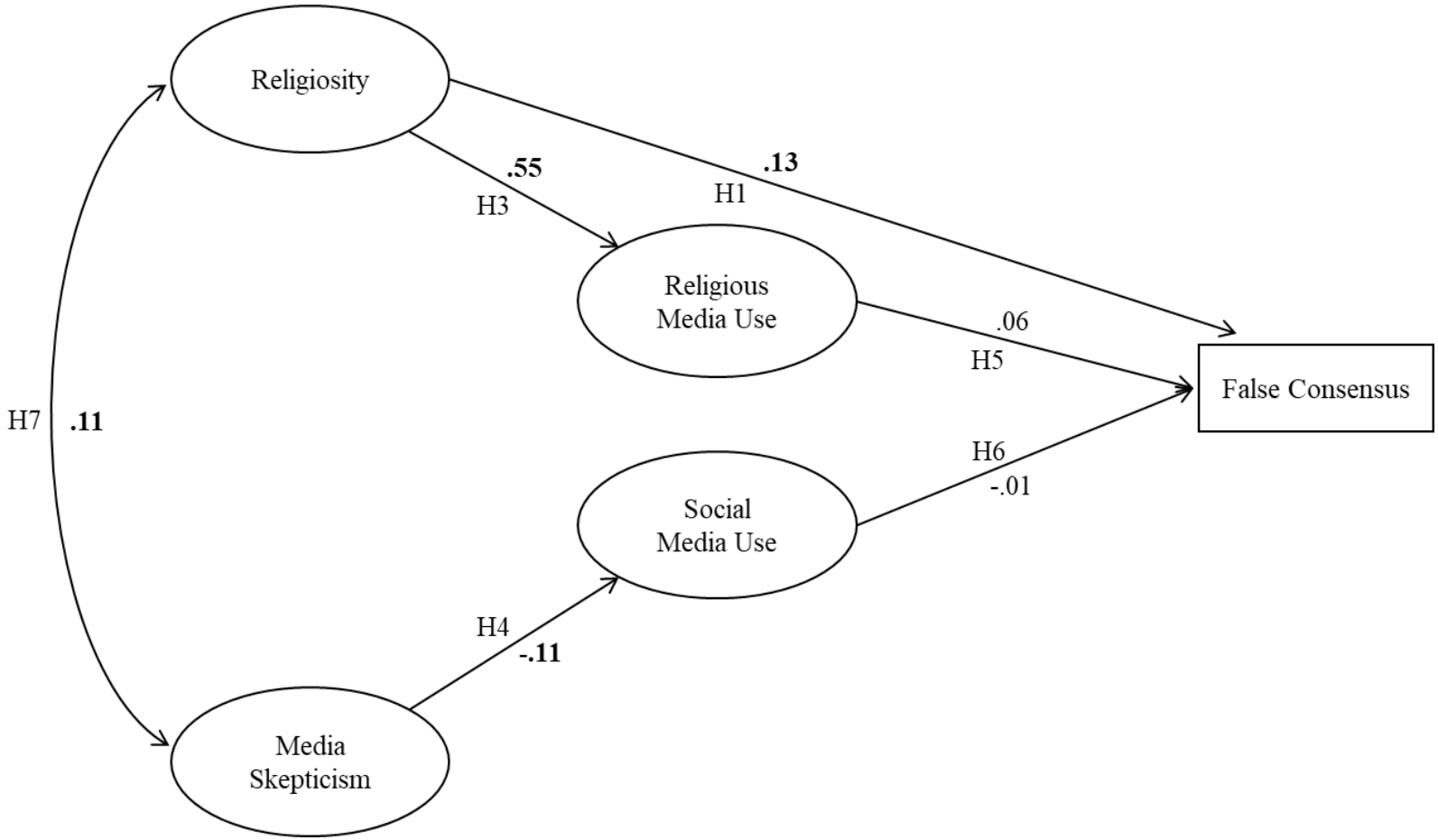


Figure 5. Final Model ($\boldsymbol{M_t}$) and Its Coefficients

Note. Coefficients in bold are statistically significant.