

Introduction

We entered this election year with many Americans feeling increasingly negative about their political counterparts. Importantly, traditional media and social media alike are becoming increasingly partisan. The unfortunate result being that republicans and democrats receive different information and find it easier than ever to gather information amiable to one's beliefs. This presentation helps to explain why we got here and why it is such a difficult cycle to break. Information gathering is crucial to the operation of a democracy as the public must make sense of a nearly infinite quantity of information. However, most people have limited time to dedicate to gathering political information meaning the public must be selective in what information they gather in preparation for political action. There are clear biases in this information gathering – most notably, people tend to avoid information that challenges their beliefs. Accordingly, many engage in motivated reasoning which means they allow their currently held beliefs to guide their selection and perception of new information. This project aims to better understand which individual differences make people less likely to entertain and seek discrepant information. Specifically, we examine the extent to which the personality traits of openness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability are related to searching for politically unbalanced information.

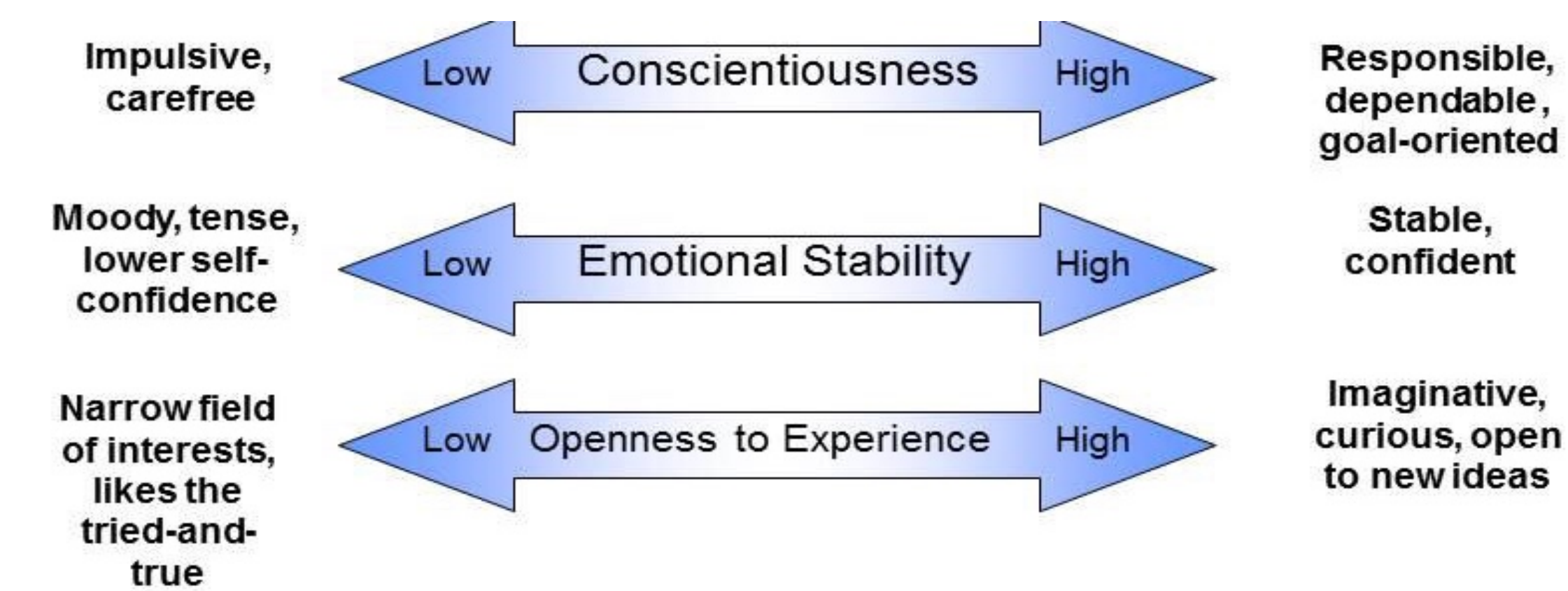


Figure 1: Description of openness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability spectrums.

(Tupes & Christal, 1961, as cited by Daft, 2007)

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Higher openness will be positively correlated with balanced information searches.

Hypothesis 2: Higher conscientiousness will be positively correlated with balanced information searches.

Hypothesis 3: Higher emotional stability will be positively correlated with balanced information searches.

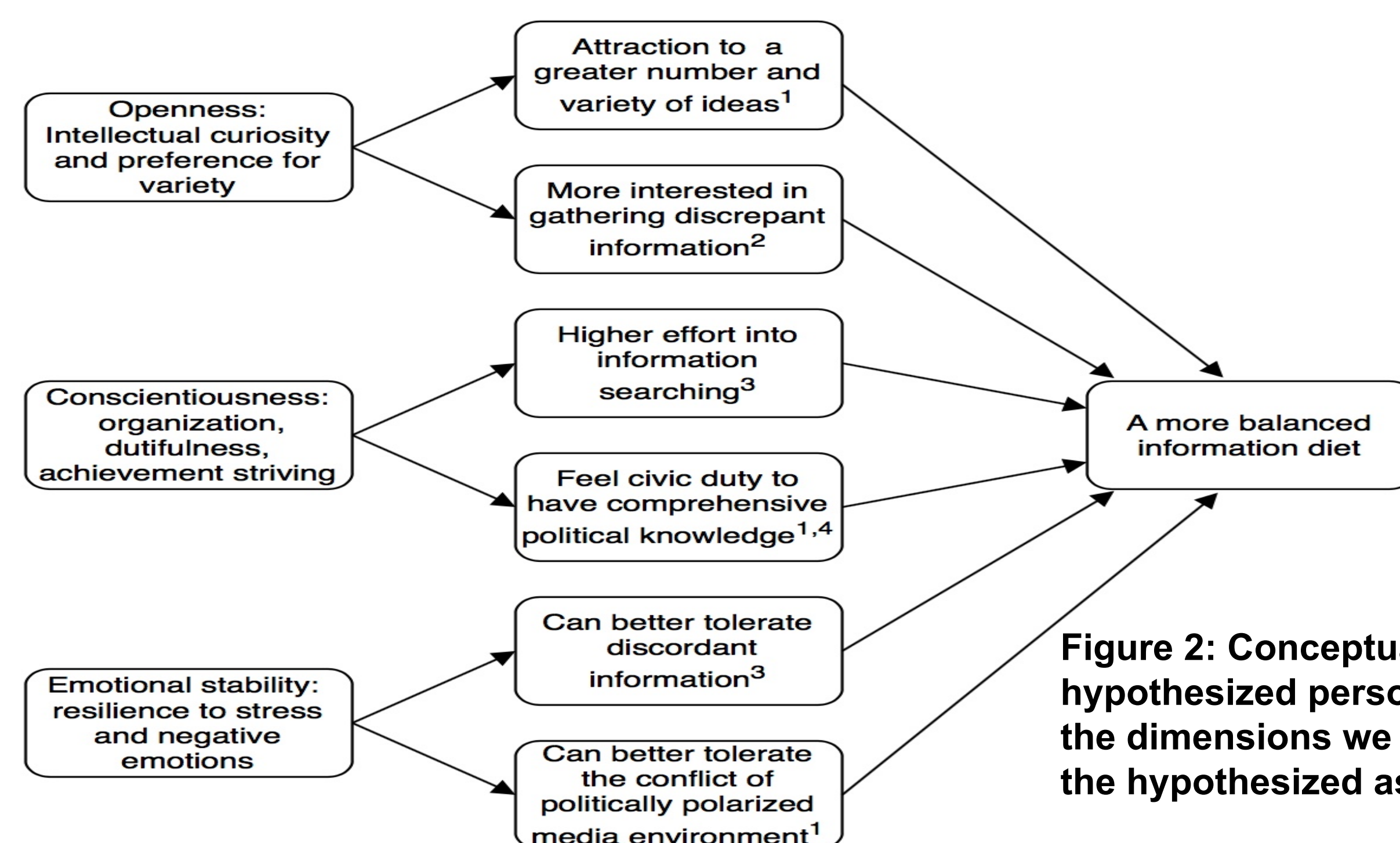


Figure 2: Conceptual map of the hypothesized personality traits and the dimensions we reason support the hypothesized association.

Methodology

1. Participants took a personality assessment in which they indicated the extent to which they agreed with statements measuring their Openness, Conscientiousness, and Emotional Stability in addition to other personality traits.

2. A week later, participants entered a deliberately overwhelming campaign simulation. Information about each candidate scrolled down the participants' screens. Participants clicked on the pieces of information they wanted to know more about and read the more detailed piece of news. After voting in the primary, this process was repeated in the general election.

3. Correlations were calculated for each personality trait and its relationship to volume of searches, comparability of information category searched for each party, and the proportion of total searches made for the in-party candidate.



Figure 3: Examples of information displayed during primary simulation.

Results

Hypothesis 1: Higher openness will be positively correlated with balanced information searches

- Not confirmed
- Openness was correlated with total unique searches and volume of out-party searches

Hypothesis 2: Higher conscientiousness will be positively correlated with balanced information searches

- Not confirmed
- Conscientiousness was correlated with a higher proportion of in-party information search in primary and total simulation

Hypothesis 3: Higher emotional stability will be positively correlated with balanced information searches

- Not confirmed
- Emotional stability was just short of a statistically significant correlation with proportion of in-party information search

Discussion

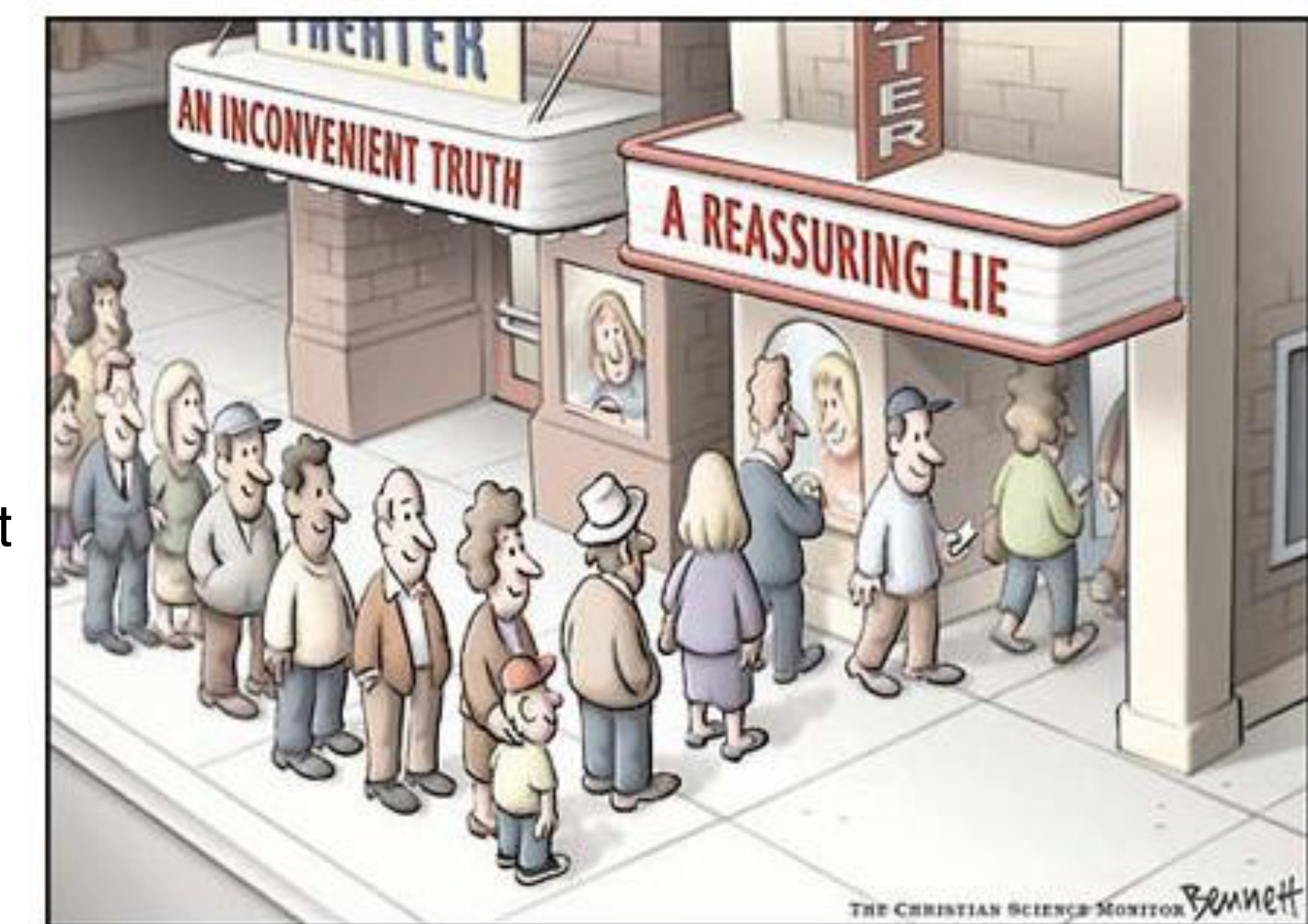
1. New media and traditional media alike are making it increasingly easy for individuals to avoid engaging with ideas they do not like.

2. The campaign simulation, with its fictitious candidates, eliminated biases about candidates. Further, all information was equally accessible and the media environment did not simulate in-person discussion networks or online "echo chambers".

3. Future research can investigate the relationship between personality and effective use of political information.

4. Future research can examine the impact of "fake news" and other distractions that limit an individual's ability to gather relevant and reliable information.

5. Future research can take a more longitudinal approach to determine how personality might impact not just information gathering but long-term retention.



Acknowledgements



References

- ¹Gerber, A. S., Huber, G. A., Doherty, D., & Dowling, C. M. (2010). Personality Traits and the Consumption of Political Information. *American Politics Research*, 39(1), 32-84.
- ²Clarke, P., & James, J. (1967). The Effects of Situation, Attitude Intensity and Personality on Information-Seeking. *Sociometry*, 30(3), 235.
- ³Heinström, J. (2003). Five personality dimensions and their influence on information behavior. *Information Research*, 9(1), 9-1.
- ⁴Mondak, J. J. (2010). *Personality and the Foundations of Political Behavior*. Cambridge University Press.