

# How Does Facebook Use for Politics Motivate Unfriending and Muting? The Role of Joy on Opinion Self-disclosure After Unfriending

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Motivated reasoning theory posits that individuals constantly engage in directional motivation which lets individuals use defensive strategies to defend their preexisting beliefs or identities. But how do people feel after they employ defensive strategies to manage political behaviors on Facebook? Results from a nationally representative sample from a Qualtrics survey panel (N = 505) showed that the political motivation of Facebook use for politics can impact the consequent management behaviors of exposing to posted political content by others and

disclosure of personal opinions on Facebook. Interestingly, individuals who felt joy after unfriending or muting others for political reasons reported they would disclose more on Facebook after doing so. This study indicates the important role of political motivation and the emotion of joy in the formation of echo chambers on social media.

*Keywords:* unfriending, Facebook political motivation, motivating reasoning, opinion-disclosure, joy

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The development of social networking sites provides users a platform to present their political opinions and discuss politics with others (boyd, 2010). For example, Facebook has become a “hot bed” for political discussion and people are often motivated to use Facebook as a source of political information (Gramlich, 2019). As a result, it stands to reason that one might encounter opposing political viewpoints on Facebook. Individuals are found to consistently engage in motivated reasoning when processing news and political information (Leeper & Slothuus, 2014; Taber et al., 2001). Motivated reasoning theory posits that individuals have two types of goals when processing information (Kunda, 1987; 1990). First, accuracy motivations are concerned with finding accurate arguments to judge the information they encounter. Second, directional motivations care about protecting pre-existing beliefs by

adopting different defensive strategies. These goals, when met, are linked to positive emotions (Colleoni et al., 2014). Might unfriending those with opposing political views, an action in line with defensive strategies, spark joy? Research is lacking on whether people feel joy after being motivated to remove people from their Facebook experience due to opposing political viewpoints.

Two presentational defensive strategies that individuals often employ to manage political behaviors on Facebook are unfriending and hiding friends from their friends' lists (Hayes et al. 2015). In addition, Hayes et al. (2015) argued that political Facebook management behaviors include both disclosure management behaviors and exposure management behaviors (e.g., unfriending others). Following this line of research, we intend to investigate how the motivations of using Facebook to get political information will impact both self-disclosure and exposure avoidance behaviors claimed by previous research (Hayes et al., 2015). In our case, we include unfriending and muting behaviors when encountering opposing opinions or discomforting political content on Facebook. What's more, muting behaviors include both unfollowing and taking a break from others which are the most common exposure management behaviors on Facebook.

The United States is increasingly politically polarized (Sunstein, 2009; Stroud, 2010). We assume that politically-driven Facebook management behaviors might contribute to polarization as individuals are purposely limiting their exposure to congruent information. Netflix's television series *Tidying Up With Marie Kondo* suggests that people should get rid of items that do not "spark joy." In this polarized political environment where tensions run hot, will unfriending or muting "friends" due to opposing political viewpoints "spark joy?" How might the role of a person's motivation to use Facebook come into play? Might the joy felt also lead to increased self-disclosure? We intend to explore the feelings of joy individuals have after they unfriend or mute others for posted political content. We believe the current political climate has created an opportunity for this examination to resonate.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Motivated reasoning theory investigates how individuals favor information aligned with their previous beliefs and are skeptical about incongruent information (Taber &

Lodge, 2006). Individuals have two types of motivations when processing information including accuracy motivation and directional motivations (Kunda, 1987; 1990). In particular, accuracy motivation requires individuals to seek accurate information to form accurate judgments. Whereas directional motivation lets individuals use defensive strategies to defend their preexisting beliefs or identities.

Flynn et al. (2017) argue that when individuals process political information they default to directional motivations. Defensive processing is mostly triggered when individuals perceive information that contradicts what they believe and information that they find offensive or uncomfortable. For example, after seeing a post with an opposing political viewpoint on Facebook individuals might choose to scroll down the posts to avoid viewing the post on Facebook. Motivated reasoning theory is related to cognitive dissonance theory which suggests that people feel mental discomfort when confronted with information contradictory to their beliefs (Festinger, 1957). In order to avoid cognitive dissonance, individuals tend to select information they agree with or avoid interacting with incongruent information (Stroud, 2010).

These defensive strategies are constantly employed on social media such as Facebook. Facebook is one of the most popular social media platforms that people use for news information. Around 43% of adults in the United States get news information from Facebook according to Pew Research Center data (Gramlich, 2019). When it comes to political information, individuals use Facebook often with directional motivations to engage with people who have similar political attitudes. Previous research focuses on how selective exposure to political disagreement will lead to polarization (Garrett & Stroud, 2014). Users were found to consciously filter out incongruent information by applying filter tools online (Yang et al., 2017) which creates a more homogenous social media environment. However, they overlooked the significant influence of Facebook use for political motivation for unfriending or muting behaviors. This study is important because of the potential implications for increased political polarization.

### **Political Motivations to Use Facebook**

Motivations to use social media can be classified into political and non-political motivations (Knoll et al., 2020). Non-political motivations refer to information seeking for entertainment or relationship maintenance which does not necessarily include political

information seeking. Political motivations for Facebook use mean that individuals intentionally seek political information or political discussion on Facebook (Heiss, Knoll, & Matthes, 2019). Previous exploratory research found that individuals were very likely to unfriend others because of political posts on social media (Sibona & Walczak, 2011). Several studies have consistently found political motivation as a precursor to unfriending on Facebook such as when political motivation drives the unfriending, weaker ties tend to be unfriended by those with strong political stances (Bode, 2016; Yang et al., 2017; John & Dvir-Gvirsman, 2015).

The current study investigates both unfriending and muting behaviors available on Facebook and whether the reason Facebook is used (i.e., political motivations) will lead to unfriending or muting behaviors due to political reasons. We can assume that those who are more motivated to use Facebook for political motivations are more likely to adopt the behaviors of unfriending or muting for others' political posts, but the literature is silent on how Facebook political motivation predicts different types of defensive reactions which may contribute to polarization and echo chambers on social media. Therefore, the following hypothesis is posited.

H1: Facebook use for political motivations is positively related to (a) unfriending for political reasons and (b) muting others from their news feed on Facebook.

### **Self-Disclosure on Facebook**

Facebook users consciously filter out opposing viewpoints; they necessarily create a more homogenous environment (Yang et al., 2017). Previous research suggests that people prefer opinion-reinforcing political information (see Frey, 1986 for a review). When there is more control over news or information exposure, as is true for social media where a person can choose who to “friend” or “follow,” people tend to choose the news information that is congruent with their existing views (Mutz, 2006; Mutz & Martin, 2001) but that more homogenous groups tend to lead to more polarized discussion (Sobkowicz & Sobkowicz, 2012). A consistent explanation for this phenomenon is cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957). According to the theory, people experience positive emotions when they are confronted with like-minded opinions and negative emotions when faced with opposing viewpoints (Colleoni et al., 2014). Thus, people seek and create homogenous groups that reflect their own beliefs, social status, etc., in an effort to minimize cognitive

dissonance (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954) and to have a more pleasurable emotional experience.

The creation of homogenous groups is made increasingly possible in the social media realm and has led to a body of literature exploring information exposure on social networking sites (see Colleoni et al., 2014). The potential for political polarization (Stroud, 2010) and lower political tolerance may occur as a result of homogenous personal networks while the opposite may be true in a more heterogeneous network (Mutz, 2006). This sentiment makes the study of active removal of friends from one's feed one of importance because when people purposely define their political exposure from friends on Facebook, they may be further polarizing themselves in a vicious cycle. Research is scant on the issue of whether people tend to feel more comfortable expressing their opinions in homogenous groups than in heterogeneous. We add to the literature on this important issue, especially in increasingly politically polarized times and suggest that people who have unfriended or muted others due to political reasons will feel more comfortable disclosing opinions on Facebook.

H2: Facebook use for politics is positively related to opinion self-disclosure after (a) unfriending for political reasons and (b) muting others from news feed on Facebook.

### **Joy & Unfriending Behavior**

Previous research focuses on identifying the motivations for “unfriending” such as getting away from polarizing content (e.g., political commentary) (John & Dvir-Gvirsman, 2015) and frequent unfavored posts (Sibona & Walczak, 2011). Some studies showed that people who were being unfriended on Facebook had negative emotional experiences such as higher levels of negative feelings when being unfriended by close friends or romantic partners (Bevan et al., 2012). Individuals who were unfriended by others experienced an expectancy violation, meaning an unexpected break in a relationship, which led to negative feelings (Bevan et al., 2014). Here, we focus on people actively unfriending others.

According to the cognitive dissonance theory, people experience positive emotions when they are confronted with like-minded opinions and negative emotions when faced with opposing viewpoints (Colleoni et al., 2014). We suggest that directional motivations for unfriending or muting people on Facebook, namely to defend their preexisting political

beliefs, will lead to increases in positive emotions such as joy. Joy can be seen as a fundamental positive emotion which is elicited by “events construed as accomplishments or progress toward one’s goals” (Fredrickson, 1998, p. 304). However, this approach does not separate joy from other positive emotions. More scholars considered joy as a discrete positive emotion with its own appraisal which is often used as its synchronom happiness (Ellsworth & Smith, 1988). When we appraise a situation that is turning out well, then we are most likely to experience joy (Watkins, 2020). In our study, joy is considered as a specific and discrete positive emotion which relies on the appraisal of specific context.

The effects of joy on information processing have mixed results. Broaden and build perspective argues that joy is a positive emotion which can broaden individual attention and increase cognitive flexibility which in turn strengthen the ability to cope with unsatisfactory situations (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005). However, some research found that the appraisal of joy leads to heuristic processing which means that joy leads to low attention and low cognitive processing (Lazarus, 1991). Despite these mixed results, joy plays a role in processing information.

For example, some scholars found that when people successfully prevent themselves from exposure to information challenging their pre-existing beliefs, they have feelings of pleasure (Westen et al., 2006). Although there are some studies about the positive emotions felt after avoiding political content, there still needs to be more research on unfriending or muting on social media platforms. Previous research about unfriending explored the emotions of people who were unfriended by others but not the emotions of people who did the unfriending (Bevan et al., 2012). We seek to test whether people may feel joy when they are motivated to remove people due to opposing political viewpoints. In addition, the potential positive consequences of unfriending for the person removing contacts have not been investigated yet.

There is a rationale behind the possibility of feelings of joy after unfriending or muting others on Facebook. For example, some popular media have suggested that a method to decrease stress can be either digitally cleaning out email inboxes or following social media accounts that “spark joy” (Carson & Friedman, 2019). Furthermore, one personal account suggested being happier after deleting people off their social media

platforms (Mckelvey, 2019). Adding to past research, our study plans to unpack the relationship between unfriending contacts on Facebook and positive emotional responses.

Therefore, we ask if deleting friends who posted unfavorable political contents can “spark joy.” We suggest that deleting friends on Facebook would decrease stress, and mitigate potential complications created by context collapse, which would lead to higher levels of joy. We are interested in the role of feeling of joy on the relationship between Facebook political motivation and individuals’ opinion disclosure. Therefore, the following two research questions are raised.

RQ1: After unfriending others, how does the feelings of joy impact the relationship between Facebook for politics and opinion self-disclosure?

RQ2: After muting others, how does the feelings of joy impact the relationship between Facebook for politics and opinion self-disclosure?

## **METHODS**

After getting the IRB approval, a nationally representative survey was conducted using Qualtrics survey software. Participants (N = 505) were recruited via Qualtrics Panels after initial screening based on age and use of a Facebook account (at least 10 minutes a day) and received monetary compensation. Ideology, gender, income and education quotas were also applied to avoid imbalances. All participants were Facebook users, and between 18 and 99 years old. The average age of the sample was 38.7 (SD =13.54), 49.3 % were male, and 50.7 % were female. Sixty-two percent indicated they had completed some college. Regarding race, 68.7% were White, 14.9% were Black, 10.3% were Hispanic, 4.6% were Asian and 0.6% were Native American. Five participants selected “other” for race. Participants were widely distributed in terms of income, with 18% in less than \$25,000, 22.6% in \$25,000 to \$49,999, 18.4% in \$50,000 to \$74,999, 13.7% in \$75,000 to \$99,999, and 15% in \$100,001-150,000 and 12.3% in \$150,001 or more.

### **Procedure**

Participants selected to participate were asked about Facebook use, ideology and ideology strength and some of the demographic items. Next, they were asked about their political motivations for using Facebook. Then they were asked how often they unfriended or muted a friend due to political content that friend posted. These behaviors were chosen

because of the current functionalities afforded by Facebook for either muting or unfriending. Participants were given a short explanation of the behavior and its consequences (ex. Unfriending someone is a choice to remove a person from your Facebook friends' list. You are not able to see their private posts anymore). Participants were then asked items about their opinion disclosure and the feelings of joy after they had unfriended or muted someone on Facebook due to political content they had posted. T

## Measures

A group of independent variables served as predictors of muting behaviors and unfriending behavior including political Facebook motivation, Facebook network sizes, types of friends, time spent on Facebook, political interest and ideology, and feeling of joy after unfriending or muting others for political reasons.

**Political Facebook Motivation.** Individuals' motivation to use Facebook for politics was measured by a four-item scale adapted from Bode (2016). Participants were asked to answer the following items using a 5-likert scale (1 = *not at all important* to 5 = *extremely important*): "Overall, how important are Facebook to you personally when it comes to...(a) keeping up with political news; (b) debating or discussing political issues with others; (c) finding other people who share your views about important political issues; and (d) recruiting people to get involved with political issues that matter to you." All the items were ensured reliability and combined into an index ( $\alpha = .90$ ;  $M = 2.71$ ;  $SD = 1.24$ ).

**Social Network Size.** Social network size on Facebook was measured by asking participants to answer the following question about: Approximately how many total Facebook friends do you have? ( $M = 703.68$ ;  $SD = 1576.62$ ).

**Types of Friends Unfriended/Muted.** Three most common types of friends on Facebook were identified including friends/family from close social circle, acquaintance, and friends that they are hardly in touch with. Participants were asked to report friends that they unfriend from the following types of friends (participants can pick more than one choice): (a) I unfriended a someone from close social circle (33.1%); (b) an acquaintance I'm not very close to (45.7%); and (c) someone I'm hardly in touch with (48.9%). Similarly, participants were also asked to report friends types they muted friends because of political contents they posted: (a) I muted someone from close social circle (38.6%); (b) an

acquaintance I'm not very close to (48.7%); and (c) someone I'm hardly in touch with (49.9%).

**Time Spent on Facebook.** Adapted from Ellison et al. (2007), participants were asked the following question to report their time spent on Facebook everyday (1 = 0-30 min to 6 = 4+ hours per day): "On a typical day, approximately how many hours do you spend on Facebook?" ( $M = 3.28$ ;  $SD = 1.28$ ).

**Political Ideology Strength.** This item was meant to capture the strength of a person's ideology regardless of whether they lean forwarded more conservative or more liberal. It was a two-item question though participants only answered one of the two items that applied to their ideology on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *not very strong* to 5 = *very strong*) that asked "How strongly would you rate your affiliation with the liberal/conservative political ideology?" The two items were merged into one item to indicate individuals' ideology strength ( $M = 3.12$ ;  $SD = 1.27$ ).

**Political Interest.** Participants were asked to answer the following question to report their interest in politics: "Generally speaking, how interested you are in politics?" ( $M = 3.28$ ;  $SD = 1.28$ ).

**Joy.** The positive feeling of joy after unfriending or muting will be captured using an adapted scale from Shiota et al. (2006). Participants were asked to rate their agreement to the following statements (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*) in the separate condition of unfriends or muting including: (a) I feel joy; (b) I feel cheerful; (c) My life is improving; and (d) This makes me happy. All the items were ensured reliability and combined into an index in the situation of unfriending ( $\alpha = .91$ ;  $M = 4.56$ ;  $SD = 1.36$ ) and muting ( $\alpha = .92$ ;  $M = 4.59$ ;  $SD = 1.35$ ).

Unfriending/muting for political reasons and opinion disclosure in the situation of unfriending and muting for political reasons serve as dependent variables.

**Unfriending for Political Reasons.** Unfriending others because of the political contents they posted was measured by an adapted six-item scale from Bode (2016). Using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*), participants were asked to report their agreement toward the following statements including: When using Facebook, have you ever "unfriended" a person from your friend list because they (a) posted too frequently about politics or political issues; (b) posted something about politics

or political issues that you disagree with or found offensive; (c) argue about political issues on the site with you or someone you know; (d) disagreed with something you posted about politics or political issues; and (e) posted something related to politics or political issues that you worried would offend your other friends or people who follow you. All the items were ensured reliability and combined into an index in the situation of unfriending ( $\alpha = .91$ ;  $M = 3.54$ ;  $SD = 1.68$ ).

**Muting for Political Reasons.** Muting behavior for political reasons was measured using the same items as measuring unfriending above ( $\alpha = .88$ ;  $M = 3.69$ ;  $SD = 1.60$ ).

**Opinion Self-disclosure.** Opinion self-disclosure was measured by 2 items adapted from Wheelless and Grotz (1976). Participants were provided the following context before answer questions: Thinking about the updates you post that go to everyone in your Facebook Friend network AFTER you have “taken a break or un-followed”/unfriended someone with opposing political views. Using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*), opinion self-disclosure was measured by asking participants to report their agreement to the following two statements including: (a) I now feel like I can discuss my feelings about myself on Facebook and (b) I now feel like I can express my personal opinions and beliefs on Facebook. The items were combined into an index in the situation of unfriending ( $r = .70$ ;  $M = 4.36$ ;  $SD = 1.49$ ) and muting ( $r = .64$ ;  $M = 4.32$ ;  $SD = 1.51$ ).

## RESULTS

H1 proposed that Facebook use for politics was positively related to (a) unfriending for political reasons and (b) muting others from news feed on Facebook. Multiple regression was employed to examine political Facebook motivation, friends’ types, Facebook use features, political interest and ideology as predictions of unfriending others because of political content they posted online. Table 1 below reports that the statistics associated with this analysis, and shows that together, these variables accounted for a significant portion of the variance in political unfriending,  $F(1, 478) = 33.75$ ,  $R^2 = .244$ ,  $p < .001$ . Political unfriending was significantly associated with greater Facebook political motivation and was higher when the friends were acquaintances or those who were hardly in touch with. Therefore, H1a was supported.

Similarly, Table 1 below reports that the model accounted for a significant portion of the variance in muting others for political contents they posted,  $F(1, 478) = 34.32$ ,  $R^2 = .255$ ,  $p < .001$ . Political muting was significantly associated with greater Facebook political motivation and was higher when the friends were acquaintances or those who were hardly in touch with. Therefore, H1b was supported.

Table 1  
*Cross-sectional Models Testing Facebook Political Motivation and Unfriending/Muting*

	Unfriending	Muting
<i>Block 1: Demographics</i>		
Gender (female)	-.111	-.096
Education	-.021	.004
Income	.094	.088
Race (white)	.191	.219
Age	-.005	.004
$\Delta R^2$ (%)	7.2%	6.0%
<i>Block 2: Political variables</i>		
Political ideology strength	.04	.071
Political interest	-.014	-.048
$\Delta R^2$ (%)	2.4%	2.8%
<i>Block 3: Facebook use</i>		
Time spent on Facebook	-.033	.019
Social network size	-.000	-.000
$\Delta R^2$ (%)	.5%	1.0%
<i>Block 4: Unfriend/Muting types</i>		
Close social circle	-.225	-.068
Acquittance	-.403*	-.487**
Hardly in touch with	-.575**	-.566**
$\Delta R^2$ (%)	9.0%	10.3%
<i>Block 5</i>		
Facebook political motivation	.394***	.382***
$\Delta R^2$ (%)	5.3%	5.4%
Total $R^2$	24.4%	25.5%

Notes. Sample size = 505. Cell entries are final-entry OLS standardized Beta ( $\beta$ ) coefficients.  
\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

H2 argues that Facebook use for politics was positively related to opinion self-disclosure after (a) unfriending for political reasons and (b) muting others from news feed on Facebook. Multiple regression was employed to examine political Facebook motivation, friends' types, Facebook use features, political interest and ideology as predictions of opinion self-disclosure after they unfriended others for political reasons. Table 2 below

reports that the statistics associated with this analysis, and shows that together, these variables accounted for a significant portion of the variance in self-disclosure after unfriending,  $F(1, 478) = 38.33$ ,  $R^2 = .182$ ,  $p < .001$ . Opinion self-disclosure after unfriending is significantly associated with greater Facebook political motivation and was higher when participants spent more time on Facebook. Therefore, H2a was supported.

Similarly, Table 2 below reports that the model accounted for a significant portion of the variance in opinion self-disclosure after muting others,  $F(1, 478) = 30.81$ ,  $R^2 = .185$ ,  $p < .001$ . Opinion self-disclosure after muting is significantly associated with greater Facebook political motivation and was higher when participants spent more time on Facebook and among those who were more interested in politics in general. Therefore, H2b was supported.

Table 2  
*Cross-sectional Models Testing Facebook Political Motivation and Opinion Self-disclosure After Unfriending and Muting*

	Disclosure after unfriending	Disclosure after Muting
<i>Block 1: Demographics</i>		
Gender (female)	.081	.004
Education	-.014	-.072
Income	.034	.068
Race (white)	-.059	-.022
Age	.01	.003
$\Delta R^2$ (%)	1.6%	1.7%
<i>Block 2: Political variables</i>		
Political ideology strength	-.073	-.035
Political interest	.087	.118*
$\Delta R^2$ (%)	3.4%	4.6%
<i>Block 3: Facebook use</i>		
Time spent on Facebook	.176***	0.178***
Social network size	-.000	-.000*
$\Delta R^2$ (%)	6.4%	6.4%
<i>Block 4: Unfriend/Muting types</i>		
Close social circle	-.144	.09
Acquittance	.037	-.074
Hardly in touch with	.017	-.151
$\Delta R^2$ (%)	0.3%	0.6%
<i>Block 5</i>		
Facebook political motivation	.387***	.354***
$\Delta R^2$ (%)	6.6%	5.3%
Total $R^2$	18.2%	18.5%

Notes. Sample size = 505. Cell entries are final-entry OLS standardized Beta ( $\beta$ ) coefficients.  
\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

RQ1 asked that after unfriending others, how the feelings of joy would impact the relationship between using Facebook for politics and opinion self-disclosure. To test the mediating effects of feeling of joy, a simple mediator model was estimated using the bootstrapping procedure (5,000 samples) of the “PROCESS” macro model 4 (Hayes, 2017). Model 4 allows us to test both main effects as well as mediation effects. In this model political Facebook motivation served as an independent variable, and feeling of joy served as a mediator, and opinion self-disclosure behavior served as the dependent variable. Figure 1 below shows that feelings of joy ( $B=.13$ ,  $SE=.03$ , 95% CI [.08 to .20]) was a partial mediator as the direct effect of Facebook political motivation was still significant ( $p < .001$ ) after feelings of joy entered the model. Thus, feeling of joy mediates the relationship between using Facebook for political motivation and opinion self-disclosure after people unfriended others on Facebook.

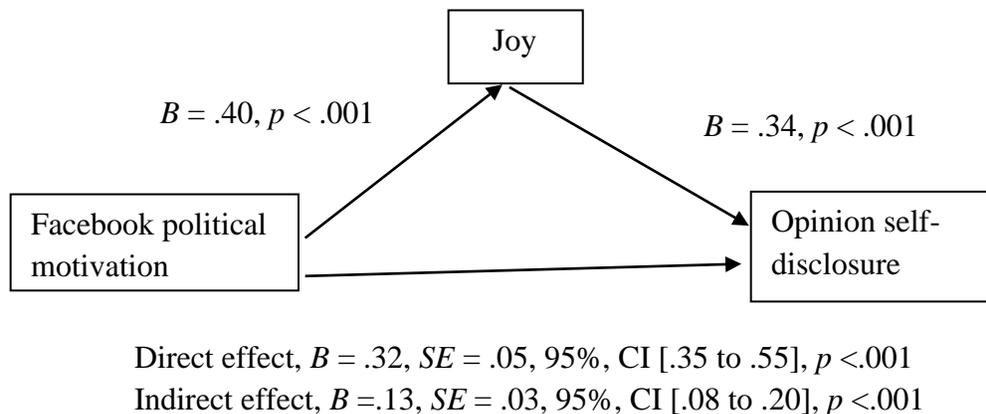


Figure 1. Mediation path of feeling of joy after unfriending

RQ2 asked that after muting others, how the feelings of joy would impact the relationship between using Facebook for politics and opinion self-disclosure. To test the mediating effects of feeling of joy, a simple mediator model was estimated using the bootstrapping procedure (5,000 samples) of the “PROCESS” macro model 4 (Hayes, 2017). Model 4 allows us to test both main effects as well as mediation effects. In this model political Facebook motivation served as an independent variable, and feeling of joy served as a mediator, and opinion self-disclosure behavior served as the dependent variable. Figure 1 below shows that feelings of joy ( $B=.16$ ,  $SE=.03$ , 95% CI [.10 to .23]) was a partial mediator as the direct effect of Facebook political motivation was still significant ( $p$

< .001) after feelings of joy entered the model. Thus, feeling of joy mediates the relationship between using Facebook for political motivation and opinion self-disclosure after people muted others on Facebook.

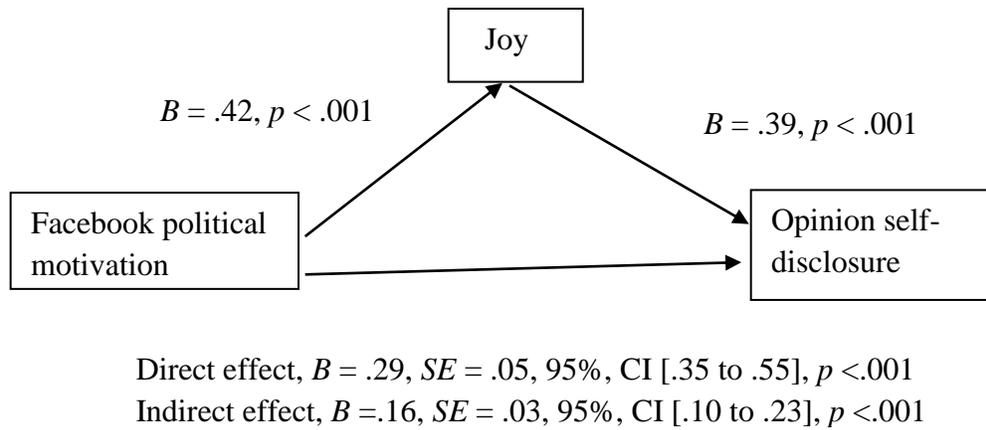


Figure 2. Mediation path of feeling of joy after muting

## DISCUSSION

The stark divide amongst Americans along ideological lines is poignant. Some attribute some of division to information people are exposed to on social media platforms and in particular, Facebook. Here we find that a person's motivation for Facebook use is important in determining the information diversity they are exposed to and also note the positive emotion people feel when they remove those with incongruent political viewpoints from view.

Interestingly, the reasons you use Facebook may have a great impact on the types of content you want to see from friends, especially in the context of political information. The initial motivation of Facebook use for politics can impact the consequent exposure to posted political content from others on newsfeeds as well as disclosure of personal opinions on Facebook. Specifically, use of Facebook for political information is strongly related to individuals' Facebook exposure management behaviors of unfriending or muting others for political reasons. Also, political motivation for Facebook use also predicts the self-disclosure behaviors after unfriending or muting others. These results align with the directional motivation individuals have when processing political information (Leeper & Mullinix, 2018).

This study also explored the role of joy as a result of either muting friends or unfriending them in mediating the relationship between Facebook political motivation and self-disclosure. Our findings suggest that people have increased feelings of joy after exposure management (ex. when they unfriend someone due to political reasons) which subsequently leads to more self-disclosure of opinions. In addition, our study explores how individuals constantly manage their exposure and disclosure of Facebook political content, a topic of special importance in the increasingly partisan environment in the U.S.

Facebook political motivation was found to be a significant predictor of unfriending and muting behaviors. This tells us that the user filtration such as using online management tools to avoid contradicting or annoying political contents posted by friends can be driven by the motivation to use Facebook for political information. Previous research found that user filtration behavior is strongly related to political disagreement online (Yang et al., 2017) but did not examine political reasons as a motivation for Facebook use. Additionally, the types of friends individuals unfriended or muted also significantly impacted their decision to unfriend or mute others. It is not surprising to see that individuals intended to unfriend someone that they were hardly in touch with (48.9%) compared to an acquaintance that they were not very close to (45.7%) and someone from a close social circle (33.1%). Similarly, individuals were more likely to mute others that they were hardly in touch with (49.9%) compared to an acquaintance that they were not very close to (48.7%) and someone from a close social circle (38.6%). Only those who were not from the close social circle had a higher likelihood of unfriending or muting.

This study also found that those who were more motivated to use Facebook for politics had a higher disclosure of opinions after unfriending others or muting others. This practice might increase the likelihood of an echo chamber. Additionally, this study also found that using Facebook for politics can positively impact self-disclosure of opinions under certain conditions. For example, when participants spend more time on Facebook, individuals will be more likely to disclose opinions after unfriending or muting. Also, among those who were more interested in politics, individuals were more likely to disclose opinions after muting others. It is interesting to see that network size does not impact opinion self-disclosure after unfriending or muting despite previous research found that network size is a significant predictor of self-presentation and disclosure (Vitak, 2012).

This means that Facebook political motivation overrides the effects of network size in predicting opinion self-disclosure.

Additionally, the results provide an interesting angle to look at the feelings of joy individuals who unfriend or mute others may have and how the feelings of joy will impact their future self-disclosure behavior. Interestingly, feelings of joy after unfriending or muting serve as a mediator when it comes to opinion disclosure. This means that the result has two important findings. First, individuals were more likely to feel more joy after unfriending or muting if they are motivated to use Facebook for politics. The mass media characteristics of social media in the current political climate are becoming more salient which may cause irritation and upset amongst users (O'Sullivan & Carr, 2018). Thus, they may be more likely to engage in exposure management behaviors of individuals on Facebook in order to avoid cognitive dissonance and increase positive emotions. Second, individuals who felt joy after unfriending or muting others for political reasons indicated they would disclose more on Facebook. This result can be explained by people's increased positive emotions as a result of a minimization of cognitive dissonance and the increased likelihood of social interaction with others of like interests and beliefs. As a discrete positive emotion, joy has the tendency to increase the scope of attention and cognitive processing of information (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005). Therefore, after unfriending or muting, the feelings of joy can increase opinion self-disclosure behaviors. However, our results cannot indicate how long the feelings of joy remain afterwards and affect the desire to self-disclose opinions. The length of the effects of joy on inducing opinion self-disclosure may be a subject of future research.

Furthermore, this study has a couple limitations. First, the key dependent variables of this study are behaviors of unfriending, muting, and opinion self-disclosure. Although unfriending and muting are the most common types of exposure management behaviors, it might not be exhaustive because some people might just choose to ignore the unfavorable political content on their social media news feed. Second, the cross-sectional survey study could not show the causality of the relationship between motivation of Facebook usage and political unfriending or muting behaviors. However, results predict strong connections between using Facebook for political motivation and possibility to unfriend or mute others for political contents they posted. Future studies can adopt experimental methods to test

the causal effect of motivation of Facebook use and avoidance behaviors. Future studies can also look at other types of emotions individuals have after they unfriend or mute others for political reasons. The positive emotions felt by increasing the homogeneity of political information is an area ripe for future research. Additionally, future work may seek to understand whether the consequences of unfriending and muting Facebook friends does indeed lead to echo chambers and/or more politically polarized (and even radicalized) groups. Further research is needed to understand the boundaries of tolerance and willingness to feel discomfort or negative emotions even in polarized political climates.

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