Talking about divisive issues

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Who am I?

▶ Political communication scholar with a focus on exposure to counter-attitudinal information

Goals for Today

▶ What influences how we process information?

▶ What does counter attitudinal communication look like and how do we approach it?

▶ What are the consequences of how we engage?

▶ What should we do?

Our biases…

▶ Confirmation bias

Our biases…

▶ Cognitive dissonance

I am a foodie

Biology is hard to override
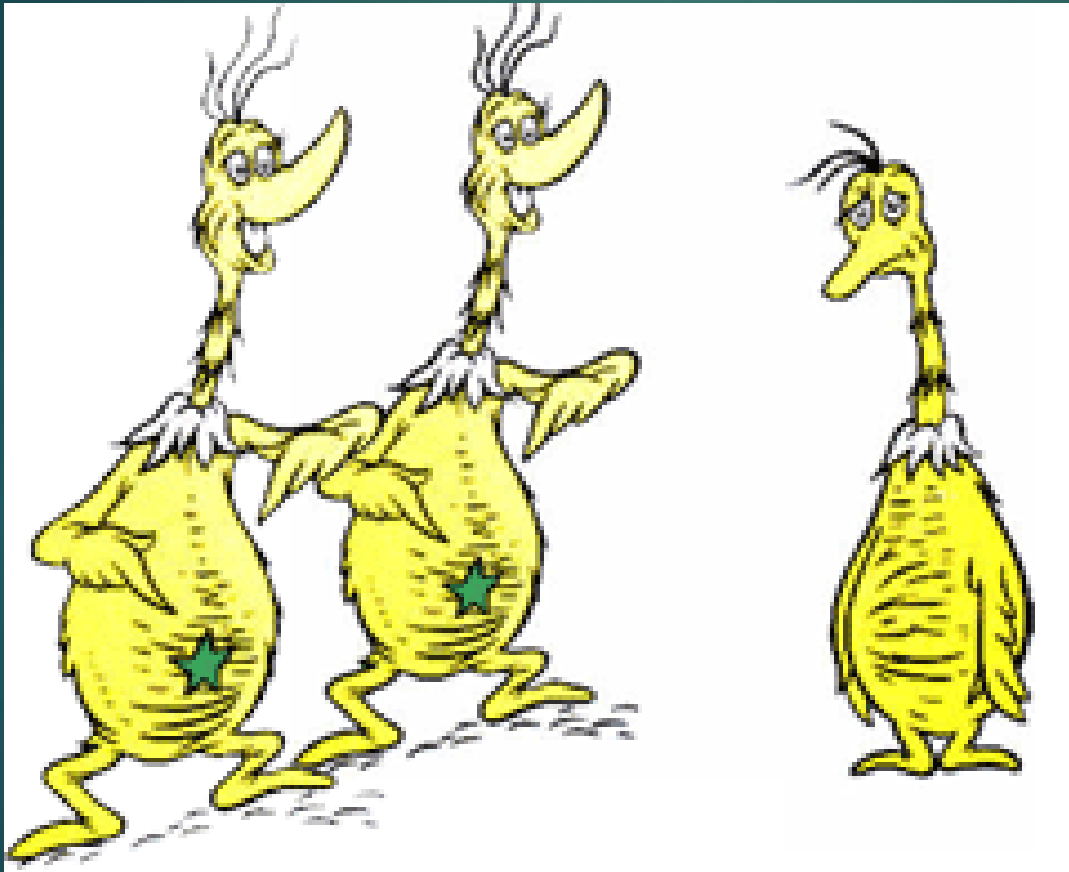
Cheetos are the perfect food
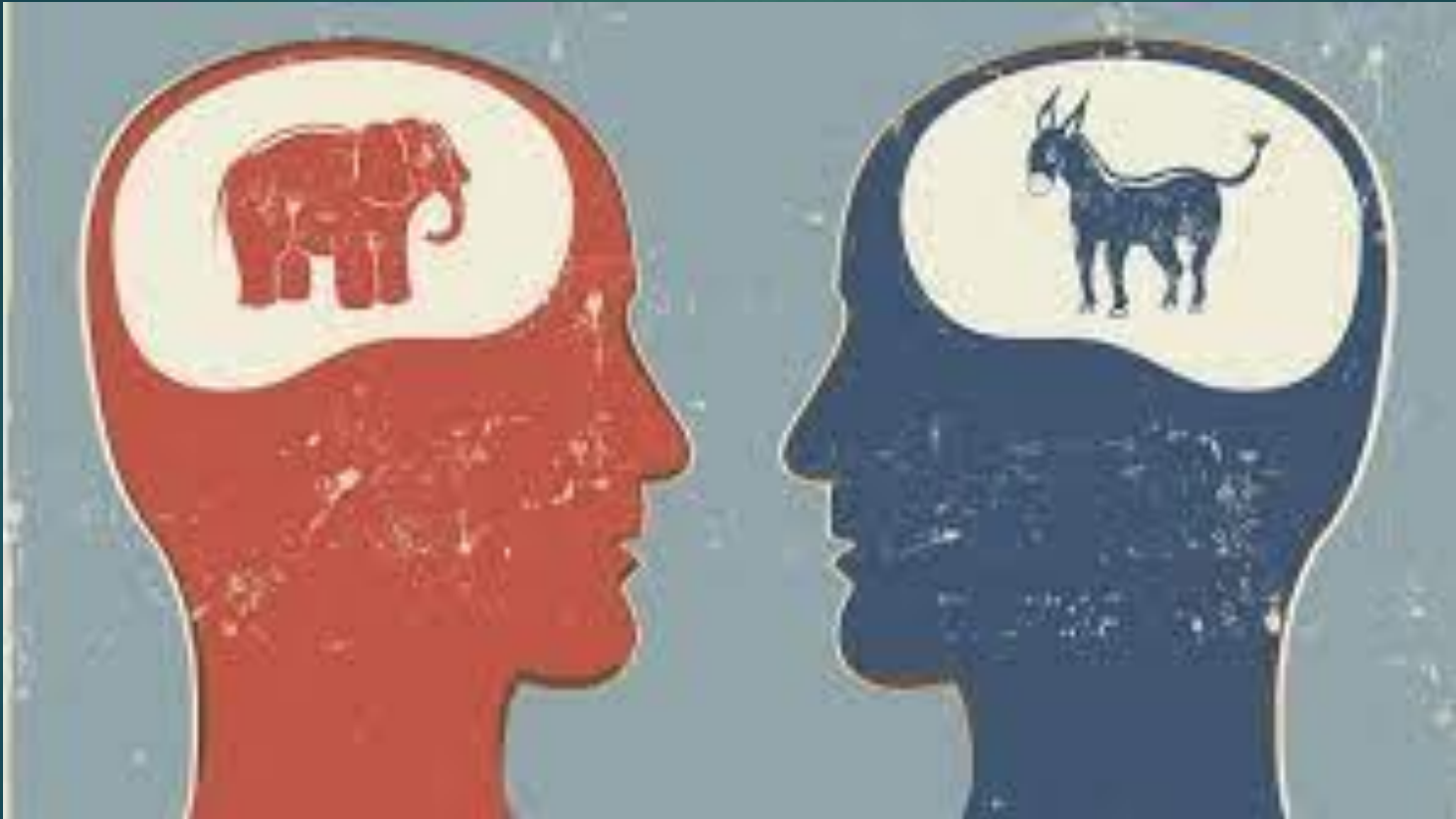
Cheetos are cheese

Our biases…

▶ Motivated Reasoning

Our biases...

▶ Social Identity, in-group

Polarization

Attitude/Issue Polarization

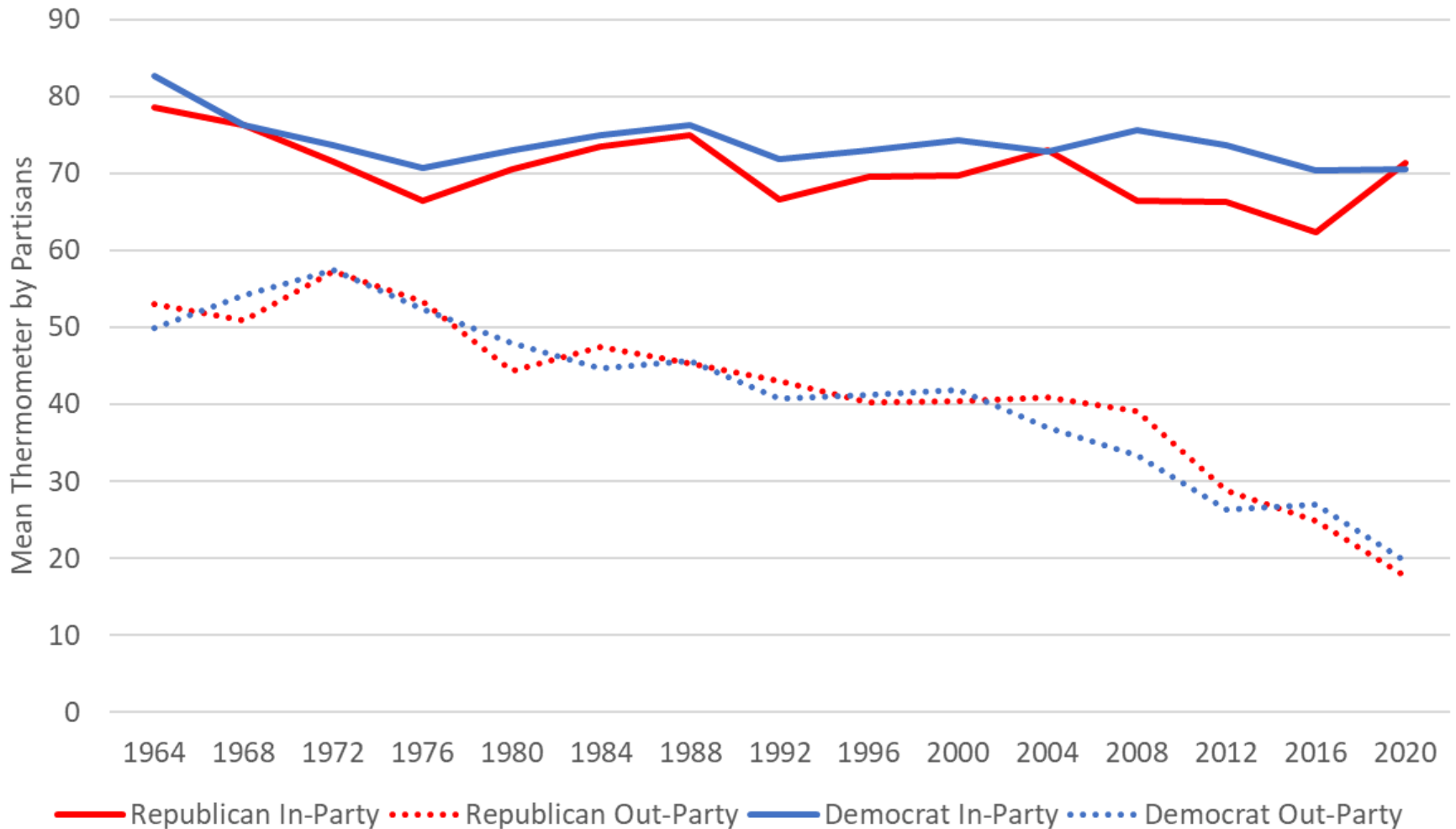► Increasingly different views on political topics

Affective Polarization

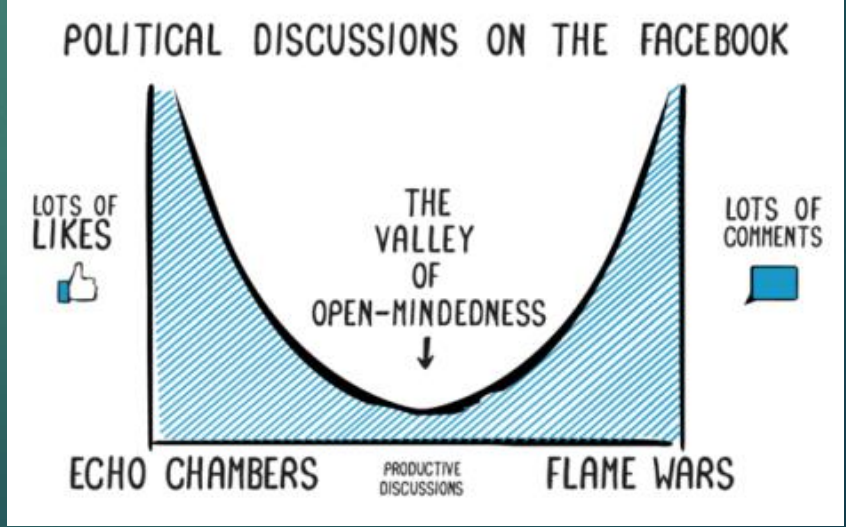▶ Gap between positive feelings towards "our side" versus "their side"

Party favorability 1964-2020
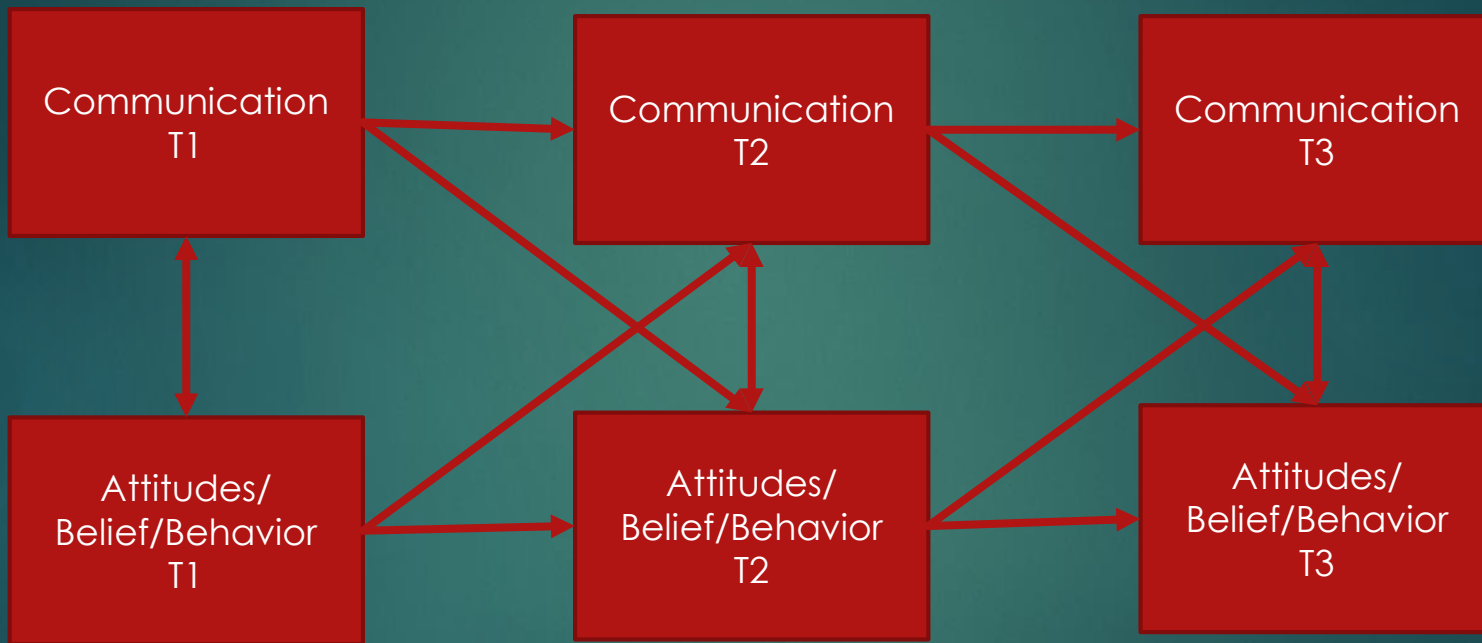
Communication's role

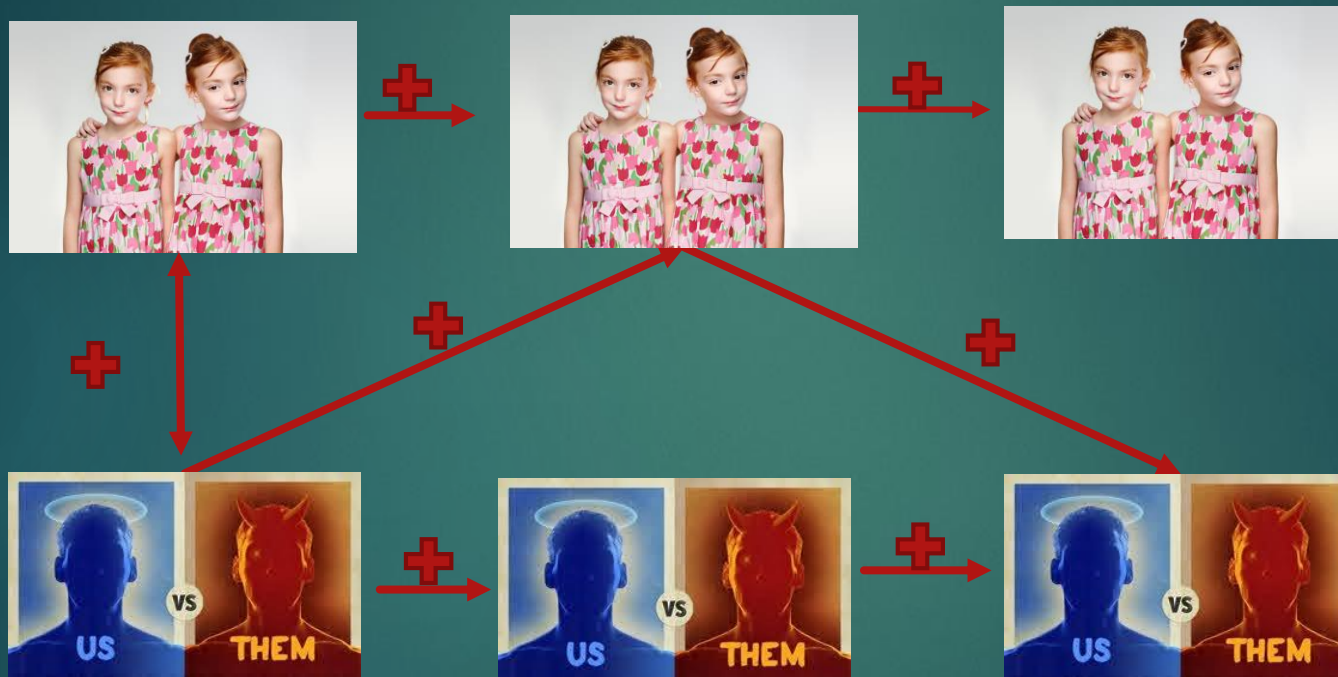# How Much Counter Attitudinal Information Do We See?

- ▶ Some!

- ▶ Preference for similar others

- ▶ Junkies vs. avoiders is more common with media

- ▶ Only about 10% of people say they never discuss politics with people they disagree with

- ▶ More common to get counter attitudinal views through mediated sources
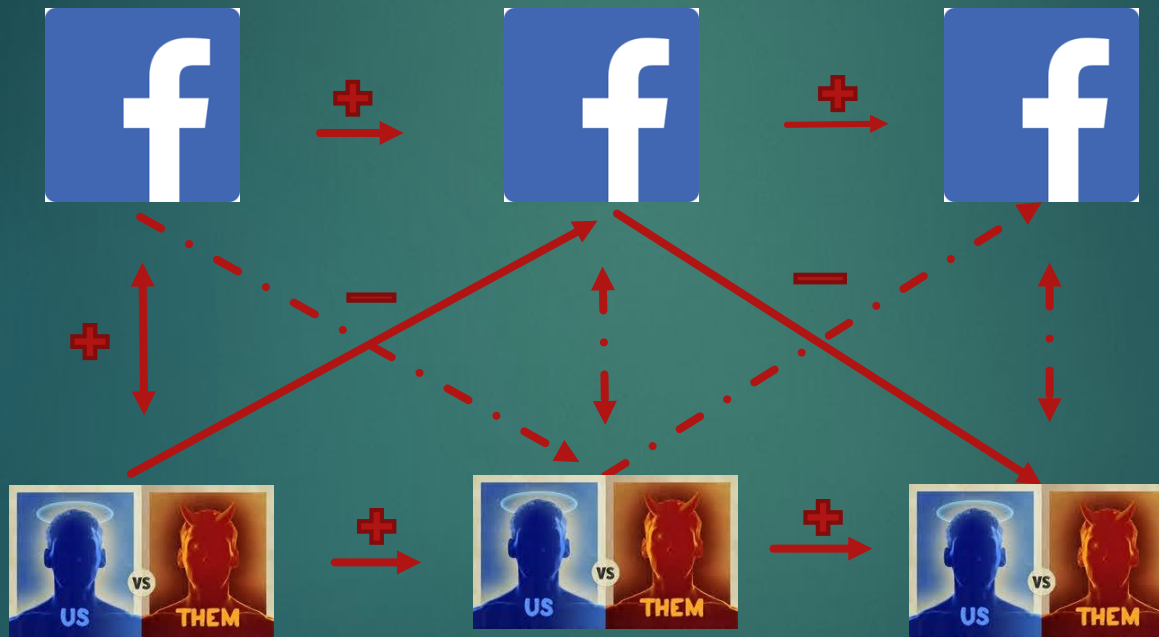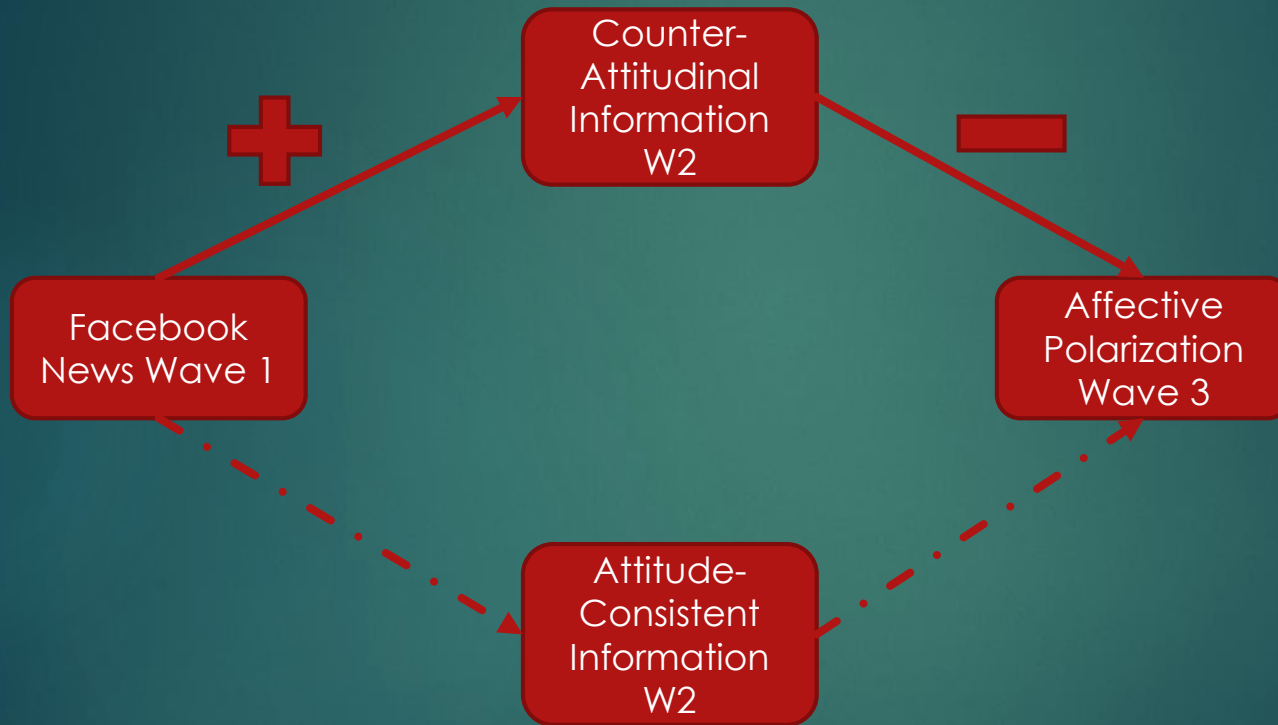
Reinforcing Spirals

Overtime Relationships Interpersonally
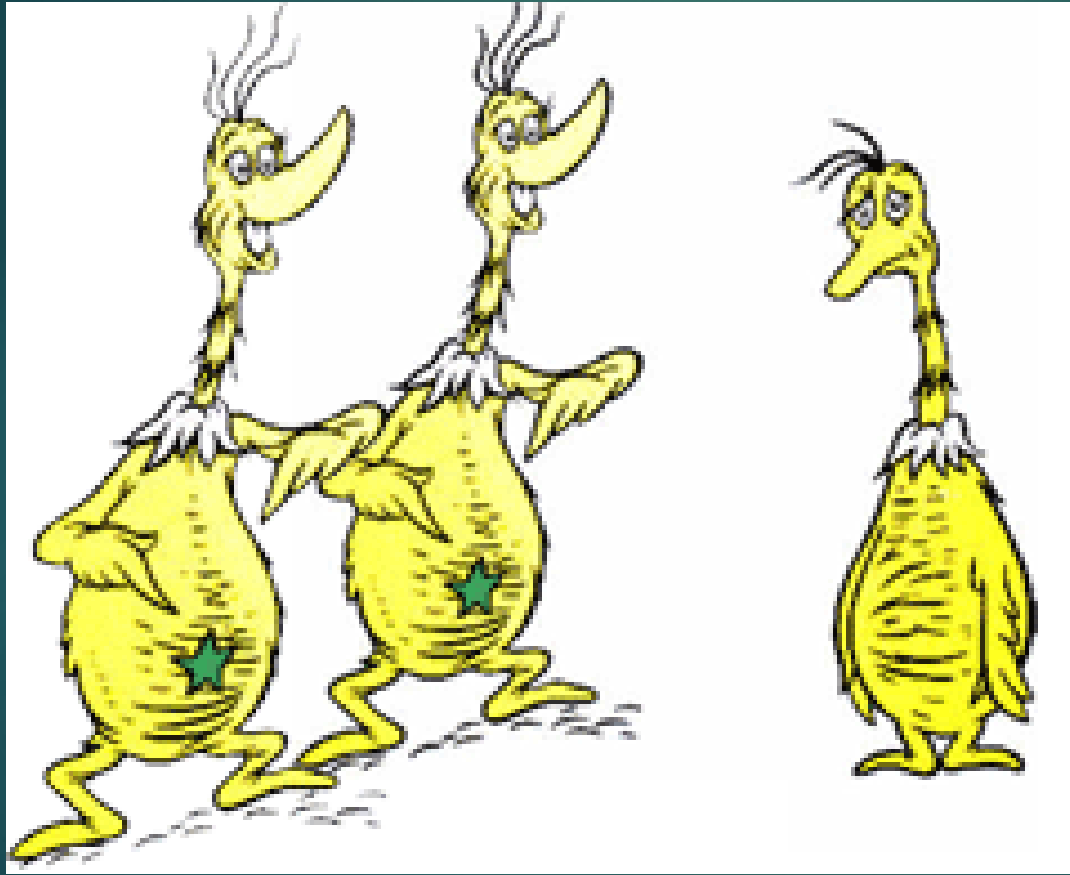
Over-time Relationships On Social Media

Mediation Based on Information Type

Conclusions

▶ Facebook doesn't appear to be facilitating filter bubbles

▶ When looking at over-time results, using Facebook for news is related to *depolarization*

  ▶ This is due to increased exposure to counter-attitudinal news sources

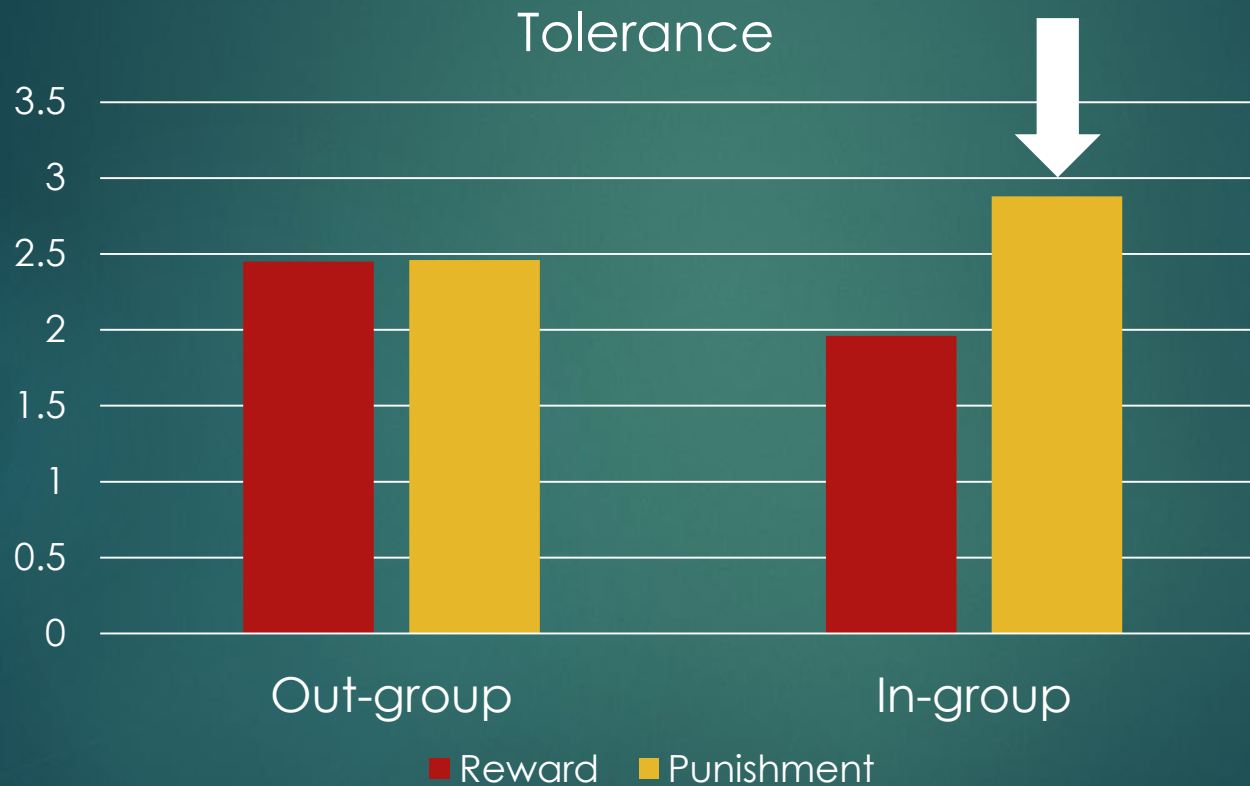▶ Talking to people like ourselves does increase polarization, so what is the effect of online discussions?

Group Identification

Power of Modeling

Results: Manipulation Effects on Tolerance

Conclusions

▶ What your in-group does matters

▶ Disagreement can have positive effects

▶ Exposure to incivility does not in and of itself lead to negative outcomes, but changes based on responses to that incivility

▶ Who is participating, and what we expect to see, matters for how we react to these situations

Key Recommendations

▶ Challenge yourself to seek out diverse perspectives

▶ Call out people on your "team" when they are behaving badly

▶ Try to reinforce shared identities when talking to someone you politically disagree with

  ▶ LISTEN in these conversations

  ▶ Remember you are talking to a person, not a media caricature

Thank you!

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