Social Media Buttons in Comment Sections

Like

"Like." Not only is it frequently used in casual conversations, the term also governs how we respond to everything from news articles to comments from our friends on Facebook. The term structures responses to online content. A heartwarming story about a local hero? "Like!" But "like" doesn't always seem appropriate. An article on a tragic event? It's hard to hit "Like" in response. A fair-minded, but counter-attitudinal, post in a comment section? It's challenging to press "Like." What if news stations used other buttons? What if, instead of "Like," one could click "Respect"? In this study, we analyzed how different buttons affected citizens' responses to comments in an online comment section. We wanted to know whether some buttons – and the concepts they convey – allow com-menters to express their appreciation for counter-attitudinal postings more than others.

Recommendations

Respect

The results show that button word choices are consequential. *We recommend the use of a "Respect" button, as it has both business and democratic benefits.* From a business angle, respondents clicked on this button more frequently than others in a comment section, particularly for some topics. From a democratic angle, "Respect" yields more willingness to click on comments from another political perspective compared to "Recommend" or "Like" buttons. The experimental test described here provides justification for news stations to experiment with buttons, and to consider using a "Respect" button on their site.

The Engaging News Project

The findings presented in this report are part of the *Engaging News Project*. The *Engaging News Project* has a single aim: to provide research-based techniques for engaging online audiences in commercially-viable and democratically-beneficial ways. The project tests web-based strategies for informing audiences, promoting substantive discourse, and helping citizens to understand diverse views. At the same time, we analyze business outcomes, such as clicks and time on page. Systematic testing provides valuable information about what works … and what doesn't. And by advancing both journalistic and business goals, the techniques are designed with contemporary newsrooms in mind.

The *Engaging News Project* is housed at the Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life at the University of Texas at Austin and is directed by Dr. Natalie Jomini Stroud. Funded by the Democracy Fund, this re-port is the third in a series of four written for the New America Foundation about the *Engaging News Project*. It covers our research on the use of buttons in comment sections on news websites. More information about our research and how you can get involved can be found at www.engagingnews project.org

To like: "to be suitable or agreeable to; to feel attraction toward or take pleasure in, enjoy"
--Merriam Webster Dictionary

As the popularity of Facebook has skyrocketed, so has the popularity of the verb "to like." We "like" our friends' status updates and photos, interesting viral videos, our favorite celebrities, and the politicians we support.

But can we "like" political views that we oppose? And what about important stories that involve death and destruction, such as the 2010 earthquake in Haiti or the 2011 tsunami in Japan? Citizens who venture online for news and political information face this dilemma constantly.

Two examples demonstrate the difficulty of "liking" the news. Although "liking" a politician on Facebook requires just a simple click on an online button, the consequences can reach much further. A friend of the authors experienced the complexity of "liking" firsthand. Although a staunch partisan, our friend decided to "like" the Facebook pages of both 2012 presidential candidates. Upon seeing that he "liked" the candidate from the other side, his Facebook page lit up with questions. Had someone logged on to his account to play a prank on him? Did Facebook's software have a glitch? Had he lost his mind? The truth was that our friend only wanted to get information from another perspective, even if he disagreed with it. Saying that he "liked" the page, however, implied to others that he supported the candidate – not that he wanted to see things from another point of view.

The second example concerns a similar difficulty that arises when citizens want to share an important story, but where "liking" the story would be in poor taste. A local news station based in Austin, Texas decided to deal with this problem directly. When there was a bomb threat on the campus of the University of Texas at Austin, the station was diligently posting breaking, important news online to spread the word about the threat. The station was concerned that viewers would be uncomfortable "liking" a news story about a bomb threat, so the on-air anchors clarified the purpose of the "Like" button. During the live bomb threat coverage, the on-air anchors instructed viewers that they could "like" the story online without feeling that they support the idea of a bomb threat on campus.

As these examples demonstrate, the use of "Like" can have important social and political consequences. In the sections that follow, we discuss social media and how buttons can affect public behavior.

SOCIAL MEDIA BUTTONS & THE NEWS

Facebook and other social media that utilize buttons such as "Like" have become increasingly popular.[1]

There are early indications that the use of social networking sites relates to important democratic outcomes. Several studies show that the more people use and rely upon social networking sites, such as Facebook, the higher their rates of civic and political participation.[2] Further, people can encounter diverse political views thanks to social networking sites.[3] This is not to say that all social networking platforms are the same. Differences among the platforms may affect how site visitors act and how they react to what others say.[4]

One important difference – the topic of this report – is which social media buttons are available. Although "Like" is prevalent, alternatives exist. We look at how social media buttons are, or could be, incorporated on news sites.

Social media buttons frequently appear on news sites atop articles and next to comments left by site visitors. To gain background on how social media buttons are incorporated on news sites, we examined a random sample of just over 100 local television news station websites.[5]

The results revealed the ubiquity of integrating social media buttons. Ninety-five percent of the websites provided site visitors with a way to interact with articles via Facebook. Fifty-two percent included a button letting users "like" their news stories, 35 percent provided a "Recommend" button, and 73 percent had an option to "share" a page. Looking specifically at sites with comment sections, two-thirds had buttons giving users the ability to interact with comments by replying to or liking others' posts.[6]

In another study, we asked people who had hit a "Like" or "Recommend" button on a news or political opinion website why they did so.[7] Although responses to the open-ended question varied, respondents tended to mention at least one of three distinct reasons:

1   Forty-one percent of respondents using social media buttons mentioned that they wanted to share information with others.
2   Forty-one percent mentioned that they used buttons to indicate their appreciation for high-quality information.
3   Thirty-six percent noted that they used social media buttons to express agreement with a particular point of view.

> People use social media buttons on news sites to share information with others, to indicate high-quality information, and to express their agreement.

Given that people use social media buttons, what are the effects of including a "Like" button on news websites? And what about other words, such as "Respect" or "Recommend"? Do these small differences affect how citizens' interact on news sites? In this report, we investigate these questions. We do so by analyzing how citizens interact in comment sections containing these different words. Do they "like" comments expressing political views unlike their own? What about "respect" them? Can these wording differences change citizens' reactions to comments following an online news story? We reach the conclusion that yes, seemingly minor word choices have important consequences.

SUMMARY
Social media sites, such as Facebook, continue to grow in popularity among news organizations and the general public. People use social media buttons, such as "Like," for many different reasons, including the expression of agreement.

THE POWER OF WORDS

The idea that word choice affects the way in which individuals think about important issues is not a new one. News research, in particular, has focused on the power of news frames – that is, specific ways in which journalists can organize and structure a message.

Much like a picture frame, a news frame can define the boundaries of an issue and focus viewers' attention on only specific aspects of the scene. Scholar Robert Entman describes framing as "select[ing] some aspects of perceived reality to make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation."[8] The framing choices made by a journalist affect how an audience thinks about an issue.

For instance, a news story about welfare could frame poverty as a story affecting one person or as a societal trend affecting many people.[9] Environmental issues can be discussed as humans trying to find "balance-with-nature" or about the right of humans to "dominate nature."[10] Any story could be framed in multiple ways. Journalists, politicians, political interest groups, and other public actors make choices among possible frames when they write a news story, distribute a press release, or even decide what buttons to include on a news website.

Research about news framing raises two questions: Do wording choices actually influence the way people think about issues? And can small changes, such as switching one word or phrase for another word or phrase, have similar effects? Research suggests that the answer is yes to both questions. We review each question in turn.

Effects of Frames

Frames *can* influence the way people think about issues. For example, when people read news stories about politics that emphasize the "game," "strategy," or "horserace" aspects of a political campaign, later on, they tend to describe that campaign in terms of who is winning or losing. People who read news stories highlighting the "issues" in the campaign, however, later describe the campaign using more issue-related language.[11] Over and over, studies have found that individuals can be influenced to think differently about issues based on the way in which the issues are framed in the media.[12]

Frames also can change individuals' attitudes toward politics and about various policies. Emphasizing political strategy in news stories can increase citizens' cynicism about politics.[13] Telling stories about individuals, rather than emphasizing broad trends, can encourage people to attribute responsibility to individual people rather than to societal causes.[14] That is, people may begin to believe that an inner-city mother is poor because she is lazy, not because there are insufficient job opportunities in her city. If the story were framed as a broad trend about poverty, readers may then start to place blame on social policies in that city. As another example, emphasizing a loss (e.g. 50% of people may die) rather than a gain (e.g. 50% of people may live) can lead people to make riskier decisions when deciding on potential programs to stop the spread of a disease.[15]

The evidence, overall, suggests that frames, the words we choose to describe a situation, can – and do – change individuals' attitudes and decisions. Perhaps the "Like" button has a similar effect and encourages individuals to think about political issues in terms of agreement or disagreement, rather than quality, for example.

> Perhaps the "Like" button encourages people to think about political issues in terms of agreement or disagreement, rather than quality.

SUMMARY
Message framing refers to the specific ways in which journalists present a message. Research shows that how a message is framed influences thoughts, attitudes, and decisions about the message topic. The "Like" button may serve to frame political messages in ways that are less than democratically ideal.

Big Impact of Small Cues

Even more closely related to the topic of social media buttons, is the question of whether frames created by simple word changes have any effect on public attitudes. Once again, research suggests that the answer to this question is yes: minor wording changes can have a major impact.

An experiment conducted by Cornell University psychologist Thomas Gilovich points to the powerful effects of changing only a few words.[16] Participants in Gilovich's study read a brief, hypothetical description of tensions between two nations and then determined whether the United States should take action. Some of the participants read descriptions that used terms such as "Winston Churchill Hall," "Blitzkrieg," and "FDR" – that is, terms that encouraged participants to compare the situation to World War II. Other participants read descriptions using words like "Dean Rusk Hall," "Chinook Helicopters," and "LBJ" – that is, words meant to prompt thinking about the Vietnam War. None of the substantive information between the two descriptions changed; only a few words differed. The minor changes, however, led the groups of participants to reach different conclusions. People in the WWII group were more likely to believe that the U.S. should intervene in the situation than people in the Vietnam group.

University of Wisconsin at Madison Communication Professor Dhavan Shah and his colleagues call these minor wording changes *small cues*.[17] Small cues are still frames in that they structure a topic in a particular way; however, they highlight the power of individual word changes. For example, people are more supportive of abortion access when they are exposed to messages that use the term "fetus" rather than "baby."[18] Individuals are more threatened by a new development when it is called "urban sprawl" rather than "suburban development."[19] News readers put more effort into reading articles when a news organization is committed to "thinking about issues" than when it is committed to "democracy and citizenship."[20] In each of these examples, only a few word changes influenced those exposed to the language.

Given the evidence that single words can influence citizens' thoughts, it is possible that the words used on news sites can frame the news experience for citizens. "Liking" may encourage a different mindset than other possible buttons. This is precisely what we set out to examine. Perhaps we can change the experience citizens have on news sites simply by changing a few words.

SUMMARY

Message framing via small cues (i.e., individual word changes in a message) can have a profound impact on how a political message is received. Our research seeks to uncover whether the words used in social media buttons influence how people engage with the news.

Anyone interested in citizen engagement and the news may be nervous about the prevalence of "liking" for at least two reasons. First, the number of "likes" garnered may affect how many people see news content. Second, and the focus of our study, "Like" may evoke partisan responses to news content.

Pleasant Issues

In his book *The Filter Bubble*, board president of MoveOn.org Eli Pariser argues that encouraging people to "like" news stories may discourage them from engaging with important, but negative, news stories.[21] It would be bad form for someone to "like" a story about a tragic school shooting, a missing child, or a natural disaster. But that doesn't mean people shouldn't be reading and distributing such stories via their social networks.

Monsoon in Thailand
Would you "Like" this story?

To date, there has been little empirical research examining which stories users are likely to "like." There is evidence, however, suggesting that news users are less likely to email or click on public affairs news stories than non-public affairs stories, at least during normal political times.[22] Furthermore, when citizens have more entertainment and news programming choices available, many prefer to watch entertainment shows over public affairs or news programming.[23] Although these examples do not involve online buttons, they do support the argument that citizens may need little prompting to avoid political news. It may be that the "Like" button further adds to this trend by encouraging people to only "like" stories that are agreeable, as opposed to stories about heavy, but important, news topics.

SUMMARY
Many people gravitate toward entertainment programming rather than hard news. The widespread use of the "Like" button may add another hurdle in getting important political information to the citizenry.

Image courtesy of piyato/FreeDigitalPhotos.net

Likeminded Content

"Like" buttons also may push people away from politically disagreeable content. It seems difficult to "like" an op-ed written by conservative syndicated columnist George Will when you are a card-carrying Democrat, or to "like" MSNBC on Facebook when you are a die-hard Republican. Are "Like" buttons encouraging partisan engagement with news stories?

Simple cues can remind people to think of their partisanship even when they normally would not do so in a given situation. For instance, reminding people of their partisanship at the beginning of a survey can increase the chances that they answer the rest of the survey questions in ways that toe the party line.[24] That is, merely reminding people that they identify as a Democrat or as a Republicans can push them to act more like members of that party.

The "Like" button does not directly mention partisanship. It may, however, serve a similar function by encouraging site visitors to think in terms of agreeing or disagreeing with an issue, or accepting or rejecting arguments based on their political views.

Even without prompting, people often are drawn toward information with which they agree.[25] Conservative Republicans, for instance, tend to read conservative news stories while liberal Democrats tend to choose liberal ones.[26] There is also some evidence that Facebook users cluster based on their political beliefs.[27] Liberals tend to have more liberal friends and conservatives, more conservative friends. Further, the Pew Research Center found that 18 percent of those using social networking sites had blocked, unfriended, or hidden a contact based on political disagreement.[28]

Not only do individuals gravitate toward likeminded information, they also are likely to mentally argue against counter-attitudinal information.[29] This pattern of behavior, called a confirmation bias, may be amplified with exposure to a "Like" button. Encouraging news users to "like" comments and the news may signal to citizens that they should seek out and interact with likeminded information – even when they may not have used their partisanship to evaluate a comment otherwise.

Although some theories mentioned here suggest that the "Like" button will encourage people to engage with likeminded information, there is little research examining this claim. In this study, we test the effects of the "Like" button and compare it to other word choices that could be used instead.

SUMMARY

The "Like" button may prompt people to see news comments through a partisan lens. For example, because it may be difficult to "like" a viewpoint that runs counter to one's own political position, the "Like" button may prompt partisan engagement.

ALTERNATIVES TO THE "LIKE" BUTTON

As troubling as the consequences of putting a "Like" button alongside news comments may be, we offer an easy solution to the problem: find other words to use as online buttons that have more beneficial consequences.

Some news sites already use different buttons, such as "Recommend," "Share," and "Follow," rather than (or in addition to) "Like." Others have introduced creative button labels. *The Huffington Post* has included buttons, such as "Amazing" and "Inspiring," that allow readers to react to a story. Several Nexstar local television news websites had a feature allowing readers to express whether they felt "bored," "furious," or "happy" about a news story, among other word choices. The *Tampa Bay Times* allows readers to click "Important," "Inspiring," and "Sad" in response to articles. *Civic Commons*, although not a news station, encourages substantive discussion among community members by allowing them to click on posts they find "persuasive," "informative," or "inspiring." Pariser suggests that news sites could add an "Important" button to ensure that people don't hesitate to interact with stories they feel are too serious to "like."[30] As these examples show, innovations in labeling buttons are widespread.

What we add is twofold. First, we examine a new button: "Respect." We suggest that the "Respect" button can allow people to signal that an argument is a strong one, even if they disagree with the conclusion. Second, we test its effects. Specifically, our study tests how the buttons "Like," "Recommend," and "Respect" affect how citizens engage with the news.

By analyzing button use, we have both business and democratic outcomes in mind.

1   Business: Which button – Like," "Recommend," or "Respect" – garners the most clicks?
2   Democratic: Do these buttons affect how much people interact with political information that runs counter to their beliefs?

SUMMARY
With the potential to increase user engagement, alternatives to the "Like" button, such as a "Respect" button, may provide valuable democratic and business benefits.

We conducted an experiment with 780 people to test our ideas. We describe the basics of the study below; interested readers can find even more information about the design in the appendix of this report.

Upon entering the survey, respondents answered questions about their attitudes toward right-to-work laws and gay rights, which were the topics of the articles they would encounter later in the survey.[31]

Next, participants were randomly assigned to read one of two articles and interact with the comments associated with the article. They saw either a news story focusing on a "right-to-work" law passed in Michigan based on an article from *The Washington Post* or a news story discussing the perspective of a lesbian who also happens to be a Republican based on an article from *The New York Times*. We strategically conducted our study using two different articles in order to evaluate whether our findings applied beyond one topic. Images of the articles can be found in the appendix.

After reading one of the two news stories, participants then had the opportunity to engage with a comment section. Eight comments were already posted – four that articulated left-leaning political views and four that expressed right-leaning views related to the article. Some of the comments were from the actual commentary on the articles selected. Other comments were created to showcase different views and tones. Images of the comment sections are included in the appendix.

The true meat of our study was the buttons that appeared in the comment section. Although the comment sections were identical, we varied the buttons available. One-third of the participants saw "Like" buttons next to each comment, one-third saw "Recommend" buttons, and the final one-third saw comments with "Respect" buttons.

Example Comment with "Like" Button

Liz R-S says: [Like (4)]

I know that some will disagree, but I think it is important to think about religion in this debate. Gay marriage is incompatible with the beliefs, scriptures, and traditions of many religions. Gay marriage may lead to churches being forced to marry couples and to teach students in religious schools that same-sex marriage is the same as opposite-sex marriage. Unless it is a matter of life or death, I don't think that we should force people to do things that are against their religion.

16 minutes ago

Example Comment with "Recommend" Button

Puzzled says: [Respect (3)]

It's funny how scared all the liberals on here are of these proud lesbian conservatives. I realize it doesn't fit with your views of the "bad guys" but get used to it. As modern-day liberalism continues to reveal itself as mindless obedience to authority, we'll see a lot more people break with the statist Democratic Party.

16 minutes ago

Example Comment with "Respect" Button

Will Cirilli says: [Respect (4)]

This country is going backwards in a huge way. Say goodbye to wages you can live on, health care, sick time, vacations and dignity. I worked for a union company when I was younger. Trust me. If these companies treated their employees like human beings, the unions never would of been voted in.

1 hour ago

Participants were able to click on the buttons if they "liked," "recommended," or "respected" a comment depending on the button they saw. Beside each button, a number indicated how many people had "liked," "recommended," or "respected" the comment. The number associated with each comment was the same for all participants. When a participant clicked on the button, the number increased by one. We unobtrusively tracked whether participants clicked on the buttons to measure whether they interacted with the comments differently depending on the button they saw.

This research design allowed us to examine three things. First, we could determine whether button-clicking behaviors differed depending on which button was present. Second, we could investigate whether people reacted differently to opposing views based on the button they saw. And finally, we could analyze whether the patterns held across two news issues.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The buttons influenced how people interacted with the comment section. Overall, the results support use of the "Respect" button.

Time with Comment Section

Respondents were required to spend at least 30 seconds on the comments site before they were permitted to advance to the next survey page. They also could spend no more than five minutes on the site before it automatically advanced them to the next page. Although respondents' time was restricted, we nonetheless evaluated whether there were any differences in the amount of time spent on the site depending on (a) which article respondents saw and (b) which buttons were on the site. Results revealed that there no differences in how much time respondents spent on the site. Across all conditions, respondents spent an average of 130 seconds with the comments.

Clicks in the Comment Section

We next looked at the number of times participants clicked on any button during the study. People who saw the "Respect" button clicked more on the buttons than participants who saw the "Recommend" button. There was no difference in number of clicks for people who saw the "Like" button.[32]

The comments on which people clicked, however, depended on the issue (right to work or gay rights), what people believed, and the view expressed in the comment. These nuanced results are discussed in the sections below.

Average Number of Button Clicks (0 - 8)
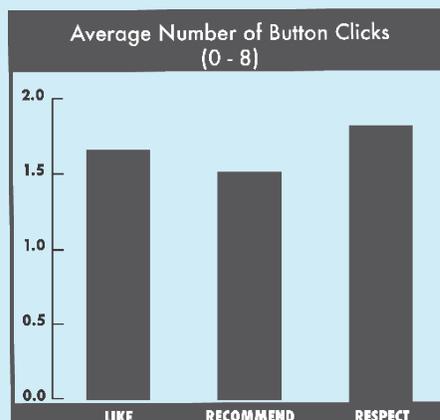
Button Clicks[33]

Clicks on Left-Leaning Comments

Half of the comments associated with each article supported a left-leaning perspective. As expected, people's political views affected whether they clicked on left-leaning comments. Those with left-leaning views clicked on more left-leaning comments than those with different political perspectives. Specifically, those opposing right-to-work laws or supporting gay rights, both opinions associated with the political left, clicked on more left-leaning comments.[34]

Yet the buttons mattered, too. People who read the article discussing a Republican woman who is also a lesbian were more likely to click on the "Respect" button, rather than the "Like" or "Recommend" buttons, independent of their attitudes toward gay rights. People who saw the right-to-work article clicked on left-leaning buttons with similar frequencies regardless of which button they saw.[35]
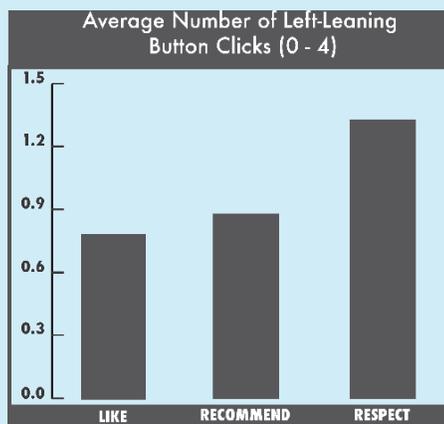
Button Clicks on Left-Leaning Comments, Gay Rights Article[36]

Clicks on Right-Leaning Comments

The other half of the comments in this study expressed opinions favoring the political right. People who favored right-to-work laws were more likely to click on likeminded, right-leaning comments than people who had other views. Attitudes toward gay rights did not predict clicking on right-leaning comments for the gay rights article.[37]

The number of clicks on these comments, however, depended on the button.

For the article focusing on a woman who is both gay and Republican, the best button for both business and democratic goals was the "Respect" button. "Like" and "Recommend" yielded similar click rates for both political views. The "Respect" button encouraged about the same number of clicks by people who opposed gay rights as the other buttons, but encouraged more clicks on right-leaning comments by people who support gay rights. In other words, people who disagreed with the comments were more likely to "Respect" them than to "Like" or "Recommend" them.[38]

For the right-to-work article, the pattern was different, though still encouraging for the "Respect" button. The "Like" button led people who favored the right to work to click on pro-attitudinal comments at much higher rates than those who opposed the right to work. For both the "Respect" and "Recommend" buttons, more people who favored right-to-work laws clicked on right-leaning comments, but the differences between those supporting and opposing right-to-work laws were less pronounced and the "Respect" button increased counter-attitudinal clicks.[40]

Button Clicks on Right-Leaning
Comments, Gay Rights Article[39]
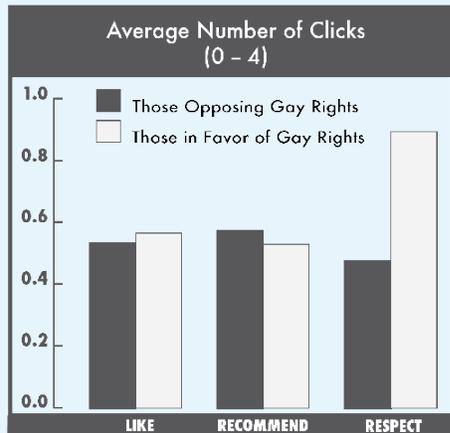
Button Clicks on Right Leaning
Comments, Right-to-Work Article[41]

Average Number of Clicks (0 – 4)
- Those Opposing Gay Rights
- Those in Favor of Gay Rights

LIKE   RECOMMEND   RESPECT

Average Number of Clicks (0 – 4)
- Those Supporting Right-to-Work
- Those Opposing Right-toWork

LIKE   RECOMMEND   RESPECT
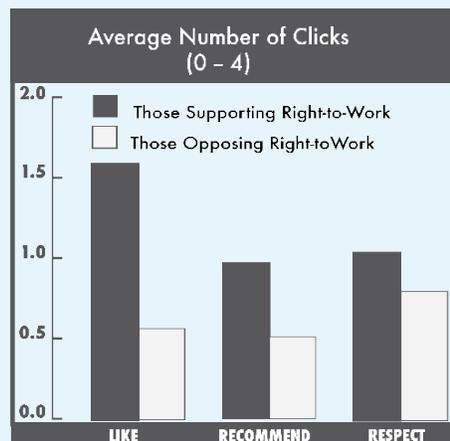
Although there were some differences depending on whether we look at the gay rights or right-to-work article, the buttons did matter. In particular, the "Respect" button can encourage clicks on right-leaning comments even when people do not necessarily agree with the argument of the comment.

SUMMARY

Most broadly, we have evidence that the language of online buttons matters. People respond differently when they can "respect" a comment, rather than "like" or "recommend" it. There is also evidence that news sites should include a "Respect" button in their comment sections for both business and democratic reasons.

From a business perspective, the results are suggestive. Although none of the buttons encouraged users to spend more time in the comment section, the results do indicate that a "Respect" button can increase the number of times users click in the comment section.

From a democratic angle, the "Respect" button looks promising as well. People "respected" left-leaning comments more frequently than the "liked" or "recommended" the comments, regardless of their political views for one of the two political issues considered here. And, at times, people were more likely to "respect" comments expressing a point of view other than their own than to "like" or "recommend" them.

The "Respect" button is not perfect. For instance, people did sometimes "respect" more politically likeminded comments than comments expressing a different view. Compared to the other buttons, however, the "Respect" button made people more comfortable expressing support for comments articulating a different political perspective.

Instead of asking people to approach online comments thinking about whether they agree with a comment, or "like" a point of view, the "Respect" button puts people in a different state of mind. Instead of "am I with them or against them?" the "Respect" button directs people to think more about "Is this a decent argument?" And comment sections certainly could use more of this.

Report Authors

Natalie (Talia) Jomini Stroud (tstroud@austin.utexas.edu) is an Associate Professor in the Department of Communication Studies and the Assistant Director of Research at the Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life at the University of Texas at Austin. Ashley Muddiman is an Assistant Professor in the Communication and Journalism Department at the University of Wyoming. Joshua Scacco is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Communication Studies and a graduate research assistant at the Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life at the University of Texas at Austin. We thank Josh Rachner and Andrew Cobb for their programming assistance on this project, and Alex Curry for his assistance in editing the report.

APPENDIX

For interested readers, we provide more details about the study below.

We recruited 780 people through the online survey research company Survey Sampling International (SSI). The participants, while not nationally representative, matched the demographic information of Internet users according to the Pew Research Center's (2012) most recent findings (see Table A1). Participants had to be U.S. residents who were at least 18-years-old.

		SSI Sample	Pew Research Sample
Gender	Male	50.8 %	51.2 %
	Female	49.2 %	48.8 %
Race/ Ethnicity	White	77.0 %	78.0 %
	Black	12.3 %	12.1 %
	Other	10.7 %	9.9 %
	Hispanic	13.5 %	12.0 %
Age	18-29	26.1 %	25.1 %
	30-49	36.0 %	38.8 %
	50-64	24.7 %	23.9 %
	65+	13.2 %	10.9 %
Education	Less than HS	3.5 %	6.8 %
	HS Grad	23.4 %	26.9 %
	Some College	39.3 %	31.8 %
	College+	33.8 %	34.0 %
Income	<$30K	33.5 %	31.3 %
	$30-50K	20.3 %	21.8 %
	$50-75K	18.0 %	17.0 %
	>$75K	28.4 %	30.0 %

Table A1.
Research Sample[42]

Image A1. Right-to-Work Laws Article

Image A2. Right-to-Work Laws Comments

Image A3. Gay Rights Article

Image A4. Gay Rights Comments

[1] Boyd, d. m., & Ellison, N. B. (2008). Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 13*, 210-230.

[2] Gil de Zúñiga, H., Jung, N., & Valenzuela, S. (2012). Social media use for news and individuals' social capital, civic engagement, and political participation. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 17*, 319-336; Valenzuela, S., Park, N., & Kee, K. F. (2009). Is there social capital in a social network site?: Facebook use and college students' life satisfaction, trust, and participation. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 14*, 875-901; Zhang, W., Johnson, T. J., Seltzer, T., & Bichard, S. L. (2010). The revolution will not be networked: The influence of social networking sites on political attitudes and behaviors. *Social Science Computer Review, 28*, 75-92.

[3] Kim, Y. (2011). The contribution of social network sites to exposure to political difference: The relationships among SNSs, online political messaging, and exposure to cross-cutting perspectives. *Computers in Human Behavior, 27*, 971-977.

[4] Pasek, J., More, E., & Romer, D. (2009). Realizing the social Internet? Online social networking meets offline civic engagement, *Journal of Information Technology & Politics, 6*, 197-215.

[5] Stroud, N. J., Muddiman, A., & Scacco, J. (forthcoming). Engaging audiences via online news sites. In H. Gil de Zúñiga (Ed.) *New agendas in communication: New technologies and civic engagement*. New York: Routledge.

[6] Stroud, Muddiman, & Scacco, forthcoming.

[7] Data were gathered from a survey fielded through Amazon.com's mTurk in August, 2012. Although the sample is similar to the United States general population in terms of gender (51% male), it is younger (*M*=36 years of age), more highly educated (48% with a four-year college degree or higher), and more Democratic (43% Democrat, 17% Republican) compared to the U.S. population. For this reason, the results do not represent the entire population. Although 306 respondents completed the survey, this portion analyzes data from the 123 respondents who said that they had hit a "Like" or "Recommend" button on a news article or political opinion site. Thanks to Cynthia Peacock for her assistance in developing the coding scheme and coding these articles. Reliability was assessed with two coders evaluating all of the responses to this open-ended question. Krippendorff's alpha, a metric to measure reliability, was .88 for share information, .71 for quality article, and .74 for agreement. These reliabilities are adequate; see Krippendorff, K. (2004). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology*. 2nd Ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

[8] Entman, R. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication, 43,* 51-58.

[9] Iyengar, S. (1991). *Is anyone responsible? How television frames political issues*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

[10] Fung, T. K. F., Brossard, D., & Ng, I. (2011). There is water everywhere: How news framing amplifies the effect of ecological worldviews on preference for flooding protection policy. *Mass Communication & Society, 14*, 553-577.

[11] Rhee, J. W. (1997). Strategy and issue frames in election campaign coverage: A social cognitive account of framing effects. *Journal of Communication, 47,* 26-48.

[12] Gamson, W. A. (1992). *Talking politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press; Price, V., Tewksbury, D., & Powers, E. (1997). Switching trains of thought: The impact of news frames on readers' cognitive responses. *Communication Research, 24,* 481-506.

[13] Cappella, J. N., & Jamieson, K. H. (1997). *Spiral of cynicism: The press and the public good*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

[14] Iyengar, 1991.

[15] Kahneman, D., & Tversky, A. (1984). Choices, values, and frames. *American Psychologist, 39,* 341-350.

[16] Gilovich, T. (1981). Seeing the past in the present: The effect of associations to familiar events on judgments and decisions. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 40*, 797-808.

[17] Shah, D. V., Boyle, M. P., Schmierbach, M., Keum, H., & Armstrong, C. L. (2010). Specificity, complexity, and validity: Rescuing experimental research in framing effects. In P. D'Angelo & J. A. Kuypers (Eds.), *Doing news framing analysis: Empirical and theoretical perspectives* (pp. 215-232). New York, NY: Routledge.

[18] Simon, A. F., & Jerit, J. (2007). Toward a theory relating political discourse, media, and public opinion. *Journal of Communication, 57*, 254-271.

[19] Shah et al., 2010.

[20] Manosevitch, E. (2009). The reflective cue: Prompting citizens for greater consideration of reasons. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research, 21*, 187-203.

[21] Pariser, E. (2011). *The filter bubble: What the Internet is hiding from you.* New York, NY: The Penguin Press.

[22] Boczkowski, P. J., & Mitchelstein, E. (2012). How users take advantage of different forms of interactivity on online news sites: Clicking, e-mailing, and commenting. *Human Communication Research, 38*, 1-22.

[23] Prior, M. (2007). *Post-broadcast democracy: How media choice increases inequality in political involvement and polarizes elections*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

[24] See discussion in Zaller, J. R. (1992). *The nature and origins of mass opinion*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, p. 76-85; see also Reid, S. (2012). A self-categorization explanation for the hostile media effect. *Journal of Communication, 62,* 381-399.

[25] Stroud, N. J. (2011). *Niche news: The politics of news choice*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

[26] Knobloch-Westerwick, S., & Meng, J. (2009). Looking the other way: Selective exposure to attitude-consistent and counterattitudinal political information. *Communication Research, 36,* 426-448.

[27]Gaines, B. J., & Mondak, J. J. (2009). Typing together? Clustering of ideological types in online social networks. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics, 6,* 216-231.

[28] Rainie, L., & Smith, A. (2012). Social networking sites and politics. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from http://www.pewinternet.org/~/media//Files/Reports/2012/PIP_SNS_and_politics.pdf.

[29] Taber, C. S., & Lodge, M. (2006). Motivated skepticism in the evaluation of political beliefs. *American Journal of Political Science, 50*, 755-769.

[30] Pariser, 2011.

[31] Respondents were asked (1) Do you favor or oppose allowing gays and lesbians to marry legally and (2) Do you favor or oppose allowing gay and lesbian couples to enter into legal agreements with each other that would give them many of the same rights as married couples (civil unions) (1=strongly oppose, 5=strongly favor). We averaged the two measures to form one measure of attitudes toward gay rights with higher values indicating greater support of gay rights (r=.75, p<.01; M=3.37, SD=1.33). Respondents were asked whether they favored or opposed laws stating that employees can hold a job regardless of whether they pay union dues (1=strongly oppose, 5=strongly favor; M=2.31, SD=1.09).

[32] Controlling for the issue, years of education, age, sex, ethnicity, race, income, political interest, pattern of Internet news use, political knowledge, ideology and partisanship in an ANCOVA, the planned contrast between "Respect" and "Recommend," is significant (*Mean difference* = .32, *SE*=.16, *p*<.05). The planned contrast between "Respect" and "Like," however, was not (*Mean difference* = .18, *SE* = .16, *n.s.*).

[33] All control variables held constant at their mean or modal value to create the figure.

[34] Significant OLS regression models, which included the covariates listed above, found that a person clicked on more left-leaning comments if they favored gay rights (B=.36, SE=.05, p<.01, R^2=.17) or if they opposed right-to-work laws (B =.35, SE=.06, p<.01, R^2 =.17).

[35] The button condition was not significant when looking at clicking left-leaning comments in the right-to-work condition. In the gay rights condition, the Respect button was significant ($B=.54$, $SE=.13$, $p<.01$), but not Recommend ($B=.09$, $SE=.13$, $n.s.$) with Like as the excluded condition.

[36] All control variables held constant at their mean or modal value to create the figure.

[37] A significant OLS regression model, which included the covariates listed above, found that the more a person favored right to work, the more likely they were to click on the right-leaning comments ($B=.25$, $SE=.07$, $p<.01$, $R^2=.13$).

[38] The interaction between the button displayed and gay rights beliefs, with "Like" as the reference category, for clicking on right-leaning comments was as follows: gay rights attitudes ($B=.01$, $SE=.06$, $n.s.$), recommend button ($B=.01$, $SE=.11$, $n.s.$), respect button ($B=.13$, $SE=.11$, $n.s.$), gay rights attitudes x respect button ($B=.15$, $SE=.08$, $p<.10$), gay rights attitudes x recommend button ($B=-.02$, $SE=.09$, $n.s.$). With "Recommend" as the reference category, the gay rights attitudes x respect button coefficient is significant ($p<.05$).

[39] Those favoring / opposing gay rights calculated as one standard deviation above and below mean attitudes toward gay rights. All control variables held constant at their mean or modal value to create the figure.

[40] The interaction between the button displayed and right-to-work beliefs, with "Like" as the reference category, for clicking on right-leaning comments was as follows: right-to-work attitude ($B=.47$, $SE=.12$, $p<.01$), recommend button ($B=-.36$, $SE=.17$, $p<.05$), respect button ($B=-.17$, $SE=.17$, $n.s.$), right-to-work attitude x respect button ($B=-.36$, $SE=.16$, $p<.05$), right-to-work attitude x recommend button ($B=-.26$, $SE=.16$, $n.s.$).

[41] Those favoring / opposing right-to-work laws calculated as one standard deviation above and below mean attitudes toward right-to-work laws. All control variables held constant at their mean or modal value to create the figure.

[42] Demographics obtained from the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project August 2012 tracking survey. The Pew Research data asked a combined race/ethnicity question where we asked two separate questions. We recalculate the racial composition of the Pew data for non-Hispanic identifiers to compare with our data.