

**Political stereotyping: Processing Beto O'Rourke and Ted Cruz rallies through fixed frame  
and 360-degree presentations**

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## **Introduction**

Individuals make political decisions including voting based on nonverbal cues such as candidates' attractiveness, vocalics, facial expressions (Grabe, 2009; Lanzetta, 1985) and appropriate levels of emotional displays, namely anger, happiness, and evasion (Grabe & Bucy, 2009). Grabe and Bucy (2009) state the reason individuals base their decisions mainly on visual cues rather than factual information is rooted in human biology. There is a dedicated area in human brains to process visual information. As a result, people process visuals faster than written or spoken words. Another explanation for visuals being a superior to verbal in terms of information processing is linked to emotions those visuals elicit in people (Grimes, 1991; Lang 1995).

The video formatting of 360-degree presentation has been found to evoke more emotions in viewers than 2-D videos (Archer & Finger, 2018; Bucy, 2019). Particularly, positive emotions such as immersion and sense of presence predicted civic participation in women's rights march (Bucy, 2019), and empathy was likely to lead to positive behavioral outcomes (Archer & Finger, 2018). Another outcome of 360-degree video presentation is information processing. According to Atkinson et al (2019), 360-degree presentation evoked livelier discussions among viewers who questioned the information presented and counter-argued the facts.

This study sought answers to the question about how Democratic and Republican supporters process 360-degree videos of a political event. Two main themes emerged from focus group discussions. First, 360-degree presentation indeed generated more discussion among interviewees than 2-D video of the same event. Participants described varieties of emotions, such as immersion, being in control, not being in control, and fear of missing out. These were consistent with the findings of previous research (Aitamurto et al., 2018; Bucy, 2019). Second, political ideology seemed to play a stronger role in interpreting and guiding ones' emotions in 360-degree

## PROCESSING 360-DEGREE PRESENTATION OF POLITICAL EVENTS

presentation. Focus group participants who self-identified as Democrats noticed more positive body language and nonverbal cues about the Democratic Party runner and his supporters in the 360-degree presentation. In the other 360-degree video recorded from the Republican candidate rally, though, focus group participants picked up more negative visual cues that support their disapproval of the Republican candidate and attendees of the event.

These findings are discussed in the context of visual political communication and expectancy violation theory (Burgoon & Hale, 1988). Participants were pleasantly surprised by the freedom to look around (i.e., positive violation of expectation) in the 360-degree video. Findings suggest that 360-degree presentation elicits more emotion, discussion, and varied interpretations of events than fixed frame. Suggestions for future research are made.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Visuals and Non-Verbal Cues in Politics**

Scholars have long been studying the link between visuals and politics because nonverbal displays of political candidates explain up to 40 percent of the variance in swing voters' decisions (Olivola & Todorov, 2010). This is mainly due to the way human brain is designed to process visual information faster than verbal information (Grabe & Bucy, 2009). Perception theory (Barry, 2005) posits that a) visual information processing precedes verbal information processing, and b) people first experience emotions, and cognition and logic follows affective feelings. Average viewers often evaluate political candidates as either presidential or incompetent based on their appearances and how they conduct themselves during debates (Bucy, 2011).

According to Bucy and Stewart (2018), there are static and dynamic nonverbal displays. Static nonverbal display consists of political candidates' age, gender, race, height, appearance, and

## PROCESSING 360-DEGREE PRESENTATION OF POLITICAL EVENTS

even body mass. Dynamic nonverbal display includes the candidates' body language, facial expressions, and vocals. Putting these together, scholars not only developed reliable measures to code and interpret political leaders' nonverbal behaviors on television but also predict the candidates' chance to win in the elections (Bucy, 2011). Bucy (2011) stated:

facial expressions, in particular, are reliable indicators of a communicators emotional state... [and] together with gestures and para vocal cues ..., facial expressions serve as the basis of judgments about politically relevant traits such as competence, integrity, political viability, dominance, and appropriateness. (p.4)

Shah et al. (2015) contended that nonverbal cues contain social information that leads to persuasion. Politicians who lead opinion polls are often found displaying more relaxed and friendly (Bucy & Steward, 2018) facial expressions, including smiling, and hand movements, such as thumbs up and open palm waving (i.e., affinity). Challengers, on the other hand, tend to adopt a more antagonistic role, and often use gestures, namely head shaking, finger pointing, and fist raising that are more defiant in nature. To sum up, the time when politicians used to be judged on policy stance and rhetoric is long gone. With the invention of television and now high-definition broadcasts and 24-hour news channels, communication scholars found links between visuals and voting. This trend is likely to continue due to the exponential growth of screen-based technology. More people consume television news and presidential debates through snippets of content or live streams via their smart phones, tablets, and laptop computers that are connected to the internet. Social media sites such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are also visually focused with photos and videos. More streaming services, namely Hulu and Netflix, provide even more video content, some of it documentary or news-like, directly to viewers. As the latest addition, the

content producer Disney joins the video streaming industry. Understanding viewers' reactions to visual stimuli has been becoming more important as visual-oriented media expand and proliferate.

### **360-Degree Presentation**

In addition to candidate-specific nonverbals, production techniques, such as shot length, camera angle, and editing pace, play into how audiences evaluate politicians (Brader, 2006; West, 2014). Messaris (1994) stated that the meaning of patriotism can be created by juxtaposing a picture of a politician with symbolic images such as the American flag and a bald eagle. Viewers perceive candidates who are shot from a low camera angle looking up as powerful, while high camera angle looking down on candidates diminishes perceptions of their stature (Bucy & Grabe, 2007). Archer and Finger (2018) argue that most of these fixed visual manipulation techniques are removed with 360-degree presentations in which are more fluid and under the user's control. Presentation of events without editing is available in the 360-degree compared to fixed frame video.

Due to their "raw," unfiltered qualities of presenting events as they unfold, 360-degree videos without narration were found to increase perceptions of the credibility of the Women's March in Washington DC in January 2017 and those who participated in the event (Bucy, 2019). This type of presentation then leads to higher levels of acceptance and increased event legitimacy among viewers. Bucy (2019) stated that "the perception of authenticity...and accessibility derived from the ability to determine for oneself the range of available perspectives" (p.11). Such an evaluative shift is due to immersive qualities of 360-degree presentation that excludes framing an event in a certain fashion and increases user control over the viewing experience (Bucy, 2019; Archer & Finger, 2018). Aitamurto et al (2018) stated that viewers also experience a sense of presence in 360-degree presentation.

## PROCESSING 360-DEGREE PRESENTATION OF POLITICAL EVENTS

Scholars reported findings that 360-degree presentation is more immersive than fixed frame video (Bucy, 2019; Archer & Finger, 2018; Aitamurto et al, 2018; Atkinson et al, 2019). *Immersion, presence, perspective taking, and emotion* are specific to narrative media effects, virtual reality, and 360-degree presentation literature. The concept of immersion is the degree to which individuals feeling oneness and unity with the narration whether the narration is in an action movie or non-narrated news footage. Similarly, presence is defined as embodied feeling and a sensory state (Green et al, 2018). Green et al. (2018) contended that technological development such as virtual reality, augmented reality, and 360-degree presentation were likely to enhance viewers' media experiences even further and make message effects stronger. Indeed, (Aitamurto et al, 2018) individuals who watched a story in the 360-degree format and took the perspectives of male characters felt more responsibility to end inequality than those in the 180-degree presentation.

Despite experiencing immersion, presence, and perspective taking (e.g., sadness, fear), viewers also report discomfort (Archer & Finger, 2018), disorientation, and fear of missing out (Aitamurto et al, 2018). User discomfort is chiefly related to the device that has to be head mounted. Some people have motion sickness that is a physical discomfort and nausea these people feel when they watch moving images using a head-mounted display. Fear of missing out, on the other hand, is a cognitive process in which individuals believe that they may not be getting the whole storyline or main point of the scene in the 360-degree presentation (Aitamurto et al., 2018). These individuals express desire to rewatch the video to make up for what they missed in the first place.

To sum up, 360-degree presentation of news video is quite new compared to fixed frame video. Jaron Lanier is believed to coin the term virtual reality in 1987 (Virtual Reality Society, 2019). Although, this technology has been around for the past three decades, 360-degree

videography is only a few years old. From the limited amount of scholarly works, 360-degree presentations generate diverse reactions among viewers. On the one hand, people are pleasantly surprised with the immersive qualities of the 360-degree presentation. On the other hand, they are also uncomfortable with the 360-degree format because it clashes with the individuals' schema about how events should be presented, and it is physically unsettling for some. People have long viewed political events shot from one angle, zooming in and out, and panning left and right. While 360-degree presentation can be refreshing for some, it can also be overwhelming and anxiety-provoking for others. Viewers must physically move around and learn to navigate in the virtual environment that is mediated by 360-degree presentation compared fixed frame videos.

### **Schema-Script Theory and Expectancy Violation**

Given the novel qualities, such as multiple perspective and immersive capability, 360-degree video format presents, two theoretical concepts, schema-script theory and expectancy violation model, are adopted. First, schema theory argues that individuals possess pre-existing scripts that are used to understand the universe. Piaget (1952) stated that children are biologically adapted to assimilate and accommodate information and what is happening around them. This means humans, from a very early age, a) notice and interpret objects, situations, and others based on the pre-existing rules, and b) renew their schemas when new information is presented. Applied to 360-degree video, the pre-existing schema is the fixed frame video and how people have been experiencing the world and events through 2-D formats of images and video presentations. However, individuals also have abilities to adopt and build novel aspects of 360-degree presentation.

Second, expectancy violation model consists of the concept of *expectancy* that is similar to schema. According to Burgoon and Hale (1988), "expectancies may include cognitive, affective,

## PROCESSING 360-DEGREE PRESENTATION OF POLITICAL EVENTS

and conative components and are primarily a function of a) social norms, and b) known idiosyncrasies of the other” (p.60). The direction of communication outcomes can either be positive (e.g., pleasantly surprised) or negative (e.g., avoidance) when this expectancy is violated. Hence, in viewing the 360-degree video, individuals can either express enjoyment (e.g., immersion) or frustration (e.g., fear of missing out), and disorientation when their pre-existing expectations regarding video presentation formats and news experiences are violated.

### **Method**

#### **Focus Group**

Focus group discussions are a type of qualitative research methodology in which scholars or trained moderators interview multiple individuals on a subject under study (Baker & Hinton, 1999). Focus group interviews offer several advantages for political communication research (Jarvis, 2011). First, focus groups help researchers understand and “interpret mixed findings” (Luntz, 1994) because this method facilitates group discussions where individuals derive ideas from one another. Participants either counterargue or agree with others’ opinions that are expressed in focus group discussions, an aspect that is absent in one-on-one interviews (Baker & Hinton, 1999).

In this study, the author conducted two focus group discussions, of which one was face-to-face and had five participants. The other discussion was an online focus group with two participants during COVID social distancing. All seven participants shared similar political ideologies with one another. While the size of focus group varies, five participants per focus group is within the range advised by Jarvis (2011), Gamson (1992) and Bucy, and Newhagen (1999). The reason participants, who share similar political ideologies, were gathered for the discussion was to create a safe environment in which each participant felt comfortable and openly shared their



## PROCESSING 360-DEGREE PRESENTATION OF POLITICAL EVENTS

viewpoints with the others (Krueger, 1998; Morgan, 1997). In addition, because the nature of the stimuli was political and was likely to activate partisan attitudes, participants were assigned into groups that shared similar political views.

### **Stimulus**

The author provided four original video clips of which two were recorded from rallies held by Democratic candidate Beto O'Rourke at the height of his 2018 campaign for U.S. Senate in Texas, and from the Republican incumbent Ted Cruz. A professional videographer attended the town hall meetings of both candidates in the fall of 2018. Two types of formatting, fixed frame and 360-degree videos, were recorded from each candidate's town hall meetings. Each video clip lasted between 60 and 90 seconds. In the Beto O'Rourke footage, the 360-degree camera was placed between the candidate who spoke from an elevated stage and the audience members. At the Ted Cruz rally, the same camera was set up in the back of the room because that was the designated area for members of the press to place their equipment.

The stimulus for this research is the message delivery format of the video footage, which has two levels: fixed frame and 360-degree or variable perspective. Fixed frame is the standard video that viewers watch on television and on almost any electronic screen including laptops and desktop computers, and smart phones. On the other hand, 360-degree video is recorded with specialized cameras that have two overlapping 270-degree lenses fitted back to back covering the horizontal and vertical axes. Hence, four videos, two 360-degree and two fixed frame, that were shot during Cruz and O'Rourke rallies were used to see the different effects these videos might have on viewers.

### **Procedure**

Undergraduate students at a large midwestern university were recruited for focus group interviews. They participated voluntarily and received extra credit for their involvement. The author had the potential participants fill out a pre-questionnaire on political ideology, party affiliation, and media usage. This was to screen focus group participants for ideological views. All participants who filled the pre-questionnaire self-identified themselves being either Democrats or Independents.

Interviewees were instructed to bring their cellphones, ear pods, and have the YouTube application downloaded on their phones. The reason participants were asked to bring their own gadgets was to pair them with Google Cardboard, the head-mounted viewer that enables users to view 360-degree videos. Moreover, 360-degree videos have a binocular view option that can be activated only when YouTube application is downloaded on the phone. Once connected to the app and viewing the 360-degree videos, focus group participants were encouraged to move around freely with their swivel chairs to experience the complete scene recorded by the 360-degree cameras at the rallies of both candidates. Online focus group participants watched the 360-degree videos by hovering their mouse over the screen.

The author of this research moderated the focus group interview. She used a standardized protocol and a list of questions to guide the focus group discussion without explicitly stating key words such as “immersion” or “control,” instead, allowing participants to come up with their own terms to describe the experience. Participants filled out a post-focus group discussion questionnaire where the terms, immersion and being in control, were used after the discussion was held. In the questionnaire, immersion was measured with six questions: four related to specific

aspects of the videos, one related to individuals' emotions, and one related to users being in control of the viewing experience.

To guide the interview, the moderator also asked questions such as, "Do you feel closer to the candidate after watching this video?" "How likely are you to identify with him?" and "Do you support him?" These questions were also included in the post-focus group discussion questionnaire.

### **Theme Analysis**

Bloor et al. (2001) advise scholars to transcribe focus group discussions entirely because such transcriptions lay the foundation for valid academic analysis. For this research, the author transcribed the focus group interview, did a close reading, and developed themes by following steps described in Vaismoradi et al. (2016). Three types of unit of analysis were used to build subthemes, categories, and themes. One, "line of transcripts" defined by Delli-Carpini and Williams (1994) was used in the findings. Two, in some instances, the author used the "participant's single uninterrupted utterance" (Graber, 2001; Bucy & Newhagen, 1999). Three, conversational exchanges (Just et al., 1996) between participants were also inserted.

### **Findings**

#### **Pre-Focus Group Discussion**

Previous studies on 360-degree video presentation reported strong senses of presence, immersion, and empathy (Archer & Finger, 2018) experienced by viewers who in turn expressed higher levels of acceptance for Women's March event (Bucy, 2019) and heightened sense of responsibility toward gender inequality (Aitamurto et al., 2018). No individual difference was considered in previous studies. Hence, in this research, participants were split into separate groups based on their political ideologies. The author was interested in exploring if and how people vary in terms of processing political information presented in 360-degree versus fixed frame formats while taking the political ideologies into account.

The moderator asked the participants' opinions on the current political news coverage to help activate participants' memories and recall regarding their thoughts and perceptions about politics and media portrayals of it. Political polarization was evident among the participants from the start. As soon as media coverage of political events and politicians were brought up, participants related these topics to polarization. Participant 4 said, "I feel like Republicans and Democrats used to get along and I am not sure how we got to this point...has it ever [been] this bad?" Participant 1 said, "...the sides now have swung so much further apart than I think they once were like Democrats hate Republicans or Republicans hate Democrats...a healthy level of respect between the two...completely broken down now." Furthermore, participants discussed the rampant disagreement among individuals and the news media. Participant 1 said, "media coverage of politics is very divisive today," and Participant 2 said, "it seems like everyone is mad when it comes to politics."

## PROCESSING 360-DEGREE PRESENTATION OF POLITICAL EVENTS

It is ironic individuals who expressed surprise and disapproval at politics being divisive themselves practiced this polarization. In the focus group where Democratic party supporters were gathered, several participants expressed unwavering support and loyalty for the Democratic Party candidate, Beto O'Rourke, throughout the discussion. Participant 1 said, "I mean I voted for Beto and agree with him on many things so yeah...I would vote for him any day, ha-ha."

Such polarization even among the focus group participants is indicative of larger American publics. Iyengar and Krupenkin (2018b) found that since the 1980s, party-based division has been widening in the U.S. There is an increased hostility against the "other" party members, whereas ingroup members treat each other more favorably.

Two main themes emerged from the focus group discussion. These were: 1) valences of emotions generated by 360-degree presentation, and 2) stereotyping in 360-degree presentation.

### **Themes**

#### **Theme one: Valences of emotions elicited by 360-degree presentation.**

Burgoon and Hale (1988) and Burgoon and LePoire (1993) contend that individuals develop positive attitude towards others when the individuals are pleasantly surprised by others, situations, and/or objects. This is also known as positive expectancy violation. Negative expectancy violation, on the other hand, occurs when a person experiences the discomfort of expected or unexpected situations and/or persons. The viewing of a political rally through 360-degree devices brought about both positive and negative expectancy violations among participants.

#### ***Positive expectancy violation: Immersion and presence.***

## PROCESSING 360-DEGREE PRESENTATION OF POLITICAL EVENTS

Answers to all immersion related questions increased from low (e.g., 1 to 3) to high (e.g., 5 through 7) after watching the 360-degree videos. Participants were visibly excited after watching the first 360-degree video. Participants' responses were:

Morgan: It is cool.

Scott: Yea, pretty cool way of watching stuff.

Rene: It is cool that you see the crowd and all their reactions.

Participants then further discussed the aspects of presence in which individuals feel heightened senses of being in the mediated world (Green et al., 2018) . This finding is consistent with that of Atkins (2019) and de la Peña (2010) who discovered stronger experiences of presence were generated by 360-degree than 2D video. One participant compared the experience of viewing fixed frame video with “looking into something” and “being an outsider” and the experience of viewing 360-degree with “being there.” This was described as vicarious participation by Bucy (2019).

Scott: You are just a lot closer. **You are surrounded by everything** instead of being on the outside looking in.

Morgan: [in the fixed frame video] You are not part of that.

Enrique: [in the fixed frame video] yea, you are like watching something. It is a [detached] perspective versus you feel like you are there [in the 360-degree video].

Presence is also equated with embodied feelings (Green et al, 2018) that lead to perspective taking. Aitamurto et al (2018) discussed the immersive qualities of 360-degree videos predicted

## PROCESSING 360-DEGREE PRESENTATION OF POLITICAL EVENTS

perspective taking. In the Ted Cruz video, one individual was dragged out because they<sup>1</sup> were expressing opposing views against Republicans in favor of Obama care. Observing this incident first in the fixed frame, later in the 360-degree presentation, one of the participants expressed strong emotions.

Robert: Like I said the first time [referring to fixed frame], it was just kind of sad. And this time [referring to 360-degree presentation], I feel just like **guilty** for like watching it.

Rene: And this time [referring to 360-degree presentation] you can see her face like real close-up. And it is just kind of sad.

Participants felt either sad or guilty for not being able to do anything to help improve the situation. Sadness, guilt, and powerlessness were examples of embodied feelings experienced by the participants.

Morgan: Hehe, I am like I don't know what I would do. I guess just same thing as her [pointing to Rene] just stay there, honestly, I just don't know what I could do. I mean I can't fight them.

Participants' comments from 360-degree presentation indicate the strong sense of being there and this was not discussed post fixed frame video viewing.

### ***Positive expectancy violation: Asynchronous voyeurism and front-row seat.***

An interesting theme that emerged from this study can be called *invisible cloak* effect. It is the extent to which the viewer experiences events, particularly other people at those scenes,

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<sup>1</sup> The gender of the person who was dragged out of the rally was either referred as "she" or "he" by participants in two focus groups. Therefore, the author referred the individual using plural "they" form.

## PROCESSING 360-DEGREE PRESENTATION OF POLITICAL EVENTS

through 360-degree video the way he or she would not have experienced if it was not for the medium.

Enrique: It [referring to the 360-degree video] is also different. It is like, you know in a real setting, or if we were like really there, we were not going to look around (turning his body) and stare at the people, you know, while they are watching. But they don't know I am here since I am not, so I can stare anywhere. It is a different feeling definitely, but I do feel more there but it is not necessarily like I am there.

It can also be called asynchronous voyeurism because viewers afford freedom to be curious and even mischievous in the 360-degree presentation by staring at people however long they want. People are often constrained in natural settings due to social norms and cultural sensitivities. The placement of 360-degree video camera at the event also matters. In the Beto O'Rourke rally, the camera was placed right in front of the audience.

Scott: ...kind of feel like you are like front row watching everybody else.

Enrique asked: Did you see behind you there was like a girl's face right in front of you? And you can see like ...she was like so concentrated on.

In the Ted Cruz video, on the other hand, the camera was placed at the back of the crowd. However, this placement of the camera helped capture the "drama" of the event that is a political opponent being forced out from the venue.

Rene: ...and this time [360-degree video] you can see her face like real close-up.

In real life situations, people are unlikely to get as close as camera lenses do and fix their gazes longer. However, 360-degree video enables viewers to individually experience political events rather than having to watch the event from just one perspective.



## PROCESSING 360-DEGREE PRESENTATION OF POLITICAL EVENTS

The asynchronicity of 360-degree presentation pertains to temporal and spatial aspects of the event. Individuals have been watching pre-recorded 360-degree videos so far because technology has not yet advanced to the level where events can be live-streamed with one or several 360-degree cameras. Regardless, asynchronous voyeurism is perhaps something specific to 360-degree presentation.

### *Negative expectancy violation: Feelings of loss of control.*

Feelings of being in control in two video viewing conditions varied across focus group participants. Some interviewees felt that fixed frame video gave them more control or less disorientation and others felt the same in 360-degree video condition.

Robert: I think the viewer has more control in this [referring to 360-degree video] and the producer has more control in terms of angle [in the fixed frame].

On the contrary,

Scott: ... in your peripheral vision, you can still see something, like that's going on, in the fixed frame. But you can't, you can't do that, while your peripheral vision can only go so far when you are in the other frame [referring to 360-degree video].

This is not so much the camera, but viewers' eyes that keep looking and wanting more. The comment above was interesting because peripheral vision might have something to do with the sense of disorientation. When the participants are asked if they are fine with their choices being limited in fixed frame video formatting as opposed to 360-degree video, answers were mixed.

Rene: Fixed frame for me.

## PROCESSING 360-DEGREE PRESENTATION OF POLITICAL EVENTS

Robert: It depends on the length of the speech and what not. I could see myself kind of getting dizzy by watching that. If it is shorter, then this (referring to 360 degree), but if longer, then fixed frame.

### ***Negative expectancy violation: Distraction and fear of missing out (FOMO).***

Since 360-degree video gives an opportunity to look around and experience the political media event from more angles than fixed frame videos offer, participants both enjoy the control over the presentation and ability to look around at will but also fear they will miss out on something or the “main point” of the clip that everybody else might have witnessed.

Rene: ... if you're just focusing on one part you might miss something else over here.

Scott: Yea, ... let's say you just look up to the right when she was getting kicked out for one moment, then you miss, like, the part when the sign is ripped out of her hand. But, in the first video, you don't miss that because you're just watching the actual scene happening right in front of you. You look inside of it. Like, honestly, if I was distracted in the second video and if I was just looking up at the ceiling then I wouldn't have seen when she got kicked out but like in the first part you just see it because it's already there.

The fear of missing out was also discovered in the study conducted by Aitamurto (2018). Individuals were likely to rewatch the 360-degree video because they thought they missed something. Participants expressed this cognitive overload they experienced in terms, such as “overwhelmed,” “felt like missing out something important,” and “not being in control.”

Robert: It is definitely more immersive. I think lots of us are not used to using 360 videos. And that is why are so distracted by it.

## PROCESSING 360-DEGREE PRESENTATION OF POLITICAL EVENTS

Distraction was another term participants used to describe their negative expectation violations. One participant said she was no longer paying attention to the audio in the 360-degree video; however, she did so in the fixed frame video. Atkins et al (2019) and Archer and Finger (2018) also found a link between 2D video and deeper levels of message processing. In comparison to 360-degree video, individuals who viewed the 2D video were able to recall more information that was in the voice over.

Rene: I was not even listening. I mean I know it was the same video, but I was not listening to him; I was looking at everybody else.

Enrique: I think, for me, it was just like a bit more distracting. I don't know. Just a video, kind of looking around...I don't know if that was supposed to happen, but I got really distracted.

Taken together, immersive qualities offered by 360-degree video formatting were expressed by participants in mixed words including “being there,” “presence,” “distracted,” “overwhelmed” and “cool.” 360-degree presentation evoked richer, contradictory, and livelier discussions among participants. On one hand, interviewees were excited feeling like they were assigned front row seats at the rally. On the other hand, focus group participants feared of missing out because they thought they were more distracted by the 360-degree angle offered by the technology. Participants’ tendency to keep looking around in the 360-degree presentation might be arising from peripheral vision. As a consequence, participants felt they were no longer in control of the level of information coming into their heads and felt overwhelmed.

### **Theme two: The utilization of 360-degree presentation in stereotyping**

Stereotyping and non-verbal cues are the two concepts that connect the arguments presented in this second theme. Polarization among participants was evident in the pre-focus group

## PROCESSING 360-DEGREE PRESENTATION OF POLITICAL EVENTS

discussion. Unfortunately, this polarization prompted biased discussions among focus group participants who spoke favorably about the ingroup members and unfavorably about the outgroup members. When stereotyping, participants often relied on nonverbal cues that were more abundant in the 360-degree presentation than fixed frame.

### *Democratic participants for Democrats.*

Participants who self-identified themselves as democrats found evidence to like and support Senator Beto O'Rourke, a Democratic Party candidate from Texas, both in the fixed frame and 360-degree presentation of his rally. After watching him speaking to the crowd in the fixed frame presentation,

Enrique: He is a good speaker. He has got the...power, like, in his voice, kind of, to get people support him...He is not just laying out facts, but he is like actually speaking with emotion and expressing his mind.

Scott also shared positive qualities he noticed in the candidate after watching him in the 360-degree presentation.

Scott: he [referring to Beto] looked taller than what he did in the previous video. So, I was looking up the whole time.

Bucy and Stewart (2018) have defined static and dynamic nonverbal characteristics of political candidates. According to the scholars, vocalics and the way politicians present are examples of dynamic nonverbals whereas a candidate's height is considered static nonverbal. As literature suggests, participants indeed notice visual elements of the room, interior, and people when watching the video whether it is presented in 360-degree or fixed frame format. However, participants discussed visual elements and nonverbal cues more after watching the 360-degree presentation than fixed frame because they were not only focusing on the speaker but able to look

## PROCESSING 360-DEGREE PRESENTATION OF POLITICAL EVENTS

around and observe what rally attendees looked like, their facial expressions, and what signs they held in their hands.

Enrique: the one thing I did, looked at the audience. They looked more engaged, and they are actually listening rather than just like cheering 24/7.

Rene: he was talking about how teachers are dying from the flu [in the health care context] and then like I looked back and there was a sign somebody held that said “Retired teacher.”

Enrique: Yea, I saw that.

Rene: So, I knew the people that are affected by what he's talking about are actually there and you can see them and their passion for it, too.

Individuals use cues to strengthen their existing viewpoints. The 360-degree presentation facilitates the reinforcement of political identity.

Rene: it really didn't change much for me that it was 360 or not.

Participant 2: I don't think the message comes across any differently. I think either way I'm still feeling what I feel. I just think this makes it feel like you're, not really there, but it just is like a different angle watching the video, but I don't think it really makes a difference on the message that I'm getting from it.

To sum up, 360-degree video offers more cues than fixed frame video. Those cues include the people's facial expressions, drama at the event, atmosphere in the room, interior, and anything that would stand out for the viewer.

### ***Democratic participants against Republicans.***

Stereotyping the other group leads to an “us” versus “them” dichotomy and political polarization. Iyengar and Westwood (2015) compared the severity of political polarization to

## PROCESSING 360-DEGREE PRESENTATION OF POLITICAL EVENTS

racism. Participants in the discussion groups were aware of their stereotypes and explicitly stated the words “I am stereotyping,” but they still based their judgments of others on these stereotypes.

Robert: Uhm. I don’t know. I feel like ... I don’t want to, like, stereotyping like the whole like Republican conservative party. I feel like they kind of ...I feel like you see a lot of media portraying them like that...like kind of aggression. When they have like outsider people...in places like that ...like I stopped the video to read the sign and it was “proud Obama care recipient” and people were trying to rip that sign out of her hand.

Participant 1: The whole thing is that it made me like Cruz even less because he didn’t do anything when that man was being kicked out and just kept going...like typical Republican and honestly, it is not surprising...

Some participants tried to understand the details of the incident. Rene asked what the person was doing to get kicked out.

Scott: I think she was just protesting.

Robert: Yea, I think she was just kind of stopping him from speaking and she was just like speaking over Ted. That’s kind of the vibe I was getting, maybe...so just disrupting it.

Rene: I think if she was being disruptive and not letting him [referring to Cruz] speak then I guess I think I would say it is necessary to remove her because you can’t really hear what he is trying to say. But if she was just trying to bring up a different point of view and they just kicked her out, then I do think that is wrong.

Participants critically evaluated the incident by conversing with each other about what is free speech and what is violating others’ rights. Based on the information they collected from the videos and each other’s observations, participants agreed on what would be wrong or right in

## PROCESSING 360-DEGREE PRESENTATION OF POLITICAL EVENTS

different situations. However, the conversation went back to stereotypes in relation to both the Republican candidate and his supporters in general.

Robert: ...Ted Cruz was kind of making fun of her as she was leaving so.

Scott: yea, she could get kicked out, of course, but with everybody having to push her and all that stuff... but they kind of made it over the top.

The moderator then asked focus group participants to flip the situation by saying, “If somebody showed up at Beto O’Rourke rally holding a sign that states ‘proud supporter of Trump,’ do you think the audience would do the same removing her or do you think they would have tolerated the protestor?” Answers varied from skepticism about whether the other political party would have handled such a situation differently to the discussion slipping back again to defending their viewpoints.

Enrique: Yea, I think it would be about the same. Maybe Beto’s response might be different...which I can’t really say but I would like to see what his response would be.

Scott: He [referring to Beto] wouldn’t like make fun of the lady for getting kicked out. I guess he would have some kind of argument, some way to back up what she is trying to say not just saying oh, you are wrong and you gotta get out of here.

The 360-degree videos help viewers better understand what happened because they offer multiple angles of the event.

Participant 3: ...with 360 videos, **we can see like what truly happened and give us a broader perspective of what actually was going on.**

## PROCESSING 360-DEGREE PRESENTATION OF POLITICAL EVENTS

In the 360-video viewing condition, individuals used the technology to further reinforce their ideological identities by finding more cues or reasons to like the candidate from their party and dislike the candidate from the opposing party.

Participant 1: I think the whole thing is a typical Democrat versus Republican, a good old town home wood everything bar looking very like country chic, as for the Democrats were like in a school gym and I think it plays to their differences as parties and like who they are targeting.

As findings suggest, we are likely to look for cues to harden our pre-existing ideologies in 360-degree videos.

### **Discussion**

This discussion is centered around two main points: the violation of viewers' schema about video presentation and the impacts of 360-degree presentation on individuals' information processing. First, the complimentary qualities of 360-degree presentation involve concepts of presence and immersion. Immersion was expressed by focus group participants in terms such as, "becoming an insider" and "losing sense of immediate time and environment." In fact, media effects literature defines the term immersion exactly the same way the participants described. Literature further argues that when people are absorbed (i.e., immersion) into the mediated world, a political rally in this case, viewers become more susceptible to persuasion (Green et al., 2018).

However, persuasion may also not occur in a 360-degree viewing condition because it violates individuals' schema. The way moving images have been traditionally presented to viewers has been complementary to the way human eyes that see what is in front of them and the peripheral views. Consequently, individuals have developed schema that imply moving images are



## PROCESSING 360-DEGREE PRESENTATION OF POLITICAL EVENTS

experienced through a fixed frame. As posited by schema/script theory (Burgoon & Hale, 1988), new information, such as 360-degree presentation, helps individuals adapt and renew their pre-existing schema on the subject. Focus group participants were familiar with 360-degree and virtual reality technology and knew that this was another way to experience events.

Expectancy violation model can be applied to 360-degree presentation context and explain positive and negative expectancy violation. Focus group participants enjoyed the 360-degree presentation; however, they also voiced concerns. These include physical burdens and cognitive overload. People are prompted to move around with their body, or at least head, to experience the richness of content the 360-degree video format offers. Having to move around while watching a film, documentary, or political rally is not something viewers have done until virtual reality technology was invented in the 1980s. Even today, this technology has not become mainstream. It took film and then television decades to catch on in the early 1900s, and then on for just short periods of time at first. Humans are used to watching television from the comfort of their armchairs, hence the term “couch potato.”

Lang (2009) argued that humans have limited resources to process information and can get overwhelmed if too much media content is made available to them. In the 360-degree video condition, participants were cognitively overloaded due to the abundance of information choices. Continuity and juxtaposition of images are important concepts in visual literacy (Messaris, 1994). Although, 360-degree presentation grants the power of choosing a camera angle/perspective (e.g., juxtaposition) and where to look next (i.e., continuity) to the viewer, immersive qualities of 360-degree presentation also distract viewers from other events that might be happening within the event. This leads to feelings of being overwhelmed, loss of control, and FOMO.

## PROCESSING 360-DEGREE PRESENTATION OF POLITICAL EVENTS

In brief, 360-degree video without reporter narration is perhaps the least biased visual reporting method, but can individuals cognitively process 360-degree video content without feeling overwhelmed by it? As of now, people want a plate of food on which their proteins, carbs, and vegetables are chopped, cooked, and seasoned almost exactly the way they have had for years instead of having a half cooked meal for which they have the burden and responsibility to finalize. Even at the cost of their choices being limited, people want to sit back and enjoy their ready-to-eat meals rather than doing the hard labor of news making in their own kitchens. However, in other study by Bucy (2019), individuals appreciated the absence of framing.

Second, partisanship is attenuated with 360-degree presentation. In other words, when people are exposed to ideologically congruent and incongruent political messages, they tend to evaluate the message based on their pre-existing attitude and automatically look for informational cues that support their viewpoints. In psychology, individuals' capability to manipulate their thoughts and see things congruent to their preferred worldview is known as motivated reasoning (Kunda, 1990). According to Nil (2011), motivated reasoning is based on two goals: accuracy and direction. Motivated reasoning is responsible for the phenomena where individuals reinforce their existing senses of self.

In summary, 360-degree video, which offers various angles of the political rally in comparison to fixed frame video, activates partisanship identities.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of this research can be summed up in two parts: mixed emotions generated by 360-degree presentation and political stereotyping assisted by 360-degree presentation.

First, there is a consistency in comparative research between fixed frame and 360-degree videos regardless of elements related to individual differences. Participants reported that they felt like they were at the event almost as if they were an insider. Some participants excitingly described how they stared at town hall meeting attendees and how they were able to see people's faces close-up. Having more choices of perspectives in the 360-degree presentation made some participants feel like they were in control because they were able to cross-check facts and emotions across the candidates and their supporters and cue up whatever storyline they were weaving. This finding is consistent with that of Bucy (2019) who discovered individuals felt more in control in immersive 360-degree video viewing experiences. In the 360-degree video condition, participants were able to look around the room, at the speaker, at audience members, and at signs individuals held in their hands, on their own pace and in their own order. This makes them feel as if they have more agency. In other words, 360-degree presentation absorbs viewers more than fixed frame presentation and participants felt pleased.

Not all participants experienced 360-degree presentation positively, though. Some participants described how distracted and overwhelmed they were. Consequently, participants said they might have missed seeing some parts of the political rally because they were so engrossed in a specific part of the event.

Second, expectancy violation model (Burgoon and Hale, 1988) argues that positive communication outcomes can be expected from positive expectancy violations. Although, previous studies on 360-degree presentation discovered some positive outcomes, such as higher

## PROCESSING 360-DEGREE PRESENTATION OF POLITICAL EVENTS

acceptance for those who march for women's rights (Bucy, 2019) and an increased sense of responsibility in closing the gender gap (Aitamurto et al., 2018), that was not the case in this study. When political ideology was put into the context of 360-degree presentation of a political event, partisan members used nonverbal and visual cues that were more plentiful in the 360-degree presentation than the fixed frame to their "advantage" to support their argument and viewpoints. Furthermore, these loyal supporters found more cues to discredit the opposition party, again, by finding cues to prove their political beliefs.

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## Appendix 1. Focus Group protocol

Political ideology was measured with three questions in the pre-questionnaire.

1. The words ‘conservative’ and ‘liberal’ are frequently used to describe how people think of themselves regarding political and social issues. Would you call yourself a conservative, a liberal, or are you in the center?

Answer choices were “strong conservative, conservative, center, liberal, strong liberal, and none of the above.”

2. How about a political party? Do you identify yourself as a Republican, Democrat, Independent, or something else?

Answer choices were “Republican, Democrat, Independent, other, please identify, and no party affiliation.”

3. If you identify with a party, how strong is your support for that party?

Answer choices were recorded on a 7-point Likert scale where 1 is “not very strong” and 7 is “very strong.”

In the questionnaire, the immersion was measured with six questions where four were related to specific aspects of the videos, one was related to individuals’ emotions, and one was related to users being in control of the viewing experience. Answers were coded on a 7-point Likert scale where 1 is “not at all” and 7 is “very much.” Questions were:

1. How involving were the videos you just viewed?
2. To what extent did you experience a sense of ‘being there,’ as if you were present at the campaign event?
3. How much did it seem as if you, the candidate, and others in attendance were together in the same place?
4. How much did you feel immersed in the media experience you just had?
5. How exciting was the media experience you just had?
6. How much control did you feel that you had over the experience?