

“Looks can be deceiving”

The moderating effect of face-trustworthiness on the relation between argument-strength and persuasiveness of online-content



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Preface

It is Sunday afternoon. I am sitting behind my desk in this little student room in Tilburg. I am thinking about what I should write in this preface. Where should I start? Who should I thank? What will I say? I realize that next week I will receive my master's degree. The closing of a wonderful time as a student. And also the beginning of a new exciting phase in my life. I am looking forward to this moment.

I am also aware of the fact that without the help of other people I was not able to write this master's thesis, or even graduate from university. Therefore, I would like to give a very special thanks to a number of people who were closely involved during the research, who have supported me during the process of writing this thesis, who gave me the opportunity to follow an internship, and who enabled me to create this paper.

First of all, I thank my parents who always support me and for giving me the opportunity to pursue a university education. Subsequently, I thank my supervisors Joost, Peter and Denis for giving me guidance throughout the process and for providing me with useful feedback and critical comments. Furthermore, I thank my friend Friso for helping me out with creating the fictional weblog. I thank the people at the Strategic Development Group for making my internship a pleasant and valuable experience. And last but not least, I thank all other people who were somehow involved in my research, and helped me achieve the final result I proudly present to you.

Thank you sincerely,

Bob

Tilburg, Sunday 10th of May

Abstract

New (Internet) technology has affected personalization of politics, which has led to the rise of the political weblogs. Political weblogs facilitate a (new) form of interpersonal computer-mediated communication (CMC). This interpersonal CMC affects a great portion of the direct feedback that is available in normal face-to-face conversation. In face-to-face interaction, humans make a (social) judgment (thin-slice judgment) about the personality solely based on brief exposure to nonverbal cues. The current research examines the effect(s) of thin-slice judgments in an online context. It is proposed that the interpretation of personal information (e.g. face-trustworthiness) may affect the persuasiveness of online-content.

In a 2x3 between-subjects true experiment the way in which personal information presented on a political weblog influences the persuasiveness of the weblog-content was investigated. A group of 148 individuals participated in a scenario experiment in which participants were primed supraliminal (100ms) with a face (untrustworthy-face versus trustworthy-face versus no-face), and subsequently were assigned to read a fictional political-weblog, differing in argument-strength (weak arguments versus strong arguments).

Results indicate that individuals are influenced by the appearance of nonverbal static cues. Hence, under certain circumstances personal information presented on a political weblog is processed through a subconscious automatic stage. The processing of face-trustworthiness subsequently effects the processing of the weblog-content. The automatically activated thin-slice judgment was subconsciously used by recipient as a 'lens' through which individuals "see" the weblog-content. This affects following information processing, and defines image-formation. Although message-recipients foremost process the weblog-content deliberately, the previously activated judgment moderates the persuasiveness-process. In summary, the personal information presented on a political weblog does influence the persuasiveness of the weblog-content, depending on the thin-slice judgment that is based on interpreting this personal information.

Keywords: *Political weblogs, CMC, thin-slice judgments, face-trustworthiness, argument-strength, message-persuasiveness*

Introduction

Personalization of politics | A prominent development within the political communication landscape is the personalization of politics. Image, personality, and personal qualities of a politician more than ever play an important role in public relations (Van Aelst, 2002; Voerman, 2004; Todorov, Mandisodza, Goren, and Hall, 2005; Dainton and Zelley, 2005). “Regardless of their content and the techniques they employ, most messages share a common final goal: persuading target consumers to adopt a particular product, service, or idea” (Meyers-Levy and Malaviya, 1999, p. 45). Hence, in the case of political communication persuading message-recipients, such as voters. Since a great deal of communication- and information transfer occurs on the Internet, new (Internet) technology has affected this personalization of politics (e.g. Brock and Green, 2005; Pauw Sanders Zeilstra Van Spaendonck, 2007; Woodly, 2008; Hyped.nl, 2008; and Drezner and Farrel, 2008). Subsequently, this development has led to the rise of the political weblog, a method of profiling oneself on the Internet through a personal website (Van Aelst, 2002; Voerman, 2004; Brock and Green, 2005; Pauw Sanders Zeilstra Van Spaendonck, 2007; Woodly, 2008; Hyped.nl, 2008; Drezner and Farrel, 2008).

Political weblogs | A *political weblog* (also known as a *political blog*) is a personal webpage with minimal to no external editing, providing online (anonymous) commentary and periodically updated input (content) that is presented in reverse chronological order. The politician (blogger) offers a kind of logbook of information that the politician wants to share with the visitor of the weblog. The content concerns text (the most explicit content on weblogs), hyperlinks, photos, videos, audio, or a combination of those. The opportunity to provide online (anonymous) commentary shapes the weblog into a very interactive *computer-mediated communication* (CMC) tool (Drezner and Farrel, 2008). As the definition indicates, the content is diverse. Nevertheless, in various cases a political weblog contains additional *personal information* about the politician, such as a photograph, a date of birth, names of family members, hobbies, etcetera (Van Aelst, 2002; Voerman, 2004; Pauw Sanders Zeilstra Van Spaendonck, 2007).

As political weblogs facilitate a (new) form of interpersonal communication (hence, social interaction) between the politician and the voter, weblogs gain a more significant role in political image-building (Brock and Green, 2005; Drezner and Farrel, 2008). Since political weblogs are a form of CMC, it inevitably affects a great portion of the direct feedback that is

available in normal face-to-face conversation (e.g. one can see if the discussion partner is nervous) (Postmes, Spears and Lea, 1998). In face-to-face interaction, humans are able to pick up a wealth of information about the other person(s) and make an accurate (social) judgment (*thin-slice judgment*) about the personality solely based on brief exposure to (non-)verbal cues (e.g. speech or appearance) (Ambady, Krabbenhoft, and Hogan, 2006).

Interpersonal computer mediated communication | However, in some ways CMC can be similar to face-to-face interpersonal communication. For example, Kock (2004, p.327) demonstrated in an experiment about collaborative tasks that CMC that does not incorporate all the elements present in the face-to-face communication media (e.g. the ability to convey tone of voice or facial expressions) often leads to decreased quality of outcomes of collaborative tasks. Another experiment by Postmes, Spears and Lea (1998) previously confirmed this principle. The researchers verified that the absence of a photograph in an online conference assignment generated more negative impressions about the out-group ('the others'). Hence, anonymity was a determinant of increased hostility (Postmes, Spears and Lea, 1998, p. 705). Postmes et al. (1998, p. 705) explain that a photo can immediately activate a stereotypical perceptions and behaviour (e.g. a feeling of untrustworthiness or modesty). On the other hand, Wiertz (2005, p. 40) claims that due to fundamental differences between offline and online communication, transferring an offline communication trait (e.g. seeing a person in real-life) to an online context is not suitable. Therefore, investigating online-interactions separately (e.g. in a virtual community, like a weblog) is necessary.

Despite the fact that CMC is different from real-life interaction, research indicates that if the CMC (online context) is similar to the "natural" face-to-face communication (offline context), individuals might engage in similar mental schemes of processing information and forming judgments (Postmes et al., 1998). However, it remains unclear how individuals shape thin-slice judgments based on personal cues presented in an online-context (political weblog) and how this effects the persuasiveness of the content (the posted writings of the politician). Furthermore, despite the growing power of political weblogs and the increasing political importance and purpose of personality, the effects of profiling oneself on a political weblog remain poorly understood (Postmes, Spears, Sakhel, and De Groot, 2001; Van Aelst, 2002; Todorov, Mandisodza, Goren, and Hall, 2005). Research on the effects of political weblogs so far have been descriptive in nature. The various studies focussed on the effects of the actual (political) content of the weblog (e.g. Gill, 2004; Bowers and Stollers, 2005; Drezner and Farrel, 2008), the motives of politicians to write on a weblog (e.g. Van Aelst, 2002; Pauw

Sanders Zeilstra Van Spaendonck, 2007), non-politician bloggers that write about politics (Sunstein, 2008) or the underlying network between the various bloggers (e.g. Zuckerman, 2008). Hence, it does not help to understand to what extent personal information influences the persuasiveness of the political weblog-content.

Who says what to whom through which channel with what effect?

Main research question | The goal of this research paper is to examine the effect(s) of thin-slice judgments in an online context. The main research question is: *to what extent does personal information presented on a political weblog influence the persuasiveness of the weblog-content?* This main research question concerns principles of information processing and will be engaged using the Lasswell formula (1948): *Who says what to whom through which channel with what effect?* More specific, personal information of a politician represents the independent source variable (who?). Second, the weblog-content is the independent message variable (says what?). Third, the message-recipient is the recipient variable (to whom?). Fourth, the modality variable is the political weblog itself (through which channel?). And finally, the message-persuasiveness represents the dependent outcome variable (with what effect?).

This research paper will first focus on the independent source variable, followed by the independent message variable and the dependent outcome variable. The recipient variable and modality variable represent the context, and direct the focus of this research. These are explicitly described in the introduction paragraph. Furthermore, the main research is presented. After an extensive overview of the results, a conclusion and discussion are offered.

Who: personal information as independent source variable

Brunswick Lens Model | In the nineteen fifties psychologist Egon Brunswick (1955) developed the Brunswick Lens Model, which explains that people use different nonverbal and verbal cues as a type of ‘lens’ to observe underlying characteristics of an individual (e.g. that person looks handsome, she must be very self-confident). Nowadays, a principle that shows a resemblance to this ‘Lens Model’ is the principle of *thin-slice judgments* (e.g. Hogan, 2006; Peracchio and Luna, 2006; Alba, 2006; Main, Dahl, and Darke, 2007). The principle of thin-slice judgments will play a major role in this research paper.

Thin-slice judgments | *Thin slices* are samples of brief expressive behaviour (reflected by dynamic and/or static cues) of an individual of a duration less than 5 minutes (Alba, 2006, p. 15). A *thin-slice judgment* is a (social-)judgment of an individual that is shaped through only a brief exposure to thin-slices of information. For example, tone of voice, physical appearance, way of walking, clothing style, haircut, but also someone's car or wristwatch (Chiravuri and Peracchio, 2003). Various studies (e.g. Ambady, Krabbenhoft and Hogan, 2006; Peracchio and Luna, 2006; Main, Dahl, and Darke, 2007) indicate that the process of thin-slice judgment is a dual-process and that it consists of two stages: an initial *automatic* (evaluative) stage and a conscious *deliberate* (controlled) stage. The first stage (automatic processing) involves minimal cognitive processing and the second stage (deliberate processing) is marked by more elaborate cognitive processing and effort (Chiravuri and Peracchio, 2003).

Recent research (e.g. Ambady, Krabbenhoft and Hogan, 2006; Main, Dahl, and Darke, 2007) indicates that the initial automatic evaluative stage is presumably more prominent in the formation of thin-slice judgments, than the deliberate controlled stage (Chiravuri and Peracchio, 2003). For example, person impressions can be formed subconscious at the very first encounter with another person. Subsequently, these impressions can have subtle and subjective unrecognized effects on the following deliberate "second stage" (Todorov, Mandisodza, Goren, and Hall (2005).

"Automatic judgments may prime certain concepts, activating them in memory, and inhibit other concepts (e.g. stereotypes or natural reflexes such as anxiety), causing subsequent judgments to be more or less accurate. Since deliberate processing involves a great deal of cognitive resources, it may need fairly 'highly involved' individuals to move beyond the initial judgment" (Peracchio and Luna, 2006, p. 26). Individuals rely on thin-slice judgment to conserve cognitive resources and achieve efficiency. On the other hand, accuracy of judgments could be reduced if too much knowledge (e.g. information about a subject) is stored in memory (Kardes, 2006). For example, your best friend might have an aggressive appearance, but you know from experience that your friend is a very kind person.

Thin-slice judgments on the Internet | Although thin-slice judgments on the World Wide Web have been poorly investigated, research indicates that online consumers are likely to criticize websites in a similar way to the formation of thin-slice judgments in an offline context (Peracchio and Luna, 2006). Subsequently, the perception of security and usefulness of a website can be derived from thin-slices. Haried and Zahedi (2006) suggest that thin-slice

judgments could be used to evoke feelings of trust, emotion and stickiness (e.g. spending more time on a website) and allow accurate predictions of outcome variables (e.g. consumer decision-making).

Still, these studies do not help to understand what exact cues on a websites contribute to the formation of thin-slice judgments and nevertheless, what the effect is of these judgments on the interpretation of the website content. Since a personal website is a voluntary act of the author, readers assume it is justified to speculate about 'real' identity of the author (e.g. considering the photograph, that person is probably not very kind). Walker (2000) states this presumption, given the 'real-life' practice that people have interpreting impressions in face-to-face interaction.

The studies stated above demonstrate that individuals are able to make more or less accurate (social-)judgments about others without face-to-face interaction, using static nonverbal cues. Nonverbal (static) cues are often more accessible to observers than to actors (e.g. individuals are mostly unaware of how their faces appear) and nonverbal (static) cues are usually harder to suppress than verbal cues (Ambady, Krabbenhoft, and Hogan, 2006). This concludes that faces unveil a wealth of information for other individuals to form thin-slice (social-)judgments and that understanding of this principle is valuable in public-affairs and political-communication (Todorov et al., 2005).

Thin-slice judgments about facial appearance | With a single experiment by Todorov et al. (2005) the significant importance of facial appearance of political candidates was demonstrated. In other words, inferences of competence, based solely on facial appearance of a candidate predicted the outcomes of elections for the U.S. Congress. Participants of the experiment were only exposed to the candidates' faces (a photograph) for just one second (!) and did not have any prior knowledge about the candidates. Nevertheless, participants were able to make judgments about various trait dimensions (e.g. intelligence, charisma) that were clustered into three factors. These were competence, trust, and likability. Subsequently, the competence judgment that participants made predicted the outcomes of the elections. "This concludes that a rapid (automatic) inference from just a (static) facial appearance of a political candidate can influence processing of subsequent information about these candidates" (Todorov et al., 2005, p. 1623).

Obviously actual (real-life) voting decision are based on multiple information sources (e.g. political ideas or political experience), but under certain circumstances facial appearance and mainly facial expressions are very significant in forming an accurate judgment. Hence, in

this research paper it is argued that the photo of a politician (personal information) on a political weblog acts as a sufficient sample of brief expressive behaviour to form accurate thin-slice judgments.

Thin-slice judgments about face-trustworthiness | When an individual is confronted with the facial appearance of other individuals, they immediately draw trait inferences from that appearance (Willis and Todorov, 2006). This often automatic (beyond the conscious control) evaluation results into important social (thin-slice) judgments (e.g. threat or attractiveness) that can predict significant social outcomes and direct decisions (Oosterhof and Todorov, 2008). In various experiments, Willis and Todorov (2006) justified the suggestion that after an exposure time of only 100ms (!) to a face (a single static cue), an individual is able to form a judgment about for example attractiveness, trustworthiness or competence. Moreover, trustworthiness showed the highest correlation. Subsequently, the trustworthiness judgement that is stemming from facial features of an individual is used as a method to sense the (behavioural) intentions of that individual. These expressions (facial features) in return trigger *approach* or *avoidance* behaviour (e.g. that person looks untrustworthy, is probably better to avoid him/her) (Todorov, 2008). As the previous research indicates, effects from facial appearance are considerable. Furthermore, faces very drastically communicate personal information. Therefore, the *independent source* variable is *face-trustworthiness*, and consist of an '*untrustworthy face*' and a '*trustworthy face*'.

Says what: political weblog-content as independent message variable

Political weblog-content | As mentioned in the introduction paragraph, the content of political weblogs is various. Therefore, it is difficult to classify a specific political weblog-content. Nevertheless, political weblogs are directly (e.g. part of a political campaign) or indirectly (e.g. informing readers about day-to-day work to create sympathy) a political communication instrument. This involves the purpose of achieving a goal and can be interpreted as (political) persuasion (Dainton and Zelley, 2005). In this matter the persuasiveness of the content will depend, for a great deal, on the arguments that are presented (Petty and Cacioppo, 1984).

Argument-Strength | The interpretation of the arguments by recipients depends, for a great deal, on the relationship between the communication-type, the argument relevance, argument

quality, the number of arguments and the level of involvement of the recipient, all relative to the context in which they are presented (Petty and Cacioppo, 1984).

In the case of a political weblog the question should be asked which ‘composition’ of argument will determine ‘strength’ of arguments. No data relating this specific situation is available, but an experiment by Petty and Cacioppo (1984) indicated that in a low involvement condition, manipulating the number of arguments (in an advertising message) had a greater impact on persuasion than in the high involvement condition. Other determinants than quality of the issue-relevant argument (e.g. expertise, likeableness of the message source or famous endorsers) become significant establishers of persuasion in low involvement conditions (Petty, Cacioppo, and Schumann, 1983).

When a message (again an advertising message) is of high personal relevance (high involvement) manipulating the quality of the arguments has a more significant effect as a determinant of persuasion. A reasonable explanation for these events is that individuals who are unmotivated or not able to cognitively process the message (low involvement), might use the heuristic of ‘the more arguments is probably better’. In a situation of high personal relevance, individuals are more motivated to actively and deliberately process the quality of issue-relevant arguments (Petty and Cacioppo, 1984).

The research presented above demonstrates that interpretation of argument-strength is indeed a combined action between the communication-type, the argument relevance, argument quality, the number of arguments and the level of involvement of the recipient. Nevertheless, argument-strength is still strongly influenced by deliberate cognitive processing of the subsequent arguments. Hence, argument-strength is a considerable foundation for persuasiveness. Therefore, *argument-strength* is the *independent message* variable in this present study and consist of ‘*weak-arguments*’ and ‘*strong-arguments*’.

With what effect: message-persuasiveness as dependent outcome variable

Message-persuasiveness | Persuasion or persuasiveness is typically defined as “human communication designed to influence others by modifying their beliefs, values, or attitudes” (Simons, 1976, p. 21). Hence, political persuasiveness involves a combination between source, message, and receiver characteristics, to create or to change attitudes in a particular direction. That is, an important feature of persuasiveness is the extent to which attitudes are based on the various types of information. Hence, “the processing strategy people adopt during judgment formation depends on the amount of cognitive resources they devote to

message processing, which can be influenced by a variety of factors that are associated with the message recipient, content, and/or context” (Meyers-Levy and Malaviva, 1999, p. 54).

The previous reasoning is in line with the intrinsic methods of persuasion of Aristoteles, appeal based on logic or reason (logos), appeal based on emotion (pathos), and appeal based on the character of the speaker (ethos). Hence, if reasoning is applied in the context of a political weblog, respectively three distinct *dependent outcome* variables form *message-persuasiveness*: ‘*message credibility*’, ‘*attitude toward message*’, and ‘*attitude toward politician*’.

Moderating effect of face-trustworthiness | In this research paper, the three dependent outcome variables represent the (political) persuasiveness of the political weblog-content. Following is determining the extent to which judgments are based on the various types of information. In other words, to what extent face-trustworthiness (independent source variable) effects the relation between argument-strength (independent message variable) and respectively message credibility, attitude toward message, and attitude toward politician (dependent outcome variables) in the context of a political weblog-content.

Judgments about message-persuasiveness are sensitive to various contextual and situational influences, and emotional and rational appeals often coexist within the persuasive message (Nabi, 1999; Meyers-Levy and Malaviya, 1999). Hence, face-trustworthiness and argument-strength coexist within the persuasive message, but the message-recipient is likely to process both appeals differently. For example, an attitude towards a (persuasive) message can be shaped prominently by cognition or prominently by affect (feelings and emotion). In the case of political communication, attitudes that are shaped by affect concern for example positive or negative feeling that an individual associates with a candidates’ appearance. Attitudes that are shaped by cognition concern for example positive or negative beliefs about political arguments (Brock and Green, 2005). These examples are consistent with the notion of Pham et al. (2001) who state that both feelings-monitoring (e.g. a feeling of trust) and reason-based assessments (e.g. argument quality) intervene in processes of evaluation (information processing), with one type of process being more ‘leading’ depending on a judgment to be made (e.g. persuasiveness).

Thus, in this research paper it is expected that within dual-process of forming a thin-slice judgment about face trust, the automatic process is more dominant, and that the judgment is an emotional affective judgment. This initially formed impression subsequently has a subtle and subjective effect on the next rational cognitive processing of the argument-

strength. The automatically activated perception of trustworthiness is used as a ‘lens’ through which individuals “see” the weblog-content.

Furthermore, it is expected that negative perceptions of a politicians’ face are the most significant, since negative ‘slices’ have a stronger attention-grabbing power (Oosterhof and Todorov, 2008). The untrustworthy appearance will provoke negative feelings. For example, feelings of untrustworthiness or distrust. While processing the weblog-content these negative feelings will negatively influence the message-persuasiveness. Therefore, face-trustworthiness has a prominent role in the formation of judgments about the persuasiveness of the political-weblog.

Face-trustworthiness, argument-strength, and message credibility: Message credibility is strongly based on logic or reason. In other words, facts are presented to support the reasoning of the variable source. Hence, recipients form their judgment on the arguments that are presented, but also on the source that provides these arguments (e.g. do these facts make sense?). Hence, this leads to the following hypothesis:

H1: *It is expected that ‘face-trustworthiness’ has a moderating effect on the relation between ‘argument-strength’ and ‘message credibility’. More specific, when a face is perceived trustworthy, argument-strength has a positive effect on message credibility; when a face is perceived untrustworthy, argument-strength has a negative effect on message credibility.*

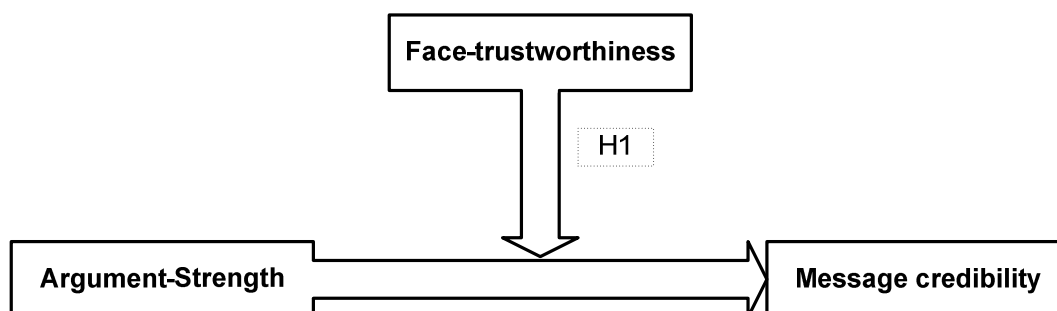


Figure 1: Schematic representation of hypothesis 1

Face-trustworthiness, argument-strength, and attitude toward message: Attitude toward message is strongly based on emotion. For example, a certain reasoning could be presented very passionately. Trying to persuade recipients with an interesting line of thought, supported with matching arguments. Hence, this leads to the following hypotheses:

H2a: *It is expected that ‘argument-strength’ has a main effect on ‘attitude toward message’. More specific, the effect of ‘strong arguments’ on ‘attitude toward message’ is positive; the effect of ‘weak arguments’ on ‘attitude toward message’ is negative.*

H2b: *It is expected that ‘face-trustworthiness’ has a moderating effect on the relation between ‘argument-strength’ and ‘attitude toward message’. More specific, when a face is perceived trustworthy, argument-strength has a positive effect on attitude toward message; when a face is perceived untrustworthy, argument-strength has a negative effect on attitude toward message.*

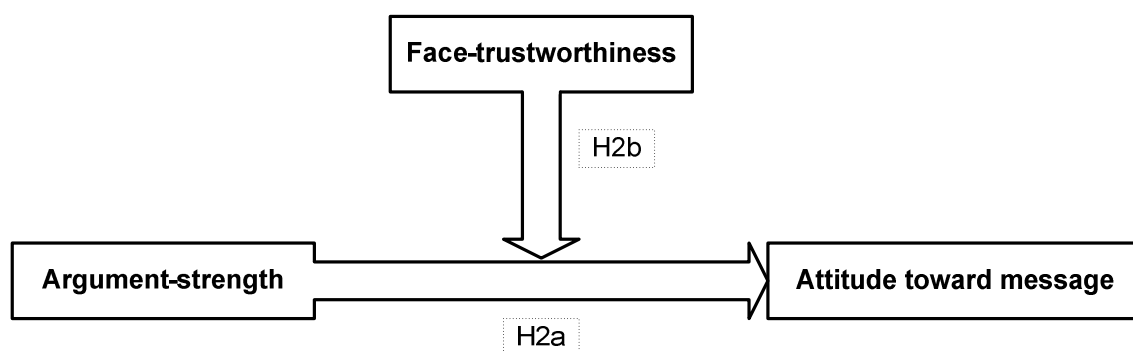


Figure 2: Schematic representation of hypothesis 2a & hypothesis 2b

Face-trustworthiness, argument-strength, and attitude toward politician: Attitude toward politician is strongly based on the character of the speaker. Recipients are being persuaded based on the fact that the source of the message is a notable or qualified authority. A person who can be trusted, based on for example experience or appearance. Hence, this leads to the following hypotheses:

H3a: *It is expected that ‘face-trustworthiness’ has a main effect on ‘attitude toward politician’. More specific, the effect of a ‘trustworthy face’ on ‘attitude toward politician’ is positive; the effect of an ‘untrustworthy face’ on ‘attitude toward politician’ is negative.*

H3b: *It is expected that ‘face-trustworthiness’ has a moderating effect on the relation between ‘argument-strength’ and ‘attitude toward politician’. More specific, when a face is perceived trustworthy, argument-strength has a positive effect on attitude toward politician; when a face is perceived untrustworthy, argument-strength has a negative effect on attitude toward politician.*

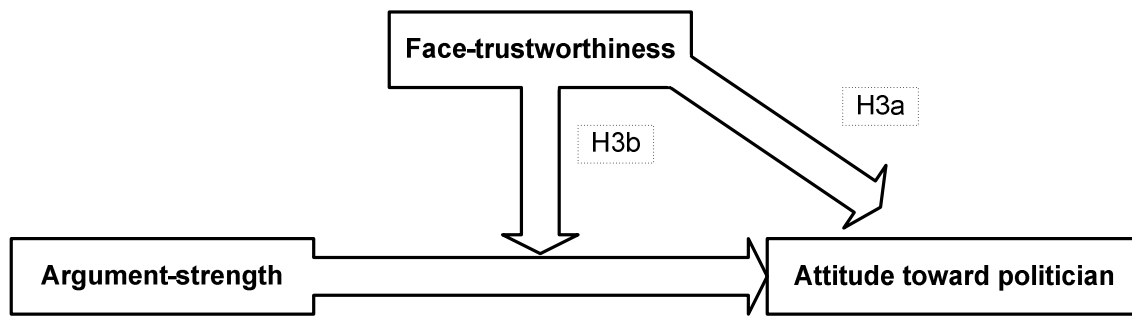


Figure 3: Schematic representation of hypothesis 3a & hypothesis 3b

Research

To provide support for the hypotheses, two studies were conducted. In study 1, the manipulation of the two independent variables *face-trustworthiness* and *argument-strength* was verified. In study 2, the hypotheses were tested. In the follow paragraphs the two studies are described. For each study, the participants, the procedure, the stimulus material, the measures, and the results are presented.

STUDY 1

Participants | A total of 39 individuals (15 men, 24 women, $M_{age} = 23.85$, $SD = 8.38$, minimum = 18, maximum = 62) participated in this study. These were all university students or employees of a faculty of behavioural science, in the Netherlands. All participants participated on a voluntary basis. The experiment was accomplished within one week time.

Procedure | In this study the manipulation of the independent variables ‘face-trustworthiness’ and ‘argument-strength’ was tested. All participants were exposed to the same ‘face-trustworthiness’ stimuli, but were randomly assigned to one of the argument-conditions (weak arguments versus strong arguments). Participants were guided to a separate room with a computer. Instructions were provided on screen. The experiment consisted of two parts (see Appendix 1 for a visual presentation of study 1). In the first part, the manipulation of face-trustworthiness was tested. A total of 39 participants were exposed to a set of three faces each, that appeared on the screen. The order of the three faces was counterbalanced. In summary, a total of six ‘line-ups’ of faces were presented. Participants were instructed to choose the *most untrustworthy face*, out of each line-up of faces.

Next, participants were (again) exposed to various faces. In this case, three different faces were used (Figure 5). Each face was exposed for a limited time (1 second, 0.5 second

and/or 0.1 second). Each face appeared separately. A clock on the centre of the screen indicated the time before the regarding face was visible. Immediately after the countdown was finished the face appeared on the exact same spot as where the clock was previously. Subsequently, after each exposure of a face the respondent had to state if they experienced the presented face as trustworthy. Next, the respondent had to indicate how confident they were about their choice. The first two face appearances (face A & face C) had a limited time exposure of 1 second. The third and fourth face appearance (face B & face C) had a limited time exposure of 0.5 second and the last two face appearances (face A & face C) had a limited time exposure of only 0.1 second (100ms), a supraliminal priming.

In the second part of the experiment, the manipulation of argument-strength was tested. 20 individuals were assigned to a weblog-text containing weak arguments (weak condition) and 19 individuals to a weblog-text containing strong arguments (strong condition). After respondents read the weblog-text they had to answer two questions about argument-strength. Apart from these questions some demographics were measured.

Stimulus material | The various faces that were used as stimulus material are derived from the trustworthiness dimension of Oosterhof and Todorov (2008) (Figure 4). This dimension is based on (behavioural) studies and computer modelling. It exists of various faces that differ in trustworthiness, and are expected to trigger approach or avoidance behaviour. The faces on this dimension represent from left (-8.0) to right (8.0), respectively untrustworthy faces, neutral faces, an trustworthy faces. For determining the most untrustworthy face out of a face line-up, various faces along the dimension were used. In testing the trustworthiness of a face with limited time exposure, the most extreme faces of the trustworthiness dimension were used (Figure 5).

The weblog-text was a fictional political text about initiating a project for subsidization art organizations due to the (financial) crisis. This text was inspired by a message placed on the political website of the left liberal Democrats 66 (D66) and was aimed at persuading readers (d66.nl, 2008). The text consisted of a mixture between facts and fiction. In the weak condition only three rather weak arguments were used to convince the reader. In the strong condition the introduction and the composition of the text was similar to the weak condition. Only in this case the three weak arguments were replaced by eight relatively strong arguments (see Appendix 1, Figure 14 & Figure 15).

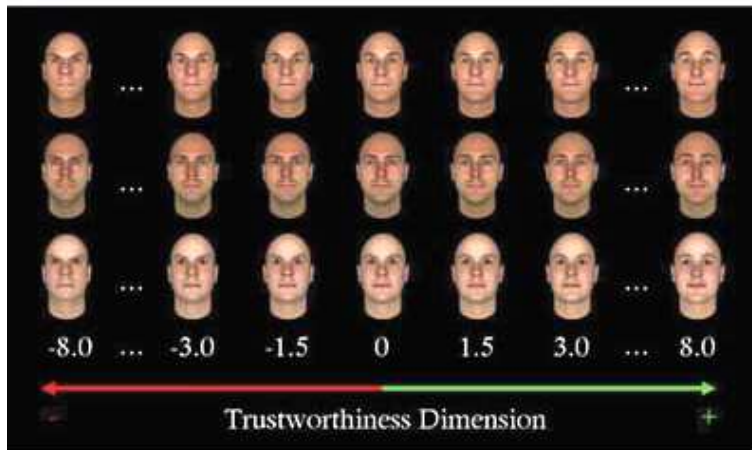


Figure 4: Trustworthiness dimension of Oosterhof and Todorov (2008)

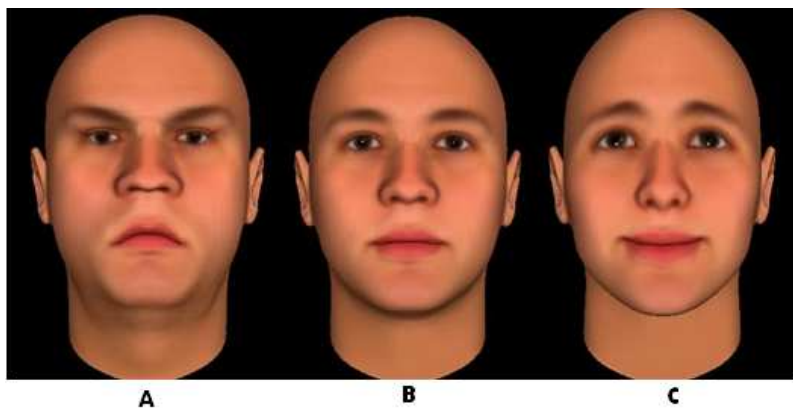


Figure 5: Extreme faces of the trustworthiness dimension (Oosterhof and Todorov, 2008)

Measures | The choice of respondents concerning the most untrustworthy face in the different line-ups was measured by clicking on a button beneath the face of choice. Determining the trustworthiness of a face with limited time exposure (e.g. 100ms) was answered with a simple yes or no. Level of confidence was measured using a five-point likert-scale, varying from ‘not very confident’ (1) to ‘very confident’ (5). The construct argument-strength ($\alpha = .89$) was measured with a 2-item scale. Example given, one seven-point scale ranged from totally not persuasive (1) to very persuasive (7). Demographics consisted of open questions about gender and age.

Results | The results from testing various sets of faces (determining the most untrustworthy face) are inline with the face trustworthiness dimension and with previous research by Oosterhof and Todorov (2008). Based on interpreting the frequency Table (Table 1) it can be stated that individuals were able to select the face that resembles the most untrustworthy face. In other words, the face that was expected to be chosen as the most untrustworthy face.

Furthermore, the participants could judge face-trustworthiness with a limited time exposure of 100ms (Table 2). When face C was exposed for a time limit of 0.1 second, 92.3 percent of the respondents determined the face as trustworthy. Subsequently, 69.2 percent of the respondents were (very) confident about their judgment. Next, in the case of exposing face A for only 0.1 second, 97.4 percent determined the face as untrustworthy. Next, 82.1 percent of the respondents were (very) confident about their judgment. These results are consistent with the expectations, and indicate that the stimulus of ‘face-trustworthiness’ is valid and reliable.

Table 1: Frequency Table determining the most untrustworthy face from line-up of faces

Set 1				
Line-up of faces	<u>Untrustworthy</u>	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Trustworthy</u>	<u>Total</u>
Percentage (n)	92.3 (n = 36) a	7.7 (n = 3)	0.0 (n = 0)	100.00 (n = 39)
Set 2				
Line-up of faces	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Untrustworthy</u>	<u>Trustworthy</u>	<u>Total</u>
Percentage (n)	2.6 (n = 1)	92.3 (n = 36) a	5.1 (n = 2)	100 (n = 39)
Set 3				
Line-up of faces	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Trustworthy</u>	<u>Untrustworthy</u>	<u>Total</u>
Percentage (n)	17.9 (n = 7)	0.0 (n = 0)	82.1 (n = 32) a	100 (n = 39)
Set 4				
Line-up of faces	<u>Untrustworthy</u>	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Trustworthy</u>	<u>Total</u>
Percentage (n)	71.8 (n = 28) a	17.9 (n = 7)	10.3 (n = 4)	100 (n = 39)
Set 5				
Line-up of faces	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Untrustworthy</u>	<u>Total</u>
Percentage (n)	7.7 (n = 3)	2.6 (n = 1)	89.7 (n = 35) a	100 (n = 39)
Set 6				
Line-up of faces	<u>Untrustworthy</u>	<u>Untrustworthy</u>	<u>Untrustworthy</u>	<u>Total</u>
Percentage (n)	35.9 (n = 14) a	28.2 (n = 11)	35.9 (n = 14) a	100 (n = 39)
a: most chosen face				
<i>Appendix 1 contains an example of a line-up of faces</i>				

Table 2: Frequency Table determining face-trustworthiness with limited time exposure

Face C (time limit of 1 second)			
Judgment	<u>Trustworthy</u>	<u>Untrustworthy</u>	<u>Total</u>
Percentage (n)	97.4 (n = 38)	2.6 (n = 1)	100 (n = 39)
Level of confidence (n): 76.9 percent of respondents (very) confident (n = 30)			
Face A (time limit of 1 second)			
Judgment	<u>Trustworthy</u>	<u>Untrustworthy</u>	<u>Total</u>
Percentage (n)	0.0 (n = 0)	100 (n = 39)	100 (n = 39)
Level of confidence (n): 77.0 percent of respondents (very) confident (n = 30)			
Face B (time limit of 0.5 second)			
Judgment	<u>Trustworthy</u>	<u>Untrustworthy</u>	<u>Total</u>
Percentage (n)	87.2 (n = 34)	12.8 (n = 5)	100 (n = 39)
Level of confidence (n): 64.1 percent of respondents (very) confident (n = 25)			
Face A (time limit of 0.5 second)			
Judgment	<u>Trustworthy</u>	<u>Untrustworthy</u>	<u>Total</u>
Percentage (n)	0.0 (n = 0)	100 (n = 39)	100 (n = 39)
Level of confidence (n): 84.7 percent of respondents (very) confident (n = 33)			
Face C (time limit of 0.1 second)			
Judgment	<u>Trustworthy</u>	<u>Untrustworthy</u>	<u>Total</u>
Percentage (n)	92.3 (n = 36)	7.7 (n = 3)	100 (n = 39)
Level of confidence (n): 69.2 percent of respondents (very) confident (n = 27)			
Face A (time limit of 0.1 second)			
Judgment	<u>Trustworthy</u>	<u>Untrustworthy</u>	<u>Total</u>
Percentage (n)	2.6 (n = 1)	97.4 (n = 38)	100 (n = 39)
Level of confidence (n): 82.1 percent of respondents (very) confident (n = 32)			

Table 3: Means and Standard Deviations study 1 for each experimental cell on argument-strength

Argument-strength	<i>M (SD)</i>
Weak	2.60 (1.12) <i>n = 20</i>
Strong	4.26 (1.23) <i>n = 19</i>
$t(37) = -4.423, p < .001$	

The data concerning argument-strength was analysed with an independent-samples T-test (Table 3). The weak arguments scored significantly lower ($M = 2.60$, $SD = 1.12$) on the construct of argument-strength, than the strong arguments ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 1.23$). The assumption of equal cell variance was rejected ($t(37) = -4.423$, $p < .001$). This result is consistent with the expectation that a considerable difference exists between the perception of weak arguments and strong arguments.

In summary, results from the manipulation check were inline with the expectations. Respondents were able to indicate the faces that resembled untrustworthy faces on the trustworthiness dimension. Subsequently, respondents could judge the trustworthiness of a face with a limited time exposure of 100ms (supraliminal priming). Furthermore, the difference between strong arguments and weak arguments in argument strength is considerable enough to use both conditions as a manipulation. Therefore, the manipulations (face-trustworthiness and argument-strength) are suitable to use in study 2.

STUDY 2

Participants | A total of 149 individuals (56 men, 93 women, $M_{age} = 28.88$, $SD = 13.92$, minimum = 15, maximum = 69) participated in this study. The study was conducted among various individuals and organizations: university students and employees of a faculty of behavioural science, employees of a consultancy firm, friends and family of the researcher, employees of a manufacturer of propulsion and rudder systems, an administrative division of a healthcare provider, and college students. The university students received course credits, but all other participants participated on a voluntary basis. Furthermore, the experiment was accomplished within one month time, and conducted in the Netherlands.

Table 4: 2x3 between-subject true experiment design study 2

	Face-trustworthiness		
Argument-strength	<i>Untrustworthy</i>	<i>Trustworthy</i>	<i>No-face</i>
<i>Weak</i>	Group 1 ($n = 25$)	Group 2 ($n = 23$)	Group 3 ($n = 26$)
<i>Strong</i>	Group 4 ($n = 24$)	Group 5 ($n = 25$)	Group 6 ($n = 25$)

Procedure | In study 2, the hypotheses were tested. The main study was a 2x3 between-subjects true experiment design (Table 4) In other words, 2 (weak arguments versus strong

arguments) x 3 (untrustworthy-face versus trustworthy-face versus no-face). Respondents were randomly assigned to one of the six experiment cells.

Participants were guided to a separate room with a computer. Instructions were provided on screen. There was no time limit involved. Respondents were asked to look at a screenshot of a political weblog. Respondents were instructed that this was the weblog of a Dutch politician, whose name and identity was not mention because of privacy-reasons. However, this was not the case. Although the weblog-layout was an existing format, the content was fictional just like the so called politician. Also all items that somehow communicated personal information (e.g. photograph and name) were ‘blurred’ and not visible for the observer. Still the item that was clearly visible in the screenshot was the weblog-text, the blog message itself (see Appendix 2 for a visual presentation of study 2).

To simulate the deliberate processing stage, respondents were assigned to read this text and answer following questions. To influence respondents’ initial automatic processing, respondents were first *primed supraliminal* with a face. The moment before the ‘screenshot’ appeared on the screen, a face (untrustworthy or trustworthy) was primed supraliminal for 100ms(!). In the controlled conditions no face was primed. To force participants to concentrate on the screen (and did not miss the priming), a clock on the centre of the screen indicated the time before the weblog was visible. The face appeared on the exact same spot as this clock, just between the final countdown and the appearance of the weblog.

After respondents were confronted with the stimulus material, respectively message credibility, attitude toward message, and attitude toward politician were measured. Apart from these constructs the experiment also included a suspicion probe (whether respondents were aware of the supraliminal priming) and questions about demographics.

Stimulus material | The priming effect of the independent variable *face-trustworthiness* was realized by using the most untrustworthy face or the most trustworthy face on the trustworthiness dimension of Oosterhof and Todorov (2008) (Figure 4). These faces were the exact same faces tested in study 1, hence face A and face C (Figure 5). De independent message variable *argument-strength* was presented by the two weblog-texts from study 1. These texts were presented in the layout of the most popular social network weblog in the Netherlands, called Hyves (AD.nl, 2008). In 2008, Dutch Internet users together spent an average of 19.6 million hours a month on www.hyves.nl (Van Dijk, 2008). Using this format, the presentation of stimulus material would be more plausible, especially since the weblog is so well known. Also various Dutch politicians are ‘Hyves-users’.

Measures | The depended outcome variable *message-persuasiveness* is composed out of three constructs. The first construct, the message credibility (MC), was measured by using a 5-item scale ($\alpha = .67$) composed of the following items: not informative/informative, untrustworthy/trustworthy, inaccurate/accurate, unconvincing/convincing and not believable/believable (Hallahan, 1999; Wang, 2006). The second construct is attitude towards the message (ATM). Also this construct was measured by using a 5-item scale ($\alpha = .73$) developed by Hallahan (2006). The scale was composed of the items: boring/interesting, not attention-getting/attention-getting, bad/good, not fun/fun, and do not like it/like it. Attitude towards the politician (ATP) was measured using a 5-item scale ($\alpha = .70$). This construct consisted partially of the trait dimension scale developed by Todorov et al. (2005), completed with frequently utilized character traits. The scale was composed of the following items: corrupt/incorruptible, fake/authentic, untrustworthy/trustworthy, incompetent/competent and not likable/likable. All 15-item scales ranged from 1 to 7 in answer alternatives, with the various items opposite each other as the extremes (e.g. 1: boring versus 7: interesting).

Suspicion probe was measured using two distinct questions. Suspicion probe was only administered for respondents that were primed with a face. In the first question respondents were asked if they detected in someway the politician's identity, "Did you catch a glimpse of the politician's identity?" This question was answered with a simple yes or no. If 'yes' was the answer, a second question followed. In this case, respondents were assigned to choose the face they assumed to have seen. Four choices were presented, of which (presented from left to right) a trustworthy face, a neutral face, an untrustworthy face, and a blank face (Appendix 2, Figure 26). The trustworthy face and the untrustworthy face were the actual primed faces used in the experiment. The neutral face was the median face on the face trustworthiness dimension (Figure 5). The blank face represented "I do not know". Data about demographics were collected using open questions about gender and age. For example, "What is your age?"

Results | Using a Cook's distance-test, an outlier within the spss-dataset was discovered. This observation had an unusual effect on the output. Therefore, based on the residual-measurement the specific observation was deleted (standard residual < -2.81). This resulted in a dataset of 148 respondents.

Message credibility (MC): Data was analysed using an univariate analysis of variance (two-way ANOVA). The analysis did not show a main effect for face-trustworthiness on message credibility ($F(2, 142) = .350$, n.s.). Next, no main effect was found for argument-strength on

message credibility ($F(1, 142) = .000$, n.s.). Subsequently, the analysis did result in an interaction effect for face-trustworthiness and argument-strength on message credibility. A significant difference was observed in the scores on message credibility ($F(2, 142) = 3.481$, $p < .033$). Hence, the interaction effect provides support for hypothesis 1 (Table 5 & Table 6). More specific, when a face was perceived trustworthy, argument-strength had a positive effect on message credibility. When a face was perceived untrustworthy, argument-strength had a negative effect on message credibility.

Table 5: Means and Standard Deviations study 2 for each experimental cell on message credibility (MC)

MC	Untrustworthy <i>M (SD)</i> <i>n = 25</i>	Trustworthy <i>M (SD)</i> <i>n = 23</i>	No-face <i>M (SD)</i> <i>n = 26</i>	Total <i>M (SD)</i> <i>n = 74</i>
Weak	4.15 (1.091) <i>n = 25</i>	3.81 (.860) <i>n = 23</i>	3.96 (.896) <i>n = 26</i>	3.98 (.953) <i>n = 74</i>
Strong	3.63 (1.021) <i>n = 24</i>	4.30 (.924) <i>n = 25</i>	3.99 (.817) <i>n = 25</i>	3.98 (.950) <i>n = 74</i>
Total	3.90 (1.079) <i>n = 49</i>	4.06 (.918) <i>n = 48</i>	3.98 (.850) <i>n = 51</i>	3.98 (.949) <i>n = 148</i>

Table 6: ANOVA for message credibility (MC)

MC	F (df)	Sig.
Face-trustworthiness	.350 (2,142)	.705
Argument-strength	.000 (1,142)	.998
Face-trustworthiness x Argument-strength	3.481 (2,142)	.033c
c: significant interaction effect		

As expected the results indicate that face-trustworthiness has a moderating effect on the relation between argument-strength and message credibility. When a trustworthy face was primed the perception of message credibility was more positive, than when an untrustworthy face was primed. Surprisingly, a counterintuitive result concerns argument-strength. In the case of priming an untrustworthy face (Figure 6), respondents evaluated message credibility *more* negative when they were confronted with strong arguments ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 1.021$), than confronted with weak arguments ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 1.091$). In summary, hypothesis 1 is confirmed.

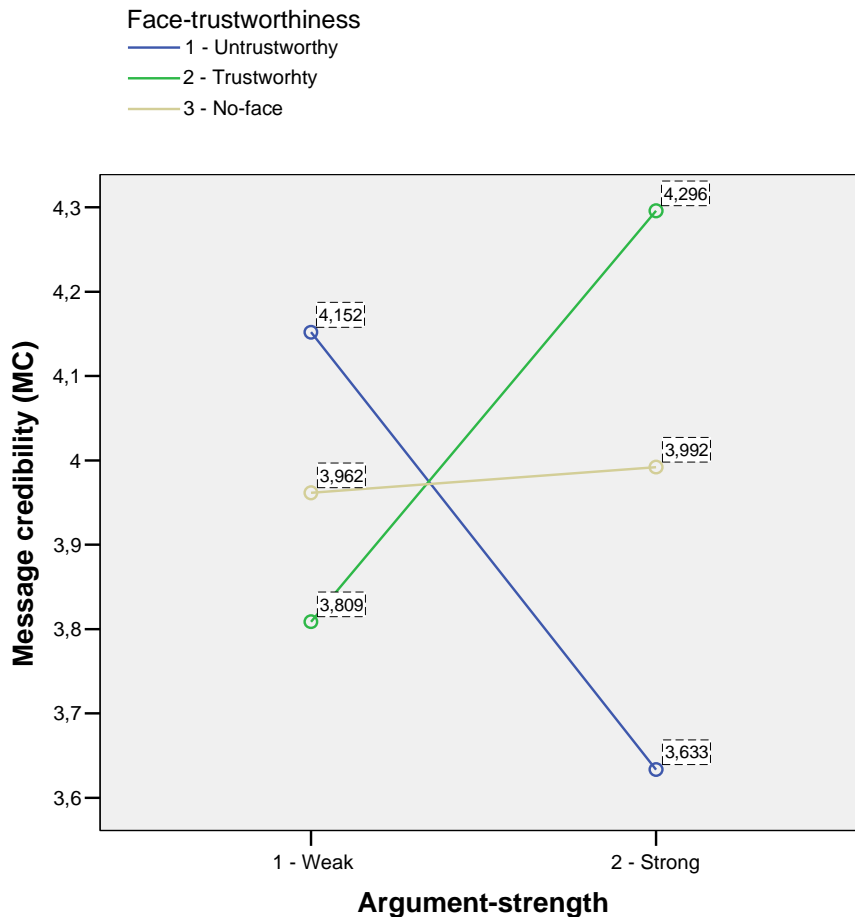


Figure 6: Interaction effect for face-trustworthiness and argument-strength on message credibility

Attitude toward message (ATM): The two-way ANOVA did not result in a main effect for face-trustworthiness on attitude toward message ($F(2, 142) = 2.044$, n.s.). Furthermore, the results did (in part) confirm hypothesis 2a (Table 7 & Table 8). As expected, a main effect for argument-strength on attitude toward message was found ($F(1, 142) = 9,295$, $p < .003$). In contrast to the expectations, judgments about attitude toward message were *on average* significantly *more* negative when confronted with strong arguments ($M = 3.15$, $SD = .935$), than confronted with weak arguments ($M = 3.57$, $SD = .776$). This result is inline with the results concerning message credibility (Figure 6).

Subsequently, the analysis found support for hypothesis 2b. The interaction effect for face-trustworthiness and argument-strength on attitude toward message was confirmed ($F(2, 142) = 4.790$, 3.481 , $p < .010$). A significant difference exists in scores on attitude toward message between the six experiment groups. These results indicate that face-trustworthiness has a moderating effect on the relation between argument-strength and attitude toward message. Inline with the hypothesis, when a face was perceived trustworthy, argument-

strength had a positive effect on attitude toward message. When a face was perceived untrustworthy, argument-strength had a negative effect on attitude toward message (Figure 7). Therefore, hypothesis 2b is confirmed.

Table 7: Means and Standard Deviations study 2 for each experimental cell on attitude toward message (ATM)

ATM	Untrustworthy <i>M (SD)</i> <i>n</i>	Trustworthy <i>M (SD)</i> <i>n</i>	No-face <i>M (SD)</i> <i>n</i>	Total <i>M (SD)</i> <i>n</i>
Weak	3.57 (.888) <i>n</i> = 25	3.39 (.754) <i>n</i> = 23	3.74 (.664) <i>n</i> = 26	3.57 ^b (.776) <i>n</i> = 74
Strong	2.76 (.955) <i>n</i> = 24	3.57 (.730) <i>n</i> = 25	3.12 (.957) <i>n</i> = 25	3.15 ^b (.935) <i>n</i> = 74
Total	3.17 (.999) <i>n</i> = 49	3.48 (.739) <i>n</i> = 48	3.44 (.871) <i>n</i> = 51	3.36 (.882) <i>n</i> = 148

b: means differ significantly from each other

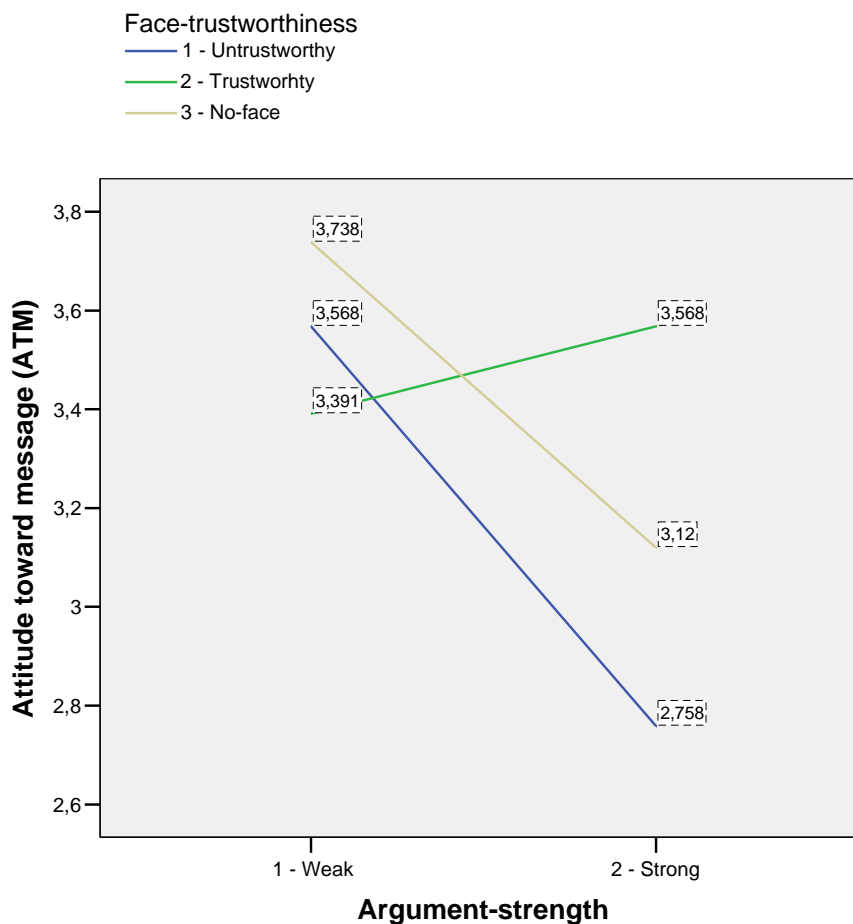


Figure 7: Interaction effect for face-trustworthiness and argument-strength on attitude toward message

Table 8: ANOVA for attitude toward message (ATM)

ATM	F (df)	Sig.
Face-trustworthiness	2.044 (2,142)	.133
Argument-strength	9.295 (1,142)	.003b
Face-trustworthiness x Argument-strength	4,790 (2,142)	.010c

b: significant main effect
c: significant interaction effect

Attitude toward politician (ATP): The results support hypothesis 3a (Table 9 & Table 10). That is, a main effect for face-trustworthiness on attitude toward politician ($F(2, 142) = 3.331$, $p < .039$). Using post hoc tests, the following effects for face-trustworthiness were found: Inline with the hypothesis, judgments about attitude toward politician were *on average* significantly *more* negative when confronted with the priming of an untrustworthy face ($M = 4.14$, $SD = .811$), than confronted with no priming ($M = 4.50$, $SD = .749$). This difference was marginal (Table 10), nevertheless significant ($p < .015$). Subsequently, no significant difference was found between the priming of an untrustworthy face and a trustworthy face ($M = 4.42$, $SD = .602$). Ditto, no significant difference was found between the priming of a trustworthy face and no-face. In summary, results indicate a significant main effect for priming an untrustworthy face. Therefore, hypothesis 3a is in part confirmed.

Table 9: Means and Standard Deviations study 2 for each experimental cell on attitude toward politician (ATP)

ATP	Untrustworthy <i>M (SD)</i> <i>n</i>	Trustworthy <i>M (SD)</i> <i>n</i>	No-face <i>M (SD)</i> <i>n</i>	Total <i>M (SD)</i> <i>n</i>
Weak	4.14 (.808) <i>n</i> = 25	4.14 (.499) <i>n</i> = 23	4.50 (.648) <i>n</i> = 26	4.35 (.677) <i>n</i> = 74
Strong	4.14 (.831) <i>n</i> = 24	4.43 (.694) <i>n</i> = 25	4.50 (.855) <i>n</i> = 25	4.36 (.800) <i>n</i> = 74
Total	4.14a (.811) <i>n</i> = 49	4.42 (.602) <i>n</i> = 48	4.50a (.749) <i>n</i> = 51	4.36 (.739) <i>n</i> = 148

a: means differ significantly from each other

Table 10: ANOVA for attitude toward politician (ATP)

ATP	F (df)	Sig.
Face-trustworthiness	3.331 (2,142)	.039a
Argument-strength	.008 (1,142)	.928
Face-trustworthiness x Argument-strength	.003 (2,142)	.997

a: significant main effect

Furthermore, the results did not confirm a main effect for argument-strength ($F(1,142) = .008$, n.s.). Next, the analysis did not support hypothesis 3b ($F(2,142) = .003$, n.s.). No significant interaction effect for face-trustworthiness and argument-strength on attitude toward politician was found. Hence, no significant moderating effect of face-trustworthiness on the relation between argument-strength and attitude toward politician (Table 10). Therefore, hypothesis 3b is rejected.

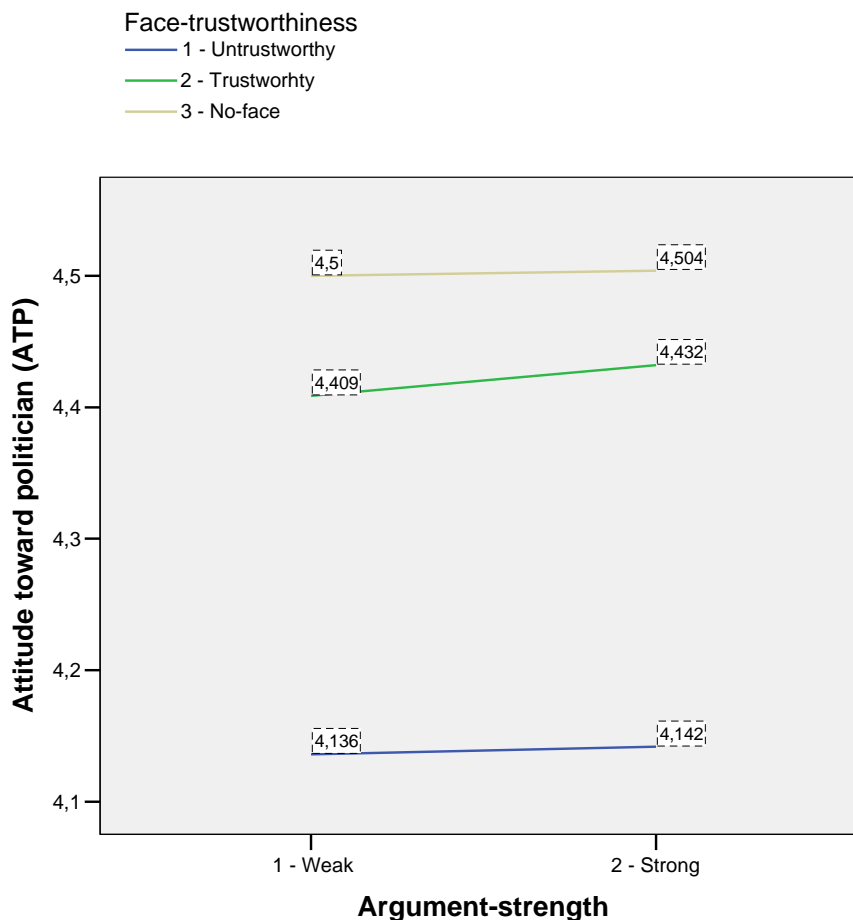


Figure 8: Interaction effect for face-trustworthiness and argument-strength on attitude toward politician

Suspicion probe: Data concerning the suspicion probe was analysed with an independent-samples T-test. The two suspicion probe question were only administered by respondents who were primed with a face. Two different tests were executed. The first test focussed on ‘catching a glimpse of the politician’s identity’, and if a difference existed between the type of priming (untrustworthy face versus trustworthy face). The assumption of significant cell variance was rejected ($t(95) = .702$, n.s.). Results showed no significant difference between the priming of an untrustworthy face ($M = 1.55$, $SD = .503$) and the priming of a trustworthy face ($M = 1.48$, $SD = .505$). In other words, the type of supraliminal priming did not show differences in means between the two experiment cells. It was assumed that these means are equal (Table 11).

Table 11: Means and Standard Deviations study 2 for suspicion probe question 1

Suspicion probe	
<i>“Did you catch a glimpse of the politician’s identity?”</i>	
	<i>M (SD)</i>
Priming of untrustworthy face	1.55 (.503) <i>n = 49</i>
Priming of trustworthy face	1.48 (.505) <i>n = 48</i>
<hr/>	
<i>t (95) = .702, n.s.</i>	

Table12: Means and Standard Deviations study 2 for suspicion probe question 2

Suspicion probe	
<i>“Which of the following faces did you see?”</i>	
	<i>M (SD)</i>
Priming of untrustworthy face	2.09 (.811) <i>n = 22</i>
Priming of trustworthy face	2.00 (.577) <i>n = 25</i>
<hr/>	
<i>t (45) = .447, n.s.</i>	

The second T-test focussed on the question whether respondents recognized the face they were primed with, and if a difference existed between the types of priming (untrustworthy face versus trustworthy face). Again, the assumption of significant cell variance was rejected

($t(45) = .447$, n.s.). The T-test provided evidence for the assumption that no significant difference between the priming of an untrustworthy face ($M = 2.09$, $SD = .811$) and the priming of a trustworthy face ($M = 2.00$, $SD = .577$) existed. Hence, this assumes that the means are equal (Table 12).

In summary, various interesting conclusions can be drawn from these results. First, the type of face that was primed supraliminal did not effect the answer about whether or not respondents ‘catch a glimpse of the politician’s identity’. Second, the type of face that was primed also did not result into significantly different choices between the groups, concerning the question about which face the respondents assumed to have seen. Furthermore, examination of the scores shows that just 47 respondents out of the 97 respondents that were primed supraliminal in the experiment (that is 48%), caught a glimpse of something suspicious just before the political weblog appeared. Surprisingly, the overall mean choice of respondents (in both groups that were primed) concerning the face they assumed to have seen was the choice of the neutral face. A face that was not primed at all during study 2. This strengthens the idea that the thin-slice judgment about face trustworthiness was processed mainly automatically.

General conclusion

Conclusion | The goal of this research paper was to examine the effect(s) of thin-slice judgments in an online context. Subsequently, the main research question was: *to what extent does personal information presented on a political weblog influence the persuasiveness of the weblog-content?* The results of the present study spread some light over the way in which personal information presented on a political weblog influences the persuasiveness of the weblog-content.

Expectations about the effects of profiling oneself on a political weblog are supported by the study results. These results uphold the notion that individuals engage in similar mental schemes of processing information and forming judgments in a CMC-context, as they do in the context of face-to-face interpersonal communication (Postmes et al., 1998). Individuals are influenced by the appearance of nonverbal static cues. Hence, under certain circumstances personal information (e.g. the appearance of a face) presented on a political weblog is processed through a subconscious automatic stage. The processing of this independent source variable subsequently affects the processing of the independent message variable, for example the weblog-content. The automatically activated thin-slice judgment (e.g. this person is

untrustworthy and should be avoided) was subconsciously used by recipient as a 'lens' through which individuals "see" the weblog-content. It affects following information processing, and defines image-formation. Although message-recipients foremost process the weblog-content deliberately, the previously activated judgment moderates the persuasiveness-process. Hence, the personal information presented on a political weblog does influence the persuasiveness of the weblog-content, depending on the thin-slice judgment that is based on interpreting this personal information.

This conclusion is in line with previous studies that illustrated the validity of 'thin-slices', and the significance of the automatic processing stage. The following examples of previous studies emphasize this significance and the importance of understanding the principle of thin-slice judgment for the political communication landscape. Main et al. (2007) found indications that consumers are likely to make thin-slice judgements about a salesperson's trustworthiness through the automatic process and that this process plays a considerable role in reactions to persuasion attempts. In two studies, Ambady et al. (2006) provided evidence that individuals are able to make accurate judgments about interpersonal qualities of a sales manager solely based on three 20-second audio clips of interview sessions with that manager.

The accuracy of impressions derived from nonverbal cues (e.g. a photograph) was also examined by Naylor (2007). Static images contain adequate nonverbal cues to make impressions about a service provider and subsequently, these impressions influence following judgments about the service provider. Furthermore, individuals' first impression that was based on the initial nonverbal cue (a photograph) served as a 'Brunswick Lens' through which subsequent behaviour is interpreted (Naylor, 2007, p. 177). Noteworthy is the fact that the previous studies were all conducted in a sales (retail) setting.

Message credibility: In the case of message credibility, recipients were influenced by both argument-strength and face-trustworthiness (interaction effect). As a result, this confirms the expected moderating effect of face-trustworthiness on the relationship between argument-strength and message credibility. The priming of a face did influence the processing of following information, and subsequently the persuasiveness. The primed face automatically activated a thin-slice judgment (e.g. distrustfulness). This judgment subconsciously influenced the judgment about message credibility. Hence, a trustworthy face had a positive effect, and an untrustworthy face a negative effect on the perception of message credibility. Surprisingly, strong arguments were perceived more negative as weak arguments, when

recipients were confronted with an untrustworthy face. This is remarkable while the manipulation check of argument-strength showed an opposing result.

A possible explanation for this phenomenon can be found in a study conducted by Schul, Mayo, and Burnstein (2004). This study investigated the possibility that when people are mistrustful they spontaneously activate associations that are incongruent with the given message (Schul, Mayo, and Burnstein, 2004, p. 668). In other words, recipients of a persuasive message *believe* the message if they *trust* the message. However, when there is distrust, recipients will 'suspend' the believability of the persuasive message and will not accept the persuasiveness. In this case strong arguments even might have contrarily affect. "Even when the distrust is unrelated in any meaningful way to the message, and even when receivers are unable to prepare a strategic response, the cognitive system reacts to distrust by automatically inducing the consideration of incongruent associations" (Schul, Mayo, and Burnstein, 2004, p. 678).

Attitude toward message: With respect to attitude toward message, recipients were also influenced by both argument-strength and face-trustworthiness. The expected moderating effect of face-trustworthiness on the relationship between argument-strength and attitude toward message was confirmed. As in the case of message credibility, the most negative attitude toward the message was measured in the group recipients that was presented with strong arguments and primed with an untrustworthy face. As in the case of message credibility, the automatically provoked distrustfulness toward the message (as a result of priming an untrustworthy face) might have spontaneously activated associations that are incongruent with the given message (Schul, Mayo, and Burnstein, 2004).

Apart from that, argument-strength proved to contribute to a certain positive or negative perception (attitude) toward the message. This result is in line with the expectation that attitude toward message is based on emotion, and that the argument-strength for a great part is cognitively processed. This emotion in return is provoked by the argument-strength. Again weak arguments were perceived *less* negative, than strong arguments. Future research should address the cause of this matter. In respect to this future research, a more distinctive difference in argument-strength should be utilized. Hence, an important focus on the persuasiveness of the message variable. Nevertheless, argument-strength has proven the play an important role in the processing of persuasive-messages.

Attitude toward politician: The expectation that recipients attitude toward politician would be strongly based on the character of the speaker was confirmed. Only face-trustworthiness was found to have a significant effect on attitude toward politician. In line with theory is the fact that under certain circumstances appearance and mainly facial expressions are very significant in forming an accurate judgment. Because the only ‘personal information concerning the politician’ available to recipients was the supraliminal priming (100ms) of a face, it is no surprise that judgments about personality were based on this brief exposure to the nonverbal static cue. Subsequently, once confronted with the facial appearance, recipients immediately draw trait inferences from that appearance. In comparison to the non-priming group, individuals’ attitude toward the politician was significantly more negative in the group that was primed with an untrustworthy face.

An apparent explanation for this result is the notion that individuals are more susceptible to the negative dimension (untrustworthiness), than to the positive dimension (trustworthiness) (Oosterhof and Todorov, 2008). Negative ‘slices’ have a stronger attention-grabbing power. Detecting ‘danger’ (avoidance behaviour) is more important for survival. Furthermore, when crucial information for voting for a candidate (e.g. the candidate’s views or life story) is limited or absent, negative attributions from appearance of the candidate (automatic processed thin-slices) are more influential on voting behaviour than positive attributions. This effect decreases when individuals have more information about the candidate, because this information is processed mainly deliberately (Spezio et al., 2008).

Suspicion probe: Results from analysing the suspicion probe support basic assumption that the initial automatic evaluative stage is very prominent in the formation of thin-slice judgments. Furthermore, person impressions are formed subconsciously at the very first encounter with another person (a supraliminal priming of only 100ms!). Although less than half of the group recipients that was primed with a face were consciously aware of this encounter. Subsequently, most recipients assumed to have caught the glimpse of a neutral face, a face that was not primed at all. This fact supports the notion that the primed face was processed mainly automatically, and that individuals content themselves with supraliminal primed information. Hence, the ‘true identity’ of the politician was not unmasked.

In summary, results from each of the three constructs that form the dependent outcome variables complete each other (Figure 6, Figure 7, and Figure 8) Each outcome presents similar trends on the ANOVA-graphics, and combined they display message-persuasiveness. In other words, strong arguments on average are perceived as more negative. As explained

previously, the automatically provoked distrustfulness toward message-persuasiveness (as a result of priming an untrustworthy face) might have spontaneously activated associations that are incongruent with the given message (Schul, Mayo, and Burnstein, 2004). In other words, the source (an untrustworthy face) is incongruent with the message (strong arguments) it communicates. Next, a trustworthy face and an untrustworthy face have respectively a positive and negative moderating effect. Furthermore, results are in line with current notions on information processing.

Results of the current study add up to the increasing evidence that individuals perform evaluations by monitoring their subjective affective responses, instead of utilizing a cold evaluation process with reasoned assessments and weighting only the component qualities of the target. Subsequently, individuals tend to rely on their feelings, while they perceive these feelings to contain valuable judgmental information (e.g. in the case of attitude toward politician). Hence, an affect-as-information framework (Pham et al., 2001, p. 167). ‘Affect’ is indeed likely to influence persuasive outcome through an effect on the extent and direction of message processing (Nabi, 1999). “Thus, initial feelings toward the target have judgmental value not just because they are relatively fast and consistent, but also because they direct thinking toward motivationally relevant properties of the stimuli” (Pham et al, 2001, p. 185).

General discussion

Limitations and future research | Despite the interesting insights about profiling oneself on a political weblog and the role of thin-slice judgments in this matter, the results of this present study should be interpreted with respect to its limitations. The first limitation concerns the generalization of the results. Even though the results present distinct significant interactions, relations, and a new view on image-formation in an online-context, it should be taken into account that the study was conducted among approximately 150 individuals. Future research should investigate similar effects among a larger group of individuals.

The second limitation regards the simulation of a political weblog that was used in the experiment. Although the layout of the weblog was similar to the authentic Hyves-weblog, the weblog-content was fictional. This limitation obviously has an effect on the persuasiveness that was measured. Although argument-strength was used as a method to investigate the moderating effect of face-trustworthiness, making use of authentic political weblog-content will create a more real-life situation.

Furthermore, real-life weblog-content concerns text, hyperlinks, photo's, video's, audio, or a combination of those. Future research should address the effects of these media. The various types of media individually rank different on a media richness scale. That is, the various types of media stated above vary in the ability to process information. They vary in the ability of immediate feedback, the number of cues they disclose, the amount of personalization, and language variety (Pieterse, 2009). Example given, in face-to-face interpersonal communication, the receiver is able to respond instantly to a message, making it possible to verify the messages' interpretation. The various types of media mentioned above could all be presented in one type of media, the political weblog. The question remains, how do these types of media influence each other? Are thin-slice judgments formed by these media also used as a 'lens' to interpret the other types of media? And, how can political weblogs become more personalized? A question that refers to the design of political weblogs.

Subsequently, a third limitation that should be taken into account is the simulation of personal information. The priming of face-trustworthiness concerned computer generated faces. Although these faces effectively substituted the facial expressions of a real face, faces of existing politicians might lead to additional interesting notions. Even so, different facial expressions or trying to provoke different thin-slice judgments for that matter. For example, what is the effect of other interpretations based on social cues, besides trustworthiness? Furthermore, to simulate personal information, the experiment exclusively contained the appearance of a face. Future research should also address the effects of other types of personal information, such as hobbies or a curriculum vitae. Or effects of stereotype appearances. Example given, rightwing politicians drive big cars, and leftwing politicians always walk around on sandals.

The fourth limitation concerns the recipients, or rather their characteristics. In analysing the results no interesting results were found linking the outcome to characteristics such as gender or age. Other studies that are more focussed on this matter might lead to interesting conclusions. This also concerns effects of, for example, prior knowledge about candidates, political preferences, level of involvement, valence thoughts, need for cognition (Cacioppo and Petty, 1979), need to evaluate (Bizer et al., 2004), Internet-usage, or level of education. Another interesting issue regarding future research is the extend to which gender, age, and or race effect peoples' sensitiveness to social cues, or certain types of social cues. Example given, are women more sensitive to female faces?

Practical implications | The results of the present study have some interesting implications for (political) bloggers, and for computer-mediated interpersonal communication in general. The first implication concerns the profiling of personal information. It is important realize that (considering the circumstances in this study) individuals form thin-slice judgments about physical appearance (nonverbal static cue) in an online context similar to that of an offline context. Subsequently, the personal information (in this case a photograph) does effect image-building, and subsequently the processing of a persuasive-message. The study also presented the significance of the hierarchy in which information is presented. Priming a face in the initial stage of information processing, subsequently effected following information processing. This indicates the importance of the composition of the information that is presented. Example given, where should the personal information be positioned within the layout of the weblog? And, what first impression do I want to establish ?

The second implication regards achieving a congruency between source and message. As political weblogs facilitate a (new) for of communication between de politician and the voter, weblogs gain a more significant role in shaping campaigns and public affairs (Brock and Green, 2005; Drezner and Farrel, 2008). Since various channels are within the political communication landscape are utilized to ‘spread the message’, it is crucial to take into account a *congruency* between the *who* (source) and the *says what* (message), in order to achieve the right effect. The personal profiling should ‘fit’ the message. A right fit between ethos, logos, and pathos (e.g. an untrustworthy face had averse effect on interpretation of strong arguments). Especially when no or limited prior knowledge is available and recipient are left with only the information that is presented.

The third implication is concerns synchronizing media channels (channel choice). The infinite amount of choices forces voters to be more selective to the messages and providers of information they tune out to (Brock and Green, 2005). With the use of new technologies, such as weblogs, citizens have the ability to bypass media coverage and have a direct unfiltered access to candidates. Although Internet-mediated forms of communication do not replace the traditional mass communication (e.g. printed press), it is proven that weblogs are helpful in mobilizing opinions and influence the agenda setting of political elites (e.g. journalists and politicians) (Drezner and Farrel, 2008). As a consequence citizens make their own choice of channel (Pieterse, 2009). To what type of media shall I turn, to inform myself about candidates? Therefore, all types of media (channels) that are utilized to communicate a political message should be synchronized regarding the message itself, and should be synchronized regarding the self presentation of the politician.

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Appendix 1: visual presentation study 1



Welk gezicht is het meest ONBETROUWBAAR?

Kies 1,2 of 3 en druk daarna op [Enter] of klik op 'Ga verder' om door te gaan.

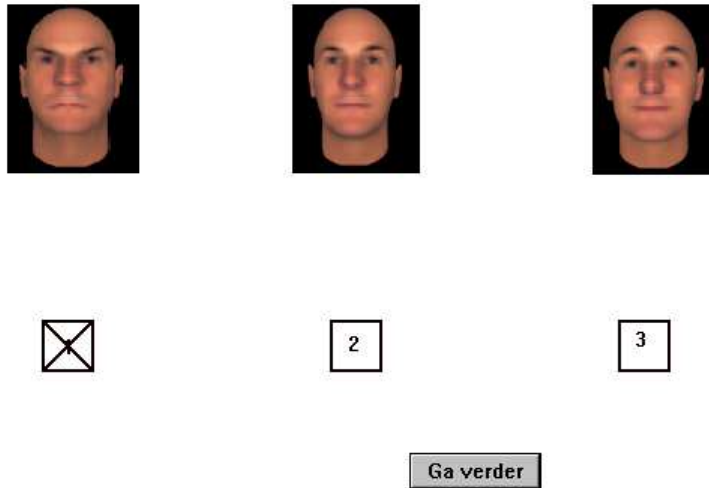


Figure 9: Example of question concerning line-up of faces (study 1)



Figure 10: Example of clock on the centre of the screen (study 1)



Figure 11: Example of exposure of face with time limit of 0.1 second (study 1)

Is deze persoon Betrouwbaar of Onbetrouwbaar?

Maak een keuze en druk daarna op [Enter] of klik op 'Ga verder' om door te gaan.

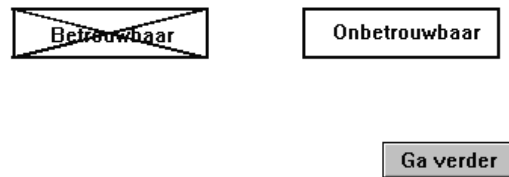


Figure 12: Example of question about trustworthiness (study 1)

Hoe zeker ben jij over deze keuze?

Kies een van de onderstaande cijfers, waarbij [1] staat voor 'zeer onzeker' en [5] staat voor 'zeer zeker'

Een kruis op het cijfer geeft de desbetreffende keuze aan. Druk daarna op [Enter] of klik op 'Ga verder' om door te gaan.

Ze~~er~~ onzeker Ze~~er~~ zeker

Figure 13: Example of question about level of confidence (study 1)

Bied kunstinstellingen meer zekerheid

gisteren, 15:43

Het is een feit... de kredietcrisis begint nu ook in Nederland haar tol te eisen. Een aantal banken hebben staatshulp nodig, sommige spaarders zijn hun geld verloren en we staan wellicht aan het begin van een economische recessie. De gevolgen van de kredietcrisis zijn ook merkbaar in de Nederlandse kunstsector. De grootste geldschietter, het VSBfonds, heeft zelfs aangekondigd dat de kunstsubsidies worden gehalveerd van 62 miljoen euro in 2008 naar 30 miljoen euro volgend jaar.

Deze situatie is zeer betreuenswaardig en ik stel dan ook voor dat het Kunst Krediet Plan (KKP) wordt ingevoerd. Dit plan houdt in dat financiële steun wordt geboden aan kunstinstellingen die als gevolg van de kredietcrisis in de problemen geraken. Een drietal redenen zijn naar mijn mening doorslaggevend om vanuit het kabinet de betreffende instellingen meer zekerheid te bieden.

1. Ten eerst kan het kabinet zich middels dit genereuze gebaar eindelijk positief profileren.
2. Kunstenaars krijgen op deze wijze de waardering die deze groep hardwerkende mensen verdient.
3. En tot slot ben ik van mening dat goede kunst alleen tot stand komt wanneer daar een hoge vergoeding tegenover staat.

Bied kunstinstellingen daarom meer zekerheid!

Ga verder

Figure 14: Text with weak arguments (study 1)

Bied kunstinstellingen meer zekerheid

gisteren, 15:43

Het is een feit... de kredietcrisis begint nu ook in Nederland haar tol te eisen. Een aantal banken hebben staatshulp nodig, sommige spaarders zijn hun geld verloren en we staan wellicht aan het begin van een economische recessie. De gevolgen van de kredietcrisis zijn ook merkbaar in de Nederlandse kunstsector. De grootste geldschieter, het VSBfonds, heeft zelfs aangekondigd dat de kunstsubsidies worden gehalveerd van 62 miljoen euro in 2008 naar 30 miljoen euro volgend jaar.

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1. Ten eerste is een halvering van de gebruikelijke kunstsubsidie een groot probleem en een zwaar verlies voor de culturele sector in zijn geheel.
2. Kunstinstellingen vervullen een belangrijke functie in onze samenleving. Een logische stap is vervolgens dat de overheid haar verantwoordelijkheid neemt en daar waar nodig ondersteuning biedt.
3. Tevens is het invoeren van het Kunst Krediet Plan een duidelijk signaal aan de burgerij dat de overheid de gehele situatie serieus neemt en onder controle heeft.
4. Op dit moment biedt de overheid hoofdzakelijk financiële steun aan (bepaalde) banken. Voor een juiste balans binnen de Nederland BV acht ik het verstandig ook andere sectoren te ondersteunen.
5. Een financiële injectie zorgt voor het behoud van de werkgelegenheid in de kunstsector en in additionele sectoren, zoals de horeca en de transport sector.
6. Vervolgens is het in deze huidige situatie noodzakelijk te blijven investeren in kunstinstellingen om jong talent een kans te geven en de ontwikkeling van de Nederlandse kunst en cultuur te stimuleren.
7. En indien dit huidige kabinet de kunstsector wil bevorderen om zelf meer inkomsten uit de markt te genereren, dan is dit het moment om de kunstsector hiermee te helpen.
8. Uiteindelijk mag de ontwikkeling van ons cultureel erfgoed niet lijden onder een crisis die mede is veroorzaakt door de nalatigheid in toezicht door het politieke apparaat.

Bied kunstinstellingen daarom meer zekerheid!

Ga verder

Figure 15: Text with strong arguments (study 1)

*Hoe **STERK** vond jij de argumentatie in de tekst?*

Kies een van de onderstaande cijfers, waarbij [1] staat voor 'zeer zwak' en [7] staat voor 'zeer sterk'

Een kruis op het cijfer geeft de desbetreffende keuze aan. Druk daarna op [Enter] of klik op 'Ga verder' om door te gaan.

Zeer zwak 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Zeer sterk

Figure 16: Example of question about determining strength of arguments (study 1)

Appendix 2: visual presentation study 2

Presentation Window

File



Figure 17: Example of clock on the centre of the screen (study 2)

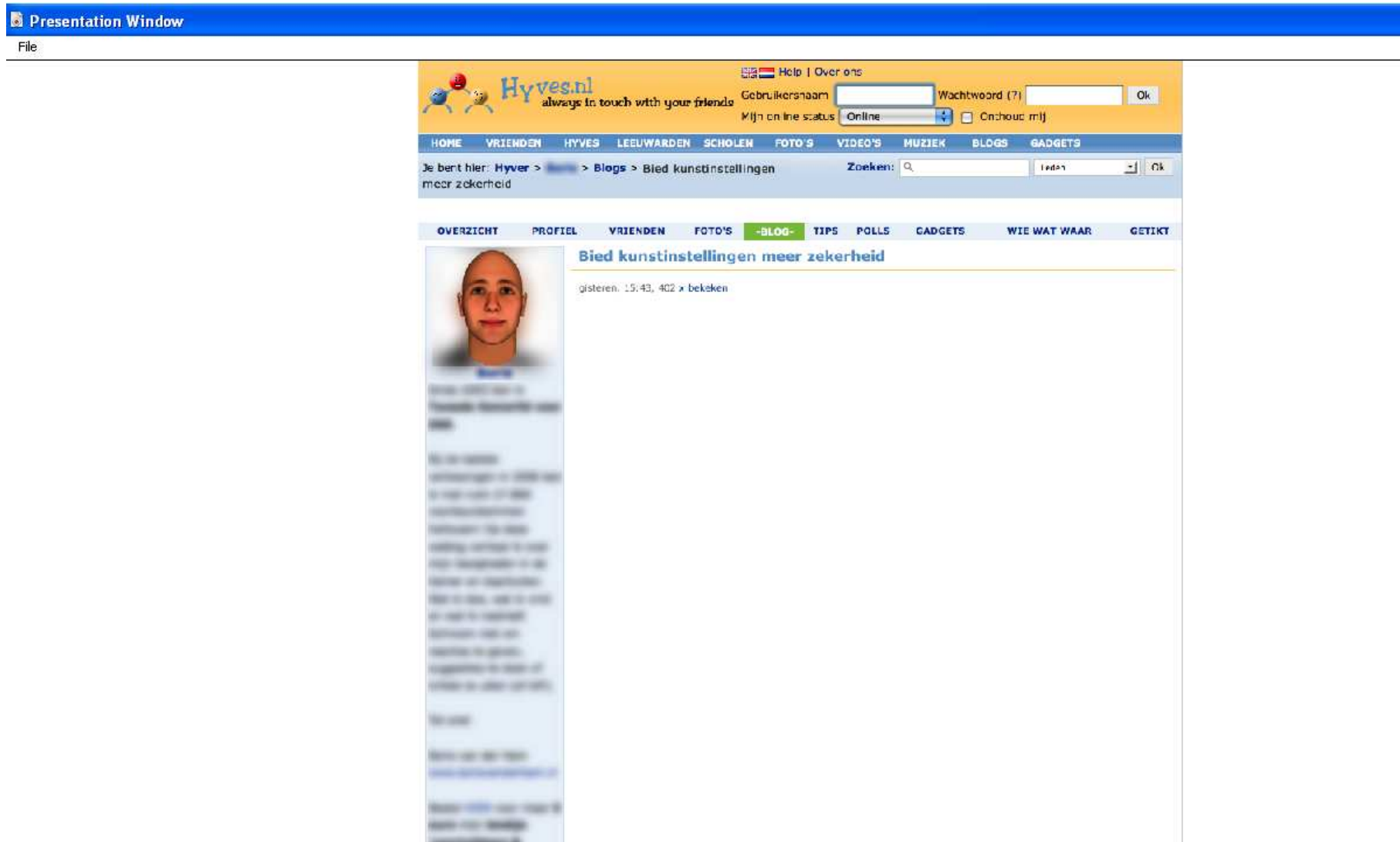


Figure 19: Supraliminal priming (100ms) of trustworthy face (study 2)

The screenshot shows a Hyves.nl weblog page. The header includes the Hyves.nl logo, navigation links (HOME, VRIENDEN, HYVES, LEEUWARDEN, SCHOLEN, FOTO'S, VIDEO'S, MUZIEK, BLOGS, GADGETS), and a search bar. The main content area features a profile picture of a man and a blog post titled "Bied kunstinstellingen meer zekerheid". The post text discusses the economic recession and the impact on the arts sector, specifically mentioning the VSBfonds and the Kunst Krediet Plan (KKP). It lists three points: 1. The cabinet should clarify its position on arts funding. 2. Artists should be valued for their contribution. 3. Good art can only stand when there is a high level of funding. The post concludes with the phrase "Bied kunstinstellingen daarom meer zekerheid!". A "Ga verder" button is visible at the bottom right of the page.

Hyves.nl
always in touch with your friends

Help | Over ons

Gebruikersnaam Wachtwoord (?) Ok

Wij zijn online status: Onthoud mij

HOME VRIENDEN HYVES LEEUWARDEN SCHOLEN FOTO'S VIDEO'S MUZIEK BLOGS GADGETS

Je bent hier: Hyver > Blogs > Bied kunstinstellingen meer zekerheid

Zoeken:

OVERZICHT PROFIEL VRIENDEN FOTO'S **-BLOG-** TIPS POLLS GADGETS WIE WAT WAAR GETIKT

Bied kunstinstellingen meer zekerheid

gisteren, 15:43, 402 x bekeken

Het is een feit... de kredietcrisis begint nu ook in Nederland haar tol te eisen. Een aantal banken hebben staatshulp nodig, sommige spaarders zijn hun geld verloren en we staan wellicht aan het begin van een economische recessie. De gevolgen van de kredietcrisis zijn ook merkbaar in de Nederlandse kunstsector. De grootste geldschieter, het VSBfonds, heeft zelfs aangekondigd dat de kunstsubsidies worden gehalveerd van 62 miljoen euro in 2008 naar 30 miljoen euro volgend jaar. Deze situatie is zeer betreurenswaardig en ik stel dan ook voor dat het Kunst Krediet Plan (KKP) wordt ingevoerd. Dit plan houdt in dat financiële steun wordt geboden aan kunstinstellingen die als gevolg van de kredietcrisis in de problemen geraken. Een drietal redenen zijn naar mijn mening doorslaggevend om vanuit het kabinet de betreffende instellingen meer zekerheid te bieden.

1. Ten eerst kan het kabinet zich middels dit genereuze gebaar eindelijk positief profileren.
2. Kunstenaars krijgen op deze wijze de waardering die deze groep hardwerkende mensen verdient.
3. En tot slot ben ik van mening dat goede kunst alleen tot stand komt wanneer daar een hoge vergoeding tegenover staat.

Bied kunstinstellingen daarom meer zekerheid!

Figure 20: Fictional Hyves-weblog with weak arguments (study 2)

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying a Hyves profile page. The page title is "Bied kunstinstellingen meer zekerheid". The content includes a paragraph of text and a numbered list of eight points. A "Ga verder" button is visible at the bottom right of the page content.

Hyves.nl
always in touch with your friends

Gebruikersnaam: Wachtwoord (?):
Mijn online status: Onthoud mij

HOME VRIENDEN HYVES LEELWARDEN SCHOLEN FOTO'S VIDEO'S MUZIEK BLOGS GADGETS

Je bent hier: Hyver > Blogs > Bied kunstinstellingen meer zekerheid Zoeken:

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1. Ten eerste is een halvering van de gebruikelijke kunstsubsidie een groot probleem en een zwaar verlies voor de culturele sector in zijn geheel.
2. Kunstinstellingen vervullen een belangrijke functie in onze samenleving. Een logische stap is vervolgens dat de overheid haar verantwoordelijkheid neemt en daar waar nodig ondersteuning biedt.
3. Tevens is het invoeren van het Kunst Krediet Plan een duidelijk signaal aan de burgerij dat de overheid de gehele situatie serieus neemt en onder controle heeft.
4. Op dit moment biedt de overheid hoofdzakelijk financiële steun aan (bepaalde) banken. Voor een juiste balans binnen de Nederland BV acht ik het verstandig ook andere sectoren te ondersteunen.
5. Een financiële injectie zorgt voor het behoud van de werkgelegenheid in de kunstsector en in additionele sectoren, zoals de horeca en de transport sector.
6. Vervolgens is het in deze huidige situatie noodzakelijk te blijven investeren in kunstinstellingen om jong talent een kans te geven en de ontwikkeling van de Nederlandse kunst en cultuur te stimuleren.
7. En indien dit huidige kabinet de kunstsector wil bevorderen om zelf meer inkomsten uit de markt te genereren, dan is dit het moment om de kunstsector hiermee te helpen.
8. Uiteindelijk mag de ontwikkeling van ons cultureel erfgoed niet lijden onder een crisis die mede is veroorzaakt door de nalatigheid in toezicht door het politieke apparaat.

Bied kunstinstellingen daarom meer zekerheid!

Figure 21: Fictional Hyves-weblog with strong arguments (study 2)

Vraag 1 van 10: Naar mijn mening is het weblog-bericht van de politicus...

Niet informatief

Informatief

Ga verder

Figure 22: Example of question concerning message credibility (study 2)

Vraag 6 van 10: Naar mijn mening is het weblog-bericht van de politicus...

Interessant 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Saai

Ga verder

Figure 23: Example of question concerning attitude toward message (study 2)

Vraag 1 van 5: Volgens mijn gevoel is de desbetreffende politicus...

Corrupt

1

2

3

5

6

7

Integer

Ga verder

Figure 24: Example of question concerning attitude toward politician (study 2)

De identiteit van de desbetreffende politicus was vanwege privacy bescherming niet zichtbaar. Persoonlijke informatie was dan ook niet duidelijk te zien.

Vraag: heeft u desondanks toch een glimp kunnen opvangen van de identiteit van de politicus ?



Nee

Ga verder

Figure 25: Question 1 concerning suspicion probe about ‘catching a glimpse’ (study 2)

Vlak voordat de persoonlijke Hyves-pagina van de politicus verscheen heeft u (zeer kort) een gezicht kunnen zien.

Vraag: Welke van de onderstaande gezichten denkt u gezien te hebben?

(Klik op het cijfer onder het gezicht van uw keuze. Let op!: Wanneer u werkelijk geen idee heeft welk gezicht u heeft gezien, klik dan op het cijfer 4)

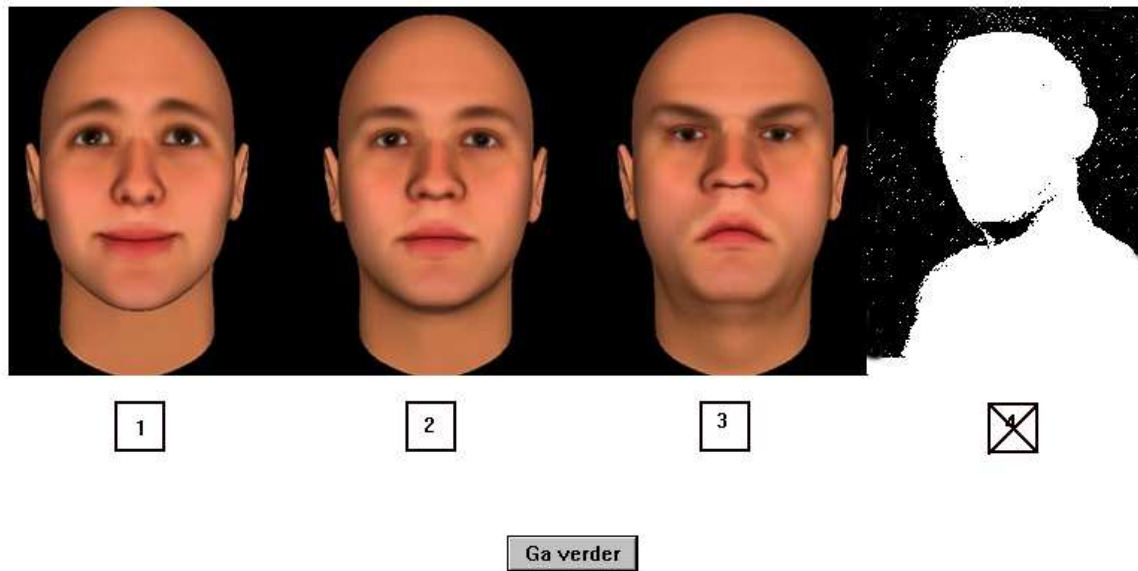


Figure 26: Question concerning suspicion probe about the primed face (study 2)