CONSTRUCTIVE JOURNALISM: THE EFFECTS OF
POSITIVE EMOTIONS AND SOLUTION INFORMATION IN NEWS STORIES

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ABSTRACT

Karen Elizabeth McIntyre: Constructive Journalism: The Effects of
Positive Emotions and Solution Information in News Stories
(Under the direction of Rhonda Gibson)

The purpose of this dissertation is both to advance the understanding of journalism's

impact on psychological well-being and to expand the boundaries of the news process by

introducing and testing the interdisciplinary concept of *constructive journalism*. Constructive

journalism is an emerging form of journalism that applies techniques from the field of positive

psychology to news work in an effort to create more productive, engaging news stories while

remaining committed to journalism's core functions. This approach offers a way to rehabilitate

journalism, given the field's steady stream of negative, conflict-based news that has resulted in

weary news audiences, among other undesirable effects.

Exploring the concept of constructive journalism, this dissertation tested, through

experimental designs, two constructive journalism techniques grounded in the psychology

literature – evoking positive emotions in news stories and including solution information in news

stories. Study 1 found that individuals who experienced positive emotions while reading a news

story felt better, had more favorable attitudes toward the story, and reported stronger intentions

to engage in some pro-social behaviors than those who experienced negative emotions while

reading a new story. Study 2 examined the impact of solution information in news stories and

found that mentioning an effective solution to a social problem caused readers to feel good and like the news story, but did not impact readers' behavioral intentions or actual behaviors.

These findings offer some support for the implementation of constructive journalism while cautioning that more research is needed. Limitations and future research are discussed, as well as theoretical and professional implications. This dissertation calls for further examination of constructive journalism by academic scholars and continued consideration by practitioners. Practical information is provided on how journalists can take a more active role in shaping their news stories in ways that both inform and empower their audiences.

To my dad, Ron McIntyre, and my mom, Jeanne McIntyre (deceased), who encouraged and inspired me from a young age to prioritize education and pursue it to its fullest extent

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Introduction

The exclusive story featured on CNN's website the morning this introduction was written in September 2014 read in large, bold type: "The fight against ISIS is 'going to go on.'" The story went on to discuss the conflict between the U.S. and the extreme terrorist group, highlighting the depressing fact that the conflict would likely not end anytime soon. An hour later, a different story was featured: "Ebola kills people who don't even have it." Conflict and negativity, as demonstrated in these stories, are ubiquitous in the news media. Some critics complain that the excessive doom and gloom are related to a growing disengagement in mainstream news.

The news industry — both print and broadcast — has clearly struggled with declining audiences and advertising revenues (Edmonds, Guskin, Mitchell, & Jurkowitz, 2013; Patterson, 2000; Potter, 2000). Media sociologist Michael Schudson (2011) specifically acknowledged that individuals' interest in newspapers, newsmagazines, and the "serious" news presented on TV has declined. One contributor to the declining interest in traditional news is the public's frustration with the news becoming increasingly negative. Patterson (2000) conducted a national survey designed to measure Americans' news habits, interests, and preferences and found that 84% of respondents perceived the news to be depressing (compared to 16% who found it to be uplifting) and 77% perceived it to be negative (compared to 23% who perceived it to be positive). A

different survey of individuals who cut back on their viewing of local broadcast news found they did so because the stories were too negative, too often about crime, and too infrequently presented positive information (Potter & Gantz, 2000).

The news media's focus on negativity and conflict is not surprising. News serves a number of traditional purposes that help explain why it is often necessary for stories to be negative and conflict-based. Lasswell, in his seminal 1948 article, identified the surveillance of the environment, including the disclosure of threats and opportunities, as a core function of communication. Shoemaker (1996) argued that the news media exist because humans are biologically built to look for environmental threats. This "hard-wired" predisposition might help explain studies showing that journalists gravitate toward drama (Niven, 2005), deviance (Shoemaker, Danielian, & Brendlinger, 1991), and scandal (Patterson, 2000). In fact, Bantz (1985) argued that news organizations see conflict as routine, expected, and perhaps essential. News also functions to provide useful information (Knobloch-Westerwick, Dillman Carpentier, Blumhoff, & Nickel, 2005) and keep the government in check. This "watchdog" role has been deemed a core democratic function of journalism (Entman, 2005; Eriksson & Ostman, 2013) and involves reporting on corruption, further explaining why some news is inherently negative.

Given these core functions, journalists would not be doing their jobs effectively if they did not report negative news. Conflict and negativity in the news are not random and personal; their presence is systematic and predictable and has been built into journalists' routines. In fact, conflict and negativity have been identified as key news values, along with other values — such as proximity, impact and timeliness — that are used to train journalists to identify newsworthy information (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Galtung & Ruge,

1973; Shoemaker & Reese, 2013; Harcup & O'Neill, 2001). However, although the surveillance and watchdog roles help justify bad news, the ubiquity of negative and conflict-oriented news is problematic.

Schudson (2011) argues that the negative, conflict-driven journalism that so often occurs in traditional media fails to adequately address whether policies are working, which he cites as another key function of news. Mainstream political coverage is an example of how journalists may fall short of fulfilling this greater purpose of journalism. In 1960, 25% of press coverage of presidential candidates was negative. By 2000, more than 60% was negative (Patterson, 2000). Despite the negative news coverage, the more hopeful and optimistic presidential candidate won the election nine out of ten times between 1900 and 1984 (Zullow & Seligman, 1990), signaling that American voters might prefer a positive president. Still, reporters often frame their political stories in terms of negative conflicts rather than positive solutions (Patterson, 2000). In an effort to appear objective, reporters may feel pressured to look for two sides to every story, which potentially creates more conflict than warranted. By identifying two sides to every story, reporters cover politics as a game - who's winning and losing at any given moment - rather than focusing on the policies or issues themselves (Patterson, 2000). In this way, political coverage has become increasingly negative, cynical, and conflict-based, to the point that, "Journalists today find fault with most everything that politicians say and do" (Patterson, 2000, p. 10). However, it's not only the journalists who focus on negativity. News consumers choose to read negative stories despite saying they prefer more positive ones (Trussler & Soroka, 2013), and individuals in general are likely to dwell on bad news, as negative events or emotions have been found to have a stronger and more lasting

impact on individuals than do positive events or emotions (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001).

Despite people's predisposition toward conflict and negativity, individuals have criticized the news media for publishing too much negative news for more than half a century. Criticism has come from all levels of consumers. A majority of respondents in a 1979 survey reported receiving too much bad news and not nearly enough good news from daily newspapers (Stone & Grusin, 1984). Public figures have also spoken out. Former vice president Spiro Agnew said the media overemphasized "stories of dissent, lawlessness, and controversy" (Hartung & Stone, 1980, p. 19). Prince Charles of Great Britain, in his argument that newspapers never published anything good, asked, "Why don't they, for a change, tell us how many jumbo jets landed safely at Heathrow Airport?" (Hartung & Stone, 1980, p. 19). White House spokesperson Larry Speakes said in the early 1980s that the focus on bad news was the press' major problem and suggested a "good news segment" on nightly news networks (Stone & Grusin, 1984, p. 517).

Prompted by consistent criticism from politicians, celebrities, and the general public that the news was overly negative, a handful of scholars examined the percentage of newspaper stories that were actually negative. These studies, which are now somewhat dated, consistently found that about one-third of print stories were considered "bad" news (Gieber, 1955; Hartung & Stone, 1980; Riffe, 1993; Harcup & O'Neill, 2001). Broadcast news was found to include higher amounts of negative news than newspapers, with some findings suggesting that bad news dominated the nightly newscasts of the three major networks in the 1980s, perhaps due to the "insatiable appetite of television for vivid, action-packed pictures," (Stone & Grusin, 1984, p. 517). A study published by the Center

for Media and Public Affairs found that from 1993 to 1997, network evening news shows tripled their coverage of crime, specifically increasing their coverage of murders by 700 percent. During that same time, actual violent crime rates had decreased (Center for Media and Public Affairs, 1997).

The increase in negative news comes at a cost, as scholars have found that although negative news has some benefits (Parrott, 2014; Rodriquez, 2013), it has a largely negative impact on consumers. Negative news can reduce helping behavior, decrease tolerance, lower perceptions of a community's benevolence, lower evaluations of strangers, and cause depression and helplessness (Galician & Vestre, 1987; Veitch & Griffitt, 1976). In addition, negative news can lead to distrust of political leaders (Kleinnijenhuis & Oegema, 2006). And specifically compared to positive news, negative news can make viewers feel less emotionally stable and more apprehensive about potential harm to themselves (Aust, 1985). Similarly, long-term exposure to television generally, which frequently broadcasts violent news, has been found to cultivate images of a mean and dangerous world in which people are only looking out for themselves and cannot be trusted (Gerbner, 1998).

Conflict and negativity will always be necessary in the news if journalists are to fulfill their core functions of alerting the public to potential threats and serving as a watchdog on government. However, given that media play an important role in individual and societal well-being, and that the reputation of the media has been declining (Pew Research Center, 2011; Pew Research Center, 2012), scholars argue that the negativity and conflict in the news can be excessive and counterproductive. One result has been compassion fatigue, or a public "weary of unrelenting media coverage of human tragedy"

(Kinnick, Krugman, & Cameron, 1996, p. 687). Kinnick et al. (1996) suggest that four factors explain how the media contribute to compassion fatigue; two of those factors are constant "bad news" and a lack of solutions to social problems being provided.

Some journalists have begun to address the detrimental effects of a news diet high in negativity and conflict and are creating change in the form of an emerging style of news labeled *constructive journalism*. Defined more fully in the following section, constructive journalism is a more positive and productive style of reporting that may present at least a partial remedy to the increasingly apathetic and frustrated public that has resulted from the mainstream news industry's negative and conflict-based content. Seán Dagan Wood, editor of the self-proclaimed world's first positive newspaper, *Positive News*, which aims to publish more constructive stories, described the approach in a TEDx talk:

> There's an emerging field of what's been called constructive journalism or solutions journalism, and this is about bringing positive elements into conventional reporting, remaining dedicated to accuracy, truth, balance when necessary, and criticism, but reporting in a more engaging and empowering way. (Dagan Wood, 2014)

In this dissertation, the effects of constructive journalism will be empirically tested. The term "constructive journalism" will first be defined and compared with other approaches to news work. In addition, ways that constructive journalism is being practiced in the field will be examined. Then, the literature on two key components of constructive journalism – positive emotions and solution information – will be discussed, followed by a consideration of their possible effects. Two experiments will be explained. Study 1 will examine the impact of the presence and placement of positive emotions in news stories on readers' affect, attitudes, and engagement. Study 2 will examine the role

of solution information in news stories and its impact on readers' affect, attitudes, engagement and behavior.

Literature Review

Constructive journalism defined

Constructive journalism is yet undefined in the academic literature, and a thorough definition of the concept is needed, considering that practitioners are increasingly using the term without agreement about what it means or how to do it (Tenore, 2014; C. Gyldensted, personal communication, April 1, 2014).

Among industry practitioners who have attempted to define constructive journalism is Cathrine Gyldensted, a Danish investigative journalist and leader in the constructive journalism movement. Gyldensted received her master's degree in positive psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, where she first suggested and empirically tested the application of positive psychology in news (Gyldensted, 2011). She is now dedicated to transforming news through psychological, sociological, and neurological techniques. She teaches a constructive journalism class to college students in Copenhagen, and published a textbook on the subject (Gyldensted & Bjerre, 2014). Gyldensted has acknowledged that journalists disagree about what constructive journalism is and says constructive journalism has been used as an umbrella label for similar terms such as positive journalism or solutions journalism. She personally has referred to it as "yes-we-can reporting" (C. Gyldensted, personal communication, April 1, 2014). Dictionary definitions of "constructive" include "serving a useful purpose; tending to build up" and "helping to develop or improve something; helpful to someone instead of upsetting and negative" ("constructive", 2015a; "constructive", 2015b). In keeping with these

definitions, Gyldensted has said constructive news builds something up; constructive stories are meant to energize or lift people up, including journalists, sources, and audience members. These news stories should leave people feeling more engaged, inspired, and positive than before (C. Gyldensted, personal communication, April 1, 2014).

Jesper Borup, a news anchor for the Danish Broadcasting Corporation, said he views constructive journalism as taking a more productive angle on a story than a reporter might usually use (J. Borup, personal communication, Oct. 9, 2014). For example, a reporter could ask a question that focuses on a solution rather than asking a more positional question. These types of questions emphasize the future rather than the past, and they tend to foster collaboration rather than conflict (J. Borup, personal communication, Oct. 9, 2014). A clear example of this type of constructive interview question occurred in 2013 when the U.S. military was preparing to attack Syria after the country had carried out a chemical weapons attack on its own people. CBS News State Department correspondent Margaret Brennan asked U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry at a news conference, "Is there anything at this point that his [Bashar al-Assad's] government could do or offer that would stop an attack?" This question pointed to the future and focused on a solution rather than recounting the past and highlighting the conflict and negativity inherent in this newsworthy event. The result of Kerry's answer was that Syria gave up control of its chemical weapons and avoided a U.S. military attack. Of course one cannot say that Brennan's question *caused* the solution that followed. However, at the very least, her question brought this deal to the public's attention.

In an effort to create a systematic definition that incorporates the key elements of constructive journalism, the concept is described here as *an emerging form of journalism that involves applying positive psychology techniques to news work in an effort to create more productive, engaging stories while holding true to journalism's core functions.* The field of positive psychology was formed on the recognition that psychologists have traditionally focused on treating mental illness and otherwise understanding "how people survive and endure under conditions of adversity" while ignoring "how normal people flourish under more benign conditions" or generally lead fulfilling lives (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 5). The goal of positive psychology is to find and foster the factors that allow individuals, communities, and societies to thrive (Seligman, 2011), and this goal is in line with the ultimate goal of constructive journalism – to improve individual and societal well-being by applying positive psychology tactics to news work. It is worthwhile to mention, however, that although this study focuses on positive psychology, more constructive news work might also be accomplished by borrowing techniques from related domains such as psychiatry, neurology, or psychophysiology.

In this early stage of development, an academic scholar can measure whether a story is constructive by identifying whether the work applies a theory-based positive psychology technique and remains dedicated to journalism's core functions. However, practitioners will likely not be so concerned with identifying a definition of constructive journalism. Some reporters, like Gyldensted, identify as constructive journalists and are focused primarily on improving well-being. Many reporters have never heard of the term "constructive journalism," yet they might unknowingly incorporate constructive techniques in their stories. Constructive journalism could be regarded as a niche form of

journalism, but ultimately it need not be separate from mainstream journalism. Rather, more constructive ways of gathering and producing news should ideally be incorporated into all journalistic work. Constructive journalism should not be regarded as a dichotomy (constructive news vs. destructive news). Rather, it is helpful to think of it more as a continuum. Although not all journalists will agree that constructive story formats should be a priority, this dissertation will argue that journalists should at least consider constructive journalism given the critical issues with negative mainstream news and the press' responsibility to minimize harm (SPJ Code of Ethics). Lastly, it is important to mention that constructive story formats can be applied to various forms of the broader concept of journalism (news, commentary, literature, film, etc.), but this dissertation will focus solely on news journalism.

What follows is a discussion of how constructive journalism is similar to and different from other news styles, as well as an explanation of how constructive journalism is practiced in the field.

Constructive journalism and similar forms of news

Although constructive journalism is a relatively new movement, it has roots in older forms of journalism, including community journalism, civic journalism, and citizen journalism. It is also sometimes used as an umbrella term in practice, encompassing alternative forms of news such as solutions journalism and positive journalism. However, constructive journalism is distinct in its intentions, methods, training, and commitment to journalism's core functions, which are reflected in all parts of the news process, from story generation to newsgathering to production. The similarities and differences between

constructive journalism and each of the above alternative forms of news are discussed below and represented in a chart (See Table 1).

To fully understand how constructive journalism and similar forms of journalism are situated in the larger field, it is necessary to briefly examine the history of journalists' roles in the United States. In the 1700s and early 1800s, journalists were expected to take a partisan viewpoint because they were financed by political parties and meant to provide the public with political discourse (May, 2009). In the mid-1800s and certainly by the early 1900s, however, newspapers shifted their financial dependence from political elites to advertisers, and the concept of objectivity became a professional standard as newspapers aimed to reach wider audiences to please their new advertisers (Powers, 2009). Metaphorically, journalists were supposed to act as mirrors, simply reflecting the world's facts onto society. Although objectivity remains a standard in journalism practice, despite the Society of Professional Journalists' removing of the word from its Code of Ethics in 1996, the concept began to be challenged in the 1970s when sociologists started examining the news process (Cohen & Young, 1981). Media sociologists and cultural scholars including Schudson, Tuchman, Zelizer, White, Breed, Gans and others argued that journalists do not simply report the news; they create it (Tuchman, 1978). They argued that objectivity is impossible given that all people, including journalists, are influenced by the societies in which they live and the experiences they have — and these influences impact which pieces of information become stories and how those stories are framed (Molotch & Lester, 1974). Since objectivity began to be contested, several new forms of journalism have been created in which the journalist has stepped away from the traditional, detached role and taken a more active, integrative approach. Constructive

journalism is one such example, but it is distinct from the other more active forms of journalism that came before it.

Community journalism, which includes an intense focus on local readers (Lauterer, 2006; Terry, 2011), is one such active form. It is also called hyperlocal news. Community journalists report on micro locations such as small towns, neighborhoods, or even individuals. News reports include information that is important to locals, such as anniversaries or honor roll students. If regional, national, or international news is covered at all, it is covered only in regard to how it might affect local readers. Constructive journalism does not have this hyperlocal focus.

Civic journalism intends to promote public discourse and debate (Haas, 2009). Also called public journalism, participatory journalism, or democratic journalism, it has a political focus in that it aims to involve journalists and citizens in public affairs. It might facilitate public debate by sponsoring a town hall meeting, for example. Jay Rosen (2001) calls this form of news "citizen journalism" in his book, *What Are Journalists For?* However, citizen journalism can also refer to a type of news where the intention is to involve regular citizens in the news process by having them submit photos or stories, for example (Netzley & Hemmer, 2012). Constructive journalism is different in that it does not have a focus on the political process (although that might be a byproduct) or a specific desire to encourage regular citizens to contribute content.

The common thread in these alternative news forms is the more active and involved role of the journalist in shaping the story. In moving away from the detached observer role for the reporter, constructive journalism can certainly be considered alternative journalism. It is important to note that constructive journalists are not

promoting personal or institutional bias in the news; they are simply calling for a more deliberate framing of reported events and issues.

Peter Bro (2008) suggested one way of looking at the difference between a passive and active journalist. He said the passive journalist is concerned with disseminating stories regardless of their effects and thus is concerned with what information *preceded* the news report. Contrarily, the active journalist serves more fully as a participant in interpreting the story and thus is concerned about the effect of the news or what happens *after* the report. Bro (2008) argues that there is a desire for more active journalism, where reporters try to help community members act upon problems rather than simply learn about them.

An acceptance of the active role of the journalist has been further identified through reporter surveys. Weaver and his colleagues (2007) suggest that journalists identify with the roles of adversary, disseminator, interpreter, and populist mobilizer. Beam and his colleagues (2009) found that journalists felt significantly stronger about their roles as interpreters and adversaries between 2002 and 2007, suggesting a growing interest in roles that identify more with constructive journalism, where journalists take a more active role in reporting the news. Although constructive journalism shares this quality with other forms of journalism, it is distinct in its methods. To be considered constructive journalism as defined in this dissertation, a specific positive psychology technique must be applied in the news content. Two additional types of journalism do employ positive psychology techniques and are therefore more closely related to constructive journalism. These are positive journalism and solutions journalism.

The inclusion of positive emotion is one positive psychology technique that can be applied to news stories, and it is a focus of this study. But reporters are understandably weary about making an effort to evoke positive emotions through their stories. Journalists who are skeptical of constructive journalism say a reporter's job is to accurately portray what's going on in the world, and if what's going on in the world is more often negative than positive, so be it. In his seminal article, Lasswell (1948) identified the disclosure of threats *and opportunities* as a core function of communication. Constructive journalism proponents argue that journalists are doing the public a disservice by ignoring many of the opportunities that occur in society and thus not reporting the world accurately, which is a key value in journalism (Lewis & Rowe, 1994). In an effort to be constructive and uphold accuracy, reporters should stop focusing on what psychologists call the disease model of the world, which represents negative events and emotions, and instead should consider the well-being model of the world, which represents both negative *and* positive events and information (C. Gyldensted, personal communication, February 12, 2015), because constructive journalism is not synonymous with positive journalism. Although both include positive emotions in their stories, the two forms of news differ in their goals and subsequently their story topic selection. Constructive news stories reflect a commitment to upholding journalism's core functions and therefore are of widespread social significance, whereas publishers of positive news stories are not generally concerned with journalism's core functions and therefore tend to publish stories about less significant topics. This distinction will be described more thoroughly below.

Positive, or good, news is composed of media outlets that only publish happy, upbeat stories. These include websites such as *Good News Network, Happy News*, and

Huff Post Good News. Positive news aims to combat the negativity that is ubiquitous in news, and stories are meant to show readers that the world is not all bad, according to the "about" pages of several good news websites. According to a survey of individuals who visit positive news websites, respondents reported reading positive news to attain a good mood more than any other motivating factor (McIntyre & Sobel, 2014). Because positive news aims to cheer people up, many stories on good news sites are considered "fluff," or short stories or videos highlighting minor good deeds or funny animals or children. A content analysis provided support for the fact that stories on positive news websites are indeed highly emotional and entertaining (McIntyre, 2014). But positive news stories should not be discredited, as psychology scholars have shown that positive emotions are not superficial, but are rather sophisticated and beneficial (Fredrickson, 2001; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). However, despite the potential benefit of positive emotions, stories on positive news websites lack the conflict and impact that is typically inherent in stories on mainstream news websites (McIntyre, 2014). Because positive journalists, who are mostly aggregators, aim to share good deeds and show readers that the world is a better place than mainstream media reflect, they may not tend to publish stories that maintain journalism's core functions, including serving as a watchdog by holding government accountable (Entman, 2005), alerting the public to potential threats (Lasswell, 1948), or providing useful information (Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2005). This lack of commitment to traditional journalism's core functions is the key difference between positive news and constructive news. However, not all "good" news stories lack these qualities, and if a story on a positive news site *does* reflect journalism's core functions, it may be considered constructive.

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Providing information about potential solutions to social issues is another positive psychology technique that can be used to create a constructive news story, and is also a focus of this study. "Solutions journalists" are forward-looking. They were typically trained as classic journalists, but they are driven to facilitate productive change, so they report on credible solutions to social problems (Benesch, 1998). Examples include work from the *Solutions Journalism Network*, *Reporters d'Espoirs*, and the *New York Times* blog series, *Fixes*. These journalists seek out individuals who are working toward solutions, analyze these solutions for their strengths and weaknesses, and/or attempt to recast social problems in terms of their possible solutions. The reporters do not suggest specific solutions to social problems; they highlight existing solutions in an attempt to improve society. A news story that mentions a solution to a social problem can be considered constructive; however, including a solution is just one of a handful of positive psychology techniques that can be applied to news to make it constructive. Therefore, a solution-based news story is constructive, but a constructive news story does not require the inclusion of a solution.

Again, the various forms of journalism discussed above are summarized in Table 1.

Constructive journalism in practice

Practitioners have not agreed on a single definition of constructive journalism. The term has been used to refer to different types of news forms, perhaps most commonly positive journalism and solutions journalism (Sillesen, 2014). Although the terms are used unsystematically and the evidence is primarily anecdotal, practitioners report optimistic findings from their experiences with these new forms of news – findings that

point to both societal and financial benefits of considering more constructive news reporting (Curry & Hammonds, 2014, Hammonds, 2014; Gyldensted, 2011; Maymann, 2013; Noack, Orth, Owen, & Rennick, 2013; Yarow, 2013).

Although positive news – which aims to cheer people up and typically lacks widespread social significance – can be more entertaining than informative (McIntyre, 2014), it is similar to constructive news in that it often includes positive emotions. And news outlets that publish stories with positive emotions are reporting success, suggesting that there are real-world benefits to incorporating emotions into news work. The *Huffington Post*, for example, publishes a section dedicated to good news, and editors presented audience metrics in 2013 showing a substantial increase in the number of visitors to their good news site (Maymann, 2013). Specifically, Digiday, a media company for digital media, marketing, and advertising professionals, reported that traffic to *Huff Post Good News* increased by 85% in the past year and that the site's content receives twice as many social referrals as other content (Bilton, 2014). *Upworthy*, a news site that uses highly emotional headlines to entice users to read meaningful stories, has, despite criticism of its "clickbait" style, been tremendously successful, increasing its monthly visitors by more than 80 million in 2013 (Yarow, 2013). *The Correspondent*, a crowd-funded online Dutch news organization dedicated to more insightful and constructive stories, launched in 2013 and raised more than a million dollars during a weeklong campaign – a crowd-funding world record in journalism (The Correspondent). These numbers suggest that journalists should care about emotions, if for no other reason than financial benefit. Others argue that all journalists should at least understand the role

of positive affect in news stories, and then they can decide to what extent they choose to subscribe to more constructive reporting.

News outlets that focus on solution-based reporting have also been called constructive journalism, and they report anecdotal success as well. *Solutions Journalism Network*, whose reporters conduct "rigorous and compelling reporting about responses to social problems" (*Solutions Journalism Network*), teamed up with more than 30 newsrooms to train journalists how to write more forward-looking stories. Chief Operating Officer Keith Hammonds described the success of these partnerships. "It's not just that online traffic to solutions stories seem to be higher; readers' comments are more positive and constructive, indicating a changed, more hopeful conversation" (Hammonds, 2014). The *Seattle Times* is one such news organization whose education reporters have been trained in solutions journalism. Reporter Claudia Rowe explained the process of generating solution-based stories in her beat. "These are not positive features about nice-sounding approaches to a problem," she said. "They are data-and-research-based explorations of how a given school or district has overcome hurdles. In other words, **they have to have real evidence of improved outcomes** to warrant being spotlighted" (emphasis in original) (C. Rowe, personal communication, June 23, 2014). Rowe said the *Seattle Times* has seen increased engagement in terms of audience metrics on its solution-based stories. Another news organization that partnered with *Solutions Journalism Network* is Utah's *Deseret News*. A case study on the paper's adoption of solution-based news found that solution-oriented stories anecdotally resulted in increased page views and shares (Noack, Orth, Owen, & Rennick, 2013). After adopting the new style of reporting, the paper experienced a 15% growth in print circulation and became the second

fastest-growing newspaper in the country in 2012. The report also mentioned the positive outcomes that solution-based reporting had on the journalists; it challenged them to ask smarter questions and made them find more meaning in their work.

Key components of constructive journalism

Various positive psychology techniques could be applied to news work. This dissertation will focus on two: Including positive emotion and solution-based information in news stories. Again, the mission of positive psychology is to understand and foster the factors that allow individuals, communities, and societies to flourish (Seligman, 2011). Positive emotions and solutions are central to this purpose, which is consistent with constructive journalism's overarching goal to improve individual and societal well-being.

Emotions

Media professionals should not focus solely on what story they are trying to tell but also on what emotions they evoke while spreading the message (Konijn & Ten Holt, 2010). The first experiment in this dissertation predicts that including positive emotions in news stories will have positive effects on readers' affect, attitudes, and behavioral intentions.

Before discussing how positive emotions might impact news consumers, emotion generally must be defined. Emotion is a psychological construct with multiple components. Broadly speaking, Lazarus (1991) summed up emotion when he said it is a response to meaning. More specifically, Nabi (2010) described emotions as internal mental states representing evaluative valenced reactions to events or objects that vary in intensity. Scholars tend to agree that emotions are states, not traits (Lazarus, 1991; Nabi, 1999). Emotions are often conceptualized as differentiated, or distinct from one another.

For example, anger is different from sadness, which is different from pride. Some scholars (Frijda, 1986; Lazarus, 1991) believe that emotions motivate certain behaviors that are often considered adaptive. For example, fear can motivate a person to run away, which could result in survival.

Emotion is complex, though, and some scholars say that a direct link between an emotion and a response behavior is too simple. Nabi (1999) suggests that emotion consists of five components: 1) cognitive appraisal or evaluation of a situation, 2) physiological arousal, 3) motor expression, 4) motivation (behavioral intentions or action readiness), and 5) subjective feeling. Among these components, scholars typically emphasize different features, like appraisal patterns or action tendencies, but they tend to agree that emotion is a result of cognition or evaluation of some specific event or object and that it results in physiological changes such as arousal (Baumeister, Vohs, Dewall, & Zhang, 2007; Fredrickson, 2001; Lazarus, 1991; Nabi, 1999).

Emotion is in part defined by how it differs from similar constructs, including mood and affect. Emotions are short-lived compared to moods. Mood is longer-lasting and perhaps a response to emotion because studies have shown that emotions influence mood (Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Nabi, 1999; Reijntjes, Stegge, Terwogt, Kamphuis, & Telch, 2006). Emotions are also thought to be intense and targeted, meaning they are directed at some specific external stimulus, in contrast to mood states, which have no specific focus (Lazarus, 1991). Emotions are also more likely than moods to be aroused in the context of a message and to be relevant to the message topic, supporting emotions as the focus of this study involving media messages (Nabi, 1999).

Scholars also tend to agree that emotion has more range and variety than affect, which is broader and more simplistic (Baumeister et al., 2007; Fredrickson, 2001). Affect tends to involve a positive or negative feeling, whereas emotions are more specific and offer a wider range of feelings. Fredrickson (2001), who created the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, says affect is a more general concept than emotion and has two dimensions: positive or negative emotional activation. Similarity, Baumeister and his colleagues (2007), who proposed emotion as a feedback system rather than a direct determinate of behavior, agree that affect is a good or bad response to a stimulus, and is broader than emotion. For example, an individual who feels generally bad after reading a depressing news story is experiencing negative affect, whereas an individual who feels angry, fearful, or sad after reading the story is experiencing negative emotions (likely in addition to negative affect).

Many emotion scholars conceptualize emotions as fitting into discrete categories such as fear, anger, joy, etc. An alternative approach is to characterize emotions based on more general dimensions, often obtained through factor analysis. Whereas the discrete view categorizes emotion as several states including fear, anger, sadness, contentment, pride, etc., the dimensional view categorizes emotion based on broad affective states such as high or low arousal, positive or negative valence, or approach or withdrawal tendencies. Nabi (2010) argues that the discrete conceptualization of emotion is better than the dimensional view for communication research. She says the discrete conceptualization incorporates the dimensional perspective by assessing valence and intensity, but goes much farther by capturing other elements of emotion. Discrete emotions – even those of the same valence – can have different effects on perceptions,

attitudes, and behaviors. For example, anger and sadness are both negative emotions but have very different causes and effects. Therefore, it is helpful to know more than the broad categories of the dimensional view; thus, the discrete perspective is more useful to communication scholars.

Conceptualization and impact of positive emotions.

This study focuses on positive emotions, which were largely ignored by academic scholars until recently. Fredrickson (1998) said scholars focused their attention on negative emotions because negative emotions are more numerous and problematic. For example, sadness can lead to depression. Positive emotions, on the other hand, can help individuals flourish. Positive emotions serve as *indicators* of flourishing (when someone is flourishing, he or she shows positive emotions), but Fredrickson (2001) argues that positive emotions can also *produce* flourishing, which suggests positive emotion used in news stories could potentially increase individual and societal well-being.

Positive emotions can be defined as those discrete emotions that are positively valenced, or those emotions that result from benefits rather than harms, according to Lazarus (1991). They can be either low or high in arousal (contentment versus excitement, for example). Positive emotions generally result in approach (versus avoidance) tendencies; however, Fredrickson (2001) argued in her broaden-and-build theory that positive emotions have less specific action tendencies than do negative emotions. Additionally, Fredrickson says these tendencies do not always involve action, and she therefore referred to action tendencies of positive emotions as thought-action repertoires. Fredrickson's (2001) broaden-and-build theory asserts that positive emotions broaden an individual's thought-action repertoire by prompting him or her to ignore automatic

behavioral scripts and pursue novel, creative paths of thought and action. This broadening of one's thought-action repertoire builds individual physical, intellectual, and social resources that can be used later when they are needed. Whereas negative emotions help us survive in immediate danger, positive emotions can help us thrive over the long run by building up those resources to use when necessary.

Fredrickson (1998) specifically examined research regarding the positive emotions of joy, interest, contentment, pride and love. She found that each emotion broadened the mind, and she and other emotion scholars identified action tendencies that supported this broadening of the mind. For example, joy is associated with the action tendency of "free activation," which is more simply described as a readiness to engage in new activities (Frijda, 1986, p. 89). Joy creates the urge to be social and creative, both artistically and intellectually – the urge to play, which fosters all types of skills. Interest is associated with the thought-action tendency of exploration and creates the urge to open the mind to new ideas and actions (Izard, 1977). Contentment is associated with a general broadening of the self- and world-view (de Rivera, 1989; Izard, 1977). Pride creates the urge to share achievements and envision greater achievements in the future (Fredrickson, 2001). And love, a collection of several emotions, could potentially be associated with all of these action tendencies and typically strengthens social bonds (Izard, 1977; Fredrickson, 1998). Additionally, Lazarus (1991) studied happiness and suggested that its action tendency is expansiveness.

Reviewing existing studies, Fredrickson (1998) cited research suggesting that positive emotion (as well as positive affect or mood) enhanced attention and cognition, making individuals more flexible, creative, and inclusive in their thinking. It enhanced

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action and physical resources, making individuals more healthy and open to new

activities. And it enhanced social resources, increasing helping behavior and social

support. Although the initial positive emotion didn't last long, the resources acquired

from positive emotion can have long-term benefits, including undoing the effects of

negative emotions, protecting health, fueling psychological resilience, and triggering

upward spirals toward more positive meaning, which leads to enhanced emotional well-

being (Fredrickson, Mancuso, Branigan, & Tugade, 2000; Fredrickson, 2001).

Impact of positive emotions in news stories.

Based on the research summarized above, it is reasonable to believe positive

emotions might play a role in successful constructive news stories. In addition to the

discrete positive emotions that Fredrickson studied, there are other positive emotions that

lend themselves to the study of constructive journalism – namely, elevation and hope.

Elevation. Cathrine Gyldensted, a leader in the constructive journalism movement,

said constructive news stories are meant to *engage* readers (C. Gyldensted, personal

communication, April 1, 2014). She elaborated, suggesting that constructive news is

meant to *build people up* – not just the audience, but journalists and their sources as well.

She said constructive news stories should leave people feeling *energized*. Haidt's (2001)

work on the emotion of elevation nicely reflects these characteristics.

Haidt (2001) conceptualized elevation as an emotional response to witnessing acts

of virtue or moral beauty. It has physical and motivational components. Elevation can

cause people to feel open and warm and to experience tingly feelings in the chest, chills,

tears, or a lump in the throat. It also motivates people to want to act more virtuously

themselves; in other words, the action tendency is emulation. Elevation also can cause

people to want to affiliate with and help others. Whereas happiness tends to promote private, self-interested pursuits, elevation motivates people to turn their attention outward, toward others.

Some scholars consider elevation an emotion that has a mixed-emotional response, calling into question whether it is solely a positive emotion. Elevation and other emotions such as gratitude and admiration are considered mixed-emotions because they are often explained with words that are associated with both positive and negative feelings (Algoe & Haidt, 2009). Elevation, for example, is associated with the words touching, moving, and inspiring. Elevation is also associated with physical responses that could occur from negative emotions, like a lump in the throat or tears.

The mixed-emotional response of elevation is acknowledged; however for the purpose of this dissertation, elevation will be placed in the positive emotion category because it is positively valenced (Oliver, Hartmann, & Woolley, 2012), is associated with other positive emotions such as contentment (Oliver et al., 2012), and has been conceptualized as a positive emotion (Algoe & Haidt, 2009). Additionally, elevation has been shown to have effects similar to those expected from positive emotions (e.g. openness, desire to affiliate, help others, be a better person), making it an appropriate positive emotion to examine in this study that looks at the pro-social effects of constructive journalism (Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Oliver et al., 2012). Lastly, the fact that elevation is associated with physical responses that could occur from negative emotions, such as tears, should not preclude it from being a positive emotion. Individuals can cry from joy, but that does not prevent joy from being a positive emotion.

In the context of a news story, elevation can be felt after reading about moral acts such as heroism, compassion, or courage in the face of adversity. It can be experienced in stories that are considered touching, moving, or inspiring, or after witnessing the embodiment of virtues such as charity, gratitude, fidelity, or generosity. No identified studies have examined elevation in a textual news story. However, Algoe and Haidt (2009) supported elevation as an emotion that can be experienced from a different form of media – video. Elevation lends itself to being studied in a media context because it is experienced after witnessing or reading about *someone else* doing something virtuous. This is particularly fitting to news, where individuals are watching or reading about others. For example, Algoe and Haidt's (2009) stimulus video evoking elevation featured a man who, at a very young age, established a homeless shelter. Haidt (2000) conceptualized the opposite of elevation as disgust– an emotion that results from seeing or reading about an atrocious deed. It is reasonable to think disgust might be experienced after reading some mainstream news, given that stories are increasingly negative and full of conflict and crime (Patterson, 2000; Schudson, 2011).

Hope. Another discrete emotion that lends itself to considerations of constructive news is hope. Lazarus (1999) defined hope as an emotion that occurs when individuals believe something positive that does not currently exist in their lives can materialize, so they yearn for it. Lazarus (1999) studied emotions in terms of their relationship with goals. He said that emotions are responses to goal outcomes. Negative emotions "stem from delay or thwarting of our goals," and positive emotions "flow from conditions that facilitate goals" (Lazarus, 1999, p. 663). Hope, he said, is an emotion because it is a response to a goal outcome, and Westerners typically consider it a positive emotion,

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although some scholars consider it a mixed emotion. Lazarus (1999) found that hope is a vital coping resource, which is relevant given the literature showing that negative news has many negative effects. Lazarus (1999) conceptualized hope as the opposite of despair, which is an utter loss of hope. Like disgust, despair might be experienced from consistently reading negative news. Hope might be experienced in news stories that highlight a silver-lining or a possible solution to an inherently negative event.

In the context of a news story, emotions such as elevation or hope might influence readers by directing their attention toward the emotion-evoking message. According to Nabi's (1999) cognitive-functional model, discrete and message-induced emotions may impact information processing, attitude change, and information recall, particularly when the emotion is linked to the message topic. Although Nabi (1999) studied negative emotions, she said positive emotions can also be conceptualized using her model. Nabi conceptualized positive emotions as tending to have approach tendencies, compared to negative emotions, which tend to have avoidance tendencies. In a news story, these response tendencies can be considered in terms of an individual's willingness to engage with the source of the emotions, willingness to think about the emotion-evoking situation generally, and willingness to think about potential solutions. A person experiencing a positive emotion while reading a news story should therefore be motivated to engage with the story, its message, and its possible outcomes. For example, a person who experiences a positive emotion such as interest while reading a story should want to pay more attention to the story. A person who experiences a negative emotion such as anger might also want to pay more attention to the story, but although emotion in general directs one's attention toward the information for further processing, negative emotions

narrow that cognitive processing while positive emotions enhance it (Konijn & ten Holt, 2010).

Based on Fredrickson's (2001) broaden-and-build theory, positive, or mixed, emotions such as elevation and hope should broaden one's thought-action repertoire, making people more flexible in their thinking and open to new ideas. Elevation, hope, or other positive emotions should undo some of the negative effects of negative news or lift people up, just as constructive news stories are meant to do. News stories that highlight positive emotions should motivate individuals to collaborate and to think of creative solutions to social problems. And the approach tendencies associated with positive emotions should motivate people to act on their thoughts and actions, possibly to share their thoughts and ideas by word of mouth or on social media. Stories that foster hope, elevation, or other positive (or mixed) emotions might encourage news consumers to engage in their environment and partake in adaptive activities, ultimately working to improve individual and societal well being.

Emotion placement

The literature suggests that positive emotion might have a greater impact if used during certain parts of a story – the peak and the end (Kahneman, Fredrickson, Schreiber, & Redelmeier, 1993; Fredrickson & Kahneman, 1993; Fredrickson, 2000). The affective intensity of the peak and end of an experience can influence one's global evaluations of that experience (Fredrickson & Kahneman, 1993; Fredrickson, 2000). How people feel at the peak and end of an experience is valuable because the peak and end of an experience carry great personal meaning (Fredrickson, 2000). The peak of an experience provides an individual with an indication of the amount of resources that person will need to cope

with the experience. In other words, the peak is an indicator of a person's capacity to handle an event. The end of an experience conveys certainty. Endings are also associated with outcomes, which are used to evaluate the worth of an experience. In other words, feeling positive affect at the end of an experience makes one feel like the experience was worthwhile, even if negative affect was felt prior to the conclusion of the experience, because the feeling at the end carries more weight (Fredrickson, 2000).

Kahneman et al. (1993) tested the effects of an affective peak-and-end experience by instructing participants to hold their hands in freezing water for 60 seconds. In another condition, participants held their hands is freezing water for 90 seconds, in which the temperature was raised by one degree during the last 30 seconds. Participants in the latter condition reported more favorable experiences, despite having to submerge their hands for a longer period of time, because the minor increase in temperature left them feeling better at the end of the experience. Fredrickson and Kahneman (1993) successfully tested the affective peak-and-end assertion in the context of individuals watching emotional film clips, which provides support for the idea that the peak-and-end hypothesis can be applied to other media experiences. Kahneman and Fredrickson measured general affect, not discrete emotions, as the outcome variable, in part because Fredrickson (2000) pointed to the difficulty of asking individuals to accurately recognize and report the onsets and offsets of several discrete emotions simultaneously. Accordingly, this dissertation will also measure general affect as an outcome variable.

Solutions

Given that the news media may contribute to compassion fatigue in part by publishing problem-based rather than solution-based stories (Kinnick et al., 1996),

articles that offer solutions might have a positive impact on reader engagement. The second study in this dissertation predicts that including solutions in news stories will impact readers' affect, attitudes, engagement and actual behavior.

Research suggesting that solution-based news should promote engagement comes in part from studies that have documented dissatisfaction with the lack of resolution in news stories and the failure of highly controversial stories to promote engagement. An ethnography on the consumption habits of young digital news consumers revealed that individuals had trouble receiving resolution information in news stories (Associated Press, 2008). Mainstream news is often conflict-based, partially because popular belief is that conflict and controversy cause conversation. But highly controversial messages might not be effective in engaging audiences. In five field and laboratory experiments, Chen and Berger (2013) found that low levels of controversy often sparked conversation, but high levels of controversy (and even moderate levels in some instances) halted conversation. This suggests that news stories that mention a controversy but also include a resolution might be more effective in engaging audiences than stories that mention the controversy and stop there.

The presence of "potential solutions" in news stories can be conceptualized in terms of what psychology scholars call coherent positive resolution. Pals (2006) defined coherent positive resolution as "the construction of a coherent and complete story of a difficult event that ends positively, conveying a sense of emotional resolution or closure" (p. 1082). She noted that the term "resolution" does not refer to the objective solving of a problem, as many events are never completely resolved. Rather, coherent positive resolution refers to "a sense of narrative completion that releases the person from the

emotional grip of the event and allows the life story to move forward" (p. 1082).

Research suggests that coherent positive resolution is associated with subjective well-being, making this technique relevant to the study of constructive journalism, whose goal is to improve individual and societal well-being through more engaging and productive news stories.

Psychology scholars have primarily examined coherent positive resolution in studies about identity in which they analyze the narratives people tell about their own lives. Individuals whose life stories included a pattern of negative experiences coupled with positive outcomes reported higher levels of subjective well-being than did individuals with fewer outcome-oriented experiences (McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten, & Bowman, 2001). And individuals who included more coherent positive resolution in narratives about difficult experiences in young adulthood had increased ego-resiliency, which mediated the relationship between coherent positive resolution and life satisfaction later in life (Pals, 2006). A study about the impact of positive parenting on identity revealed links between coherent positive resolution and identity achievement and emotional adjustment (Dumas, Lawford, Tieu, & Pratt, 2009).

Although news practitioners likely do not use the term "coherent positive resolution," they do practice solution-based reporting. In 1998, the *Columbia Journalism Review* included a story highlighting a trend in resolution reporting. Newspapers including the *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, *San Diego Union-Tribune*; magazines like *The Nation*; and broadcast shows such as *ABC News' World News Tonight with Peter Jennings* all published stories highlighting possible solutions to social problems (Benesch, 1998). High-quality solutions journalism, Benesch said, "differs from other good

journalism in one simple way: instead of pointing out what's wrong in the hope that someone will fix it, solutions journalism points out what's right, hoping that someone can imitate it" (Benesch, 1998, p. 39).). In 2014, the *Columbia Journalism Review* published another article about solutions journalism, this time mentioning how the *Washington Post* joined the trend by providing its digital subscribers with an email newsletter, *The Optimist*, meant to inspire (Sillesen, 2014; Wallberg, 2014).

While some media professionals may argue that it is not the media's job to examine solutions to social problems, proponents of constructive journalism suggest that the media should, after they confront audiences with information about conflict and controversy, provide individuals with productive ways to channel their outrage (Gyldensted, 2011). This is in keeping with Bro's (2008) conceptualization of the active journalist, or the journalist who is concerned with what happens after the story is published.

Potential solutions might be further conceptualized in terms of mobilizing information. Mobilizing information is information "that helps people act on the attitudes they already have" (Stanfield & Lemert, 1987, p. 604, citing Lemert, 1981). In a news story, a discussion about potential solutions might serve as mobilizing information and facilitate reader engagement. Mobilizing information is often missing from public affairs news stories because these stories are issue-based, and information provided is about the policy, not about how individuals can express their opinions on the issue (Stanfield & Lemert, 1987). Providing information about how readers can act on a specific public policy might not typically be acceptable in traditional news outlets that claim to be non-partisan, or more broadly, non-opinionated. Providing such information might make news

outlets susceptible to bias charges because they might appear to be supporting a cause. Stanfield and Lemert (1987) found through a content analysis and interviews that alternative activist newspapers that are not held to the same standard included more mobilizing information in their stories than did traditional newspapers. This finding is consistent with the idea that other alternative news outlets, including constructive news outlets, might be more likely than traditional news organizations to include mobilizing information in their stories.

And in fact, alternative news outlets are increasingly writing solution-focused stories. In 2003, non-governmental organization *Reporters d'Espoirs* (Reporters of Hope) was launched to promote news that recasts problems in terms of their possible solutions. In 2010, the *New York Times* began publishing a blog series titled *Fixes*, in which the authors explore solutions to major social problems (Fixes). Shortly afterward, one of the *Fixes* writers co-founded *Solutions Journalism Network*, which again examines credible responses to social problems to get at how and why potential solutions are working or not working (*Solutions Journalism Network*). Solution-based reporting is also appearing in mainstream news, as *Solutions Journalism Network* has partnered with more than 30 traditional news organizations to train reporters how to generate story ideas, conduct interviews, and frame stories with solutions as a priority (Curry & Hammonds, 2014).

Empirical evidence supporting solution-focused news is in its infancy. One systematic study of solution-based news has been conducted, and it provided promising results. *Solutions Journalism Network* together with the Engaging News Project conducted a quasi-experiment in April 2014 in which American adults read a news story that involved a social issue and either included or did not include a potential solution to

the problem. In a resulting survey, respondents who read the solution-oriented stories reported more perceived knowledge about the topic, higher self-efficacy in regard to a potential remedy, and greater intentions to act in support of the cause (Curry & Hammonds, 2014). Although Curry and Hammonds' study revealed optimistic outcomes of solution-based reporting, its results should be viewed with caution as participants were not randomly assigned and, thus, internal validity is threatened. This dissertation seeks to test the effects of solution-oriented news stories using a true, randomized experiment, dramatically reducing the likelihood that findings could be due to chance.

Key outcomes of constructive journalism

The purpose of this dissertation is to test whether two constructive journalism techniques are successful in meeting the goals of increasing audience engagement through more productive stories that ultimately improve individual and societal well-being. The following experiments will test the effects of news stories with either positive emotions or effective solutions on readers' feelings, attitudes, level of engagement, and actual behaviors. Below are explanations of some primary outcome variables to be measured in the two studies.

Affect

Positive affect can be both an indicator and a producer of human flourishing (Fredrickson, 2001). Given that constructive journalism is ultimately meant to heighten individual and societal well-being, or flourishing, affect is a key outcome measure of this study. Affect is a broad, two-dimensional emotional activation – a good or bad response to a stimulus (Baumeister et al., 2007; Fredrickson, 2001). Discrete positive emotions are positively valenced and discrete negative emotions are negatively valenced, and

positively valenced news stories have been shown to increase positive affect (McIntyre and Gibson, 2014) Therefore, individuals who experience discrete positive emotions after reading news stories should feel positive affect and those who experience discrete negative emotions after reading news stories should feel negative affect. Additionally, there is reason to believe offering solutions in news stories should influence positive affect. Research has shown that coherent positive resolution is correlated with life satisfaction and subjective well-being (McAdams et al., 2001; Pals, 2006; Dumas et al., 2009), and affect is a strong predictor of well-being (Emmons, 1986). Therefore, adding a positive resolution to a news story should result in more positive emotional evaluations of that story.

Perceived self-efficacy

Practitioners of constructive journalism aim to motivate individuals to contribute to productive social change. Individuals with high levels of self-efficacy, or the "capability to produce valued outcomes and to prevent undesired ones" (Bandura, 1995, p. 1) should be more likely to contribute to such change. Self-efficacy is similar to perceived self-efficacy; the former regards one's actual ability to take action, whereas the latter regards one's beliefs about his or her ability to take action. Specifically, according to Bandura (1997), perceived self-efficacy is "concerned with people's beliefs in their capabilities to produce given attainments" (p. 307). Given that this study will rely on participants' self-reports, perceived self-efficacy is the appropriate outcome measure. Research has shown that experiencing positive emotions can increase self-efficacy while experiencing negative emotions can lower self-efficacy, suggesting that reading news stories with positive emotions might increase perceived self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986;

Myrick, 2013). Additionally, providing individuals with self-efficacy information has improved perceptions of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). In the context of a news story, self-efficacy information could take the form of providing solutions. And, in fact, reading news stories with solutions has been shown to increase self-efficacy (Curry & Hammonds, 2014). Given the relevant past research and the importance of self-efficacy to the goals of constructive journalism, this dissertation will test the effects of news stories with positive emotions and solutions on participants' levels of perceived self-efficacy.

Engagement/behavioral intentions

A primary goal of constructive journalism is to engage news audiences. To determine whether news stories with positive emotions or positive solutions in fact increase engagement, this dissertation will examine various behavioral intentions. Based both on Nabi's (2000) cognitive-function model and Fredrickson's (2001) broaden-and-build theory detailing how positive emotions are associated with approach tendencies and can produce more open-minded thoughts, news stories with positive emotions should motivate readers to engage. This engagement might take place in the form of seeking more information, sharing stories on social media, signing a petition, or donating time or money to a cause. News stories that offer solutions to social problems might also result in increased reader engagement if the acknowledgement of a solution acts as mobilizing information, or information that helps individuals act on their attitudes (Stanfield & Lemert, 1987).

Hypotheses and Research Questions

Study 1: Effects of news stories that include positive emotions

H_1: Participants who read a news story with positive emotions will report higher levels of positive affect than will participants who read a news story with negative emotions.

H_2: Participants who read a news story with positive emotions at the peak and end will report higher levels of positive affect than participants who read a story with positive emotions throughout the story.

H_3: Participants who read a news story with positive emotions will report higher levels of perceived self-efficacy than will participants who read a story with negative emotions.

H_4: Participants who read a news story with positive emotions will report more favorable attitudes about the story topic than will participants who read a story with negative emotions.

H_5: Participants who read a news story with positive emotions will report stronger behavioral intentions to seek more information, share the story, and support the cause than will those who read a story with negative emotions.

Study 2: Effects of news stories that mention solutions

H_1: Participants who read a news story that mentions an effective solution will report higher levels of positive affect than will participants who read a news story that mentions an ineffective solution or doesn't mention any solution information.

H$_2$: Participants who read a news story that mentions an effective solution will report higher levels of perceived self-efficacy than will participants who read a news story that mentions an ineffective solution or doesn't mention any solution information.

H$_{3a}$: Participants who read a news story that mentions an effective solution will report more favorable attitudes toward the news article than will participants who read a news story that mentions an ineffective solution or doesn't mention any solution information.

H$_{3b}$: Participants who read a news story that mentions an effective solution will report more favorable attitudes toward a solution than will participants who read a news story that mentions an ineffective solution or doesn't mention any solution information.

H$_4$: Participants who read a news story that mentions an effective solution will report stronger behavioral intentions to seek more information, share the story, and support the cause than will those who read a news story that mentions an ineffective solution or doesn't mention any solution information.

H$_5$: Participants who read a news story that mentions an effective solution will be more likely to seek more information about the problem than those who read a news story that mentions an ineffective solution or doesn't mention any solution information.

Commitment to core functions

Constructive journalism aims to produce more productive and engaging stories while remaining committed to journalism's core functions, including providing useful information (Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2005), alerting the public to potential threats, and holding government accountable (Entman, 2005). It is important that reporters don't fail to fulfill journalism's core functions by adding positive emotions or solutions to news

stories. A focus on positive emotions or solutions without also adhering to the core functions of news could result in "fluff," or stories that lack widespread social significance. Therefore, the following research questions are proposed:

RQ$_1$ (Study 1): Do participants who read stories with positive emotions perceive the stories to be less committed to journalism's core functions than they do stories with negative emotions?

RQ$_1$ (Study 2): Do participants who read a story that mentions an effective solution perceive the story to be less committed to journalism's core functions than they do a story that mentions an ineffective solution or doesn't mention any solution information?

CHAPTER 2: METHOD

Method

Study 1 – Emotions

Design

A 2 x 2 between-subjects experiment with a pretest and a control group without manipulation was designed to examine the effects of positive emotion-evoking content in news stories. The independent variables were emotion valence (positive, negative) and emotion placement (peak and end, throughout). This created four conditions: News stories with positive emotions in the peak and end, negative emotions in the peak and end, positive emotions throughout, and negative emotions throughout. Additionally, there was an un-manipulated control condition.

Participants

Participants were recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk, a crowd-sourcing labor market where researchers (and others) pay "workers" minimal wages to complete small tasks. There were 506 original U.S. participants. However, data were discarded for individuals who spent less than four minutes completing the survey or had technical problems. The remaining sample consisted of 480 participants ranging in age from 18 to 75 years ($M = 38.42$, $SD = 13.51$). The majority were female (55%) and white (77%). Half held either a bachelor's (37%) or graduate degree (13%), which is slightly more than the national average (Census Bureau, 2013).

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Mechanical Turk, named after an eighteenth century fake chess-playing machine, was developed for use by Amazon to pay people to do tasks computers cannot do. The service went public in 2005, and social science researchers started using Mechanical Turk workers as participants in 2010 (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011; Paolacci, Chandler, & Ipeirotis, 2010). Mechanical Turk is a useful social science tool because it allows researchers to gather data quickly and inexpensively. In the current experiment, data collection was completed in two days. Workers were paid $.50 each for their participation, and the average time to complete the experiment was 8.5 minutes. This resulted in an hourly average wage of about $3.50, which is less than half the federal minimum wage but roughly double the hourly wage used by other social scientists on Mechanical Turk (Paolacci et al., 2010).

Participant samples from Mechanical Turk might not be representative of the U.S. population, but they are significantly more diverse than typical American college samples (Buhrmester et al., 2011). Although more research is needed on the effectiveness of this relatively new data collection method, research has shown that data collected through Mechanical Turk are at least as reliable as those obtained by traditional methods (Buhrmester et al., 2011). An additional benefit of Mechanical Turk is that it lessens the typical concern with experiments that the artificial circumstances in which data are gathered might constrain emotional responses.

Stimulus materials

A fictitious news site, *Network News*, was created for this experiment. The site was designed using Adobe Illustrator and was intended to look like a standard professional news website. The header included a logo, search bar, social media icons,

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and horizontal navigation bar with several story categories such as "Business," "Politics," "Education," etc. The footer repeated the logo, includes additional social media icons and also standard (fake) links such as "About Us" and "Contact Us." The sidebar simulated a simple "Local Weather" widget and included a plain ad for a fictitious paper company. The body of the fake news site included a version of a news story complete with headline, byline, date, photo, cutline, story text, and pull quote. The only differences between the sites were the headline, cutline, pull quote, and body text for each version of the story.

Stories published on mainstream news sites were combined and manipulated to create the story for this experiment, which discussed a campaign in which selected parking meters would collect donations for a city's homeless programs. The story was manipulated to evoke either positive or negative emotions, and the emotion-evoking information was placed either solely at the peak and end of the story or spread throughout the article. The story was additionally stripped of its emotion-evoking text for the targeted emotions to create a no-emotion control condition. Note that the "no-emotion" control story does not imply that the story was incapable of evoking any emotion. Rather, the story did not include the specific information used to evoke the six discrete negative emotions and six discrete positive emotions present in the manipulated stories. All story versions ranged between 442 and 568 words, with the shortest version being the control condition because it lacked emotion-evoking information.

Procedure

Participants self-selected to take a survey posted on the Mechanical Turk website. The survey was described as a research study in which each worker would be asked to read a news story and respond to a questionnaire. The description indicated that the task

should take about 10 minutes. Workers who chose to participate were redirected to a Qualtrics survey, where they were thanked for their interest and asked for their consent to participate, including a confirmation that they were at least 18 years old. If they did not grant consent or reported that they were younger than 18, they were redirected to the end of the survey. After giving consent, participants first responded to a few demographic questions and a short affect scale to assess their baseline affective state. Then they were randomly assigned to one of the five news story versions and asked to read the story carefully. Finally, participants responded to several questions measuring the outcome variables. At the end of the questionnaire, participants were given a code to enter into the Mechanical Turk interface in order to receive their payment.

Independent variables

Emotion valence. Participants in every condition read a news story about the same topic – a charity parking meter program that raises money for the homeless. However, participants in some conditions read versions of the stories that included positive emotion-evoking content and others read versions of the stories that included negative emotion-evoking content. The stories in the positive emotion conditions were manipulated to evoke elevation, hope, happiness, joy, pride, and excitement. The stories in the negative emotion conditions were manipulated to evoke disgust, despair, sadness, guilt, worry, and anger. Emotion-evoking information was included in the headline, cutline, pull quote, and in quotes and other information in the main text. The emotion-evoking content included information and quotes describing how the characters felt. Sometimes discrete emotion words were used directly (e.g. for hope: he felt hopeful). Other times, emotions were described in the message (e.g. for elevation: she was touched

after witnessing a moral act and then inspired to do a good deed herself). The no-manipulation control condition was also included in which the story did not include the information meant to evoke the discrete emotions evoked in the other conditions.

Emotion placement. The stories with emotions in the peak and end included emotion-evoking information in three and a half paragraphs considered to be the peak and three paragraphs considered to be the end. The peak was operationalized as the most emotional part of the story located in and directly after the nut graph, or paragraph that explains the value of the news story, beginning in the third paragraph of the story. This is consistent with the literature that conceptualizes the peak of an experience as an emotional peak, not an informational peak. The end was operationalized as the final three paragraphs of the story. The stories with emotions spread throughout included emotion-evoking content in six and a half paragraphs spread throughout the stories. See Appendix 1 to view the stories.

Dependent variables

Affect. Affect was measured at pretest and posttest using a short form of the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (Thompson, 2007). Participants were asked to report *how they feel right now* at pretest, and *how the story made them feel* at posttest. Participants were asked to rate their agreement with how much they felt upset*, hostile*, alert, ashamed*, inspired, nervous*, determined, attentive, afraid*, and active (words marked with an asterisk were reverse coded).

Attitude toward the story topic. Because emotions play a role in attitude change (Petty, Fabrigar, & Wegener, 2003), participants' attitudes were measured. A six-item semantic differential scale was adapted from MacKenzie and Lutz (1989) and tailored to

the specific story topic. Participants were asked about their attitudes regarding charity parking meters that raise money for homeless programs. The endpoints of the scale were labeled unacceptable/acceptable, unfavorable/favorable, wrong/right, negative/positive, bad/good, and foolish/wise.

   Perceived self-efficacy. Items measuring perceptions of self-efficacy were created following Bandura's guide for developing self-efficacy scales (2006). Participants were asked to rate their confidence on a seven-point scale ranging from "very unconfident" to "very confident" with statements measuring their ability to contribute to certain outcomes. These statements were tailored to the story, as Bandura (2006) warns that self-efficacy is context dependent. Statements included: Nothing can be done to reduce homelessness*; There is something I can do to help address homelessness in my community; I can support a policy that aims to reduce homelessness; I can donate money to an organization that supports homelessness services; I can volunteer at a homeless shelter (the item marked with an asterisk was reverse coded).

   Behavioral intentions. Seven behavioral intentions were measured to assess participants' perceived engagement with the story topic, following Oliver, Hartmann, and Woolley (2012). Participants were asked to rate how likely, on a seven-point scale ranging from "very unlikely" to "very likely," they would be to engage in the following actions: Read more stories about homelessness; "Like" this story on Facebook; Share this story on social media; Talk about homelessness with friends or family; Sign a petition in support of implementing charity parking meters in your community; Donate money to a parking meter dedicated to homeless charities.

Perceived commitment to journalism. To test whether journalists can include

positive emotions in a story while upholding the traditional purposes of news, this study

measured participants' perceptions of the story's commitment to journalism's core

functions. To measure whether the manipulated story was perceived as fulfilling

journalism's core functions, this study asked participants to rate their agreement on a

seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" with

16 statements such as: "The story I just read: seemed realistic, was informative, involved

conflict, is likely to impact people, helped hold public officials accountable, etc."

Pretest and manipulation check

Emotion. To ensure that the news stories indeed evoked the 12 intended emotions,

a pretest was conducted on an independent sample. Subsequently, to ensure the

manipulation was successful during the actual experiment, participants were asked to rate

how the story made them feel on a seven-point semantic differential scale with endpoints

labeled "negative" and "positive."

Additional relevant information was collected including questions about

participants' demographics, news habits and familiarity with the story topic. See

Appendix 2 to view the questionnaire.

Study 2 - Solutions

Design

An alternative-treatments experiment with a pretest was designed to test the

effects of another technique used to make journalism more constructive – including a

solution in a news story. The independent variable was solution information (effective

solution mentioned, ineffective solution mentioned, no solution mentioned). This design

resulted in three conditions: A news story that discussed an effective solution, discussed an ineffective solution, or did not mention any solution information.

The ineffective solution condition was included to improve ecological validity, as journalists commonly cover stories about complex problems that may not have effective solutions (i.e. war, hunger, poverty, etc.) or that may be based on an ineffective solution (i.e. Some consider a hands-free mobile device an ineffective solution to preventing distracted driving). This study design allowed for differences to be examined between stories that solely mention a problem and stories that mention what has been done about that problem, both when what was done worked or did not work.

Participants

The sample consisted of 164 undergraduate students from a large Southeastern research university who received course credit for their participation. The participants were 83% female and 79% white, and their ages ranged from 18 to 29 years, with a mean age of 20.34 years ($SD = 1.24$). Participants reported high familiarity with online news; 62% percent of the sample said they used the Internet at least once a day to get news.

Stimulus materials

The same fictitious news site that was created for Study 1, *Network News*, was used for this experiment. Again, the only difference between the sites was the story text, including headline, cutline, and pull quote. The story for this study involved a rise in illegal graffiti and again was created by combining and manipulating stories published on mainstream news sites.

The story was manipulated to mention either an effective solution, an ineffective solution, or no solution to the social problem of illegal graffiti. Each story version had a

different headline, photo cutline, and pull quote. The body text of each version was identical until the ending. When the no-solution story ended, the solution stories went on to mention either an effective solution or an ineffective solution. Both types of solution information were included in three and a half to four and a half additional paragraphs that concluded each story. All stories ranged between 404 and 575 words, with the no-solution story being the shortest because it excluded solution information. See Appendix 1 to view the stories.

Procedure

Participants were welcomed and asked to provide informed consent before they were given a card with a participant ID number and instructed to chose a seat in a quiet, well-lit classroom equipped with ASUS desktop computers with Lenovo keyboards and a mouse. Participants were then told they would be reading a news story and responding to a questionnaire. Then they were asked to begin the Qualtrics survey. The survey followed the same format as the survey in Study 1. After asking participants to confirm that they were 18 years or older, it asked them to respond to the pretest affect scale, then read the news story carefully, and finally respond to several questions measuring their affect, attitudes, perceived self-efficacy and behavioral intentions. Upon finishing the task, participants were instructed to take their participant ID number with them to the hallway, where they turned in their ID cards and received a debriefing form, but were asked to wait until they left the building to read the form. Then they were thanked and dismissed. At that point, when participants thought they were finished, they were approached by a confederate, who conducted a behavioral measure.

Independent variable

Solution information. Participants in every condition read news stories about the same topic – the rise in graffiti. Participants who were assigned to the no-solution condition read a version of the story that detailed the social problem, simply ending without mentioning anything that could be done about the issue. Participants who were assigned to the effective solution condition read the same story, except an effective solution to the problem was mentioned in an additional four and a half paragraphs that concluded the story. Participants who were assigned to the condition that mentioned an ineffective solution read the same baseline story, except an ineffective solution was mentioned in an additional three and a half paragraphs that concluded the story.

According to Pals (2006), the solution does not necessarily offer complete resolution, but rather should convey "a sense of narrative completion that releases the person from the emotional grip of the event and allows the life story to move forward" (p. 1082). In the current story, the effective solution version included information about a successful volunteer graffiti abatement team. In the story that mentioned an ineffective solution, information was provided about how police attempt to tackle the graffiti problem by punishing those responsible and painting over the graffiti, but their efforts are fruitless because police can't remove graffiti as quickly as graffiti artists can recreate it.

Dependent variables

Affect. The same multiple-item short-form PANAS (Thompson, 2007) used in Study 1 was used in this study. Again, affect was assessed both at pretest and posttest.

Attitude toward the news article. A measure adapted from Kalyanaraman and Ivory (2009) served as the dependent variable representing attitude toward the news

article. Participants were asked to rate their agreement with how well 11 adjectives (e.g. engaging, enjoyable, well written, etc.) described the story, with responses ranging seven points from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree."

Attitude toward a solution to the problem. The same six-item semantic differential attitude scale adapted from MacKenzie and Lutz (1989) that was used in Study 1 was included in this study to measure participants' attitudes toward a solution to graffiti in the form of graffiti removal programs.

Self-efficacy. Items measuring perceptions of self-efficacy were again created following Bandura's (2006) guide for developing self-efficacy scales. To make the measure context dependent, participants were asked to rate their confidence with the following statements: Nothing can be done to reduce graffiti*; There is something I can do to help address the graffiti problem in my community; I can support a policy that aims to reduce graffiti; I can donate money to an organization that supports graffiti abatement; I can volunteer to help remove graffiti in my community (the item marked with an asterisk was reverse coded).

Behavioral intentions. The same seven behavioral intentions assessed in Study 1 (e.g. likelihood to talk about the topic with friends, share the story on social media, donate to the cause, etc.) were adapted for use in this study to measure participants' engagement with the story topic.

Perceived commitment to journalism. To test whether journalists can include solution information in a story while upholding the traditional purposes of news, this study again measured participants' perceptions of the story's commitment to journalism's core functions. The same items used in Study 1 were used in this study.

Behavior. An actual behavioral measure was included in this study that was modeled in part after El-Toukhy, Holman, and Gibson (2013) and El-Toukhy (2012). As participants finished the online questionnaire, they approached the experimenter to receive a debriefing form and conclude the study, or so they thought. After being thanked and dismissed, they were approached by a confederate claiming to represent the university's student government. The confederate explained a student government initiative to raise awareness about several issues that affect the campus community. The confederate then handed each participant a single piece of paper that listed a number of environmental issues affecting the campus (including graffiti) and asked each participant to check the issues that he or she wished to receive information about and include an email address where the information could be sent (See Appendix 3 to view the form). Actual behaviors to seek more information were operationalized as participants' willingness to fill out the form, the number of issues they choose to receive information about, and whether or not they chose to receive information specifically about graffiti.

Additional relevant information was collected during the initial survey including participants' demographics, news habits and familiarity with the story topic. See Appendix 2 to view the full questionnaire.

Pretest

Solution information. To ensure the manipulation, a pretest was conducted on an independent sample. Participants were asked to rate the extent to which the story they read mentioned anything that had been done to address graffiti. Participants responded to a 7-point Likert-type scale with endpoints labeled "Not at all" and "Very much."

CHAPTER 3: STUDY 1 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Study 1 Results

Manipulation check

To ensure that the emotional manipulations were successful, affect was measured using a single item asking participants how they felt on a continuum from negative to positive. A one-way between subjects ANOVA revealed a significant relationship between emotion valence and affect in that participants who read a story that evoked positive emotions felt significantly more positive affect ($M = 5.79$, $SD = 1.31$) than participants who read a story that evoked negative emotions ($M = 2.78$, $SD = 1.29$), $F(2, 477) = 249.06$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .51$ (See Figure 1). Bonferroni post hoc comparisons of mean affect ratings further revealed significant differences between both story conditions and the no-emotion control condition ($M = 4.32$, $SD = 1.36$), supporting the manipulation.

Effects of news stories that include positive emotions

The first hypothesis predicted that participants who read news stories with positive emotions would feel better than would participants who read news stories with negative emotions, no matter where the emotions were placed in the story. The data supported this hypothesis. Because the Positive And Negative Affect Schedule is intended to be used as a bidirectional scale, the five items intended to measure positive emotional activation were averaged to create a composite variable ($\alpha = .81$, $M = 4.44$, $SD = 1.31$). A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect of emotion valence on positive

affect, $F(2, 470) = 13.23$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .05$ (See Table 2). Bonferroni post hoc

comparisons showed that participants who read a story that evoked positive emotions felt

significantly more positive affect ($M = 4.82$, $SD = 1.4$) than participants who read a story

that evoked negative emotions ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 1.18$; See Figure 2). A significant

difference was found between the positive emotion story and the no-emotion control

condition ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 1.25$) but not between the negative emotion story and the

control condition. In other words, participants who read a story that evoked positive

emotions felt significantly better than either those who read the control story or a story

that evoked negative emotions.

The above test revealed that the emotions evoked in the news stories affected

readers' feelings, but this test did not reveal which discrete emotions had the biggest

impact. A multiple linear regression was conducted in order to determine which positive

emotions were driving the effect. Readers' positive emotional activation was regressed

onto all six positive emotions — hope, elevation, pride, joy, excitement, and happiness.

The correlations of the variables are shown in Table 4. All were statistically significant.

The prediction model was also significant, $F(6, 462) = 31.59$, $p < .001$, and accounted for

29.1% of the variance in predicting participants' positive affective activation after

reading the news story ($R^2 = .291$, adjusted $R^2 = .282$) (See Table 6). Tests to see if the

data met the assumption of collinearity indicated that multicollinearity was not a concern

(Elevation: Tolerance = .24, VIF = 4.22; Pride: Tolerance = .28, VIF = 3.61; Happiness:

Tolerance = .2, VIF = 5.02; Excitement: Tolerance = .28, VIF = 3.57; Joy: Tolerance

= .22, VIF = 4.48; Hope: Tolerance = .72, VIF = 1.38). And the data met the assumption

of independent errors (Durbin-Watson value = 2.02). For this model, happiness,

excitement, elevation, and pride significantly predicted positive emotional activation, and hope and joy were not significant predictors. Positive affective activation was primarily predicted by the extent to which readers felt elevated [$B = .22$, $SE\ B = .06$, standardized $\beta = .31$; $t(462) = 3.9$, $p < .001$]. After elevation, pride was the biggest predictor of positive affect [$B = .16$, $SE\ B = .05$, standardized $\beta = .23$; $t(462) = 3.11$, $p < .01$], followed by excitement [$B = .14$, $SE\ B = .06$, standardized $\beta = .18$; $t(462) = 2.41$, $p < .05$]. Hope [$B = -.06$, $SE\ B = .04$, standardized $\beta = -.07$; $t(462) = -1.61$, $p = .11$] and joy [$B = -.07$, $SE\ B = .06$, standardized $\beta = .1$; $t(462) = 1.16$, $p = .25$] did not significantly predict readers' positive emotional activation. And happiness, along with hope, was a negative predictor [$B = -.15$, $SE\ B = .06$, standardized $\beta = -2.31$; $t(462) = -2.63$, $p < .01$]. The model is written as follows:

Positive affective activation = 3.34 + .215(elevation) + .163(pride) + .135(excitement) + .067(joy) - .056(hope) - .157(happiness)

A multiple linear regression was similarly conducted in order to determine which negative emotions made participants feel the worst. Readers' negative emotional activation was regressed onto all six negative emotions — anger, despair, disgust, guilt, worry, and sadness. The correlations of the variables are shown in Table 5. All were statistically significant. The prediction model was also significant, $F(6, 465) = 195.85$, $p < .001$, and accounted for 71.6% of the variance in predicting participants' positive affective activation after reading the news story ($R^2 = .716$, adjusted $R^2 = .713$) (See Table 6). Tests to see if the data met the assumption of collinearity indicated that multicollinearity was not a concern (Anger: Tolerance = .31, VIF = 3.21; Worry: Tolerance = .45, VIF = 2.2; Despair: Tolerance = .46, VIF = 2.17; Guilt: Tolerance = .59,

VIF = 1.69; Disgust: Tolerance = .31, VIF = 3.27; Sadness: Tolerance = .03, VIF = 1.74).

And the data met the assumption of independent errors (Durbin-Watson value = 1.93).

For this model, all of the negative emotions were significant predictors except for sadness.

Negative affective activation was primarily predicted by the extent to which readers felt

angry [B = .2, $SE(B)$ = .03, standardized   = .3; $t(465)$ = 6.87, $p < .001$]. After anger,

worry was the biggest predictor of positive affect [B = .15, $SE(B)$ = .02, standardized

= .22; $t(465)$ = 6.12, $p < .001$], followed by despair [B = .13, $SE(B)$ = .03, standardized

= .19; $t(465)$ = 5.13, $p < .001$], guilt [B = .13, $SE(B)$ = .03, standardized   = .15; $t(465)$ =

4.75, $p < .001$], and disgust [B = .1, $SE(B)$ = .03, standardized   = .15; $t(465)$ = 3.31, p

$< .01$]. Sadness was not a significant predictor [B = .02, $SE(B)$ = .02, standardized

= .03; $t(465)$ = .84, p = .4]. The model is written as follows:

Negative affective activation = .362 + .203(anger) + .148(worry) + .129(despair)

+ .124(guilt) + .096(disgust) + .018(sadness)

H₂ predicted that participants who read news stories with positive emotions at the

peak and end of the story would feel better than participants who read stories with

positive emotions evoked throughout the story. This hypothesis required each of the five

story conditions to be parsed out in order to compare *only* the story with *positive*

emotions at the peak and end and the story with *positive* emotions throughout (note that

the interaction found in a 2 by 2 ANOVA would not resolve this hypothesis because the

variable "emotion placement" does not distinguish between positive and negative

emotions, and this hypothesis was only concerned with the placement of the positive

emotions). Therefore, a new variable was created that represented each of the five story

conditions. An ANOVA was run using this new story condition variable as the fixed

factor, and it revealed that the data did not support this hypothesis. A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant relationship between story condition and affect [$F(4, 468) = 6.77$, p < .001, $\eta^2 = .06$]; however, a bonferroni post hoc test revealed no difference between the story with positive emotions at the peak and end only ($M = 4.82$, $SD = 1.4$) and the story with positive emotions spread throughout the story ($M = 4.82$, $SD = 1.4$). Therefore, the location of the positive emotions in the news story did not impact readers' resulting affect.

H_3 predicted that participants who read stories with positive emotions would report higher levels of perceived self-efficacy regarding the general story topic (homelessness) than would participants who read stories with negative emotions. The data did not support this hypothesis. Those who read a story that evoked positive emotions ($M = 5.29$, $SD = 2$) reported a slightly higher sense of self-efficacy in regard to their attitudes about homelessness than those who read a story that evoked negative emotions ($M = 5.25$, $SD = 1.1$; See Figure 4), but a one-way ANOVA with perceived self-efficacy as the dependent variable and emotion valence of the news stories as the fixed factor revealed that the difference was not statistically significant, $F(2, 477) = 1.22$, $p = .68$, $\eta^2 = .001$ (See Table 2).

H_4 predicted that participants who read stories with positive emotions would report more favorable attitudes toward the specific story topic (charity parking meter programs for the homeless) than would participants who read stories with negative emotions. The data supported this hypothesis. A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect of emotion valence on attitudes in that those who read news stories that evoked positive emotions ($M = 6.02$, $SD = 1.37$) reported more favorable attitudes about charity parking meter programs than those who read stories that evoked negative emotions ($M =$

3.24, *SD* = 1.7), *F*(2, 473) = 153.97, *p* < .001, η^2 = .39 (See Figure 5 and Table 2). This

means that 39% of the variance was explained by the valence of the emotions evoked in

the stories. Bonferroni post hoc comparisons further revealed significant differences

between both story conditions and the no-emotion control condition (*M* = 5.13, *SD* =

1.61).

H₅ predicted that participants who read news stories with positive emotions would

report stronger behavioral intentions to seek more information, share the story, and

support the cause than would those who read news stories with negative emotions. This

hypothesis was partially supported in that emotion valence impacted some behavioral

intentions, but not others.

Initially, seven behavioral intentions (read more stories about the issue, "like" the

story on Facebook, share the story on social media, talk about the topic with friends, sign

a petition supporting charity parking meter programs, donate money to a charity parking

meter, and volunteer at a homeless shelter) were combined into one variable to test this

hypothesis. A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant impact of emotion valence on

behavioral intentions, *F*(2, 477) = 10.51, *p* < .001, η^2 = .04 (See Table 2). Bonferroni

post hoc comparisons revealed that participants who read a story that evoked positive

emotions (*M* = 4.67, *SD* = 1.43) reported significantly stronger behavioral intentions than

participants who read a story that evoked negative emotions (*M* = 3.64, *SD* = 2.78). There

were no significant differences between the positive and neutral stories (*M* = 4.2, *SD* =

2.03) or the negative and neutral stories (See Figure 6).

Each behavioral intention was then tested individually to attain more nuanced

results. The valence of the emotions evoked in the stories did not affect readers'

intentions to read similar stories, share the stories on social media, talk about the issue with friends, or volunteer at a local homeless shelter (See Table 2 and Figures 7, 9, 10, and 13). However, those who read a story that evoked positive emotions were more likely to "like" the story on Facebook, sign a petition supporting charity parking meter programs, and donate money to a parking meter that collected money for the homeless (See Table 2 and Figures 8, 11, and 12).

A one-way ANOVA showed a significant effect of emotion valence on readers' likelihood to "like" the story on Facebook, $F(2, 476) = 5.73, p < .01, \eta^2 = .02$ (See Table 2). Two percent of the variance was explained by the valence of the emotion evoked in the stories. A simple effects post-hoc test with a Bonferroni correction showed that participants who read a story that evoked positive emotions ($M = 4.26, SD = 2.16$) were significantly more likely to "like" the story on Facebook than those who read the story that evoked negative emotions ($M = 3.54, SD = 1.95$). There were no significant differences between the positive and neutral stories ($M = 3.87, SD = 2.09$) or the negative and neutral stories (See Figure 7.2).

A one-way ANOVA showed a significant relationship between emotion valence and likelihood to sign a petition supporting charity parking meter programs, $F(2, 477) = 51.09, p < .001, \eta^2 = .18$ (See Table 2). This means 18% of the variance was explained by the valence of the emotion evoked in the stories. A simple effects post-hoc test with a Bonferroni correction showed that participants who read a story that evoked positive emotions ($M = 4.97, SD = 1.94$) were significantly more likely to be willing to sign a petition than those who read the story that evoked negative emotions ($M = 2.97, SD = 1.93$). Significant differences existed between the negative and positive and negative and

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no-emotion control ($M = 4.4$, $SD = 2.17$) conditions, but there was no significant difference between the positive and control conditions (See Figure 7.5).

A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant relationship between emotion valence and likelihood to donate money to a parking meter that collected donations for homeless services, $F(2, 477) = 39.15$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .14$ (See Table 2). This means 14% of the variance was explained by the valence of the emotion evoked in the stories. A simple effects post-hoc test with a Bonferroni correction showed that participants who read a story that evoked positive emotions ($M = 5.04$, $SD = 1.94$) were significantly more likely to donate than those who read the story that evoked negative emotions ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 1.93$). Significant differences existed between the negative and positive and negative and no-emotion control ($M = 4.59$, $SD = 2.18$) conditions, but there was no significant difference between the positive and control conditions (See Figure 7.6).

In addition to the above hypotheses, one research question was posed: Did participants who read stories with positive emotions perceive the stories to be less committed to journalism's core functions than they did stories with negative emotions? A one-way ANOVA revealed no significant relationship between emotion valence in the news stories and readers' perceptions of how successfully the stories upheld journalism's main functions, $F(2, 477) = 1.41$, $p = .25$, $\eta^2 = .01$ (See Table 2). Participants in the control condition ($M = 5$, $SD = 1.37$) reported a slightly stronger commitment to journalism's core functions than participants in the negative emotion condition ($M = 4.66$, $SD = 2.15$) or positive emotion condition ($M = 4.61$, $SD = 1.94$), but these differences were not significant. In other words, evoking positive emotions in the news stories did not cause readers to perceive the story as significantly less valuable.

Study 1 Discussion

As expected, Study 1 provided support for the prediction that discrete emotions experienced from reading news stories can impact individuals' resulting affect. Participants who read news stories that made them feel elevated, happy, hopeful, excited, proud, and joyful felt significantly better than those who read a control story that did not evoke these emotions. And those who read the no-emotion control story felt significantly better than those who read a news story that made them feel angry, despaired, disgusted, guilty, worried, and sad. More specifically, this study found that the emotions of elevation and anger were the biggest predictors of positive and negative affect, respectively. However, judgments about the relative importance of these predictors are difficult because all of the positive, and negative, emotions were significantly and modestly correlated.

Given the literature that highlights the negative effects of negative emotions and positive effects of positive emotions generally, these findings support the idea that the "Media would do well to not just focus on what they are trying to tell, but also on what emotions they evoke while spreading a message" (Konijn and ten Holt, 2010, p. 44). This finding does not imply that journalists should only write about happy topics to ensure their stories have a sufficient amount of positive emotion. As discussed in the introduction of this dissertation, journalists often need to disseminate inherently negative information to fulfill their core functions. However, reporters can maintain the time-honored surveillance function of news yet also harness the constructive impact of positive emotions by evoking positive emotions, or mixed emotions such as elevation or hope, through the details they choose to describe and the quotes they choose to include when

writing about intrinsically negative events. For example, a reporter writing about the

beheadings of American journalists by the Islamic extremist group ISIS certainly must

publish negative information. However, he or she can positively impact readers' reactions

to the story by choosing to additionally evoke positive emotions. The reporter could

quote the victim's mother talking about how proud she is of her son, paraphrase the

victim's former boss discussing his employee's courage, or otherwise describe the

compassionate reaction by the country. These tips are consistent with previous research

revealing the positive affective impact of including a silver lining in an inherently

negative news story (McIntyre & Gibson, 2015).

A natural criticism of this finding might come from journalists who claim that if

they fill their stories with positive emotions, their stories will not be taken seriously.

However, the result of the one research question in this study suggests that journalists can

indeed include more positive emotion in their stories without individuals perceiving the

stories to be less valuable or impactful. This study is a testament to the fact that

journalists can write about an inherently negative topic (in this case, homelessness), but

include positive emotions without jeopardizing the newsworthiness of the story.

This study also showed that journalists can influence readers' emotions through

the information and quotes they choose to publish. Understanding the impact of these

decisions is important given what is known about the effects of emotions. By including

information that is likely to evoke negative emotions in their stories, journalists can

increase the likelihood that individuals will feel helpless and depressed, mistrust others,

and engage in fewer prosocial behaviors (Aust, 1985; Galician & Vestre, 1987;

Kleinnijenhuis & Oegema, 2006; Veitch & Griffitt, 1976). Contrarily, by choosing to

evoke positive emotions in their stories, journalists can enhance their audience members' cognitive processing of the stories and cause them to think more creatively and inclusively (Fredrickson, 2001; Nabi, 1999). Future studies might further examine the impact of affect on readers' memory, as Konijn and ten Holt (2010) have noted memories are organized by affect. "The mood we were in when we stored information is stored together with the information and is thus more accessible when we are in a similar affective state" (p. 44). Konijn and ten Holt (2010) pointed out that scholars have studied this relationship but primarily with negative emotions. Baumgartner and Wirth (2012) addressed that concern and examined the relationship between news story valence and memory. They found that individuals who read a positive news article remembered more positive than negative information from subsequent articles. More work can be done in this area.

Although the current study supported the affective impact of emotional news stories overall, it did not support the peak-and-end hypothesis – the idea that the affective intensity of the peak and end of an experience can influence one's global evaluations of that experience (Fredrickson & Kahneman, 1993; Fredrickson, 2000). Participants were not significantly influenced by the placement of the emotions in the story. Gyldensted (2011) tested this concept and found that individuals who read a news story with a positive peak and end felt slightly more positive than individuals who read other story versions, but again this difference was not statistically significant. It is possible that participants skimmed the article and did not read it thoroughly enough to succumb to the peak-and-end effect. It is also possible that news stories do not lend themselves to the peak-and-end effect due to their briefness and nonfictional nature. Perhaps the placement

of emotions would be more meaningful in longer feature articles or fictional stories where readers might be more likely to become absorbed in the story as writers use narrative conventions to more successfully build up to a peak in the story. The fact that Fredrickson and Kahneman (1993) successfully tested the affective peak-and-end assertion in the context of individuals watching emotional film clips but that the peak-and-end assertion was unsuccessfully tested in the context of short news stories in the current study and in Gyldensted's (2011) study supports this speculation. It might also be the case that the peak-and-end effect lends itself to specific mediums. Perhaps a news story presented as video rather than text would be more absorbing and allow viewers to more intensely experience the peak and end of the story.

The data in Study 1 also did not support the hypothesis that participants who experienced positive emotions would report a greater sense of perceived self-efficacy. This finding was surprising because individuals who read a story that evoked positive emotions felt hopeful, and hope is often dependent on self-efficacy (Lazarus, 1999). Perhaps the lack of a significant effect in this case was due to the generality of the measurement. Bandura (2006) talks about the issues that result from measuring self-efficacy in too general of terms and says "scales of perceived self-efficacy must be tailored to the particular domain of functioning that is the object of interest" (p. 307-8). In the current experiment, participants were asked perceived self-efficacy questions in regard to the problem of homelessness. But the "object of interest" might more appropriately be considered charity parking meter programs for the homelessness, not merely homelessness in general. Perhaps individuals would have reported greater levels of perceived self-efficacy had they been asked about the more specific story topic. In H_4,

where participants were asked about their attitudes toward the article's specific topic, charity parking meter programs for the homeless, emotion valence played a significant role.

The mixed results regarding the impact of emotion valence in news stories on various behavioral intentions seemed puzzling at first, but a close look revealed some understandable patterns. First, to reiterate the results: A look at the mean ratings of each of the seven behavioral intentions showed that in all cases individuals who read the positive emotional stories were more likely to report intentions to engage in the behavior than individuals who read the negative emotional stories (See Figures 7.1 through 7.7). However, the mean differences were only significant in about half of the cases. Individuals in the positive emotion conditions were significantly more likely to "like" the story on Facebook, sign a petition supporting programs for the homeless, and donate money to a charity parking meter that collects change for the homeless. But these individuals were not significantly more likely to read similar stories, share the story on social media, talk about the issue with friends, or volunteer at a homeless shelter. Regarding the behaviors that were statistically significant, "liking" the story on Facebook and signing a petition supporting programs for the homeless require little effort, especially given the pervasiveness of online petitions that require only a "click" to sign. The third behavior, donating money to a charity parking meter that collects change for homelessness organizations, requires more effort, but its outlying nature makes sense when we consider that participants could have reasonably been drawn to this specific action because it is identical to the action that evoked positive emotions in the news story. Positive emotions seemed to have caused people to act in pro-social ways that require

little effort or are particularly salient. However, these emotional effects were not so strong as to cross a threshold where behaviors were more effortful and also less private, such as talking about the issue with friends, sharing the story on social media, or volunteering at a homeless shelter. Although reading similar stories can be a private behavior, it requires more time and effort than "liking" a story on Facebook or signing an online petition. In sum, it seems that positive emotions motivated individuals to engage in pro-social behaviors that are easy, do not attract attention, or are particularly linked to the message that evoked the emotions. However, positive emotions were not strong enough to motivate individuals to engage in behaviors that were more effortful, public, or not connected enough to the emotion-evoking message.

The finding that individuals who read the positive emotional stories were not more likely to report intentions to share the story on social media seemed to stick out from the others (sharing on social media, talking with friends, and volunteering) because it is a private activity and the others are public. However, a closer look at this finding revealed that it might not be so surprising. The result conflicts somewhat with Berger and Milkman's (2010) study that showed people were more likely to share positive than negative stories on the *New York Times* website. However, Berger and Milkman point out that valence alone was not driving sharing behavior, but that highly arousing emotions, no matter whether they are positive (like excitement) or negative (like anger), motivate sharing behavior. Because participants in the current study simultaneously experienced emotions both low and high in arousal (anger and sadness, for example), it should not be expected that they differ significantly in their online sharing behavior. Future research

might examine the impact of both emotion valence (positive, negative) and emotion

activation (high, low) on readers' online sharing behavior.

CHAPTER 4: STUDY 2 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Study 2 Results

Manipulation check

To ensure the solution information manipulations were effective, an ANOVA was conducted. Results revealed a significant relationship between story condition and the extent to which readers perceived the story to include solution information, $F(2, 55) = 19.19$, $p < .000$. Individuals who read the effective solution story ($M = 5.95$, $SD = 1.56$) were more likely to perceive the story to include solution information than those who read the ineffective solution story ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 2.02$) or the no-solution story ($M = 2.42$, $SD = 1.9$).

Effects of news stories that include solution information

The first hypothesis predicted that participants who read a news story that included discussion of an effective solution to a social problem would report higher levels of positive affect than would participants who read a news story that included an ineffective solution or no solution information. This hypothesis was supported. An ANOVA revealed a significant effect of solution information on positive affect, $F(2, 158) = 14.85$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .16$. Participants who read a story that mentioned an effective solution to the problem of graffiti felt significantly more positive affect ($M = 4.86$, $SD = .77$) than participants who read a story that did not mention a solution to the problem ($M = 4.36$, $SD = .61$) or mentioned an ineffective solution ($M = 4.18$, $SD = .63$; See Table 3 and Figure 15). Bonferroni post hoc comparisons further revealed that the story with

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the effective solution significantly differed from both the story without a solution and from the story with an ineffective solution. However, there was no significant difference between these latter two stories. In other words, when an effective solution was discussed, readers felt much better, but they felt equally worse when no solution was discussed or an ineffective solution was discussed.

Additionally, affect gain scores (posttest minus pretest) were analyzed in an ANOVA with solution information (effective solution, ineffective solution, no solution) as the independent variable, $F(2, 156) = 14.7$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .16$. The decrease in affect was significantly greater for participants in the ineffective solution condition ($M = -1.21$, $SD = .11$) than for participants in the no-solution condition ($M = -.96$, $SD = .11$) or effective solution condition ($M = -.42$, $SD = .1$). Bonferroni post hoc comparisons showed that these differences were significant between the effective solution and no-solution conditions and the effective solution and ineffective solution conditions, but not between the no-solution and ineffective solution conditions. Inspection of the 95% confidence intervals around each mean indicated that there was a decrease in affect for participants in all three conditions, but this decrease was smallest for those in the effective solution condition.

H2 predicted that participants who read a news story with an effective solution would report higher levels of perceived self-efficacy than would participants who read a news story that discussed an ineffective solution or didn't mention any solution information. This hypothesis was not supported. An ANOVA revealed that solution information in the news story had no significant impact on readers' perceived self-

efficacy regarding the story topic: graffiti, $F(2, 161) = 1$, $p = .37$, $\eta^2 = .01$ (See Table 3 and Figure 16).

H3a predicted that participants who read a story with an effective solution would report more favorable attitudes toward the news article than would participants who read a news story that discussed an ineffective solution or didn't mention any solution information. This hypothesis was supported. An ANOVA revealed that participants who read a story that mentioned an effective solution to the problem of graffiti ($M = 4.63$, $SD = .81$) reported significantly more favorable attitudes about the story than participants who read a story that did not mention a solution to the problem ($M = 3.81$, $SD = .7$) or mentioned an ineffective solution ($M = 3.79$, $SD = .65$), $F(2, 158) = 24.6$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .24$ (See Table 3 and Figure 17). Bonferroni post hoc comparisons further revealed that the story with the effective solution significantly differed from both the story without a solution and from the story with an ineffective solution. However, there was no significant difference between these latter two stories. In other words, when an effective solution was discussed, readers reported more favorable attitudes about the article, but they reported equally worse attitudes when no solution was discussed or an ineffective solution was discussed.

H3b predicted that participants who read a news story with an effective solution would report more favorable attitudes toward a solution to the problem (graffiti removal programs) than would participants who read a news story that discussed an ineffective solution or didn't mention any solution information. This hypothesis was not supported. An ANOVA revealed that the presence of solution information in the news stories did not

significantly impact readers' attitudes about graffiti removal programs as a possible

solution, $F(2, 161) = 1.52$, $p = .22$, $\eta^2 = .02$ (See Table 3 and Figure 18).

H4 predicted that participants who read a news story with an effective solution

would report stronger behavioral intentions to seek more information, share the story, and

support the cause than would those who read a news story that discussed an ineffective

solution or didn't mention any solution information. This hypothesis was also not

supported. First, an ANOVA was conducted with story condition as the fixed factor and

average scores of the seven behavioral intentions as the dependent variable, $F(2, 161)$

$= .52$, $p = .59$, $\eta^2 = .01$ (See Table 3 and Figure 19). Then, ANOVAs were conducted

with each of the seven individual behavioral intentions. The presence or absence of

solution information in the news stories did not significantly impact readers' intentions to

read similar stories [$F(2, 161) = 1.41$, $p = .25$, $\eta^2 = .02$], "like" the story on Facebook

[$F(2, 161) = .49$, $p = .61$, $\eta^2 = .01$], share the story on social media [$F(2, 161) = .15$, p

$= .86$, $\eta^2 = .00$], talk about the issue with friends [$F(2, 161) = 1.45$, $p = .24$, $\eta^2 = .02$], sign

a petition supporting graffiti reduction [$F(2, 161) = 1.7$, $p = .19$, $\eta^2 = .02$], donate money

to a graffiti abatement program [$F(2, 161) = .05$, $p = .96$, $\eta^2 = .00$], or volunteer to help

remove graffiti [$F(2, 161) = .07$, $p = .94$, $\eta^2 = .00$; See Figures 20 through 26].

H5 predicted that participants who read a news story with an effective solution

would be more likely to actually seek information about the problem than those who read

a news story that discussed an ineffective solution or didn't mention any solution

information. This hypothesis was not supported. A chi-square revealed no significant

difference between participants' story condition and their willingness to fill out the form

offered by the confederate who pretended to be a member of student government trying

to raise awareness of campus issues, $\chi^2(2, N = 135) = 1.5$, $p = .47$. Worth noting is that almost all participants were willing to fill out the form: 98% of those who read the story with the ineffective solution, 96% who read the story with the effective solution, and 93% who read the story with no solution information. Next, an ANOVA was conducted to determine whether story condition influenced the number of items that participants chose to receive information about on the student government form. This test was not significant, $F(2, 132) = .27$, p = .76, $\eta^2 = .00$ (See Table 3). Lastly, another chi-square was conducted to determine whether story condition influenced participants' decision to receive more information about graffiti specifically. This test was not significant, $\chi^2(2, N = 135) = .66$, $p = .72$. However, it is important to note that only 11 participants chose to receive information about graffiti (See Table 7).

One research question was also posed: Did participants who read a story with an effective solution perceive the story to be less committed to journalism's core functions than they did stories with an ineffective solution or no solution information? An ANOVA revealed no significant relationship between story condition and readers' perceptions of how successfully the stories upheld journalism's main functions, $F(2, 159) = .22$, $p = .8$, $\eta^2 = .00$. Participants in the effective solution condition ($M = 4.56$, $SD = .78$) reported a slightly stronger commitment to journalism's core functions than participants in the ineffective solution condition ($M = 4.5$, $SD = .8$) or the no-solution condition ($M = 4.46$, $SD = .81$), but these differences were not significant. In other words, including solution information in the news stories did not cause the readers to perceive the story as less valuable.

Study 2 Discussion

The findings from Study 2 showed that when individuals read a story about a social problem, they felt better (more positive affect and more favorable attitudes about the story itself) when that story mentioned an effective solution to the problem rather than when it mentioned an ineffective solution or did not mention a solution at all. This finding is consistent with the well-established notion that people like happy endings (Ross & Simonson, 1991). Theoretically, it supports the idea of experiencing coherent positive resolution, or "the construction of a coherent and complete story of a difficult event that ends positively, conveying a sense of emotional resolution or closure," which is correlated with subjective well-being, in which affect is a predictor (Pals, 2006, p. 1082). Professionally, this finding tells media executives that people like solution-based stories, and if they like a certain story, one can speculate they might then have good feelings about the news organization as a whole and perhaps they will be more likely to read more stories from said organization. Additionally, gain score analysis showed that all participants felt worse after reading the story about graffiti, but the decrease in affect was smallest for those who read the story with the effective solution, signaling that a solution-based story can mitigate some of the negative effects of negative news stories.

In the current study, although the story with the effective solution resulted in significantly higher positive affect and more favorable attitudes about the story itself among participants, there was no significant difference in the affective or attitudinal reactions of those who read the story with the ineffective solution or the story that did not mention a solution at all. In other words, a conflict-based story and one that included an ineffective solution were both ineffective at influencing readers' feelings and attitudes,

but a story that offered an effective solution was influential. This suggests that the key to successful coherent positive resolution, at least in a news context, might be the *positive* ending mentioned in the definition (not just the mere discussion of a solution). When individuals read a story that included a solution-based positive ending (a successful graffiti abatement program), they felt good and had positive attitudes about the story. However, they did not feel as good when the story did not have a positive, solution-based ending. Participants felt the worst and had the least favorable attitudes when the story mentioned an ineffective, or negative, solution. Perhaps this is because when they read a story solely about a problem, they could imagine a possible solution; they had hope. But when they read a story that discussed a problem and an ineffective solution, they were left feeling unsettled about the problem and pessimistic about whether an effective solution exists.

For journalists who publish articles about social problems, these findings indicate that individuals will like stories more (feel more positive and have more favorable attitudes) if they include discussion of an effective solution to the problem. Journalists might be resistant to writing solution-focused stories, however, claiming that it is their job to write about conflict, and stories that highlight solutions rather than problems paint a rosy picture of the world and will not be regarded as "real" news. This study does not advocate that reporters avoid stories that include conflict. However, the result of the one research question in this study suggests that journalists can discuss effective solutions to social problems in their stories without individuals perceiving such a story to be less valuable or impactful. This study is a testament to the fact that journalists who write

about a conflict and include effective solution information can leave readers satisfied while perceiving the story as legitimate news.

Journalists might also argue that many of the problems they write about are complex and do not have clear solutions. In this study, the solution was a clear one; however, it is worth noting that a solution in a news story may not need to be an absolute resolution to the problem. Pals (2006) noted that the term "resolution" in "coherent positive resolution" (p. 1082) does not refer to the objective solving of a problem, as many events are never completely resolved. Rather, the resolution refers to "a sense of narrative completion that releases the person from the emotional grip of the event and allows the life story to move forward" (p. 1082). Applying this to journalism, reporters who want to improve readers' emotional reactions by including solutions in their news stories may not need to discover definitive solutions to the complex issues they write about. They might only need to craft an emotional resolution in their narrative. Future research should test the difference in audience responses to objective versus emotional solutions in news stories.

However, the results of the current study suggest that if the problem is such that the closest a reporter can come to a solution is an ineffective solution, presenting that ineffective solution will likely leave the reader feeling hopeless. Therefore, journalists should not ignore the ineffective solution, but rather they should frame the story as a problem in which people care enough to try to solve, and even though this particular solution wasn't effective, there is still hope. Journalists should continue to ask questions about other potential solutions so as not to leave the reader feeling helpless and in despair.

By evoking hope, a reporter might mitigate some of the effects of negative news, as hope is a vital coping resource (Lazarus, 1999).

In the current study, the inclusion of solution information in a news story impacted readers' feelings and attitudes, but it did not impact their sense of self-efficacy, or confidence in addressing the problem themselves. This finding contrasts with that of Curry and Hammonds (2014), who found in a quasi-experiment that individuals who read a solution-focused news story reported higher levels of perceived self-efficacy than those who read a problem-focused version of the same story. Curry and Hammonds (2014) measured self-efficacy by asking participants to rate their agreement with statements such as, "Now that I've read this article, I think I can contribute to a solution to this problem," "Now that I've read this article, I think there are ways to effectively address this problem," and "The article influenced my opinion about the issue." In the current study, perceived self-efficacy was measured by asking participants to rate their agreement with statements such as "Nothing can be done to reduce graffiti" (reverse coded), "There is something I can do to help address graffiti in my community," and "I can support a policy that aims to reduce graffiti." Perhaps the differences in the question formatting (i.e. including "Now that I've read this article…" in the beginning, for example) impacted the results. However, it is also possible that participants in the current experiment did not feel compelled to do something about the problem because they did not perceive graffiti to be particularly problematic.

The nature of the story topic used in the current experiment (i.e. the problem of graffiti) might explain the majority of the insignificant findings. It is possible that participants' story condition did not impact their attitudes about the story topic,

behavioral intentions, or actual behavior because they did not perceive graffiti to be a problem worth changing their attitudes and behaviors for. This study set out to test the effects of including solution information in news stories about significant social problems. In order for solution information to be meaningful, it must appear in regard to an actual problem. It just might be that individuals do not perceive graffiti to be a problem worth solving. In describing her experience after completing the experiment, for example, one student mentioned that the story was quite negative and talked about the severity of the graffiti problem. "Is graffiti really that big of a deal?" she asked. Curry and Hammonds (2014), who found that solution-focused stories significantly impacted readers' behavioral intentions, used stimulus stories about topics that might have been perceived as more problematic: the effects of traumatic experiences on American schoolchildren, homelessness in urban America, and a lack of clothing among poor people in India. Future studies should include a pretest of the story topic to ensure that individuals perceive the issue to be sufficiently problematic.

A second possible explanation of the unsupported hypotheses is that people who read the story that offered an effective solution felt that it was not necessary for them to change their attitudes or behavior in order to resolve the problem because the problem has already been solved and thus they do not need to worry about contributing to a solution. Some of the data from the current experiment are in line with this idea. For example, those who read the story with the effective solution were the least likely to agree with the statement, "Graffiti is a problem that deserves attention." After all, if an effective solution was described, perhaps the perception is that nothing more needs to be done.

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Lastly, it is worthwhile to briefly discuss some observations in regard to participants' actual behavior. To reiterate, when participants finished the survey, they were released into the hallway where a young man stopped them and asked them quickly fill out a form. The confederate claimed he was a member of student government trying to raise awareness about issues that impact the campus community. He asked participants to fill out a form in which they checked items that they wished to receive more information about. The items included topics such as climate change initiatives, recycling innovations, traffic congestion alleviation, as well as graffiti removal. The researcher hypothesized that those who read the story that included an effective solution would be more likely to be willing to stop and fill out the form. This was not the case. Surprisingly, almost every participant (96%) agreed to fill out the form. No differences were found based on story condition. Although measures were taken to prevent students from associating the confederate with the experiment, it is possible that some participants were suspicious. It is also reasonable to believe students were more likely to stop and abide by the confederate's requests because of social pressure. Future studies might consider incorporating a behavioral measure that does not succumb to these possible threats to validity.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Conclusion

This dissertation set out to examine the emerging form of news called constructive journalism, in which positive psychology techniques are applied to news work in an effort to create more engaging and productive stories that improve individual and societal well-being. Specifically, this dissertation tested the effectiveness of two constructive news story techniques – the use of discrete emotions in news stories and the use of solution information in news stories. Broadly speaking, Study 1 found that emotions impact the way news consumers feel, think, and intend to behave. More specifically, individuals who read stories that made them feel elevated, proud, happy, and excited felt more positive, had more favorable attitudes toward the story topic, and were more likely to report intentions to "like" the story on Facebook and engage in pro-social behaviors regarding the story topic including signing a petition and donating money to support a cause. Study 2 found that when writing a news story about a social problem, mentioning an effective solution to the problem did not impact readers' behavioral intentions or actual behaviors, but it did cause readers to feel positive and report favorable attitudes toward the news article. As a whole, this dissertation contributed to the field by introducing and testing the concept of constructive journalism. Although it is not without limitations, this dissertation resulted in both theoretical and professional implications as well as directions for future research.

Theoretical implications

Perhaps the biggest theoretical contribution of this dissertation is introducing the concept of constructive journalism to the academic literature. Journalists are practicing constructive journalism in various forms in the field, but communication scholars have not yet defined the term or tested its effectiveness. This dissertation offered a definition of constructive journalism, distinguished it from other forms of pro-social journalism such as community journalism, and tested two ways to implement it.

Study 1 applied Fredrickson's (2001) broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions to a news context and revealed that positive emotions evoked in a news story can positively impact readers' feelings, attitudes, and behavioral intentions. These findings provide support for the idea that using positive emotions in news can result in more engaging stories. These are encouraging findings for proponents of constructive journalism, but they should be regarded with some caution. The six positive emotions evoked in the stimulus stories had a significant impact; however, additional emotions that were not manipulated or measured could have also influenced readers' feelings, attitudes, or behavioral intentions. Additionally, although positive emotions caused readers to report intentions to engage in some pro-social behaviors such as to "like" the story on Facebook, they did not cause readers to engage in other prosocial behaviors such as to share the story on social media. This suggests that the relationship between emotions and behavioral intentions is nuanced and more work should be done to examine the ties between specific emotions and specific behavioral intentions.

Although gains have been made by explicating the concept of constructive journalism and testing the effects of positive emotional content embedded in news stories,

the conceptualization and operationalization of constructive journalism will need further clarity and precision. The key contributions to the definition of constructive journalism offered in this dissertation are that the concept, 1) must apply a theory-based positive psychological technique to a piece of work that 2) remains committed to journalism's core functions. This definition offers rules to determine what *can* be considered a constructive news story, but it does not create boundaries for what *cannot* be considered a constructive news story. This dissertation is intended to be the first step in a process to help rehabilitate the field of journalism; it is not meant to prescribe a narrow formula for a constructive news story. The hope is that constructive journalism will continue to be conceptualized and operationalized as more research is conducted.

Study 2 applied Pals' (2006) concept of coherent positive resolution to a news context and revealed that a positive resolution can positively impact readers' feelings and attitudes toward a news article, and thus can contribute toward more constructive news stories. However, a positive resolution did not impact readers' other attitudes, behavioral intentions, or actual behavior. In fact, in some cases reading a story about an effective solution to a social problem caused readers to be even less likely to work toward a solution, perhaps because they felt it was unnecessary to do so because a solution had already been reached. This result is not encouraging for proponents of solutions journalism. However, it should be regarded with caution for two reasons: 1) These results conflict with the results from an existing study that found solution information motivated behavioral intentions (Curry & Hammonds, 2014), and 2) the lack of significant findings in the current study might have been due to the fact that participants did not regard the story topic, graffiti, to be a substantial problem. Scholars who examine the impact of

solution-based news stories in the future should pretest the story topic to ensure individuals view it as especially problematic. Another point worth mentioning is that even individuals who regarded graffiti as a problem did not change their behavior, which suggests that mobilizing information, or information "that helps people act on the attitudes they already have" (Stanfield & Lemert, 1987, as cited in Lemert, 1981, p. 604) is not an appropriate theory to support solutions journalism.

Study 2 provoked questions about the conceptual relationship between positive emotions and solution information, or between positive journalism and solutions journalism. Which emotions do readers feel when they read a solution-based story? It is reasonable to believe individuals experience positive emotions when reading about a solution given that a solution involves the solving of a problem, which is typically positive. What else conceptually distinguishes a solution from a positive feeling? Perhaps the emotion of relief is an emotion worth studying in the context of solution-based news. In general, the topic of what conceptually defines a solution-focused news story, both in regard to emotions and separate from emotions, deserves further attention.

Future directions for constructive journalism research

This dissertation tested the effects of positive emotions and solution information in the full text of a news story. Going forward, communication scholars should examine the use of these constructive elements in other aspects of news stories such as headlines and images. Consider the emotional impact of the negative headlines highlighted at the beginning of this dissertation: "The fight against ISIS is 'going to go on'" and "Ebola kills people who don't even have it." Are such hopeless headlines particularly detrimental if individuals read them and neglect to read the full stories? The empirical study of

quicker-to-digest news elements such as headlines and images is particularly worthwhile given that technology today encourages information quantity, not quality, through platforms such as Twitter and on-the-go news apps such as Flipboard, which was designed to allow users to quickly flip through news content when they don't have time to read lengthy articles.

Positive emotions and solution information are not the only techniques for creating more constructive news stories. Gyldensted (2011) tested the impact of a handful of story formats derived from concepts in positive psychology, including a news story with three times more positive than negative words, one with a meaningful narrative, and one with a hero narrative. Additional techniques from positive psychology and other domains can be applied to news work. For example, positive psychologist Martin Seligman believes that *p*ositive affect, *e*ngagement, good *r*elationships, *m*eaning, and *a*ccomplishment are key to a fulfilling life (Seligman, 2011). Gyldensted trains journalists to implement Seligman's PERMA construct into their work by considering it while generating story ideas. Reporters can ask questions such as: Who is thriving? Who has collaborated? Who has solved a problem? What has been gained? (C. Gyldensted, personal communication, April 1, 2014) Another psychological technique that Gyldensted has applied to newsgathering and used in her constructive journalism trainings comes from family therapist Karl Tomm (1988), who identified four types of interview questions based on the interviewer's intentions and assumptions. The interviewer can act like a detective, explorer, judge, or coach, depending on the type of questions he or she asks. Journalists have the potential to conduct more constructive interviews by acting more as explorers or coaches than as detectives or judges, but this

idea has not been empirically tested. These are just two examples of theory-based psychological techniques for creating more constructive news stories that reach beyond the scope of this dissertation. Scholars should test these ideas and develop additional constructive news techniques.

Implications for the field of journalism

Journalism's reputation, at least in the U.S., needs to be strengthened. News organizations' credibility rankings have been in decline for more than a decade (Pew Research Center, 2012). U.S. residents increasingly believe stories are inaccurate, biased and influenced by those in power (Pew Research Center, 2011). The negativity in the news contributes to journalism's overall weakening reputation (Patterson, 2000). However, the media are still more trusted than government and business (Pew Research Center, 2011). They hold a position that comes with great power and responsibility, and they have a duty to minimize harm (SPJ Code of Ethics).

This dissertation found that evoking positive emotions in news stories can minimize harm by causing individuals to feel positive and intend to engage in pro-social behaviors. Including effective solution information can also cause readers to feel more positive, in general and about the news article. These findings offer some support that a more constructive approach to news has the potential to reduce harm and even strengthen journalism's ethical foundation by improving the public's image of the news.

However, more work is needed to make robust claims about the effectiveness of more constructive story formats. In this dissertation, support was stronger for the inclusion of positive emotions in news stories than for solution information. In the field, several news outlets are writing solution-based stories with the hope that these stories

will motivate readers to take action. This dissertation showed no relationship between solution information and readers' behavior. However, as noted, the story topic might have been the reason.

Practitioners can take away some key tips from this research. News reporters, editors, and publishers should understand the role of affect in journalistic storytelling. In an adaptation of the old adage, this study revealed that the media might not tell people *what to think*, but they do tell people *how to feel*. As long as media professionals remain committed to journalism's core functions, they should aim to leave their audiences feeling positive because positive emotions cause people to feel energized, open, optimistic and ready to engage, which can ultimately result in pro-social behavior (Fredrickson, 2001; Haidt, 2001). More specifically, this dissertation revealed that reporters should include information that causes individuals to feel happy, hopeful, proud, joyful, and elevated. And reporters can, and should, do this even (or especially) if the topic of the news story is inherently negative. This means reporters need to generate story angles, ask questions, and choose information and quotes that evoke positive emotions. This also means editors should allow, and even encourage, their reporters to evoke positive emotions, even when reporting on serious topics. It will no doubt be a difficult process to teach reporters to approach their jobs with a more constructive mindset, and resistance is inevitable given that the newsworthiness of conflict and negativity is ingrained in the news generation process. Therefore, journalism educators should expose their students to this more productive way of thinking in an effort to contribute to a more constructive media environment in the future.

Journalists can also leave their audiences feeling positive by writing solution-focused stories, but although these stories might leave readers feeling good, they might not inspire action. Therefore, reporters should think critically about the goals of their stories. If a story is meant to leave readers feeling satisfied so they will have positive attitudes about the story, a solution-based story could be effective. But if a story is meant to leave readers feeling satisfied in order to provoke action, a solution-based story might not be the most effective angle. More research needs to be conducted before robust claims can be made about the impact of solution-focused news stories.

The study of constructive journalism is particularly timely given that the subject is being talked about and experimented with in popular media. Reporters have discussed this topic in international news outlets such as *The Guardian*, *Columbia Journalism Review*, *All Africa*, and more (Gyldensted, 2014; Sillesin, 2014; Pilane, 2014; Albeanu, 2014; Tullis, 2014; Haagerup 2014). The largest trial of what can be termed constructive reporting in a U.S. news organization launched in early 2015, when Arianna Huffington announced her site's new commitment to constructive stories in an initiative called "What's Working?" She said:

> While we [The *Huffington Post*] will continue to cover the stories of what's not working -- political dysfunction, corruption, wrongdoing, violence and disaster -- as relentlessly as we always have, we want to go beyond 'If it bleeds, it leads.' And to be clear, I'm not talking about simple heartwarming stories, or aw-shucks moments, or adorable animals (although don't worry, we'll still give you plenty of those as well). What I'm talking about is consistently telling the stories of people and communities doing amazing things, overcoming great odds and coming up with solutions to the very real challenges they face. (Huffington, 2015)

This action by the *Huffington Post*, one of the most popular news sites in America (Folkenflik, 2015), shows that journalists believe this method is worth investing in. However, it is also an apt example of the complexity that researchers face in

conceptualizing, operationalizing, and testing constructive journalism given the inconsistency of the terms and techniques used in the industry. Consistent definitions and applications of constructive journalism are needed in order for communication scholars to study the topic and back up the well-meaning ideas with sound empirical research. This dissertation attempted to clarify and test the concept in an effort to call for more precision in constructive journalism practice and more research among scholars to examine the effects of this innovative shift in journalism.

In sum, this dissertation introduced constructive journalism to the academic literature and provided some support for its practice. Going forward, more research should test the effects of this form of news that former journalist Martyn Lewis, before his time, so eloquently proposed:

> What I am arguing is this: that when we come to decide the editorial priorities for each day's news we should be more prepared than we have been in the past to weigh the positive stories – not artificially created, but as they naturally occur in the news agenda, on the same set of journalistic scales on which we weigh the negative stories. And the balancing factor on those scales – the main criteria for commissioning and including stories – should not be the degree of violence, death, conflict, failure, or disaster they encompass or represent, but should be based on the extent to which those stories shape or change, or have the potential to shape or change, the country or the world in which we live. These are criteria which will not only allow us to expose the injustices and the tragedies in the world, but also to give proper weight to the achievements, successes and triumphs. (Lewis & Rowe, 1994, p. 3

TABLES

Table 1

Constructive news compared to other approaches to journalism

Type of news	Overarching intention/goal	Method	Classic training	Committed to core functions	Constructive
Community	Appeal to local readers	Cater coverage to locals (chicken dinner stories)	Yes	Yes or No	No
Civic/ public/ democratic	Promote democracy	Create public sphere (sponsor town hall meeting, etc.)	Yes	Yes	No
Citizen	Involve citizens in news process	Solicit content from citizens	No	Yes or No	No
Solutions	Facilitate productive change	Highlight solutions to social problems	Yes	Yes	Yes
Positive	Improve mood, entertain	Publish happy, upbeat stories	Yes or No (mostly aggregate)	No	Sometimes
Constructive	Engage; improve well being	Apply positive psychology techniques	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 2.

Study 1: ANOVAs for key dependent variables

Emotion valence					
	F	**df$_1$**	**df$_2$**	**MSE**	**η^2**
Affect	13.23***	2	470	21.65	.05
Perceived self-efficacy	1.22	2	477	1.22	.00
Attitudes re: story topic	153.97***	2	473	375.57	.39
Behavioral intentions (all)	10.51***	2	477	50.44	.04
-Read similar stories	1.35	2	476	3.25	.01
-Like on Facebook	5.73**	2	476	24.59	.02
-Share on social media	1.62	2	475	6.5	.01
-Talk about issue	.47	2	476	1.22	.00
-Sign a petition	51.09***	2	477	198.54	.18
-Donate money	39.15***	2	477	154.31	.14
-Volunteer	.07	2	477	.23	.00
Commitment to core functions	1.41	2	477	5.25	.01

* = p < .05, ** = p < .01, *** = p < .001

Table 3.

Study 2: ANOVAs for key dependent variables

Solution information					
	F	**df$_1$**	**df$_2$**	**MSE**	**η^2**
Affect	14.85***	2	158	6.82	.16
Perceived self-efficacy	1	2	161	1.2	.01
Attitudes re: story	24.6***	2	158	12.91	.24
Attitudes re: topic	1.52	2	161	2.09	.02
Behavioral intentions (all)	.52	2	161	.7	.01
-Read similar stories	1.41	2	161	3.93	.02
-Like on Facebook	.49	2	161	1.11	.01
-Share on social media	.15	2	161	.29	.00
-Talk about issue	1.45	2	161	4.85	.02
-Sign a petition	1.7	2	161	5.25	.02
-Donate money	.05	2	161	.09	.00
-Volunteer	.07	2	161	.2	.00
-Behavior	.27	2	132	.54	.00
Commitment to core functions	.22	2	159	.63	.00

* = p < .05, ** = p < .01, *** = p < .001

Table 4.

Study 1: Correlations between discrete positive emotions

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Happiness	1					
2 Hope	.51	1				
3 Joy	.82	.38	1			
4 Elevation	.85	.41	.81	1		
5 Pride	.75	.36	.79	.74	1	
6 Excitement	.75	.32	.79	.74	.8	1

Note: All correlations were significant at the p < .001 level.

Table 5.

Study 1: Correlations between discrete negative emotions

	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
1 Sadness	1					
2 Disgust	.6	1				
3 Anger	.56	.79	1			
4 Guilt	.3	.48	.42	1		
5 Worry	.49	.55	.53	.59	1	
6 Despair	.47	.57	.64	.5	.64	1

Note: All correlations were significant at the p < .001 level.

Table 6.

Study 1: Stepwise regressions for discrete emotions

Positive emotions				
	B	**SE(B)**	**β**	**t**
Elevation	.22***	.06	.31	3.9
Pride	.16**	.05	.23	3.11
Happiness	-.16**	.06	-.23	-2.63
Excitement	.14*	.06	.18	2.41
Joy	.07	.06	.1	1.16
Hope	-.06	.04	-.07	-1.61
Negative emotions				
	B	**SE(B)**	**β**	**t**
Anger	.2***	.03	.3	6.87
Worry	.15***	.02	.22	6.12
Despair	.13***	.03	.19	5.13
Guilty	.12***	.03	.15	4.75
Disgust	.1**	.03	.15	3.31
Sadness	.02	.02	.03	.84

* = p < .05, ** = p < .01, *** = p < .001

Table 7.

Study 2: Percent of participants who chose to receive more information about graffiti

Chose to receive more information	No solution (n = 38)	Effective solution (n = 51)	Ineffective solution (n = 46)
Yes	10.53%	5.88%	8.7%
No	89.47%	94.12%	91.3%

Table 8.

Hypotheses and research questions results

| Dependent variable	Hypothesis	Supported?
Study 1: Effects of news stories that include positive emotions		
H_1: Affect	Participants who read news stories with positive emotions will report higher levels of positive affect than will participants who read news stories with negative emotions.	Yes
H_2: Affect	Participants who read news stories with positive emotions at the peak and end will report higher levels of positive affect than participants who read stories with positive emotions throughout the story.	No
H_3: Perceived self-efficacy	Participants who read stories with positive emotions will report higher levels of perceived self-efficacy than will participants who read stories with negative emotions.	No
H_4: Attitude toward topic	Participants who read stories with positive emotions will report more favorable attitudes about the story topic than will participants who read stories with negative emotions.	Yes
H_5: Behavioral intentions	Participants who read news stories with positive emotions will report stronger behavioral intentions to seek more information, share the story, and support the cause than will those who read news stories with negative emotions.	Partially
RQ: Commitment to core functions	Do participants who read stories with positive emotions perceive the stories to be less committed to journalism's core functions than they do stories with negative emotions?	N/A
Study 2: Effects of news stories that mention solutions		
H_1: Affect	Participants who read a news story that mentions an effective solution will report higher levels of positive affect than will participants who read a news story that mentions an ineffective solution or doesn't mention any solution information.	Yes
H_2: Perceived self-efficacy	Participants who read a news story that mentions an effective solution will report higher levels of perceived self-efficacy than will participants who read a news story that	No

|	mentions an ineffective solution or doesn't mention any solution information.	
H$_{3a}$: Attitude toward the article	Participants who read a news story that mentions an effective solution will report more favorable attitudes toward the news article than will participants who read a news story that mentions an ineffective solution or doesn't mention any solution information.	Yes
H$_{3b}$: Attitude toward a solution	Participants who read a news story that mentions an effective solution will report more favorable attitudes toward a solution than will participants who read a news story that mentions an ineffective solution or doesn't mention any solution information.	No
H$_4$: Behavioral intentions	Participants who read a news story that mentions an effective solution will report stronger behavioral intentions to seek more information, share the story, and support the cause than will those who read a news story that mentions an ineffective solution or doesn't mention any solution information.	No
H$_5$: Actual behavior	Participants who read a news story that mentions an effective solution will be more likely to seek more information about the problem than those who read a news story that mentions an ineffective solution or doesn't mention any solution information.	No
RQ: Commitment to core functions	Do participants who read a story that mentions an effective solution perceive the story to be less committed to journalism's core functions than they do a story that mentions an ineffective solution or doesn't mention any solution information?	N/A

Study 1

Figure 1.

Mean affect ratings among those who read a news story with positive emotions, negative

emotions, or a no-emotion control (manipulation check)

Mean affect ratings among each story condition

Error Bars: +/− 1 SD
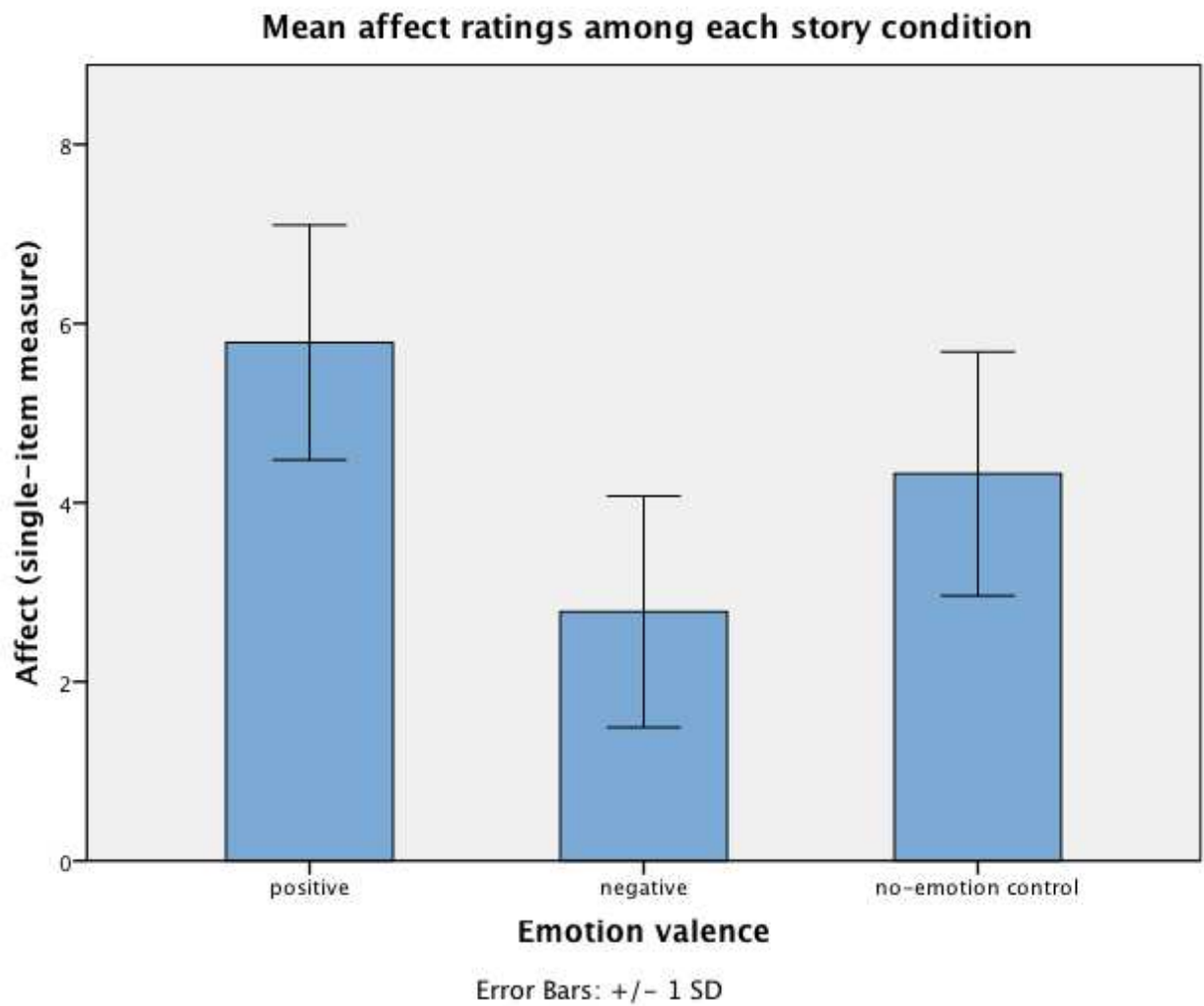
Figure 2.

Mean affect ratings among those who read a news story with positive emotions, negative

emotions, or a no-emotion control (H_1)

Mean positive affect ratings among each story condition

Error Bars: 95% CI
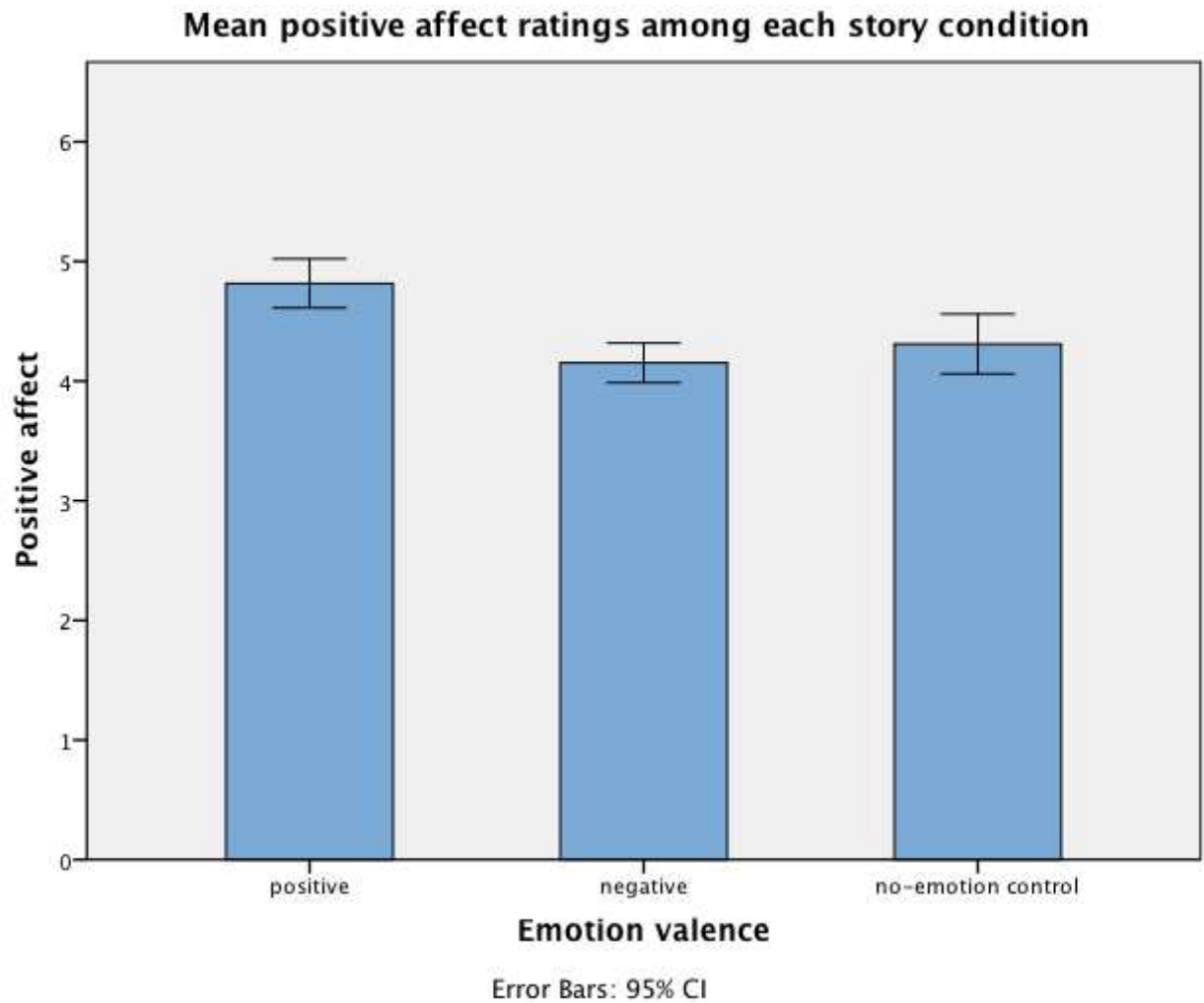
Figure 3.

Mean affect ratings when accounting for the placement of positive emotions in two story

conditions (H_2)
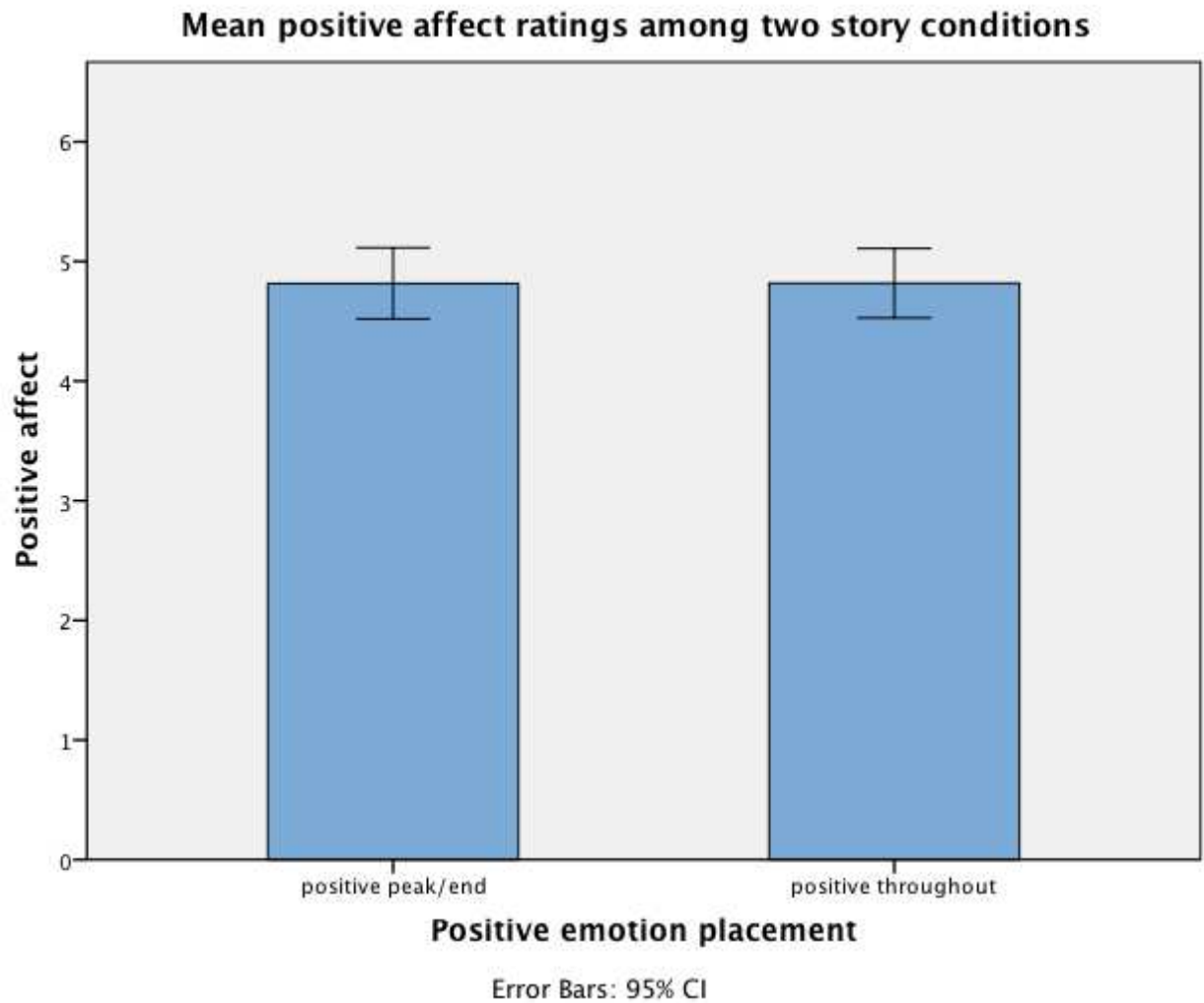
Figure 4.

Mean perceived self-efficacy ratings among those who read a news story with positive

emotions, negative emotions, or a no-emotion control (H₃)

Mean ratings of perceived self-efficacy among each story condition

Error Bars: +/- 1 SD
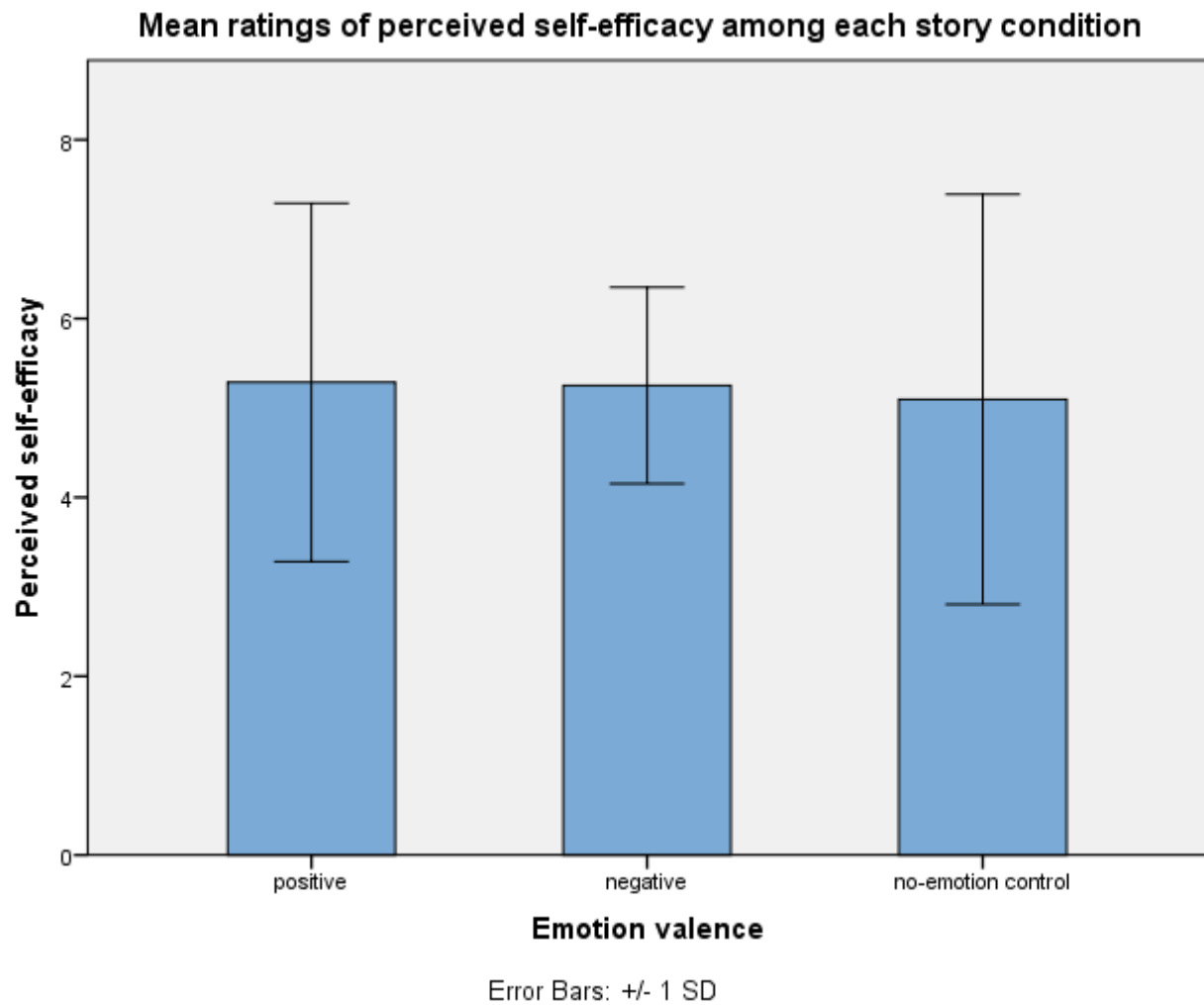
Figure 5.

Mean attitude toward the story topic ratings among those who read a news story with

positive emotions, negative emotions, or a no-emotion control (H_4)

Mean attitude ratings among each story condition

Error Bars: +/- 1 SD
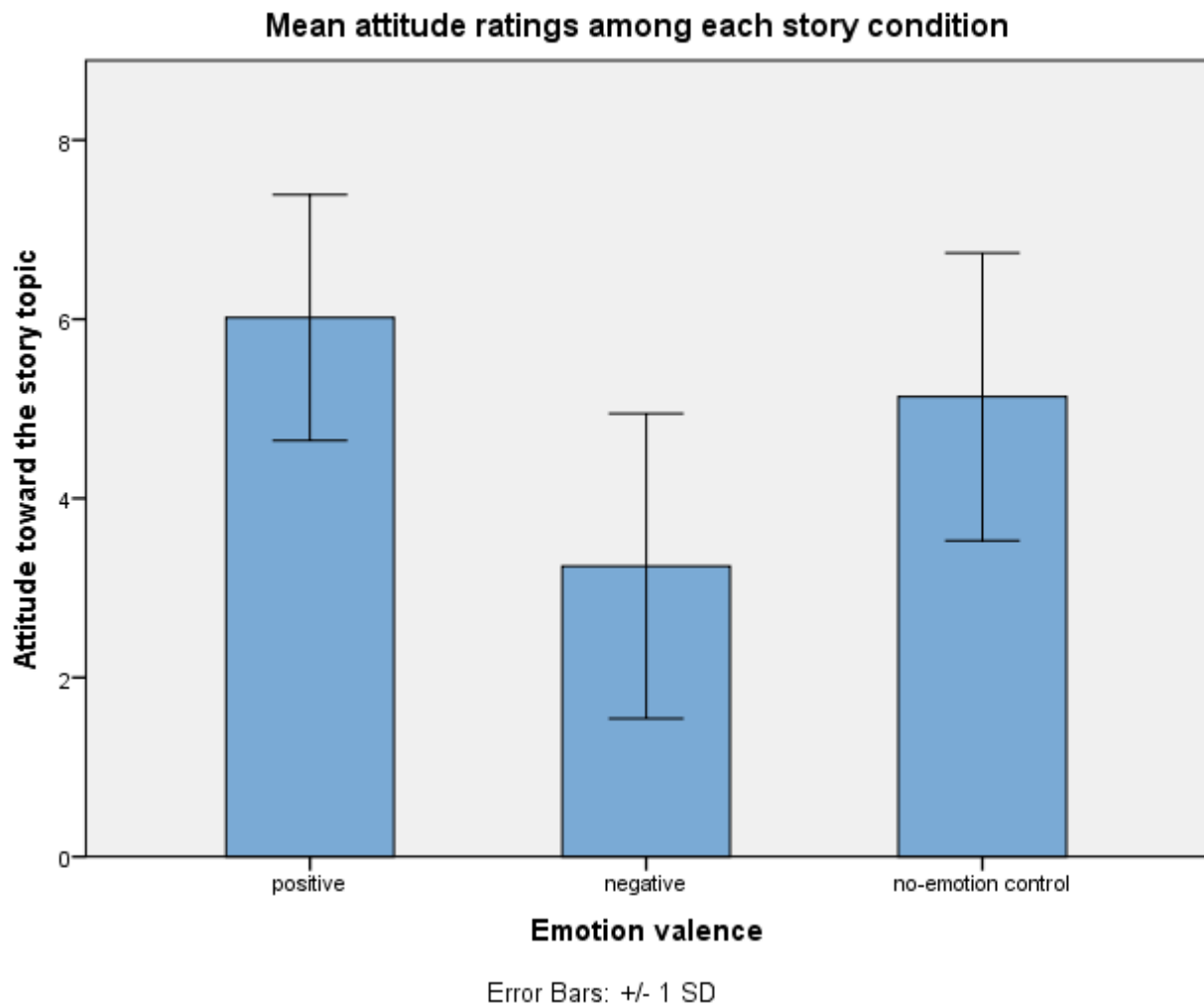
Figure 6.

Mean ratings of seven behavioral intentions among those who read a news story with positive emotions, negative emotions, or a no-emotion control (H_5)


Mean ratings of readers' prosocial behavioral intentions among each story condition

Error Bars: +/- 1 SD
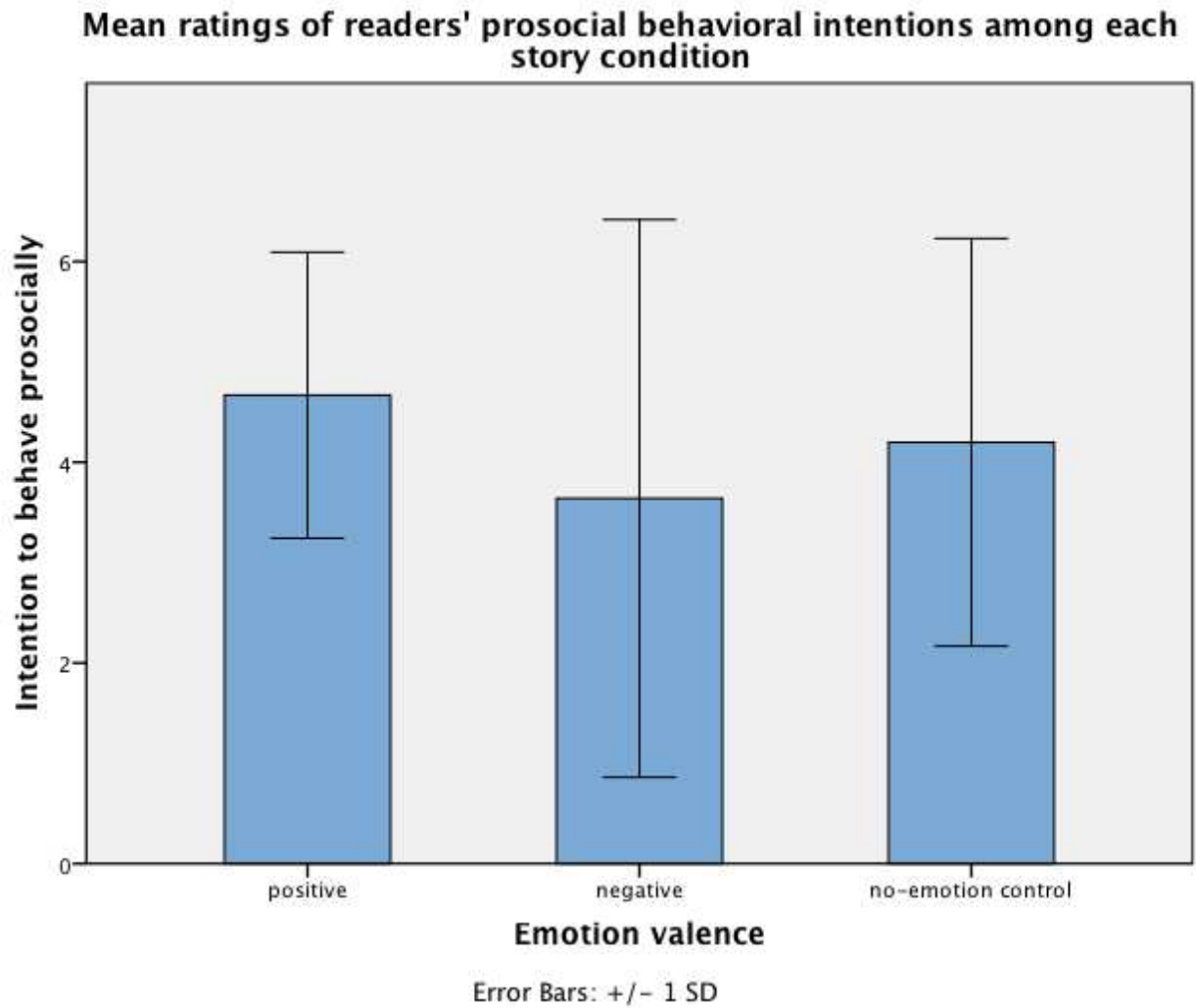
Figure 7.

Mean ratings of readers' likelihood to read similar stories among those who read a news

story with positive emotions, negative emotions, or a no-emotion control (H_5)

Mean ratings of readers' likelihood to read similar stories among each story condition

Error Bars: +/- 1 SD
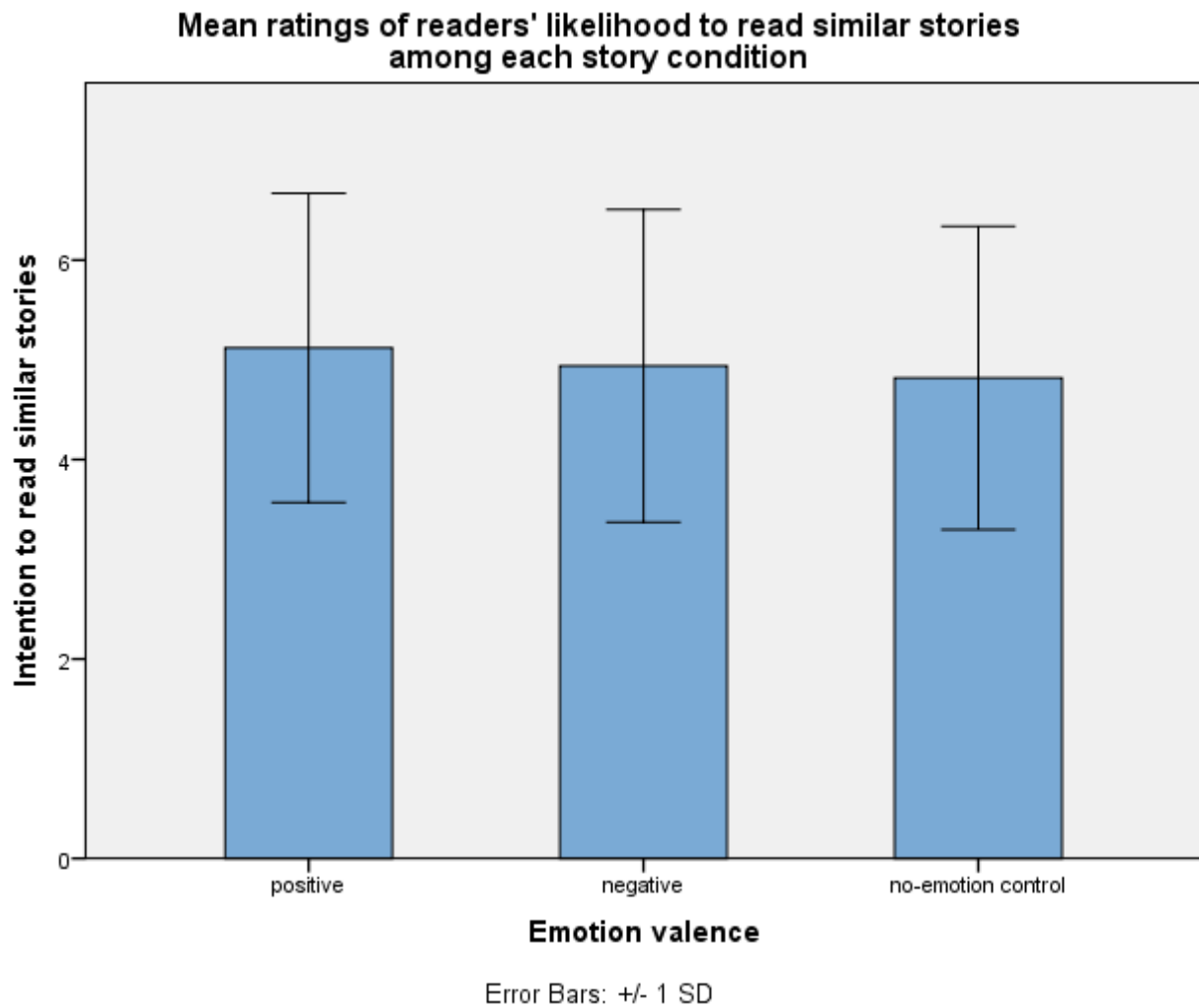
Figure 8.

Mean ratings of readers' likelihood to "like" the story on Facebook among those who

read a news story with positive emotions, negative emotions, or a no-emotion control

(H_5)

Mean ratings of readers' likelihood to "like" the story on Facebook among each story condition

Error Bars: +/- 1 SD
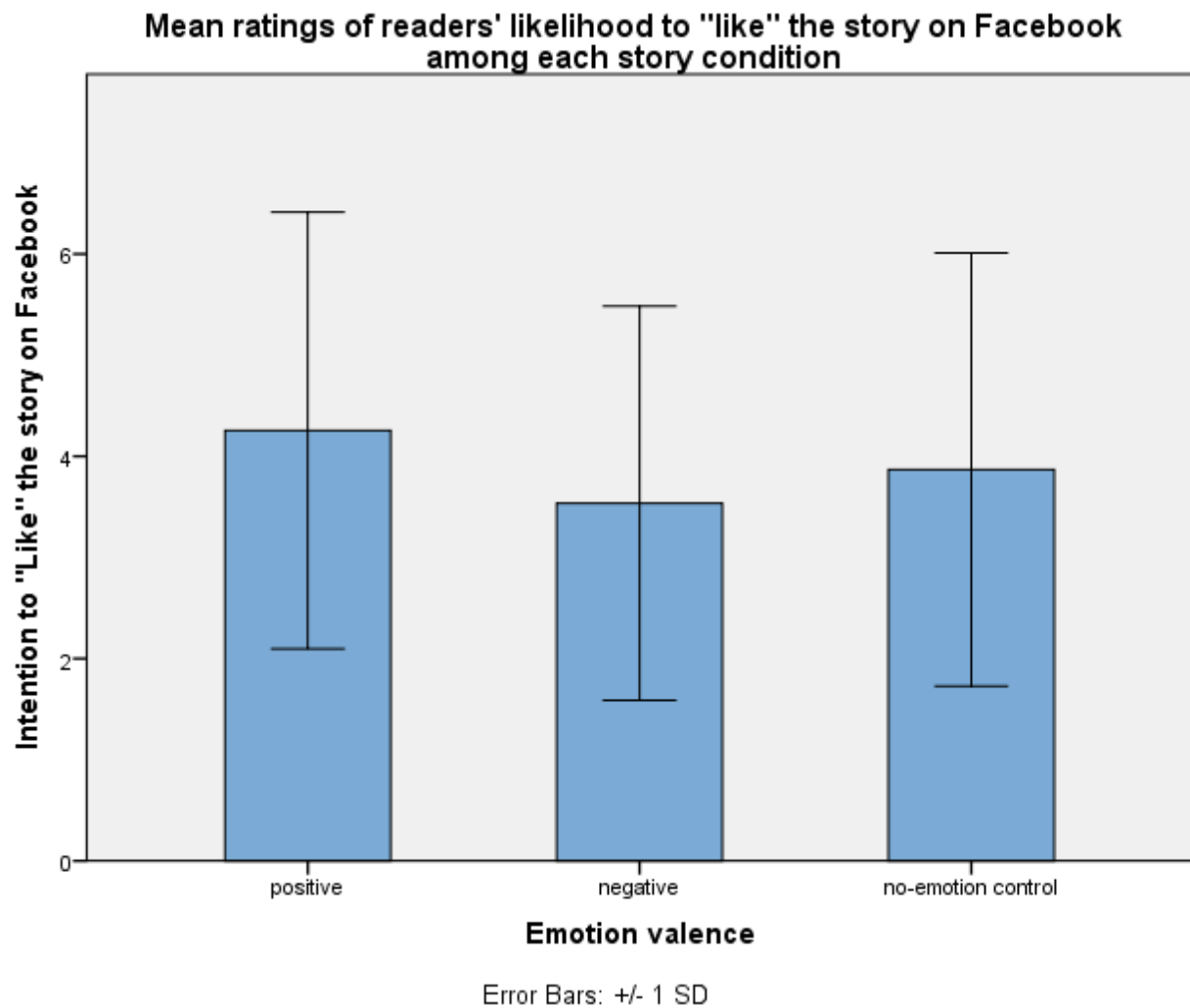
Figure 9.

Mean ratings of readers' likelihood to share the story on social media among those who

read a news story with positive emotions, negative emotions, or a no-emotion control

(H_5)

Mean ratings of readers' likelihood to share the story on social media among each story condition

Error Bars: +/- 1 SD
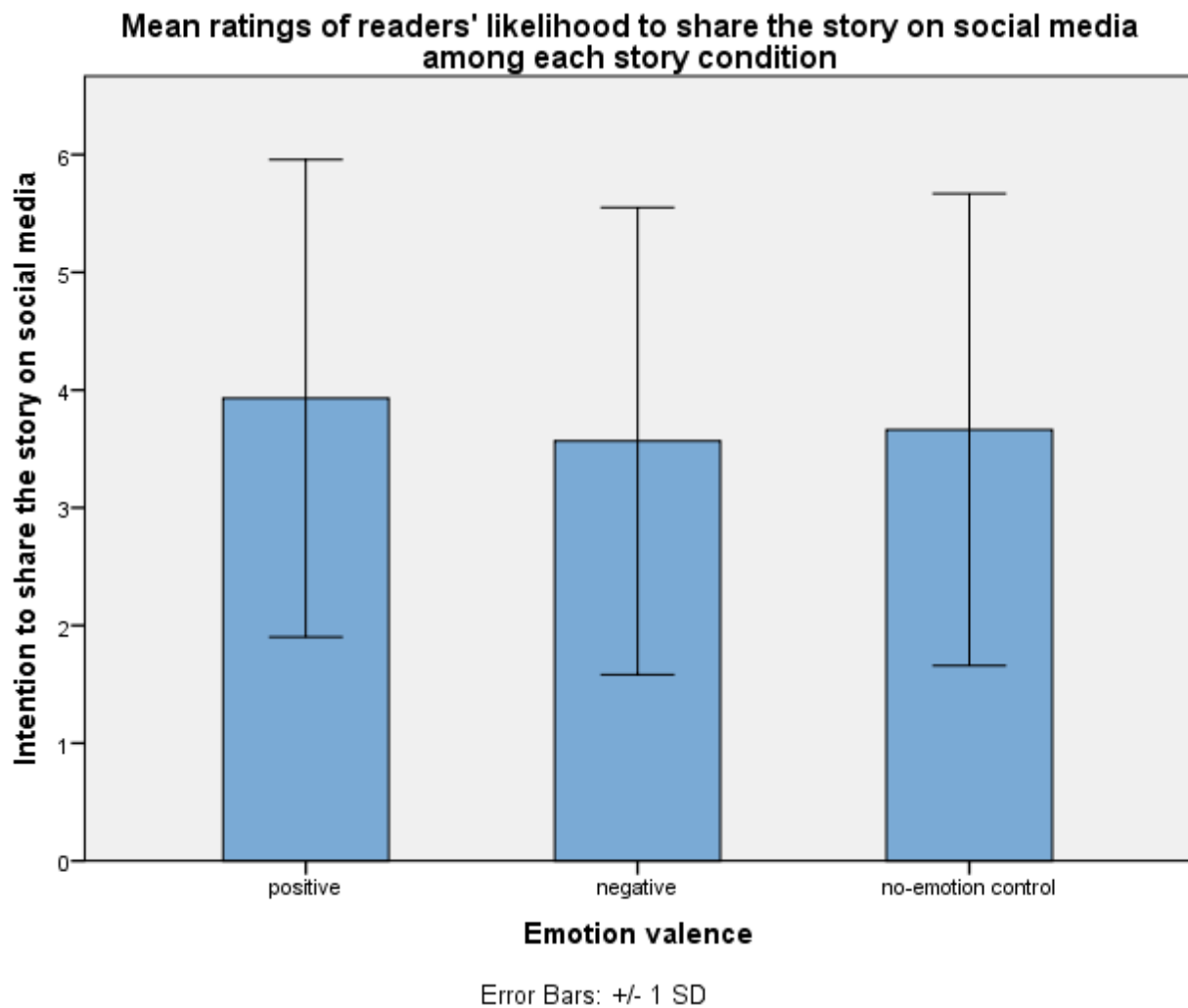
Figure 10.

Mean ratings of readers' likelihood to talk about the story topic among those who read a

news story with positive emotions, negative emotions, or a no-emotion control (H_5)

Error Bars: +/- 1 SD
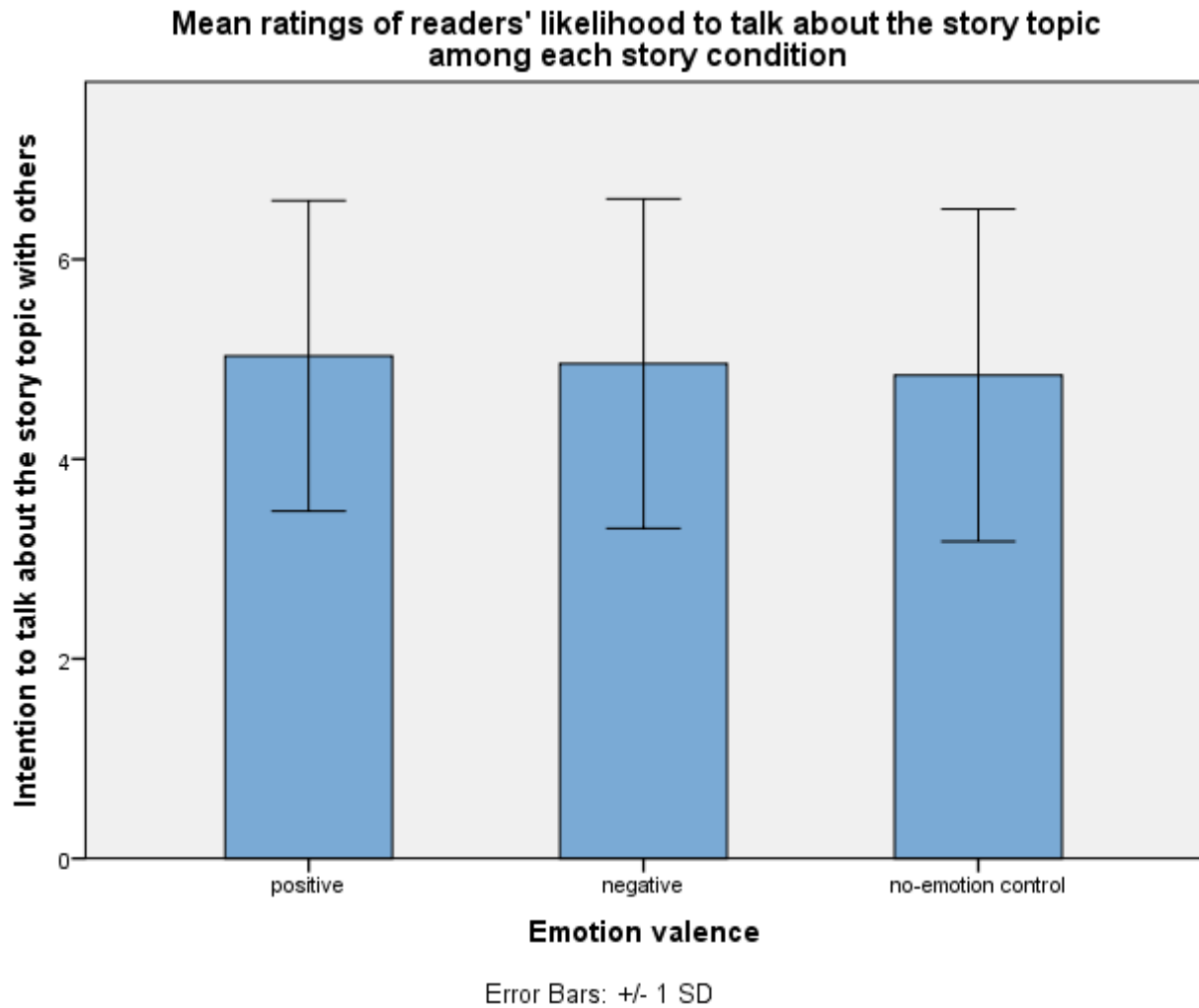
Figure 11.

Mean ratings of readers' likelihood to sign a petition supporting the cause among those

who read a news story with positive emotions, negative emotions, or a no-emotion
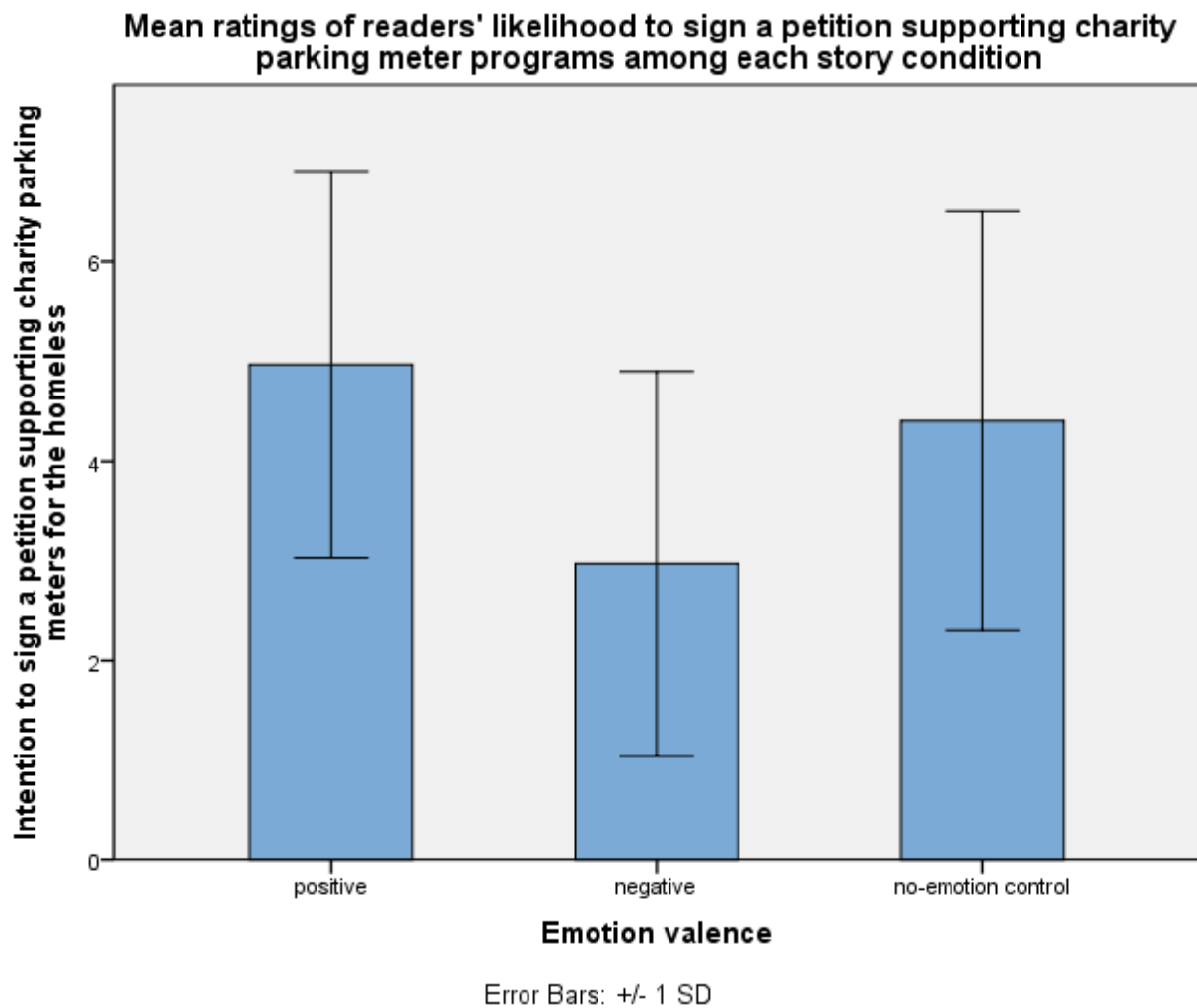
control (H_5)

Figure 12.

Mean ratings of readers' likelihood to donate money to the cause among those who read a

news story with positive emotions, negative emotions, or a no-emotion control (H_5)

Mean ratings of readers' likelihood to donate money to a charity parking meter among each story condition

Error Bars: +/- 1 SD
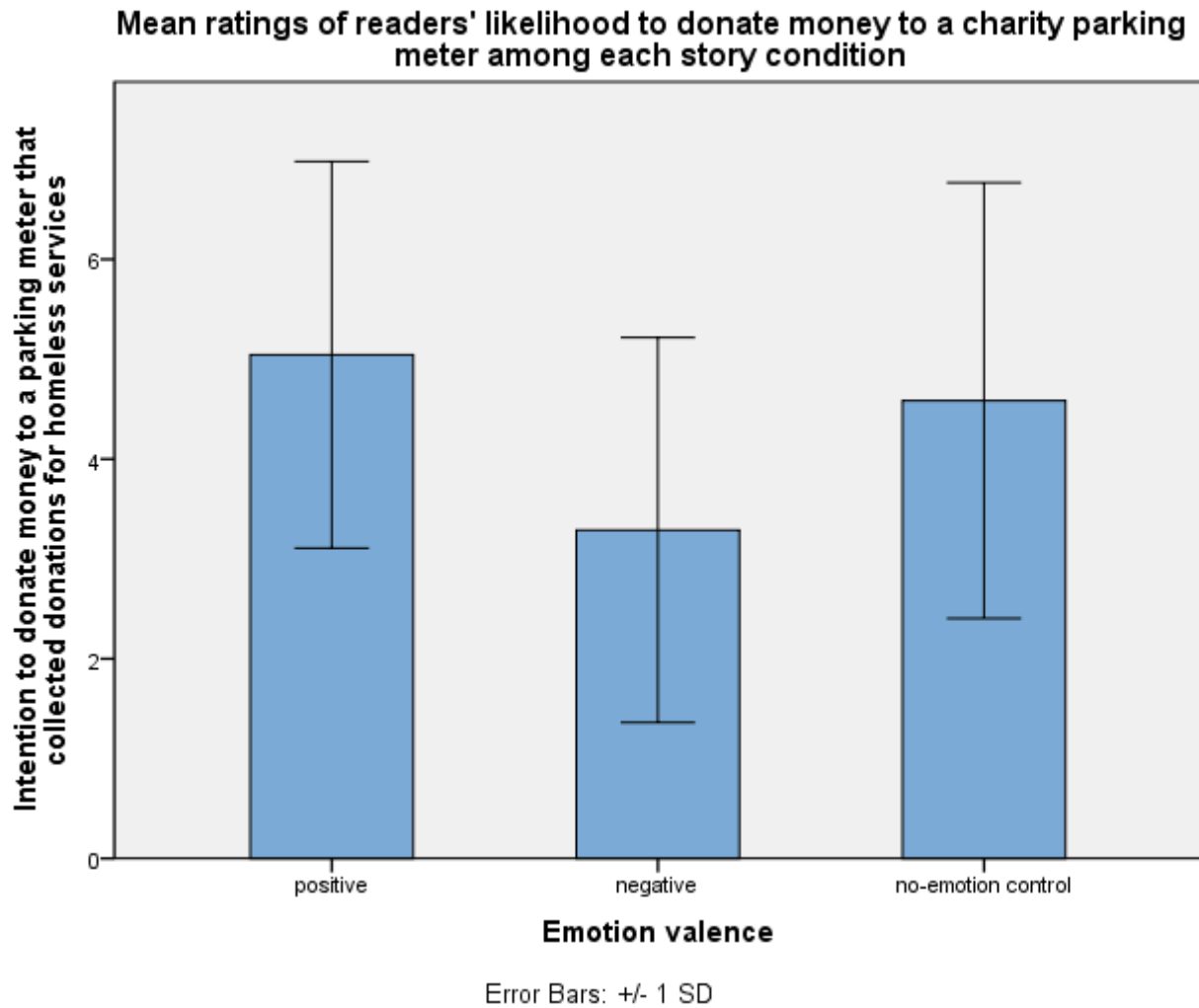
Figure 13.

Mean ratings of readers' likelihood to volunteer to support the cause among those who

read a news story with positive emotions, negative emotions, or a no-emotion control

(H_5)

Mean ratings of readers' likelihood to volunteer at a homeless shelter among each story condition

Error Bars: +/- 1 SD
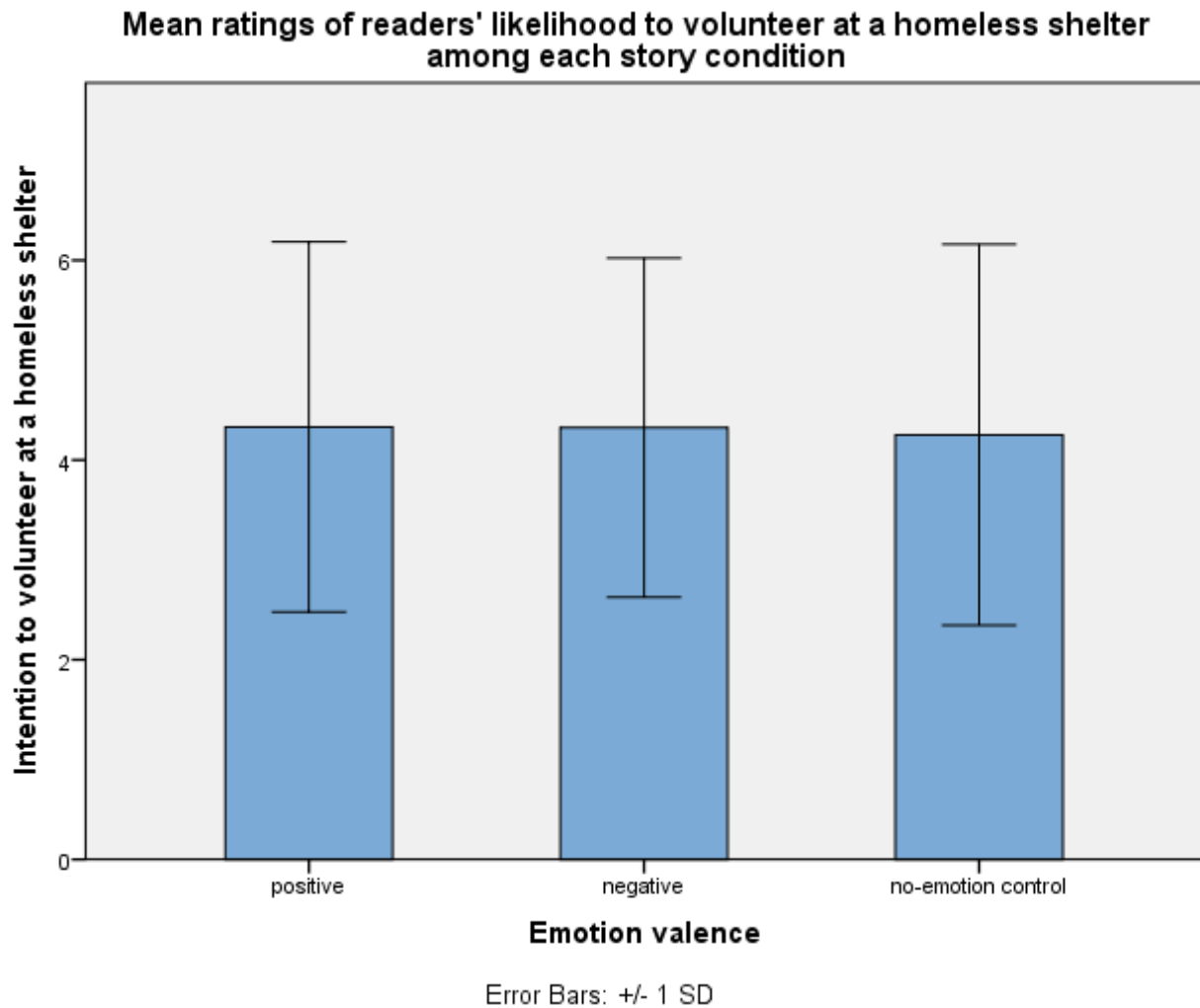
Figure 14.

Mean affect ratings among those who read a news story with an effective solution, an

ineffective solution, or no solution information (H_1, single-item measure)
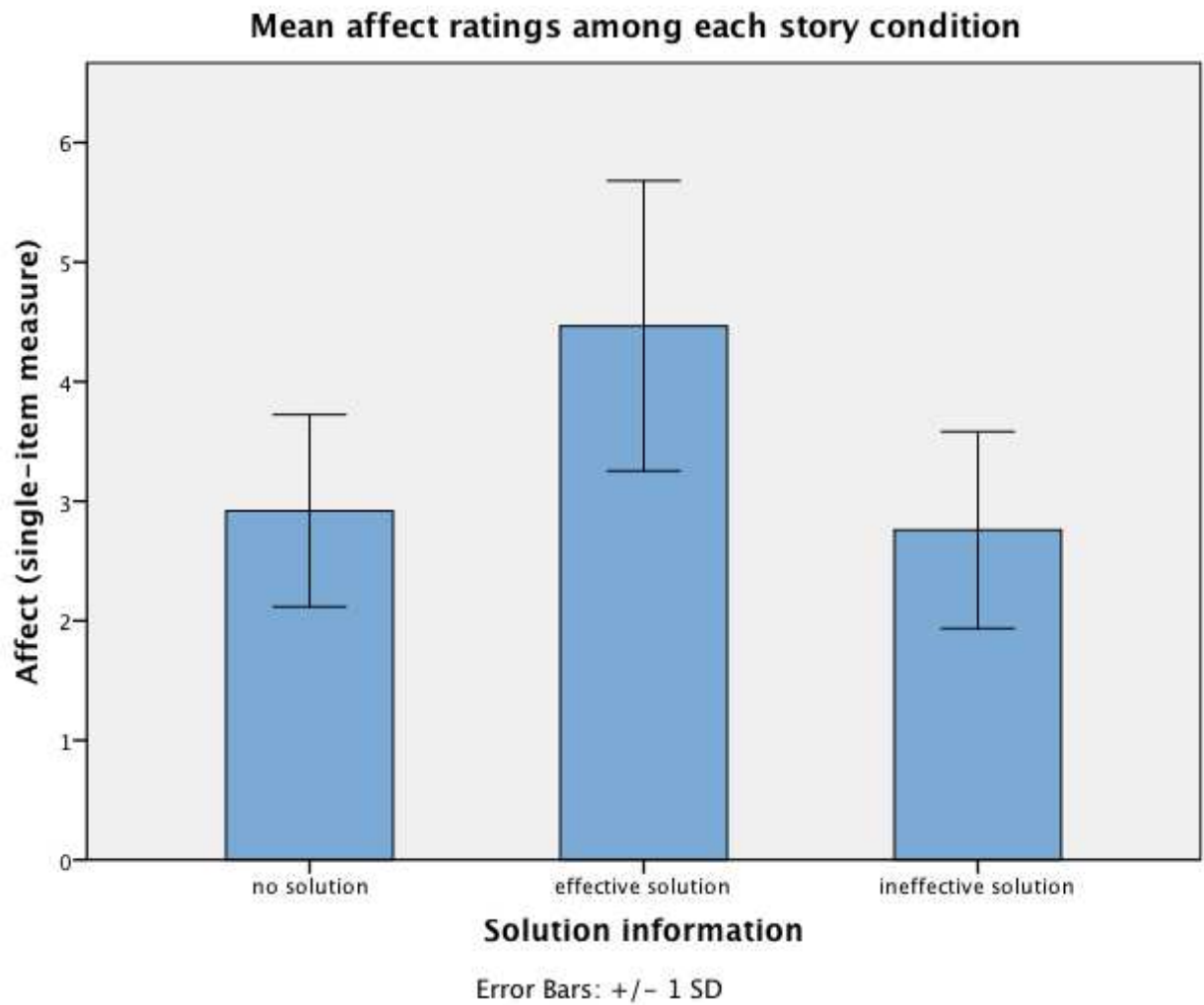
Figure 15.

Mean affect ratings among those who read a news story with an effective solution, an

ineffective solution, or no solution information (H_1)
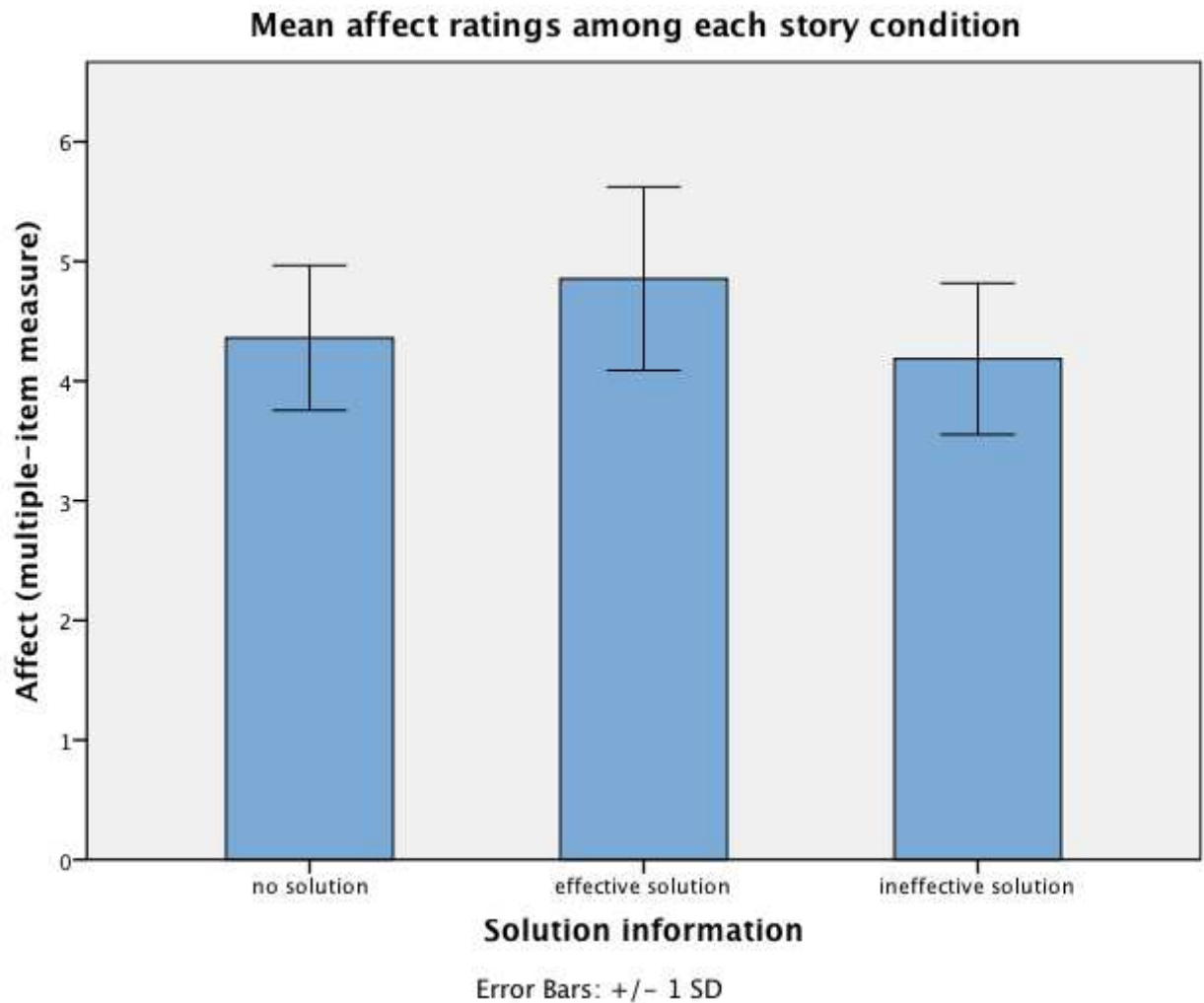
Figure 16.

Mean ratings of readers' perceived self-efficacy among those who read a news story with

an effective solution, an ineffective solution, or no solution information (H_2)

Mean ratings of perceived self-efficacy among each story condition
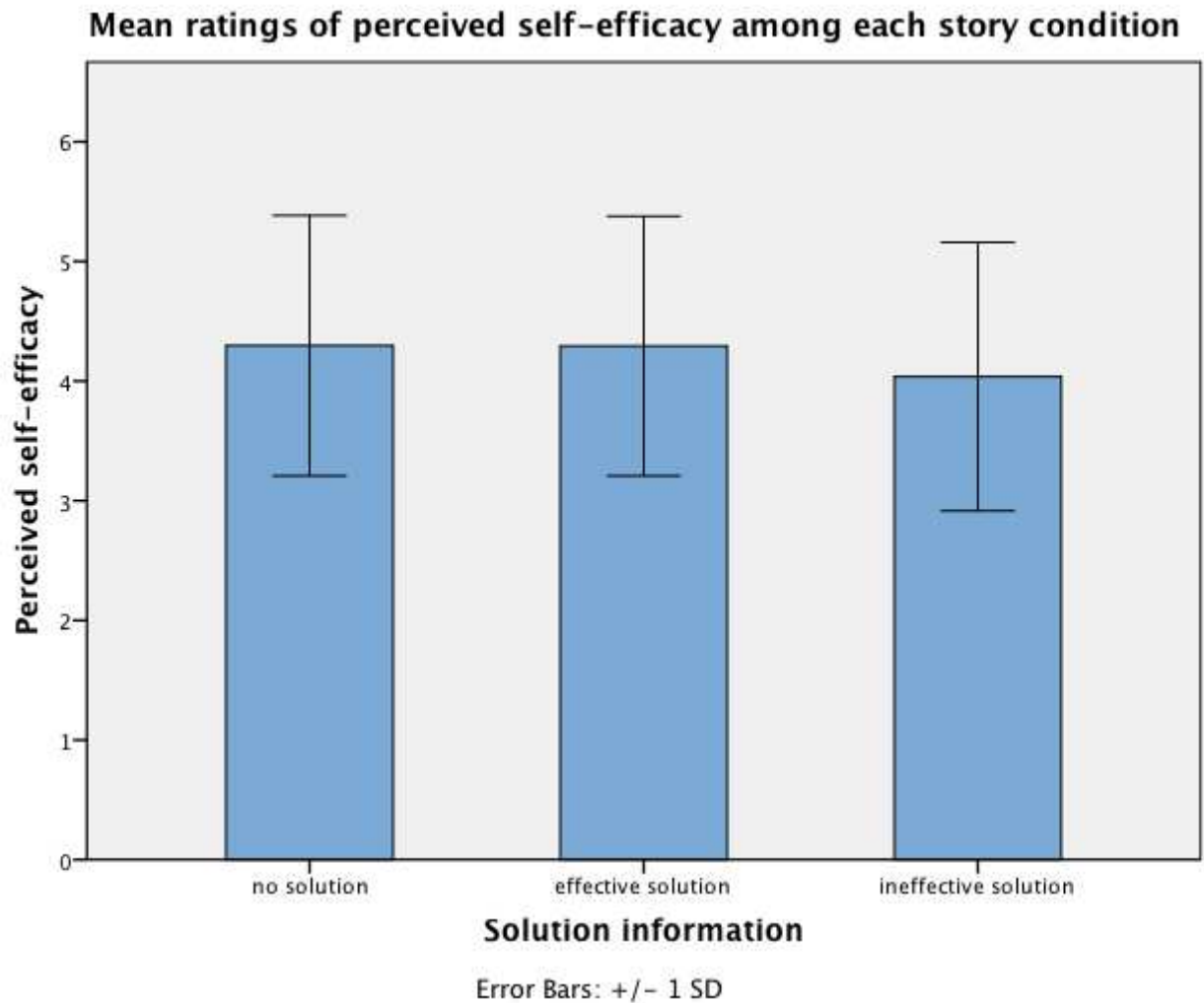
Figure 17.

Mean ratings of readers' attitudes toward the news article among those who read a news

story with an effective solution, an ineffective solution, or no solution information (H$_{3a}$)
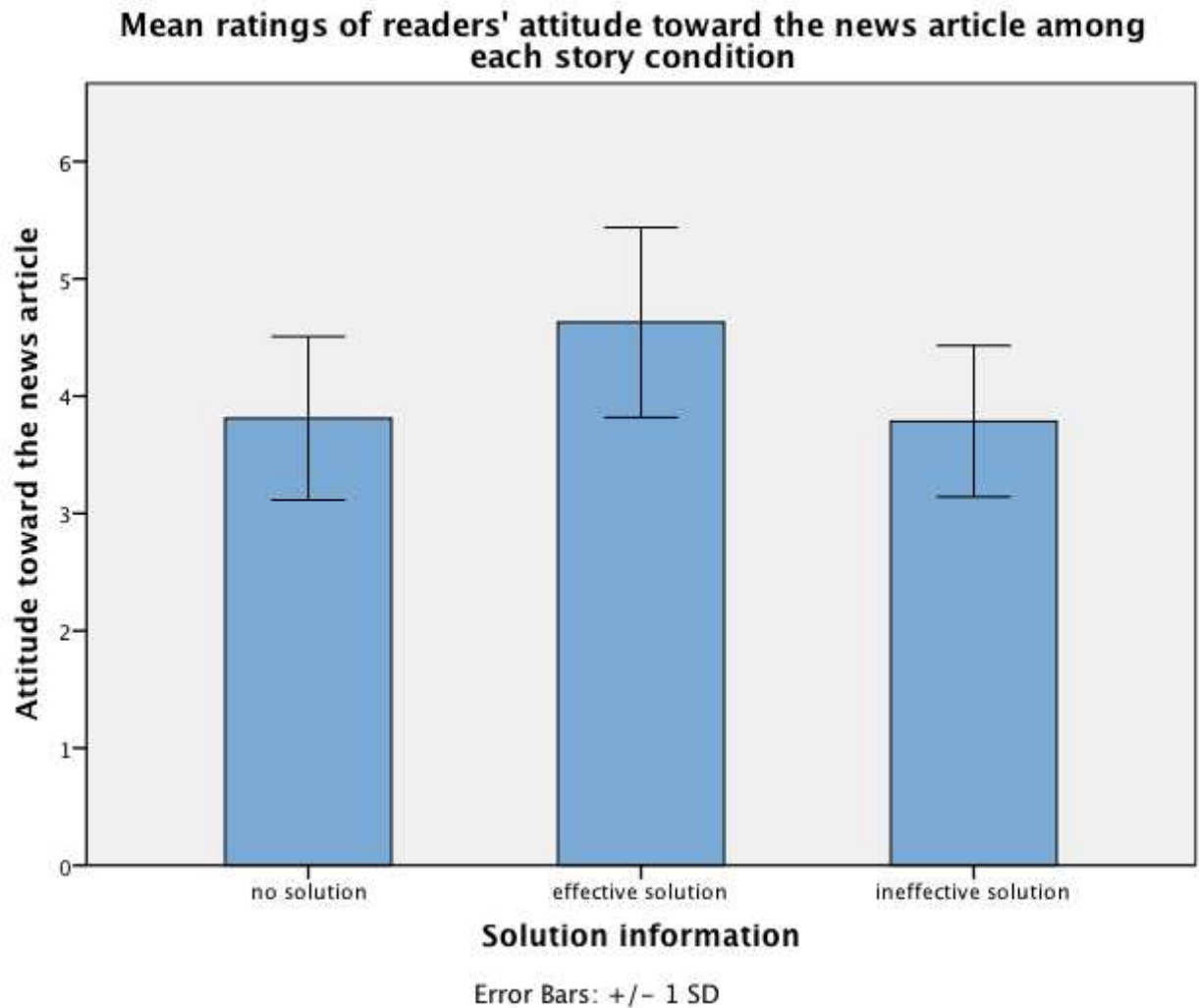
Figure 18.

Mean ratings of readers' attitudes toward a solution to the problem among those who read

a news story with an effective solution, an ineffective solution, or no solution information

(H3b)
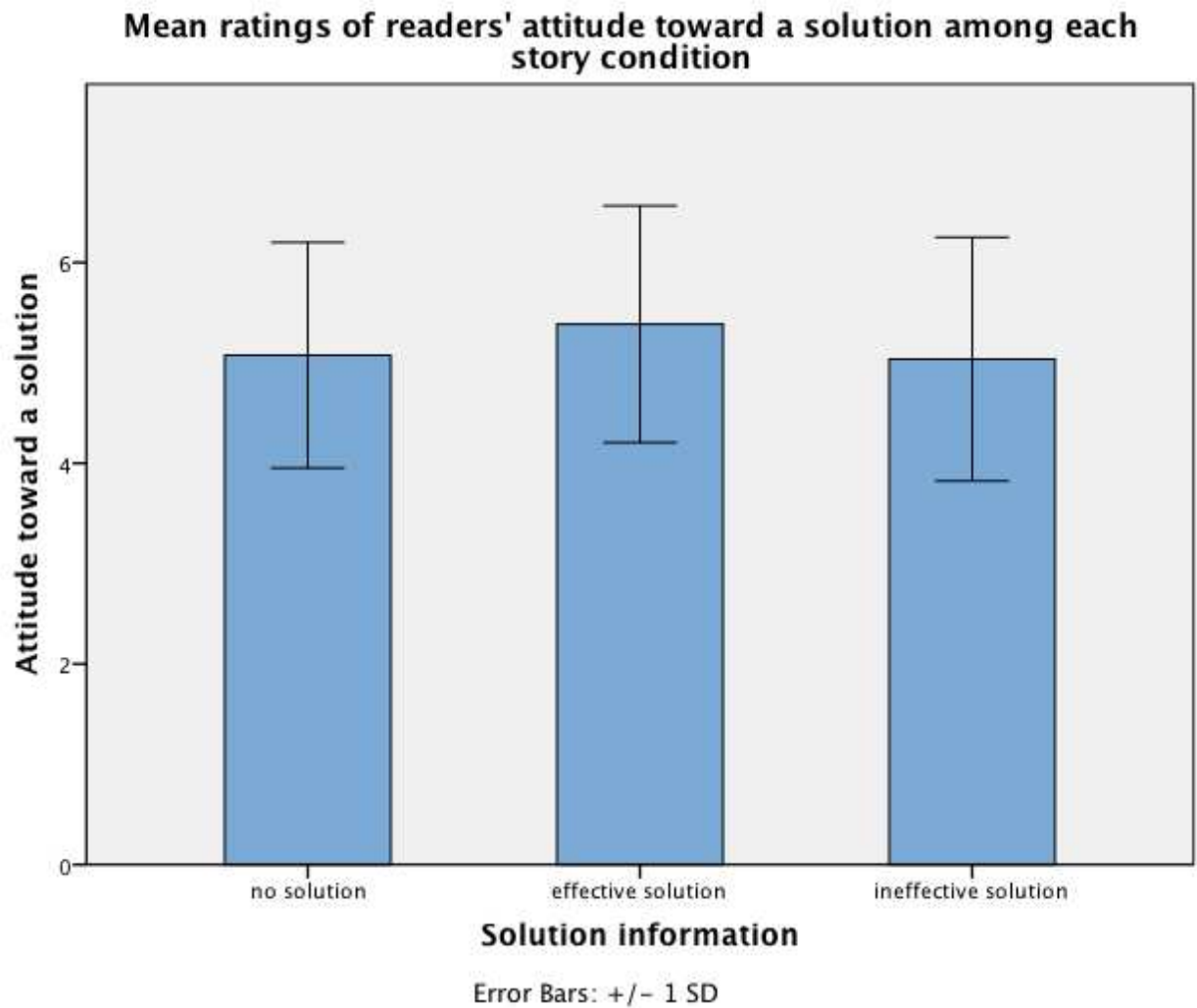
Figure 19.

Mean ratings of seven behavioral intentions among those who read a news story with an

effective solution, an ineffective solution, or no solution information (H_4)
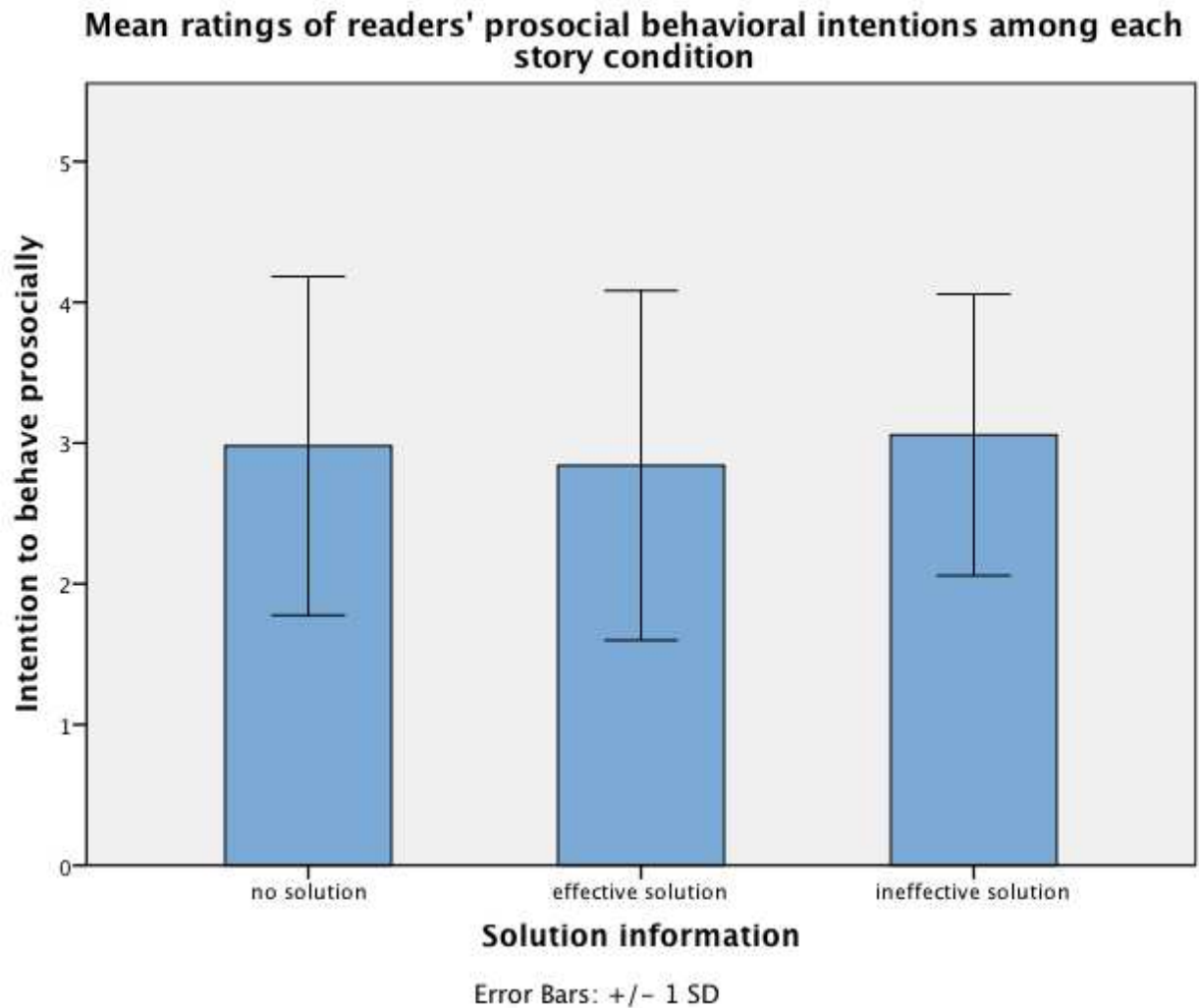
Figure 20.

Mean ratings of readers' likelihood to read similar stories among those who read a news

story with an effective solution, an ineffective solution, or no solution information (H_4)
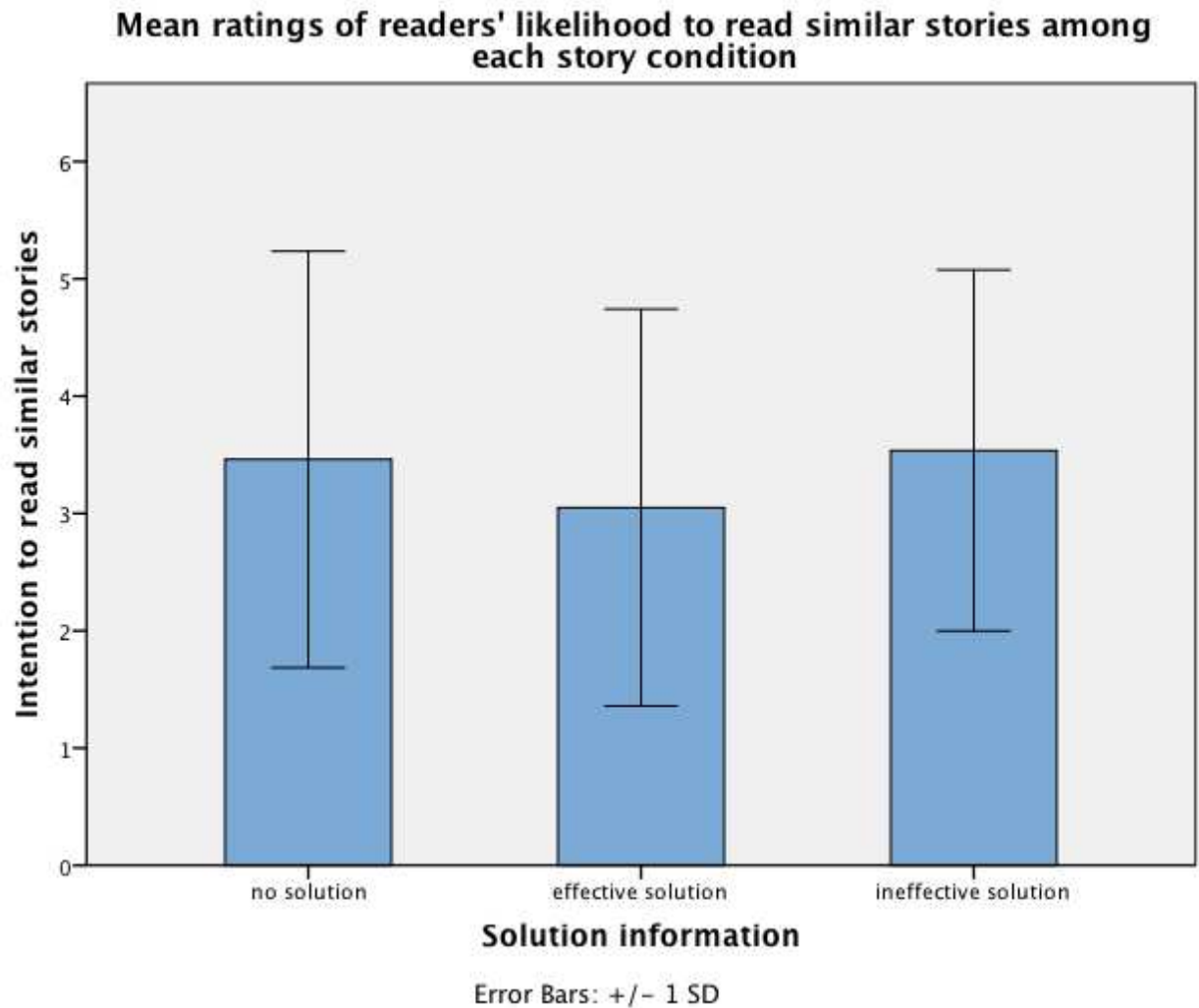
**Figure 21.**

Mean ratings of readers' likelihood to "like" the story on Facebook among those who

read a news story with an effective solution, an ineffective solution, or no solution

information (H4)

Mean ratings of readers' likelihood to "like" the story on Facebook among each story condition
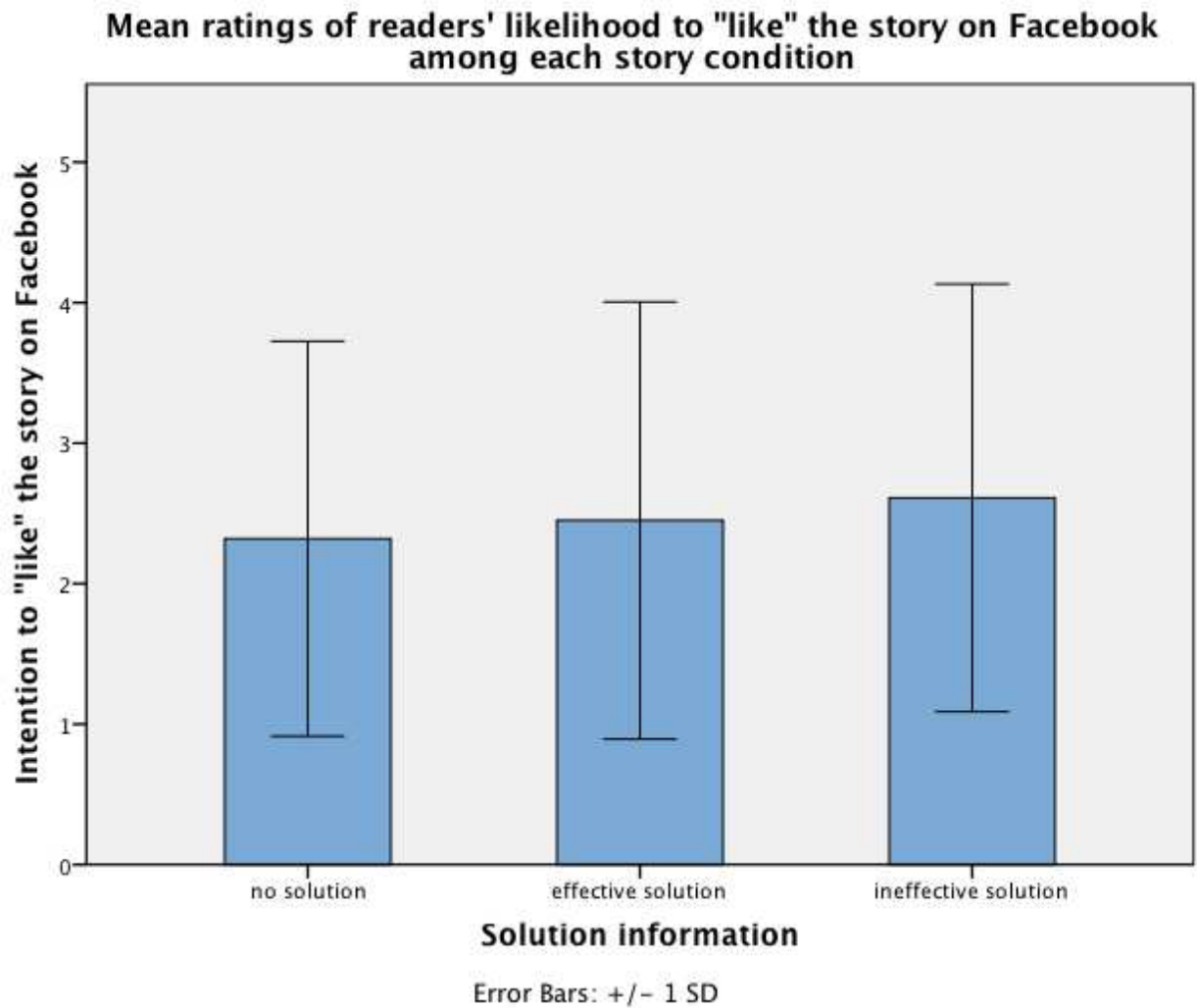
Figure 22.

Mean ratings of readers' likelihood to share the story on social media among those who

read a news story with an effective solution, an ineffective solution, or no solution
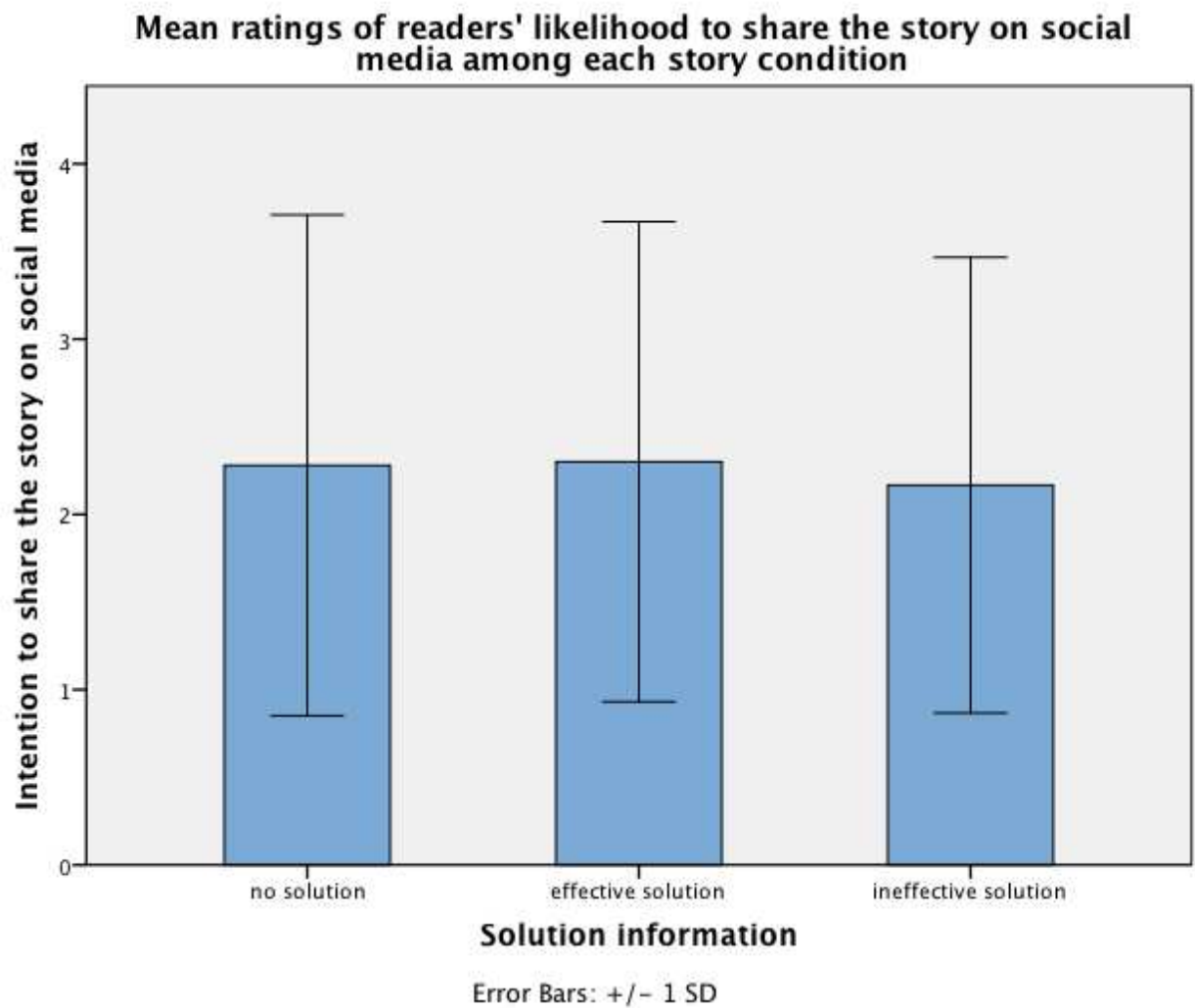
information (H4)

Figure 23.

Mean ratings of readers' likelihood to talk about the story topic with others among those

who read a news story with an effective solution, an ineffective solution, or no solution

information (H4)

Mean ratings of readers' likelihood to talk about the story topic
among each story condition

Error Bars: +/− 1 SD
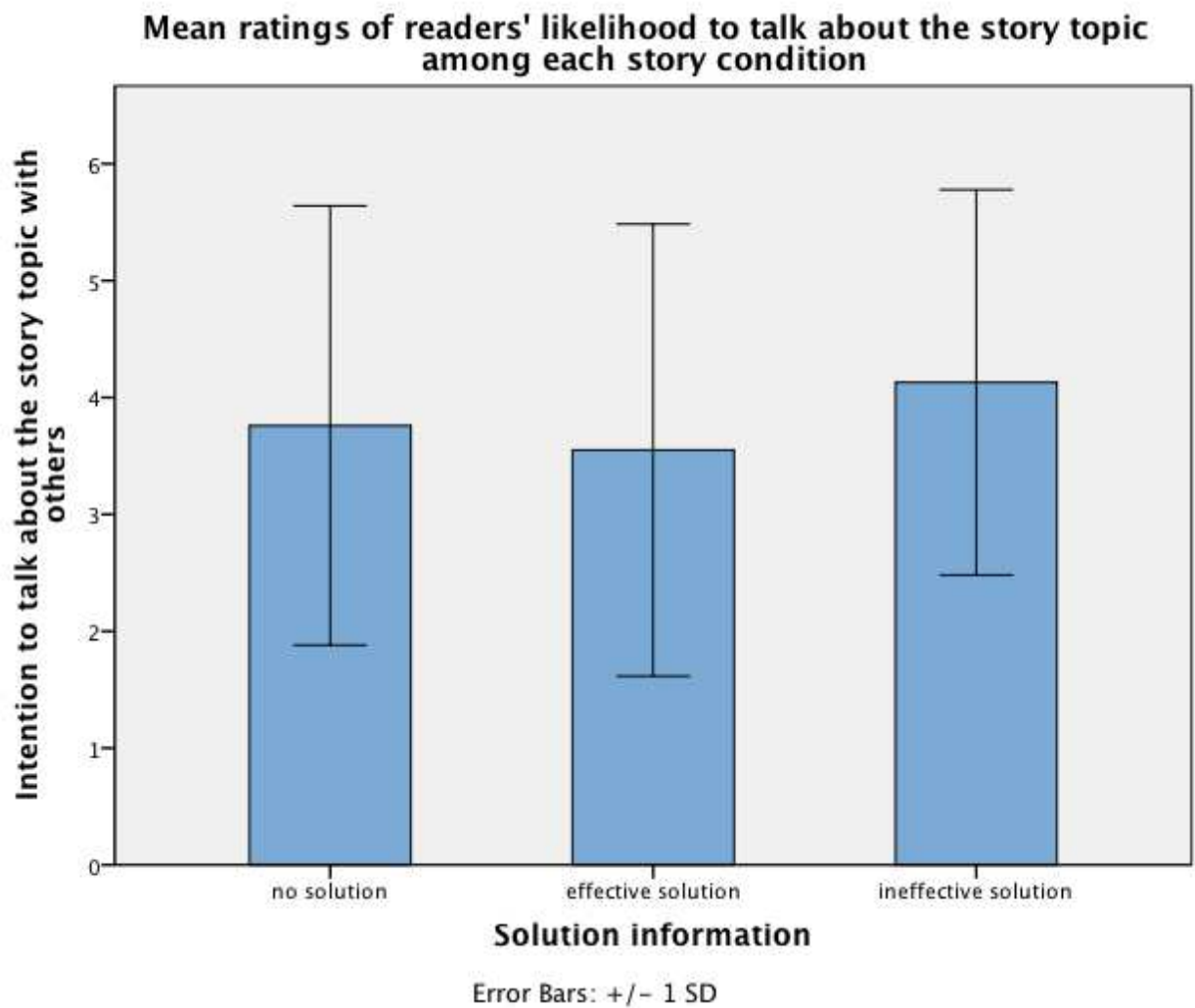
Figure 24.

Mean ratings of readers' likelihood to sign a petition supporting graffiti reduction among those who read a news story with an effective solution, an ineffective solution, or no solution information (H_4)
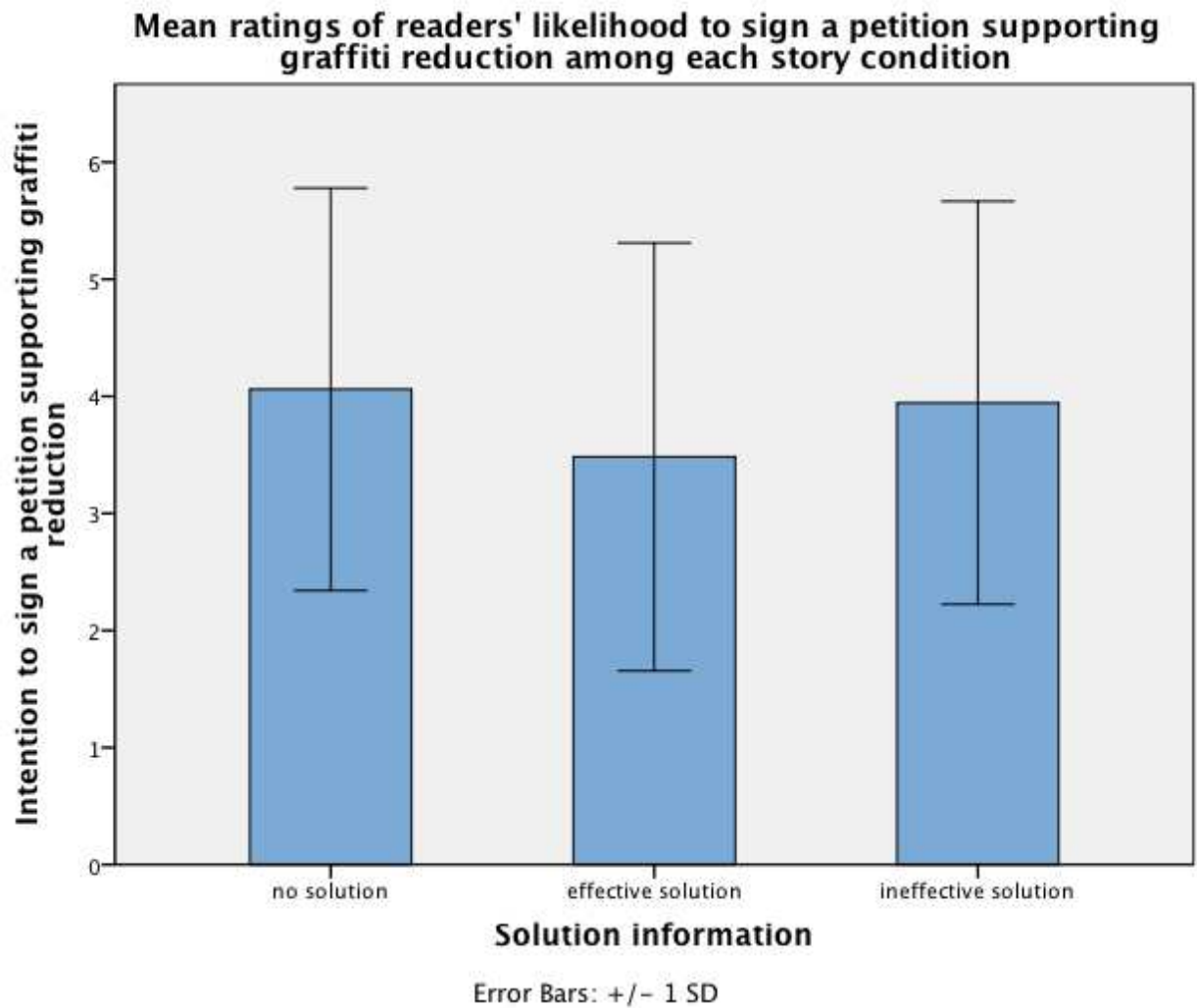
Figure 25.

Mean ratings of readers' likelihood to donate money to a graffiti abatement program

among those who read a news story with an effective solution, an ineffective solution, or

no solution information (H_4)

Mean ratings of readers' likelihood to donate money to a graffiti abatement program among each story condition

Error Bars: +/− 1 SD
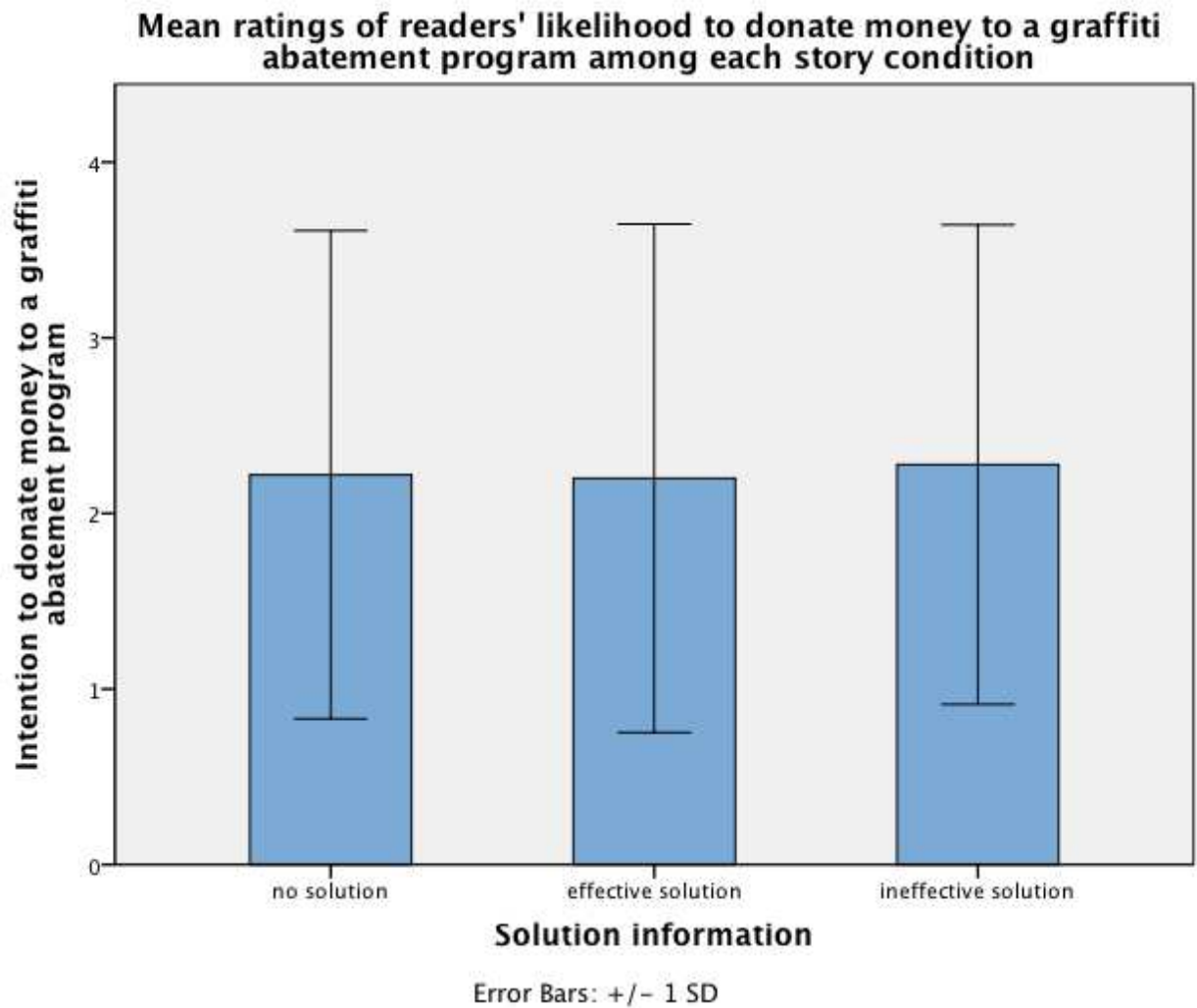
Figure 26.

Mean ratings of readers' likelihood to volunteer to help remove graffiti among those who read a news story with an effective solution, an ineffective solution, or no solution information (H4)

Mean ratings of readers' likelihood to volunteer to help remove graffiti among each story condition

Error Bars: +/- 1 SD
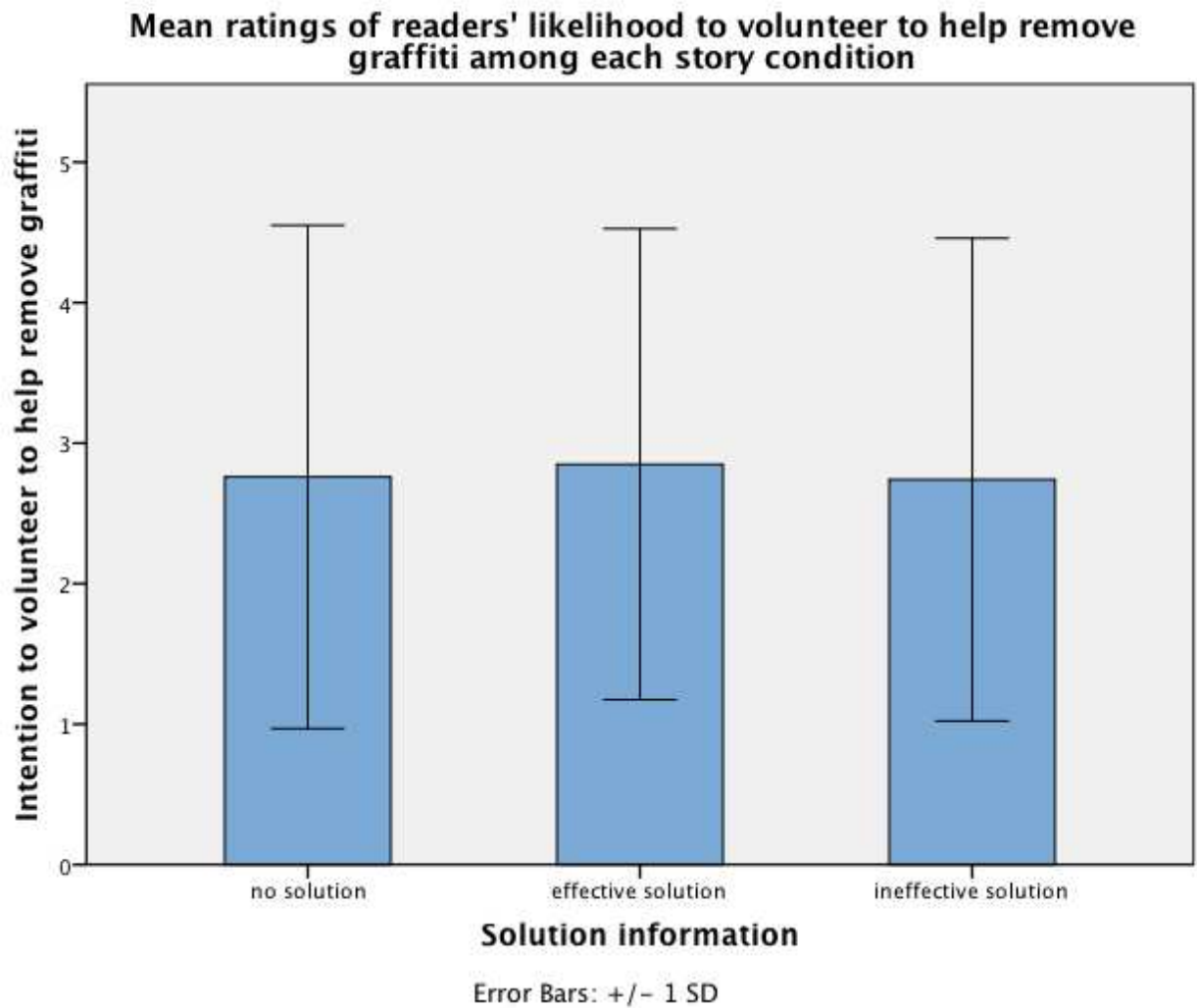
Study 1: Emotion stories

Positive emotions at peak and end

Headline: Pasadena's charity parking meter program brings hope, inspiration to homeless

Pull quote: "I'm so proud of my community and the way we are all working together to help those in need." – Frank Harwood

Cutline: Pasadena homeless resident Dorothy Edwards said the new charity parking meter program has caused her to feel truly happy and hopeful for the first time since she became homeless.

It's a quandary faced by anyone who's been asked for money by a homeless person: Will my spare change stave off hunger or support an addiction?

Pasadena is now testing an alternative to giving to the panhandler.

Fourteen repurposed parking meters across the city will collect change for nonprofits that serve the homeless. The city is hopeful that the meters, painted bright orange and decorated with inspirational sayings, will raise awareness for the city's homeless programs.

"I feel so good about this decision," said Dorothy Edwards, 56, who has lived without a home in eastern Pasadena for three years. "This morning I saw a woman park her car, read the meter, and then talk to her kid about the importance of helping people in the community before she put some coins in the meter and let her son put some in too. Seeing this act of kindness warmed my heart and even brought me to tears."

Edwards said this week is the first time she has felt truly happy and hopeful since she became homeless. And she's not alone.

Frank Harwood, a Pasadena native, also had positive feelings about the new policy. "It's a joyful feeling," he said. "I'm so proud of my community and the way we are all working together to help those in need."

Pasadena is the first city in Los Angeles County to try the donation meters, though Los Angeles has been talking about trying them out in downtown. Officials don't expect to raise huge sums of money: The two meters currently in place have raised $270 over three weeks.

In other cities that have installed donation meters, the results have been modest. In Orlando, 15 parking meters raised $2,027 in three years. And in downtown San Diego, about 20 meters generate about $3,600 a year in change.

The Pasadena meter campaign was designed by a class of students at the Art Center College of Design at a cost of about $350,000, including marketing, design and class materials, paid for by grants from East West Bank and other corporate sponsorships. The meters were donated by IPS Group, and most of the funds were spent on the design of the campaign, Huang said. No city funds were used.

The United Way of Los Angeles and the Flintridge Center will collect the meter donations on a weekly basis, and local nonprofits targeting homelessness can apply for funding. Businesses can also sponsor meters for a $1,500 annual donation.

On a recent day in Pasadena's Central Park, Fernando Ruiz and Michael Castillo relaxed at a picnic table as they waited for the weekly feeding program in the park.

Ruiz, homeless for eight years, was optimistic about the meters. He recycles when he needs cash and never panhandles because it makes him feel proud to earn the money himself, he said.

"I hope they put a lot of them around. Put a meter on every street," Ruiz said. "I really believe it will make a difference."

Castillo agreed. "I'm just giddy every time I see one of the orange meters. This is exciting, and also inspiring. I have already promised myself that as soon as I get back on my feet, I am going to donate to them myself."

Positive emotions throughout

Headline: Pasadena's charity parking meter program brings hope, inspiration to homeless

Pull quote: "I'm so proud of my community and the way we are all working together to help those in need." – Frank Harwood

Cutline: Pasadena homeless resident Dorothy Edwards said the new charity parking meter program has caused her to feel truly happy and hopeful for the first time since she became homeless.

Dorothy Edwards, 56, who has lived without a home in eastern Pasadena for three years said this week is the first time she has felt truly happy and hopeful since she became homeless. And it's due to a new policy in the city that will test an alternative to giving to the panhandler.

Fourteen repurposed parking meters across the city will collect change for nonprofits that serve the homeless. The city is hopeful that the meters, painted bright orange and decorated with inspirational sayings, will raise awareness for the city's homeless programs.

The new policy aims to prevent the quandary faced by anyone who's been asked for money by a homeless person: Will my spare change stave off hunger or support an addiction? Now, residents won't be faced with that dilemma, at least not as often.

"I feel so good about this decision," Edwards said. "This morning I saw a woman park her car, read the meter, and then talk to her kid about the importance of helping people in the community before she put some coins in the meter and let her son put some in too. Seeing this act of kindness warmed my heart and even brought me to tears."

Pasadena is the first city in Los Angeles County to try the donation meters, though Los Angeles has been talking about trying them out in downtown. Officials don't expect to raise huge sums of money: The two meters currently in place have raised $270 over three weeks.

In other cities that have installed donation meters, the results have been modest. In Orlando, 15 parking meters raised $2,027 in three years. And in downtown San Diego, about 20 meters generate about $3,600 a year in change.

Frank Harwood, a Pasadena native, had positive feelings about the new policy. "It's a joyful feeling," he said. "I'm so proud of my community and the way we are all working together to help those in need."

The Pasadena meter campaign was designed by a class of students at the Art Center College of Design at a cost of about $350,000, including marketing, design and class materials, paid for by grants from East West Bank and other corporate sponsorships. The meters were donated by IPS Group, and most of the funds were spent on the design of the campaign, Huang said. No city funds were used.

Fernando Ruiz, homeless for eight years, said he was optimistic about the meters. He recycles when he needs cash and never panhandles because it makes him feel proud to earn the money himself, he said.

"I hope they put a lot of them around. Put a meter on every street," Ruiz said. "I really believe it will make a difference."

Ruiz' friend Michael Castillo agreed. "I'm just giddy every time I see one of the orange meters. This is exciting, and also inspiring. I have already promised myself that as soon as I get back on my feet, I am going to donate to them myself."

The United Way of Los Angeles and the Flintridge Center will collect the meter donations on a weekly basis, and local nonprofits targeting homelessness can apply for funding. Businesses can also sponsor meters for a $1,500 annual donation.

Negative emotions at peak and end

Headline: Pasadena's charity parking meter program brings worry, hopelessness to homeless

Pull quote: "I'm disgusted by this decision. The city is not acting in the best interest of its homeless residents." – Dorothy Edwards

Cutline: Pasadena homeless resident Frank Harwood said he is worried that the new charity parking meter program is designed to help cities push out the homeless. "I have nowhere else to go," he said. "This is my home."

It's a quandary faced by anyone who's been asked for money by a homeless person: Will my spare change stave off hunger or support an addiction?

Pasadena is now testing an alternative to giving to the panhandler.

Fourteen repurposed parking meters across the city will collect change for nonprofits that serve the homeless. The meters, painted bright orange and stamped with information about the campaign, are meant to raise awareness for the city's homeless programs. But some homeless advocates are worried that the donation meters lack the human element normally found in charitable giving and are angry that they might monopolize money that might have gone to genuinely needy people.

"Honestly, I'm disgusted by this decision," said Dorothy Edwards, director of the Western Regional Advocacy Project, a homelessness advocacy group. "The city is not

acting in the best interest of its homeless residents by doing this; they're doing them a disservice, and it makes me sick."

Frank Harwood, 56, who has lived without a home in eastern Pasadena for three years, also had negative feelings about the new policy. He said he is sad about the meter program because he thinks it is designed to help cities push out the homeless.

In San Diego and Denver, for example, the donation meters were used as panhandling deterrents, installed in areas where homeless people gathered to ask for money. "I'm worried that I'm going to be pushed out," Harwood said. "I have nowhere else to go. This is my home."

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On a recent day in Pasadena's Central Park, Fernando Ruiz and Michael Castillo relaxed at a picnic table as they waited for the weekly feeding program in the park.

Ruiz, homeless for eight years, said he didn't think the meters would help him at all. He recycles when he needs cash and never panhandles because it makes him feel guilty to beg, he said.

"I really don't care how many meters they put up because I have no faith that this will work," Ruiz said. "This is not going to make a difference."

Castillo agreed. "I'm just depressed every time I see one of the orange meters. Even if people do put money in them, I doubt I will ever benefit from it. This whole thing is hopeless."

Negative emotions throughout

Headline: Pasadena's charity parking meter program brings worry, hopelessness to homeless

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Cutline: Pasadena homeless resident Frank Harwood said he is worried that the new charity parking meter program is designed to help cities push out the homeless. "I have nowhere else to go," he said. "This is my home."

Frank Harwood, 56, has lived without a home in eastern Pasadena for three years said this week is the first time he has felt truly sad and worried since he became homeless. And it's due to a new policy in the city that will test an alternative to giving to the panhandler.

Fourteen repurposed parking meters across the city will collect change for nonprofits that serve the homeless. The meters, painted bright orange and stamped with information about the campaign, are meant to raise awareness for the city's homeless programs.

The new policy aims to prevent the quandary faced by anyone who's been asked for money by a homeless person: Will my spare change stave off hunger or support an addiction? But some homeless advocates are worried that the donation meters lack the human element normally found in charitable giving and are angry that they might monopolize money that might have gone to genuinely needy people.

"Honestly, I'm disgusted by this decision," said Dorothy Edwards, director of the Western Regional Advocacy Project, a homelessness advocacy group. "The city is not acting in the best interest of its homeless residents by doing this; they're doing them a disservice, and it makes me sick."

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No emotion control

Headline: Pasadena repurposes parking meters to collect change for homeless

Pull quote: "This is a clear alternative where people contributing know that all the money will go to specific services." - Bill Huang

Cutline: Homeless Pasadena resident Dorothy Edwards said she can see both the potential benefits and harms of the city's new charity program to raise money for homeless services.

It's a quandary faced by anyone who's been asked for money by a homeless person: Will my spare change stave off hunger or support an addiction?

Pasadena is now testing an alternative to giving to the panhandler.

Fourteen repurposed parking meters across the city will collect change for nonprofits that serve the homeless. The meters, painted bright orange and stamped with information about the campaign, are supposed to raise awareness for the city's homeless programs.

The campaign has been met with mixed support.

"This is a clear alternative where people contributing know that all the money will go to specific services," said Pasadena Housing Director Bill Huang.

But the meters are rooted in a more controversial idea — that putting money directly into the hands of homeless people is not an effective way to help them.

Some homeless advocates say the donation meters lack the human element normally found in charitable giving and monopolize money that might have gone to genuinely needy people.

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On a recent day in Pasadena's Central Park, Dorothy Edwards relaxed at a picnic table as she waited for the weekly feeding program in the park.

Edwards, 56, used to panhandle by the Target in eastern Pasadena. She'd use the money to buy food for her dog, rain gear and tents. She could understand both sides of the debate about giving money directly to the homeless. Buying her own supplies helped her be independent, she said, but the money also made it easier for her to stay homeless.

Study 2: Solution stories

No solution mentioned

Headline: Residents fed up over rise in graffiti

Pull quote: "I grew up here, and I have never seen the graffiti so bad." - Diane Poston

Cutline: An alarming rise in graffiti has left Green Bay residents feeling frustrated.

Graffiti is back. And in some ways, it's back bigger and bolder than ever.

"I can't stand the graffiti," said Tim Jones, a long-time Green Bay resident who lives in a popular graffiti neighborhood. "I used to go weeks or even months at a time without seeing new graffiti on my block, but lately I've been seeing something new every single morning."

Graffiti never goes away entirely; it's a perennial aspect of urban life, like litter and crime. But its intensity is cyclical. For years it can be a low hum, then explode into something louder, more pervasive. Today, it's nearly deafening in at least one city.

Green Bay has seen a huge rise in graffiti the past few years. In 2010, the city's 3-1-1 service logged about 1,000 requests for graffiti removal; in 2013, nearly 7,500 calls came in. And the number of calls so far this year is on target to exceed last year's number.

More recently, a huge spike in graffiti has been reported in the last few weeks. And residents are fed up.

"I grew up here, and I have never seen the graffiti so bad," said Diane Poston, whose home was targeted by graffiti last week. "I'm so sick of it that I finally put my house up for sale last week. I can't live in this filth."

Some argue that graffiti is just art and not a big deal. But Poston's neighbor, Jerome Blair, said it's much more than that.

"You might think graffiti is harmless; it's a little paint and kids causing trouble," Blair said. "But if you live with it every day, you worry that the graffiti has turned into something bigger and your kids are not safe."

The graffiti and other gang-related crimes have the attention of the Green Bay Police Department's Gang Suppression Unit. On the wall of the department's lobby, a map plotting each graffiti case shows the hardest hit neighborhoods in the central part of the city.

"We have it on city property. We have it in public places. We have it in private property. We have it in businesses. We have it on the streets. It's everywhere," said Lt. Ben Allen, who co-leads the Green Bay Police Department's Gang Unit.

"It's not fair to the majority of residents who try to keep up the neighborhoods and keep their houses nice," Allen said. "All I can say is, this needs to stop."

Effective solution mentioned

Headline: New graffiti abatement team 'perfect solution' to city's graffiti problem

Pull quote: "It's only been a week and already I've noticed a real improvement." – Carol Bunson

Cutline: A sharp rise in graffiti has plagued Green Bay recently, but a new volunteer graffiti abatement team has come to the city's rescue.

Graffiti is back. And in some ways, it's back bigger and bolder than ever.

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"We have it on city property. We have it in public places. We have it in private property. We have it in businesses. We have it on the streets. It's everywhere," says Lt. Ben Allen, who co-leads the Green Bay Police Department's Gang Unit. "Unfortunately, the fact is that violent crimes take precedence and we don't have the time or resources to run around re-painting the city's walls all day every day."

What little cleanup the police officers did seemed useless because more graffiti typically popped back up within a couple days.

Until last week, when the department's volunteer officers joined together to launch a Graffiti Abatement team. The volunteers, who range from 14 to 83 years old, donate their time cleaning up graffiti and keeping an eye out for more to come. And the team members enjoy doing it.
"Mark is earning badges for his Explorers group, and I can tell he feels really good about the work he's doing to help the city," said Carol Bunson, whose son volunteers on the team. "It's only been a week and already I've noticed a real improvement."

The Graffiti Abatement team is off to such a successful start that the mayor is scheduled to recognize the team members at the next city council meeting.

"I want them to know how much we appreciate their hard work and dedication," Mayor Alan Nagy said. "The Abatement team is the perfect solution to our city's graffiti problem. It's a win-win."

Ineffective solution mentioned

Headline: Green Bay continues to battle rampant graffiti with no clear solution in sight

Pull quote: "We just can't keep up. It's a losing battle." – Ben Allen

Cutline: There's no end in sight for Green Bay's graffiti problem, as law enforcement officials say their minimal eradication services can't keep up with the graffiti artists.

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What little cleanup the police officers have done seems useless because more graffiti pops back up within a couple days.

"We just can't keep up," Allen said. "It's a losing battle."

Police officers and residents alike are feeling hopeless about the lack of a clear solution to the graffiti problem. With no plan in place, graffiti is expected to remain rampant.

APPENDIX 2: QUESTIONNAIRES

Study 1 – Emotions survey

Consent and demographic questions

Thank you for your interest in this research study!

My name is Karen McIntyre and I am a Ph.D. candidate at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I am conducting a research study on the effects of news stories. The purpose of the research is to learn more about the impact that news stories have on their audiences.

The survey, which will ask you to read a news story and respond to some questions about the story, should take about 10 minutes and is voluntary. You may stop taking the survey at anytime, and you may skip any question for any reason.

Your answers will remain anonymous. I will report only summaries of the aggregated data. This means that your responses will be combined with all of the other responses received and will not be able to be identified as yours.

If you have any questions regarding this survey, you may contact me via email at kmcintyre@unc.edu.
If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research subject you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Institutional Review Board at (919) 966-3113 or via email at IRB_subjects@unc.edu with study number 14-2976.

Do you agree to participate in this research study? By clicking "yes" below and completing the survey, you agree to be a participant.

○ Yes
○ No

You must be at least 18 years old to participate in this study. Are you at least 18?

○ Yes
○ No

Great! As we get started, it's helpful for us to have a little bit of background information about people who participated in our study.

First, please tell us your gender.
○ Male
○ Female
○ Other

What region of the U.S. do you live in?
○ Northeast
○ Southeast
○ Southwest
○ West
○ Midwest

What is your age?
[＊]

How would you best describe your racial/ethnic group?

- ○ American Indian
- ○ Alaska native
- ○ African American
- ○ Asian or Pacific Islander
- ○ Caucasion
- ○ Hispanic/Latino(a)
- ○ Other (please describe below)

What is your highest level of education obtained?

- ○ Less than high school
- ○ High school or GED
- ○ Some college
- ○ Associate's degree
- ○ Bachelor's degree
- ○ Graduate degree

Affect at pretest

Thank you. Now, please indicate your agreement with the following statements.

Right now, I feel:

Negative ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Positive

Right now, I feel:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Slightly agee	Agree	Strongly agree
Upset	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Hostile	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Alert	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Ashamed	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Inspired	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Nervous	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Determined	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Attentive	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Afraid	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Active	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

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Stimulus story

A news story will appear on the following page. Please **read the story carefully**, as you will not be able to return to the story later. When you are finished reading, please click the arrow on the bottom right of the page and respond to the questions that follow.

Technical problems

Thank you. Before you answer the following questions, did you have any technical issues seeing or reading the news story?

○ No

○ Yes

[ ]

Affect at posttest

Now, please indicate your agreement with the following statements.

The story I just read made me feel:

Negative ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Positive

The story I just read made me feel:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Slightly agee	Agree	Strongly agree
Upset	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Hostile	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Alert	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Ashamed	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Inspired	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Nervous	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Determined	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Attentive	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Afraid	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Active	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Manipulation check

Please rate your agreement with the following statements regarding which emotions you felt while reading the story.

During the story I just read, I felt:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Happy	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Elevated	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Hopeless	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Excited	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Proud	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Angry	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Bored	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Depressed	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Inspired	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Joyful	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Disgusted	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Guilty	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Worried	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Touched	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Interested	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Attitudes toward the story topic

After reading this story, what is your attitude regarding charity parking meter programs?

Charity parking meter programs are:

Unacceptable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Acceptable
Unfavorable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Favorable
Wrong	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Right
Negative	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Positive
Bad	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Good
Foolish	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Wise

Please rate your agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Homelessness is a problem that deserves attention.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Government should spend more money supporting services for the homeless.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Homelessness is a problem in my community.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Perceived self-efficacy

Please rate **how confident you feel** about the following statements.

	Very unconfident	Unconfident	Slightly unconfident	Neither confident nor unconfident	Slightly confident	Confident	Very confident
Nothing can be done to reduce homelessness.*	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
There is something I can do to help address homelessness in my community.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I can support a policy that aims to reduce homelessness.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I can donate money to an organization that supports homelessness services.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I can volunteer at a homeless shelter.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Behavioral intentions/engagement

Please rate **how likely you would be to actually engage** in the following actions regarding the story you just read about a charity parking meter program that collects donations for programs that support the homeless.

I would:

	Very unlikely	Unlikely	Somewhat unlikely	Neither likely nor unlikely	Somewhat likely	Likely	Very likely
Read more stories about the issue.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
"Like" the story on Facebook.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Share the story on social media.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Talk about the story topic with friends or family.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Sign a petition supporting charity parking meter programs.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Donate money to a parking meter that collected donations for homeless services.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Volunteer at a homeless shelter.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Commitment to journalism's core functions (Note: Option labeled with an asterisk was reverse coded)

Please rate your agreement with the following statements assessing the news story.

The story I just read:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Seemed realistic	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Was informative	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Was valuable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Involved a socially significant topic	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Should be shared with people	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Helps make society better	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Involved conflict	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Is likely to impact people	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Seemed credible	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Was interesting	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Was well written	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Was engaging	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Was constructive	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Was sensational	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Allowed different viewpoints to be heard	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Helped hold public officials accountable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

News habits and topic familiarity

Thank you. You're almost finished. We have just a few more questions.

How familiar were you with the topic of the story you just read *before* reading the story about it?

○ Not familiar at all

○ A little familiar

○ Pretty familiar

○ Very familiar

How often do you read news online?

○ Never

○ Less than once a month

○ Monthly

○ Weekly

○ Daily

○ Multiple times a day

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Conclusion

Thank you for participating in this research study.

Please enter your Mechanical Turk ID number below. Then click the continue arrow to submit your survey and receive the code you need to provide Mechanical Turk to receive credit for your participation.

[   ]

Study 2 – Solutions survey

Intro and demographic questions

Thank you for your interest in this research study!

You must be at least 18 years old to participate. Are you at least 18?

○ Yes

○ No

Great, thanks. Now, what is your participant ID number? (This is the black number that you were given at the start of the session.)

[   ]

What is your computer number? (This is the blue number taped to the computer you are working on.)

○ 1

○ 2

○ 3

It's helpful for us to have a bit of background information about people who participate in our study.

First, please tell us your gender.

○ Male

○ Female

○ Other

What is your age?

[⬍]

How would you best describe your racial/ethnic group?

○ American Indian

○ Alaska native

○ African American

○ Asian or Pacific Islander

○ Caucasion

○ Hispanic/Latino(a)

○ Other (please describe below)

[_____]

Affect at pretest

Thank you. Now, please indicate your agreement with the following statement.

Right now, I feel:

Negative | ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ | Positive

Right now, I feel:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Upset	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Hostile	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Alert	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Ashamed	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Inspired	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Nervous	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Determined	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Attentive	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Afraid	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Active	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Stimulus story

A news story will appear on the following page. Please **read the story carefully**, as you will not be able to return to the story later. When you are finished reading, please click the arrow on the bottom right of the page and respond to the questions that follow.

Affect at posttest

Thank you. Now, please indicate your agreement with the following statement.

The story I just read made me feel:

Negative ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Positive

The story I just read made me feel:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Upset	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Hostile	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Alert	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Ashamed	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Inspired	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Nervous	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Determined	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Attentive	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Afraid	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Active	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Attitudes toward the news article

Please indicate your agreement with the following descriptions about the news story you just read.

The story was:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Well written	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Enjoyable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Engaging	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Appealing	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Constructive	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Negative	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Pleasant	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Upsetting	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Sensational	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Depressing	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Inspiring	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Please rate your agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Graffiti is not a problem that deserves attention.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The government should spend more money supporting services that tackle graffiti.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Graffiti is a problem in my community.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Attitudes toward a solution to the problem

After reading this story, what is your attitude regarding programs that attempt to reduce graffiti?

Such programs are:

Unacceptable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Acceptable
Unfavorable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Favorable
Wrong	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Right
Negative	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Positive
Bad	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Good
Foolish	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Wise

Perceived self-efficacy

Please rate **how confident you feel** about the following statements.

	Very unconfident	Unconfident	Slightly unconfident	Neither confident nor unconfident	Slightly confident	Confident	Very confident
Nothing can be done to reduce graffiti.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
There is something I can do to help address graffiti in my community.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I can support a policy that aims to reduce graffiti.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I can donate money to an organization that supports graffiti abatement.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I can volunteer to help remove graffiti in my community.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Behavioral intentions/engagement

Please rate **how likely you would be to actually engage** in the following actions regarding the story you just read about graffiti.

I would:

	Very unlikely	Unlikely	Somewhat unlikely	Neither likely nor unlikely	Somewhat likely	Likely	Very likely
Read more stories about the issue.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
"Like" the story on Facebook.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Share the story on social media.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Talk about the story topic with friends or family.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Sign a petition supporting graffiti reduction.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Donate money to a graffiti abatement program.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Volunteer to help remove graffiti.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Commitment to journalism's core functions

Please rate your agreement with the following statements.

The story I just read:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Seemed realistic	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Was informative	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Was valuable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Involved a socially significant topic	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Should be shared with people	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Helps make society better	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Involved conflict	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Is likely to impact people	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Seemed credible	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Was interesting	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Was well written	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Was engaging	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Was constructive	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Was sensational	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Allowed different viewpoints to be heard	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Helped hold public officials accountable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

News habits and topic familiarity

Thank you. These are the last two questions.

How familiar were you with graffiti issues *before* reading this story?

○ Not familiar at all

○ A little familiar

○ Pretty familiar

○ Very familiar

How often do you read news online?

○ Never

○ Less than once a month

○ Monthly

○ Weekly

○ Daily

○ Multiple times a day

Environmental and other issues impact our campus!

Help us raise awareness by choosing to receive information about the following issues.

<u>CHECK THE TOPICS YOU WOULD LIKE TO RECEIVE INFORMATION ABOUT.</u>

☐ Climate change initiatives

☐ Air quality measures

☐ Water quality measures

☐ Safe disposal of electronics

☐ Recycling innovations

☐ Graffiti removal

☐ Crime reduction

☐ Population control

☐ Ways to alleviate traffic congestion

Please provide your email address: _____

We respect your privacy! Your email address will **<u>not</u>** be shared and will be destroyed after we send you just **<u>one</u>** email with information about the issues you selected. Thank you!

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