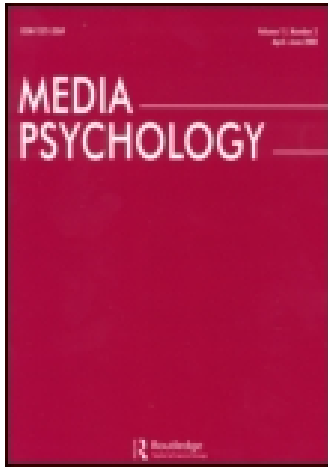


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Ambivalent Versus Univalent Voters: Perceived Media Influences and Third- Person Perceptions

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Ambivalent Versus Univalent Voters: Perceived Media Influences and Third-Person Perceptions

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By differentiating “ambivalent” from “univalent” voters, this study argues that ambivalent voters need information to reach a decision, which implies they are more open to persuasion through media coverage than are univalent voters. In turn, they may infer that election coverage exerts a greater influence on them, resulting in smaller self–other perceptual discrepancies in terms of their coverage susceptibility. Conversely, univalent voters have made their voting choices early during the campaign; for them, only when the intended influence seems desirable does the perceived influence of campaign news on them increase, leading to a smaller self–other perceptual gap. In other words, ambivalent voters engage in motivated inferences to reduce their ambivalence-aroused discomfort, whereas univalent voters engage in motivated inferences to avoid dissonance. The results of a survey conducted during the official campaign for the 2012 Taiwanese presidential election support these predictions, demonstrating the utility of categorizing voters as ambivalent or univalent when examining the perceived effects of election campaign news.

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Election research that explores the perceived influence of campaign information frequently focuses on the effects of a self-serving superiority bias and demonstrates a self–other discrepancy in perceptions of vulnerability (e.g., Hoffner & Rehkoff, 2011; Salwen, 1998). Because people are motivated to boost their self-esteem, they consider themselves superior to others, which in this setting, implies that they perceive themselves as less vulnerable to the influence of campaign information than others are. The phenomenon appears robust, regardless of the voter's political identification (e.g., Lovejoy, Cheng, & Riffe, 2010; Wei, Chia, & Lo, 2011), so prior research tends to ignore individual differences.

However, this line of literature also suggests that perceived media influences and the self–other vulnerability gap depend on the desirability of the influence being exerted (Perloff, 1993). The desirability of the intended influence may vary as a function of individual differences, such as a person's voting ambivalence; that is, voters might be ambivalent and express simultaneous favorable views toward two opposing candidates or parties, or they might be univalent, in that they express unilaterally favorable attitudes for only one candidate or party (see also Lavine, 2001; Rudolph & Popp, 2007). In relation to voting decisions, this article seeks to extend prior research by examining voting ambivalence and clearly distinguishing ambivalent voters, who express a high likelihood of voting for both candidates, from univalent voters, who clearly support one candidate over the other. In so doing, this study addresses a possibility that has been generally ignored: Voters with different levels of ambivalence toward candidates may react to campaign information differently, and to the extent they believe its influence is desirable, they may infer a greater perceived influence on their choices.

Ambivalent voters, who need to reach a decision, may believe that campaign information can help facilitate their decisions and thus infer a desirable influence. Attitude literature already suggests that people with ambivalent attitudes are more open to persuasion, because they are motivated to choose one side to reduce their discomfort (Bell & Esses, 2002; Monteith, 1996). Extending the notion from persuasion to perceived influence, this study reasons that voting ambivalence might increase the perceived effects of election coverage. If the drive to reduce discomfort increases persuasion susceptibility, it also should encourage inferences of enhanced influence.

Although univalent voters are less affected by media coverage than ambivalent voters, in situations in which the desirability of the intended influence is high, even univalent voters may perceive intended influences positively. An intended influence appears desirable if admitting to being persuaded can help the person avoid cognitive dissonance. In an election context, the desirability of an intended influence hinges on its target (opposed vs. supported candidates) and its valence (positive vs. negative). Thus, this study envisions four possible scenarios and explores how the perceived influence of election coverage, as well as gaps in perceived influ-

ences (third-person perceptions), vary for univalent voters in these different situations. Dissonance avoidance motivations should encourage inference-making among univalent voters, such that they infer greater intended influences on themselves when coverage of their supported (opposing) candidate is positive (negative) rather than negative (positive).

The proposed model (see Figure 1) illustrates different perceived coverage effects among ambivalent and univalent voters, with the central argument that people engage in motivated reasoning to reduce discomfort or avoid dissonance. Ambivalent voters infer a greater perceived influence of election coverage because they are motivated to use it to form favorable attitudes toward one candidate, in their effort to reduce ambivalence-aroused discomfort. Univalent voters instead infer greater perceived influence when

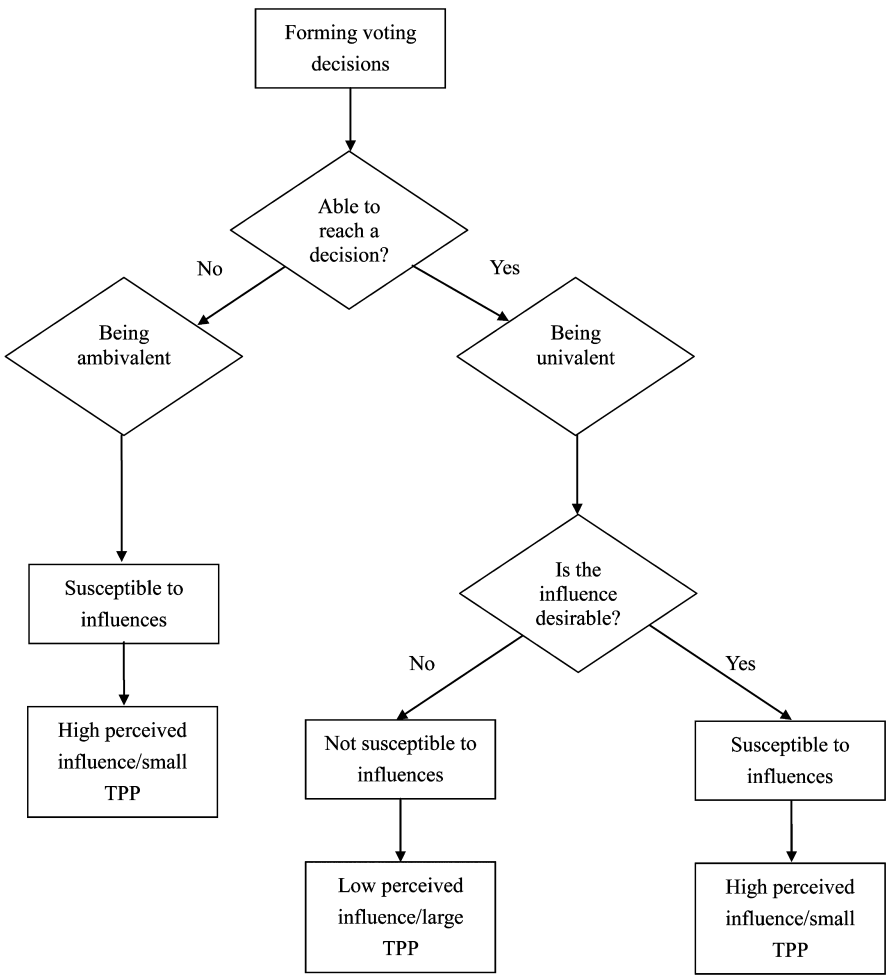


FIGURE 1 Proposed model.

the coverage is attitude congruent, because that information helps them avoid dissonance. If estimations of influences on the self increase, the self–other discrepancy that arises in relation to perceptions of vulnerability should diminish, assuming that perceptions of the influences on others remain fixed.

This study also explores whether voter ambivalence affects people's intentions to take actions to limit biased news coverage. A paternalism explanation would argue that greater self–other discrepancy in terms of perceived influence increases intentions to support media restrictions (McLeod, Detenber, & Eveland, 2001; McLeod, Eveland, & Nathanson, 1997). Ambivalent voters, who perceive smaller self–other discrepancies, then should express lower intentions to take action against biased coverage. However, in line with the idea that ambivalent voters need election coverage to facilitate their decision, an alternative, expectation-based explanation suggests that ambivalent voters, compared with univalent ones, may be more likely to expect journalists to do a good job and provide informative, unbiased coverage. If they find that the press fails to meet their expectations, they likely take action. This study examines which of these two explanations applies best.

To test these ideas and the proposed model, this investigation used data collected from a survey of eligible voters in the 2012 Taiwanese presidential election. Voting rates in presidential elections have been high in Taiwan since the first direct election in 1996, ranging from 74.26% to 82.67%, with an average at 77.94% across the five elections (International IDEA, 2012). These data suggest that people in Taiwan are willing to participate in the political process in general and cast their vote in the election in particular. It is thus likely that even those who do not form any preference for a candidate feel obligated to cast their votes; that is, a strong intention to vote may be accompanied by difficulty determining who deserves support. These ambivalent voters, who have a high need for orientation, may constitute a great percentage of the electorate. Accordingly, Taiwan provides an ideal setting in which to test for perceived media influence on ambivalent versus univalent voters. The findings regarding the importance of individual differences as antecedents of perceived media influence also add to the extant literature.

THE 2012 TAIWANESE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Elections for the president of Taiwan are held every four years. The election for the thirteenth president (and vice president) took place on January 14, 2012—the fifth direct election for the president since 1996. Three sets of candidates represented the three main political parties: Ying-jeou Ma and Den-yih Wu for the Kuomintang (KMT), Ing-wen Tsai and Jia-chuan Su nominated by the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), and James Soong Chu-yu and Ruey-shiung Lin representing the People First Party (PFP). Political parties in Taiwan mainly distinguish themselves according to their position in favor of

unification with (Pan-blue camp) or independence from (Pan-green camp) China. Presidential elections usually involve a contest between forerunners representing each coalition. The KMT and PFP are both members of the Pan-blue camp, while DPP represents the Pan-green camp.

In 2012, the electorate chose between Ma for KMT and Tsai for DPP, the two forerunners in the Pan-blue and Pan-green camps, respectively. The official campaign period ran from December 17, 2011, to January 13, 2012, during which time the candidates could run political ads and hold events or rallies; media coverage of the elections also was intensive during this period. Ultimately, the standing president Ma was reelected with 51.50% of the votes; Tsai and Soong garnered 45.63% and 2.77%, respectively.

AMBIVALENT VERSUS UNIVALENT VOTERS

An alternative to the traditional definition of attitude, which suggests that positive and negative evaluations are reciprocal and that attitudes can be either favorable or unfavorable (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993), asserts that positive and negative evaluations of an object actually can be independent (Kaplan, 1972). That is, in addition to univalent positive and negative attitudes, people may hold ambivalent or indifferent attitudes (Kaplan, 1972). In the former case, people maintain simultaneous positive and negative evaluations, whereas, with indifference, they exhibit the simultaneous absence of positive or negative evaluations. Although ambivalence usually refers to responses to the same objects, in a choice context, it also can describe the state in which people are torn between two options. In some situations, people can make only one choice among different, competing options. Ideally, if they hold positive attitudes toward one option and negative attitudes toward the other, they easily make up their mind and reach a choice. Yet, in reality, people may feel positive toward both options; in an election context, for example, voters might prefer to vote for both candidates to the same degree or prefer to support neither. In the former case, voters feel ambivalent and unable to make up their mind, such that they suffer voting ambivalence.¹ In the latter case, voters are indifferent between the two options.

Prior research usually categorizes voters as partisan or independent (Keith, Magleby, Nelson, Orr, & Westlye, 1992); the proposed ambivalent–univalent voter typology differs from this partisan–independent categorization. The former describes a state, which can be independent of a person's party orientation and is specific to a particular candidate (Lavine, 2001). In a study of five U.S. presidential elections between 1980 and 1996, approximately 30% of voters indicated feeling ambivalent toward the candidates (Lavine, 2001). Casting a vote can be very complicated because the decision involves the simultaneous consideration of various party ideologies and candidates. In each election, even voters who normally support one party's

candidates may find a candidate nominated by that party less likable than the one chosen by an opposing party. In addition, even truly independent voters, who frequently shift between parties, may find one candidate ideal and reach a single-minded decision state early in the campaign. In any particular election, partisans, thus, can be ambivalent voters and independent voters can be univalent. Categorizing voters in terms of ambivalence, a tool more recently adopted by political scientists, can explain variations in candidate evaluations and voting behaviors beyond the level of variance explained by political partisanship (Lavine, 2001; McGraw, Hasecke, & Conger, 2003).

Lavine (2001) further asserts that ambivalence is a prevalent characteristic with “nontrivial implications for political judgment and choice” (p. 915); feeling ambivalent toward presidential candidates may be especially consequential. For example, regardless of the strength of their party identification, ambivalent voters rely less on party cues for their judgments (Basinger & Lavine, 2005), have a greater need for cognition (Rudolph & Popp, 2007), take longer to determine their voting intention (Lavine, 2001; Nir, 2005), and offer less stable evaluations of candidates (Lavine, 2001). However, as an election campaign unfolds, the percentage of ambivalent voters decreases (Rudolph, 2011). Therefore, ambivalent voters may be open to the influence of campaign information to help them reach a decision, a process that would enable them to shift to a univalent state. Furthermore, their torn, ambivalent state likely influences their own perceived vulnerability to persuasion.

FEELING AMBIVALENT AND PERSUASION

Persuasion literature indicates that people with ambivalent attitudes toward a target are more open to the influence of persuasive information pertaining to that target than are those with univalent attitudes (e.g., Armitage & Conner, 2000; Bell & Esses, 2002; Zemborain & Johar, 2007). These results are consistent, regardless of whether the attitude targets are issues or persons. For example, hospital workers who feel ambivalent about low-fat diets generate more attitude changes in accordance with messages that promote them than do univalent workers (Armitage & Conner, 2000). People with ambivalent attitudes toward Native Americans also show polarized attitude changes, depending on whether they read positive or negative essays about this group, whereas univalent people do not (Bell & Esses, 2002). Notably, ambivalent participants’ attitudes toward a political candidate are polarized by the valence of the information about the candidate, regardless of the credibility of the source, but univalent participants’ attitudes shift in accordance with message valence only when the source is credible (Zemborain & Johar, 2007). These findings suggest that when people experience attitudinal ambivalence, they are more susceptible to the influence of new information.

Because ambivalence is an uncomfortable state (Monteith, 1996), people are motivated to reduce it (Bell & Esses, 2002), such as by choosing a specific side and developing positive and negative or polarized evaluations. To swing to a univalent side, these ambivalent people need new information. Therefore, new information exerts its intended influence on ambivalent people better than on univalent people. This effect explains the findings that, to the degree ambivalent people perceive a new message as able to reduce their felt ambivalence, they are more likely to elaborate on that message (Clark, Wegener, & Fabrigar, 2008).

Similarly, political communication literature demonstrates that people who use media to match their surveillance motives are more likely to infer a greater media influence on themselves (Price, Huang, & Tewksbury, 1997). Similarly, agenda-setting effects appear enhanced among people with a high need for orientation, which is determined by uncertainty (McCombs, 2005). Ambivalent candidate attitudes imply greater uncertainty (Meffert, Guge, & Lodge, 2004), such that when people are willing to vote but feel torn between candidates, they are uncertain about their choices and need new information to reach a decision, which should also reduce their discomfort. These ambivalent voters, compared with univalent voters, therefore, should find election coverage useful and be more susceptible to its influence. As a result, they also might infer that election coverage has a greater influence on them.

VOTER AMBIVALENCE AND THE PERCEIVED INFLUENCE OF ELECTION COVERAGE

Prior research has explored perceived influences of campaign coverage (Rucinski & Salmon, 1990; Salwen, 1998), mainly with decided voters (Duck, Hogg, & Terry, 1995; Salwen, 1998) or without identifying voter differences as a potential moderator (Rucinski & Salmon, 1990). This study instead postulates that voter ambivalence, as an individual factor, affects perceived media influence in elections and captures a psychological state in which people perceive more value from new information. Prior research already has shown that when people find information useful, they infer that it has greater influence on them. For example, Rucinski and Salmon (1990) note that people rate the influence of election news as greater than that of political advertising, likely because they think that news, which generally comes from a less biased source than does political advertising, provides more useful information. Ambivalent, as opposed to univalent, voters who need information to reach a decision and reduce their ambivalence-triggered discomfort also should infer a greater influence of news information. This notion may explain Duck *et al.*'s (1995) findings that voters who experience uncertainty are more likely to believe that campaign communications, such as news coverage, debates, polls, and ads, exert a greater influence on them than

on people without such uncertainty. Because ambivalent voters are in an uncertain state and find more utility in election information that facilitates their decisions and reduces their ambivalence-driven discomfort, they should infer a greater influence.

H1: Ambivalent voters infer a greater influence of election coverage on themselves than do univalent voters.

DESIRABILITY OF THE INTENDED INFLUENCE AND THE PERCEIVED INFLUENCE OF ELECTION COVERAGE

People may generally deny their vulnerability to media influences, but those perceptions actually should vary as a function of voter differences and the desirability of the intended influence. As noted, ambivalent voters tend to perceive greater coverage effects, regardless of its valence, because they welcome all possible information. Alternatively, univalent voters should perceive greater coverage effects only if they find its intended influence desirable (Figure 1).

The desirability of intended influences is associated with a greater perceived influence on the self (see Perloff, 1993). For example, because it is more desirable to be persuaded by public service announcements than by product advertising, the former generate greater perceived influences on the self (Gunther & Thorson, 1992). In an election context, because it is more desirable to be persuaded by media coverage than by political advertising, the former produces a greater perceived influence (Rucinski & Salmon, 1990).

Even though univalent voters are less affected by media coverage than ambivalent voters, in situations in which the desirability of the intended influence is high, even univalent voters may perceive intended influences positively, such as when admitting their susceptibility would help them avoid cognitive dissonance. People tend to agree with information that is congruent with their existing attitudes because disagreeing with it would arouse cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). Accordingly, they infer greater influence from such information, which implies motivated reasoning (Kunda, 1990). Thus, the desirability of the intended influence likely depends on the target and valence of the coverage, as Table 1 depicts.

The desirability of an intended influence of news partly depends on which candidate is being featured. For example, in exploring the influence of negative political advertising on voters, Cohen and Davis (1991) find that supporters of George H. W. Bush perceived a political advertisement that attacked Bush as having a lesser effect on them than on supporters of Michael Dukakis, whereas the Dukakis supporters believed that a political advertisement that attacked their candidate influenced them to a lower degree than it did Bush supporters. In line with their findings, this study reasons that

TABLE 1 Factors Determining the Desirability of the Intended Influence

	Opposed candidates	Supported candidates
Positive coverage	Being influenced is not desirable <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lower influence on the self• TPP	Being influenced is desirable <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Greater influence on the self• Reversed TPP
Negative coverage	Being influenced is desirable <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Greater influence on the self• Reversed TPP	Being influenced is not desirable <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lower influence on the self• TPP

Note. TPP = third-person perception.

people should infer a greater (smaller) influence if admitting susceptibility to information avoids (arouses) cognitive dissonance, because the information endorses supported (opposed) candidates.

In turn, the desirability of intended influences also hinges on the valence of the information. Cohen and Davis (1991) indicate that the valence of the coverage largely determines the desirability of its intended influence, because positive coverage tends to be associated with greater credibility and more information value. Similarly, Wei, Lo, and Lu (2011) propose that some people find positive value in news coverage of election polls, whereas others worry about its negative consequences; people who view news about election polls as beneficial infer a smaller self–other vulnerability gap, whereas those who regard news about election polls as harmful infer a greater such gap.

These arguments suggest that depending on the target, positive and negative information about a candidate has varying usefulness and desirability, in terms of its intended influence for univalent voters. These voters have made up their minds, so they prefer to express and read opinions congruent with their decisions. Because positive news stories that support a preferred (opposed) candidate strengthen (challenge) their attitudes, univalent voters perceive the influence of these stories as desirable (undesirable) and a greater (smaller) influence on themselves.

Both ambivalent and univalent voters may perceive a greater influence of positive coverage, though for different reasons. The former need information to make a decision and reduce their discomfort; the latter seek to avoid cognitive dissonance. Therefore, ambivalent voters perceive greater news effects, regardless of the target or valence of the coverage. In contrast, for univalent voters, the degree of perceived influence varies, depending on whether the positive message centers on a supported or an opposed candidate.

H2: When coverage is positive, ambivalent and univalent voters who support the featured candidate infer greater perceived influence on themselves than univalent voters who oppose the candidate.

In relation to the current study context, this research focuses on the two main party candidates and further specifies:

- H2a: The perceived influence of positive coverage of Ma is greater among ambivalent voters and Ma supporters than Tsai supporters.
- H2b: The perceived influence of positive coverage of Tsai is greater among ambivalent voters and Tsai supporters than Ma supporters.

Similarly, ambivalent and univalent voters who support the featured candidate should perceive greater influences of negative coverage than univalent voters who oppose this candidate, but again for different reasons. Ambivalent voters who need information infer its higher perceived influence regardless of the news target and valence, because of its utility in reducing their ambivalence. Univalent voters infer a greater influence if doing so helps them avoid cognitive dissonance, such as when the negative coverage is attitude congruent. Because negative news stories that criticize their opposed (supported) candidate strengthen (challenge) their attitudes, univalent voters consider this influence desirable (undesirable) and perceive a greater (smaller) influence. The degree of perceived influence of negative coverage, thus, varies, depending on whether the message applies to the supported or an opposed candidate.

- H3: When coverage is negative, ambivalent and univalent voters who oppose the featured candidate infer greater perceived influence on themselves than univalent voters who support the candidate.

In the context of this study,

- H3a: The perceived influence of negative coverage of Ma is greater among ambivalent voters and Tsai supporters than Ma supporters.
- H3b: The perceived influence of negative coverage of Tsai is greater among ambivalent voters and Ma supporters than Tsai supporters.

VOTER AMBIVALENCE AND THIRD-PERSON PERCEPTIONS OF ELECTION COVERAGE

Third-person perception (TPP) refers to differences in perceptions of the influence of persuasive communication on the self and on others (Davison, 1983). It is triggered by two processes: overestimation of the influences on others and underestimation of the influence on the self (Perloff, 1993). The desirability of perceived influence may alter perceptions of the influence on the self, but it is unlikely to alter perceptions of the influence on general

others in an election context, for two reasons. First, the desirability of the intended influence, as defined in this study, depends on the voter, whereas the perceived influences on others are less likely to vary as a function of the potential desirability of the influence to any particular voter; that is, even if a voter perceives the influence of an election story as desirable to the self, it is difficult for him or her to assess its desirability to others unless their party alignment information is available. This differs from assessing desirability of the influence of malicious media content, such as violence and pornography, which people tend to perceive as undesirable in terms of the influence on both the self and others. Second, the idea that the desirability of the influence affects the person's perceptions of its effects on himself or herself reflects ambivalent voters' motives to reduce discomfort and univalent voters' motives to avoid dissonance. Such self-driven motives likely emerge only when people infer the influence of election coverage on themselves, not on others. Ambivalent and univalent voters should not differ in their perceptions of the influence of election coverage on others, even if the desirability of this influence varies. If estimations of the influence on others do not vary, but estimations of these influences on the self do, as proposed previously, the TPP should change accordingly.

Extensive campaign information studies also document the presence of TPP for election news (Salwen, 1998), polls (Price & Stroud, 2005; Wei, Lo, et al., 2011), and debates (Duck et al., 1995), as well as political advertising in general (Cohen & Davis, 1991; Golan, Banning, & Lundy, 2008; Wei & Lo, 2007). People perceive influences on others as significantly greater than the influences on themselves. For example, in a study that explored the perceived influence of five types of election-related media content (news, political ads, negative political ads, debates, and polls), Rucinski and Salmon (1990) report significant self–other discrepancy in perceived vulnerability. Research on campaign news has generated similar results (Salwen, 1998).

Yet, relatively less attention centers on the potential moderating influence of voter characteristics on perceived vulnerability to campaign communications or election coverage. According to the hostile media hypothesis, party supporters who perceive a negative bias in the media coverage of their candidates tend to generate greater TPP (Banning, 2006). Furthermore, the strength of political identification predicts greater TPP. Duck et al. (1995) find that self–other differences in perceived media vulnerability increase among those with stronger political identifications and a greater commitment to a political ideology, compared to those with weaker political identifications.

This study explores another important moderator: whether voters are ambivalent or univalent. Because TPP pertains to differences in the perceived influences on the self and others, and this study predicts that these perceived influences decrease among ambivalent as opposed to univalent voters, it appears likely that TPP may change with this voter characteristic.

- H4: TPPs of media effects (televised news, newspapers, online news, and debates) on voting decisions are smaller among ambivalent than among univalent voters.

DESIRABILITY OF INTENDED INFLUENCES AND TPP OF ELECTION COVERAGE

In a review, Perloff (1993) concludes that TPP is less likely to emerge when messages are personally beneficial. In a similar vein, because the desirability of the intended influence of campaign coverage varies as a function of the interaction between its target and its valence, this study predicts that TPP varies accordingly.

Prior research demonstrates that the TPP of campaign messages is moderated by the featured candidates. For example, Cohen and Davis (1991) find TPP among Bush/Dukakis supporters when a political advertisement attacked Bush/Dukakis but reversed TPP among them when the political advertisement attacked Dukakis/Bush. Similarly, Wei, Chia, et al. (2011) demonstrate that people's TPP of vulnerability to polls diminishes (increases) when those polls indicate support for the candidates they support (oppose). People likely form these different perceptions to avoid cognitive dissonance, which is why TPP varies as a function of which candidates the coverage targets.

The perceived self–other discrepancy in media vulnerability grows more pronounced when information is negative or socially undesirable. For example, the self–other vulnerability gap emerges for product advertising but not for public service announcements, whose intended influence is more socially desirable (Gunther & Thorson, 1992). In an election context, the TPP vulnerability gap similarly arises in response to negative political advertising (Cohen & Davis, 1991).

Furthermore, TPP depends on the perceived differences between the voter's own vulnerability and that of others. As argued previously, the perceived influence on the self, but not on others, should change with coverage valence or targets; the degree of TPP, thus, should change only in accordance with change in the perceived influence on the self. As noted, when they read positive coverage of a candidate, ambivalent and univalent voters who support that candidate infer greater perceived influence on themselves. These enhanced influence estimates should reduce the perceived differences between the self and other. Thus,

- H5: When the coverage is positive, ambivalent and univalent voters who support the featured candidate generate smaller TPP than univalent voters who oppose the candidate.

In this specific study context,

H5a: The TPP of positive coverage of Ma is smaller among ambivalent voters and Ma supporters than among Tsai supporters.

H5b: The TPP of positive coverage of Tsai is smaller among ambivalent voters and Tsai supporters than among Ma supporters.

As postulated, when reading negative coverage of a candidate, ambivalent and univalent voters who oppose the candidate likely infer a greater perceived influence of this coverage on themselves than do univalent voters who support the candidate. This enhanced estimation should attenuate perceptions of self–other differences, such that:

H6: When the coverage is negative, ambivalent and univalent voters who oppose the featured candidate generate smaller TPP than univalent voters who support the candidate.

Specifically,

H6a: The TPP of negative coverage of Ma is smaller among ambivalent voters and Tsai supporters than Ma supporters.

H6b: The TPP of negative coverage of Tsai is smaller among ambivalent voters and Ma supporters than Tsai supporters.

VOTER AMBIVALENCE AND ACTIONS AGAINST BIASED ELECTION COVERAGE

The relationship between TPP and behavioral outcomes is a central concern for communication researchers. Perceptions of self–other vulnerability gaps often induce strong support for strict regulations on media information, such as pornography (Gunther, 1995) or depictions of violence (Rojas, Shah, & Faber, 1996). In election contexts, such perceptual gaps are associated with greater support for restrictions on biased news (Salwen, 1998) and news about election polls (Wei, Chia, et al., 2011). Such findings generally reflect a paternalism perspective (McLeod, Detenber, et al., 2001; McLeod, Eveland, et al., 1997), which contends that when people perceive that materials are harmful to others, especially those who are incapable of screening harmful content and need protection, they express greater intention to engage in protective behaviors. Therefore, larger perceptual gaps lead to greater behavioral intentions.

Because the focus of this article is the difference between ambivalent and univalent voters, whereas prior research has examined the relationship between TPP and related protective behaviors, the present exploration entails

whether voter ambivalence affects intentions to take actions to limit biased news coverage or media, when the perceived influence on the self and others and TPP are taken into account. Extant research offers competing predictions of the possible influences of voter ambivalence. On the one hand, because ambivalent voters generate smaller TPP, they may express lower intentions to take action against biased news coverage, in line with the paternalism explanation. On the other hand, ambivalent voters, in comparison with univalent ones, need election coverage to facilitate their decisions and expect journalists to perform their jobs, that is, to provide information. As a result, these voters should be more motivated to take action if journalists fail to meet their expectations, which implies an expectation explanation. To examine which explanation applies, this study tests the following research question:

RQ1: Are ambivalent voters more or less likely to engage in actions against biased news coverage and media than univalent voters?

METHODOLOGY

Procedures

At the beginning of the 2012 official campaign period for Taiwan's presidential election (December 17, 2011 to January 13, 2012), registered students at three universities—including undergraduate and postgraduate students, as well as participants in various executive master's programs—received e-mailed solicitations to participate in an online survey, in return for the chance to win a gift drawing. Those who agreed clicked on the link provided in the e-mail, which took them to an online survey powered by SurveyMonkey. The survey remained accessible during the official campaign period, up until election day on January 14, 2012. During this period, they received three reminder e-mails but were allowed to answer the survey only once, to reduce repeated respondents. The 6,264 people who responded were randomly assigned to six surveys for different purposes, and 1,010 completed this election survey, which took less than 10 minutes. Of the respondents, 682 (67.5%) were eligible voters. The data analyses were based on these eligible voters, whose mean age was 24.00 years ($SD = 4.52$, ranging from 20 to 59 years), and 43.5% were men.

Categorization of Voter Ambivalence: Ambivalent Versus Univalent Voters

Respondents reported their voting intentions toward Ma and Tsai, using a 1–5 scale (*not at all likely* to *very likely*). The average voting intention was

TABLE 2 Ambivalence Scores Based on Griffin's Formula: $(M + T)/2 - |M - T|$

Tsai/Ma	1	2	3	4	5
1 ^a	1.0	.5	0	-.5	-.1
2	.5	2.0	1.5	1.0	.5
3	0	1.5	3.0	2.5	2.0
4	-.5	1.0	2.5	4.0	3.5
5	-1.0	.5	2.0	3.5	5.0

^aRespondents reported their voting intention toward Ma and Tsai, using a scale with 1 (*not at all likely*) and 5 (*very likely*). M represents voting intention toward Ma, and T represents voting intention toward Tsai.
Bold = ambivalent voters.

3.36 ($SD = 1.39$) for Ma and 2.78 ($SD = 1.33$) for Tsai. These responses determined whether each voter was categorized as ambivalent or univalent, according to Griffin's ambivalence formula: $(M + T)/2 - |M - T|$, where M indicates voting likelihood for Ma and T refers to voting likelihood for Tsai. Furthermore, intensity was captured by the average intention to vote for the two candidates, $(M + T)/2$; similarity was captured by the absolute difference in voting intentions for the two candidates, $|M - T|$. Thus, if a person was very likely to vote for Ma (=5) and equally likely to vote for Tsai (=5), he or she would earn a high ambivalence score of 5 $((5 + 5)/2 - |5 - 5|)$. Respondents who scored higher than 2.5 represented ambivalent voters (see Table 2). Those who scored lower than 2.5 could represent three different groups, depending on their relative voting intention scores: univalent Ma supporters ($M > T$), univalent Tsai supporters ($T > M$), and indifferent voters ($M = T$). The sample sizes were 242 ambivalent voters (35.5%), 257 Ma supporters (37.7%), 149 Tsai supporters (21.8%), and 34 indifferent voters (5%).

The correspondence between voter ambivalence and voter identification was not high (see Table 3). Moreover, the ambivalence scores suggested that 45.22% (175) of respondents who indicated they were independent voters actually supported Ma or Tsai.

TABLE 3 Classification of Voter Ambivalence Across Party Identification

	Pan-green	Pan-blue	Independent	Total
Indifferent	3	3	28	34
Ma supporters	2	157	97	256
Tsai supporters	71	0	78	149
Ambivalent supporters	21	36	184	241
Total	97	196	387	680

Notes. Two respondents did not indicate their party orientation.

Measurements

Perceived effects of election news on the self and others. Respondents rated the influence of four types of news (televised, newspapers, online, and presidential debates and related news) on their voting decisions in the 2012 presidential election (1 = *not at all* to 5 = *a great deal*). Their responses to the four items were averaged to form a composite measure of perceived effects of election news on oneself ($M = 2.90$, $SD = .78$, $\alpha = .80$). Using the same scale, respondents rated the influence of these four types of election news on the voting decisions of other voters. The average responses to these four items created the composite measure of perceived effects of election news on others ($M = 3.65$, $SD = .63$, $\alpha = .70$).

TPPs of election news. The derivation of the TPP scores involved subtracting the perceived effects of election news on the self from the perceived effects on others ($M = .76$, $SD = .77$).

Perceived influence of positive media coverage on self and others. Respondents assessed the influence of positive coverage of Ma and Tsai on their voting decisions, using two items for each candidate,² on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*a great deal*).

Perceived influence of negative media coverage on self and others. Respondents rated the influence of negative coverage of Ma and Tsai on their voting decisions, again using two items for each candidate,³ on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*a great deal*).

Actions against biased news coverage. Respondents assessed the likelihood that they would engage in the following behaviors: “sign petitions for fair media reports of elections,” “boycott news organizations that reported elections with bias,” “support legislative action to penalize news organizations that reported elections unfairly,” and “support legislative action to ban unfair reports of elections,” using scales from 1 (*not likely at all*) to 5 (*very likely*) ($M = 3.14$, $SD = .83$, $\alpha = .77$).

Party identification. To indicate their party orientation, respondents could choose among Pan-blue, Pan-green, or independent. The Pan-green and Pan-blue camps are informal, common political affiliation descriptions in Taiwan; the former refer to supporters of the DPP, Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU), or minor Taiwan Independence Party (TAIP), whereas the latter identify with the KMT, PFP, or the New Party (CNP). Among the 680 respondents who indicated their party orientation, 387 (56.91%) claimed they were independent voters, 196 (28.82%) suggested that they were Pan-blue camp voters, and 97 (14.26%) indicated that they were Pan-green camp voters.

Control variables. The analysis also considered demographic information. The respondents indicated their birth year and gender, to provide demographic data. The analysis also considered news attention, which enhances perceived effects on self (Wei, Lo, & Lu, 2007). Respondents reported how much attention they paid to election news in the 2012 presidential election

(1 = *none at all* to 5 = *a great deal*; $M = 1.93$, $SD = 1.05$). The analysis included scales for election elaboration and concern about the election, to reflect respondents' interest in elections, because this factor increases perceived media effects (Rucinski & Salmon, 1990). Respondents rated the degree of their election elaboration by responding to the prompt, "I have spent a lot of time thinking about the consequences of the presidential election." The 1–5 response scale was anchored by *strongly disagree* and *strongly agree* ($M = 1.93$, $SD = 1.05$). Respondents indicated the degree of their concern about the election using five items (e.g., "I am worried about the outcomes of the presidential election"; $M = 3.29$, $SD = .80$, $\alpha = .81$). Finally, prior research suggests that biased media content lowers perceptions of effects on the self but increases TPP (Rucinski & Salmon, 1990). Because this study examines the impact of voting ambivalence on perceived media effects, it is important to partial out the influence of perceived media credibility. The respondents therefore assessed the perceived credibility of election coverage in the 2012 presidential election on a 5-item, 5-point scale (e.g., "News coverage of this election is fair"; 1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*; $M = 2.31$, $SD = .68$, $\alpha = .90$).

RESULTS

In addition to the analyses of covariance (ANCOVA) or repeated measures ANCOVA conducted to test the hypotheses, multiple regressions conducted with both party orientation and voter ambivalence, entered as two sets of variables, differentiated the unique contribution of voter ambivalence from that of party orientation. Two orthogonal contrast codes represented party identification (1, -1, 0 and .5, .5, -1 for Pan-blue, Pan-green, and independent voters). The tests of Hypotheses 1 and 4 involved all respondents and relied on two orthogonal contrasts codes for voter ambivalence (1, -1, 0 and .5, .5, -1 for univalent Ma supporters, univalent Tsai supporters, and ambivalent voters), which enabled comparisons between ambivalent and univalent voters. Then the tests of Hypotheses 2, 3, 5, and 6 excluded indifferent voters and used two effects codes for voter ambivalence (1, 0, -1 and 0, 1, -1 for univalent Ma supporters, univalent Tsai supporters, and ambivalent voters), to facilitate comparisons of ambivalent voters with Ma supporters (code 1) and Tsai supporters (code 2).

Hypotheses Tests

The ANCOVA for the perceived influence of election news on the self showed that the main effect of voter ambivalence was significant (see Table 4). A planned contrast indicated that ambivalent voters generated significantly greater perceptions of this influence than did univalent voters.

TABLE 4 Perceived Influence of Election Coverage: Indifferent, Univalent, and Ambivalent Voters

	Means			Planned contrasts								
	Indifferent (I) (<i>N</i> = 34)	Univalent (U) (<i>N</i> = 405)	Ambivalent (A) (<i>N</i> = 241)	Main effects			I vs. A		U vs. A		I vs. U	
				<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Perceived influence on the self (H1)	2.88 (.83)	2.83 (.81)	3.01 (.69)	8.54	.01	.02	0.77	.44	4.13	.01	1.08	.28
Perceived influence on others	3.74 (.66)	3.65 (.66)	3.65 (.57)	0.71	.49	.01	0.99	.32	0.37	.71	1.18	.24
TPP (H4)	0.85 (.98)	0.82 (.78)	0.63 (.71)	7.18	.01	.02	1.58	.12	3.76	.01	0.08	.93

Notes. *N* = 680. In the analyses, age, gender, attention, election elaboration, concern about the election, and perceived credibility of election coverage were analyzed as control variables.

The results supported Hypothesis 1, in that ambivalent voters perceived themselves as more subject to the influence of election news than univalent voters. As Table 4 shows, neither the contrast between ambivalent voters and indifferent voters nor that between univalent and indifferent voters was significant. Hierarchical multiple regression analyses further indicated that only voter ambivalence, not party affiliation, accounted for the significant variance in this perceived influence on the self (see Table 5). The results also confirmed that ambivalent voters inferred a greater influence than did univalent voters (code 2).

Together, Hypotheses 2 and 3 suggest a significant three-way interaction effect of candidate type by valence by voter ambivalence on the perceived influence on the self. A repeated measure ANCOVA, with candidate and valence as within-subject factors and voter ambivalence as the between-subject factor, confirmed that the three-way interaction was significant, $F(2, 635) = 69.03, p < .01, \eta^2 = .18$.

Furthermore, with regard to Hypothesis 2a (positive coverage of Ma), an ANCOVA indicated that the main effects of voter ambivalence were signifi-

TABLE 5 Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Perceived Influence on the Self and TPP

Predictor	Self		TPP	
	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β
Step 1	.01		.01	
Age		-.05		-.06
Gender		-.04		.02
Step 2	.09**		.05**	
Attention		.24**		-.19**
Elaboration		-.01		-.03
Concern		.11*		-.02
News credibility		.04		-.07
Step 3	.02**		.02**	
Party code 1 ^a		.02		-.03
Party code 2		-.02		.05
Ambivalence code 1 ^b		.15**		-.13**
Ambivalence code 2		-.01		-.03
Total R^2	.12**		.08**	

Notes. $N = 680$.

^aTwo orthogonal contrasts codes were created for party identification (1, -1, 0 and .5, .5, -1 for Pan-blue camp, Pan-green camp, and independent voters). The first code specified the difference between Pan-blue camp and Pan-green camps, and the second difference distinguished partisans and independent voters.

^bTwo orthogonal contrasts codes were created for voter ambivalence (1, -1, 0 and .5, .5, -1 for ambivalent, univalent, and indifferent voters). The first code specified the difference between ambivalent and univalent voters. The second code specified the difference between the averaged responses of ambivalent and univalent voters and those of indifferent voters.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

cant (see Table 6). According to a planned contrast, the difference between ambivalent voters and Ma supporters was not significant, but ambivalent voters inferred significantly greater influence than Tsai supporters, in support of Hypothesis 2a. Hierarchical multiple regression analyses also confirmed that even with party affiliation included in the model, ambivalent voters inferred greater influence than Tsai supporters (code 2), though they did not infer different influence from Ma supporters (code 1) (see Table 7).

Similarly, for Hypothesis 2b (positive coverage of Tsai), the ANCOVA results showed that the main effects of voter ambivalence were significant (see Table 6). The planned contrast revealed that the difference between ambivalent voters and Tsai supporters was not significant, whereas ambivalent voters inferred greater influence than did Ma supporters, in line with Hypothesis 2b. The hierarchical multiple regression analyses affirmed that, even with party affiliation included in the model, ambivalent voters inferred greater influence than univalent Ma supporters (code 1) and less influence than univalent Tsai supporters (code 2).

With regard to the effects of negative coverage of Ma, an ANCOVA indicated that the main effects of voter ambivalence were significant (see Table 6). The planned contrast showed that the difference between ambivalent voters and Tsai supporters was not significant, but ambivalent voters inferred greater influence than Ma supporters, in line with Hypothesis 3a. The results of hierarchical multiple regression analyses again confirmed that a model including party affiliation showed that ambivalent voters inferred greater influence (code 1) than Ma supporters and less influence than Tsai supporters (code 2).

As for Hypothesis 3b, pertaining to the negative coverage of Tsai, the results of an ANCOVA showed that the main effects of voter ambivalence were significant (see Table 6). According to planned contrasts, the difference between ambivalent voters and Ma supporters, which was predicted to be insignificant, was significant, whereas the difference between ambivalent voters and Tsai supporters only approached significance. Thus, the results failed to support Hypothesis 3b. Hierarchical multiple regression analyses showed that ambivalent voters inferred greater influence than Ma supporters.

The perceived influence of negative coverage of Tsai among Ma supporters was not as high as predicted. A closer examination of the results of Hypotheses 2 and 3 suggested that Ma supporters did not believe that they were more susceptible to negative news coverage of Tsai ($M = 2.38$) than to positive coverage of Tsai ($M = 2.29$). Perhaps because Ma's supporters did not perceive media favoritism toward Tsai or believe that their favored candidate suffered from a disadvantage, they were less motivated to express enhanced vulnerability when media coverage of the opponent was negative. Additional analyses confirmed that their perception of the coverage of Tsai was not positively slanted ("degree to which you believe that coverage of Tsai is slanted toward the positive side (5) or the negative side (1)");

TABLE 6 Perceived Influence and TPP of Positive and Negative Coverage for Ma Supporters, Tsai Supporters, and Ambivalent Voters

Perceived influence of	Means				Main effects				Planned contrasts			
	Ma supporters (M) (<i>N</i> = 256)	Tsai supporters (T) (<i>N</i> = 149)	Ambivalent voters (A) (<i>N</i> = 241)		Main effects		Main effects		Main effects		Main effects	
					<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>p</i>
Positive coverage of Ma (H2a)	2.80 (1.04)	2.18 (1.01)	2.74 (.83)		17.28	.01	.05	0.78	.43	4.87	.01	
Positive coverage of Tsai (H2b)	2.29 (0.90)	2.73 (1.07)	2.74 (.82)		21.65	.01	.06	5.82	.01	0.22	.83	
Negative coverage of Ma (H3a)	2.26 (0.83)	2.91 (1.19)	2.76 (.78)		33.83	.01	.09	6.55	.01	1.61	.11	
Negative coverage of Tsai (H3b)	2.38 (1.02)	2.57 (1.03)	2.74 (.82)		10.77	.01	.03	4.65	.01	1.67	.10	
TPP for												
Positive coverage of Ma (H5a)	0.30 (0.91)	0.72 (0.91)	0.33 (.80)		10.84	.01	.03	0.66	.51	3.84	.01	
Positive coverage of Tsai (H5b)	0.66 (0.89)	0.30 (0.96)	0.35 (.75)		13.61	.01	.04	4.23	.01	0.89	.37	
Negative coverage of Ma (H6a)	0.85 (0.89)	0.34 (1.08)	0.49 (.76)		20.45	.01	.06	4.51	.01	2.09	.04	
Negative coverage of Tsai (H6b)	0.63 (1.03)	0.64 (0.99)	0.46 (.80)		2.28	.10	.01	2.01	.05	1.55	.12	

Note. *N* = 646, not including indifferent voters.

TABLE 7 Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Perceived Influence of Positive and Negative Coverage and TPP

Predictor	Perceived influence of positive coverage on self			Perceived influence of negative coverage on self			TPP for positive coverage			TPP for negative coverage		
	Tsai (H2b)			Ma (H3a)			Ma (H5a)			Tsai (H5b)		
	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2
Step 1	.02**		.01	.01		.01	.01		.01			
Age		-.15			-.07			.04			.05	
Gender		-.02			-.03			-.01			.08	
Step 2	.06**		.04**	.03**		.03**	.02**		.03**			.02*
Attention		.11*		.09	.15**		.06	-.13		-.10	-.15	
Elaboration		-.01		.12*	.03		.09	.03		-.07	.01	
Concern		.05		-.07	-.03		.01	.07		.07	.08	
News credibility		.22**		.12**	.05		.09	-.10		-.09	-.09	
Step 3	.07**		.06**	.12**		.05**	.05**		.04**		.08**	.02**
Party code 1 ^a		.18**		-.01	.09		.13*	-.15**		.01	-.08	-.12*
Party code 2		-.08*		-.04	-.19**		-.13**	.11**		.02	.15**	.13**
Ambivalence code 1 ^b		.08		-.29**	-.39**		-.24**	-.08		.24**	.31**	.11
Ambivalence code 2		-.15**		.14**	.29**		.10	.12*		.12*	-.27**	-.04
Total R ²	.15**		.11**	.14**		.08**	.08**		.07**		.11**	.05**

Notes. N = 646, not including indifferent voters.

^aTwo orthogonal contrasts codes were created for party identification (1, -1, 0 and .5, -.5, -1 for Pan-blue camp, Pan-green camp, and independent voters). The first code specified the difference between Pan-blue and Pan-green camps, and the second difference distinguished partisans and independent voters.

^bTwo effects codes were created for voter ambivalence (1, 0, -1 and 0, 1, -1 for univalent Ma supporters, univalent Tsai supporters, and ambivalent voters). The first code specified the difference between Ma supporters and ambivalent voters, and the second code specified the difference between Tsai supporters and ambivalent voters.

*p < .05. **p < .01.

$M = 3.10$, $SD = .82$), nor did it differ significantly from their perception of Ma's coverage ($M = 3.05$, $SD = .92$), $F(256) = .56$, $p = .46$. In contrast, Tsai's supporters perceived that Ma's coverage was positively slanted ($M = 3.62$, $SD = .94$) and Tsai's coverage was negatively slanted ($M = 2.76$, $SD = .86$), and the difference was significant, $F(256) = 57.71$, $p < .01$. Thus, Tsai's supporters were motivated to express greater perceived influence on them when such responses were justified (i.e., when media coverage of Ma was negative).

The prediction in Hypothesis 4 that TPP would be smaller among ambivalent than among univalent voters received support, because the ANCOVA indicated that the main effect of voter ambivalence was significant (see Table 4). A planned contrast revealed that ambivalent voters generated significantly lower TPP than univalent supporters, in support of Hypothesis 4. According to Table 4, the contrasts between ambivalent voters and indifferent voters and between univalent and indifferent voters were not significant. In the hierarchical multiple regression analyses, only voter ambivalence, not party affiliation, accounted for significant variance in TPP. The significant contrast confirmed that TPP diminished among ambivalent compared with univalent voters (code 1). As Table 4 indicates though, the perceived influence on others did not vary among Ma supporters, Tsai supporters, and ambivalent supporters. The different TPP thus resulted mainly from voters' different estimates of the perceived influence on themselves, not their estimates of the perceived influences on others, consistent with this study's predictions.

The combination of Hypotheses 5 and 6 suggests a significant coverage target by valence by voter ambivalence interaction effect on TPP. A repeated measure ANCOVA with target and valence as the within-subject factors and voter ambivalence as the between-subject factor showed that the three-way interaction was significant, $F(2, 635) = 61.00$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .16$.

When the news coverage of Ma was positive, as Table 6 reports, the ANCOVA indicated significant main effects of voter ambivalence on TPP. The planned contrast showed that the difference between ambivalent voters and Ma supporters was not significant, whereas TPP was smaller among ambivalent voters than among Tsai supporters, consistent with the predictions of Hypothesis 5a. Hierarchical multiple regressions also confirmed that when party affiliation appeared in the equation, TPP was smaller among ambivalent voters than among Tsai supporters (code 2) but was not different from that expressed by Ma supporters (code 1) (see Table 7).

When the news coverage of Tsai was positive, these ANCOVA results showed that the main effects of voter ambivalence on TPP were significant (see Table 6). According to the planned contrast, the difference between ambivalent voters and Tsai supporters was not significant, whereas TPP was smaller among ambivalent voters than among Ma supporters, in line with Hypothesis 5b. Hierarchical multiple regressions confirmed that TPP was

less pronounced among ambivalent supporters than among Ma supporters (code 1).

When the news coverage of Ma was negative, the ANCOVA indicated significant main effects of voter ambivalence, as shown in Table 6. The planned contrast revealed a significant difference between ambivalent voters and Tsai supporters, which was not expected, and the TPP was smaller among ambivalent voters than among Ma supporters, as expected. These results provided partial support for Hypothesis 6a. The hierarchical multiple regressions with party affiliation in the model showed that TPP was more pronounced for Ma supporters (code 1) than ambivalent voters and less pronounced for Tsai supporters than ambivalent voters (code 2).

Finally, when the news coverage of Tsai was negative, the results of the ANCOVA showed that the main effects of voter ambivalence were not significant (Table 6). According to the planned contrast, and in contrast with the prediction in Hypothesis 6b, the difference between ambivalent voters and Ma supporters, which was expected to be insignificant, was significant, whereas the difference between ambivalent voters and Tsai supporters, which was expected to be significant, was not. Hierarchical multiple regressions indicated that party affiliation was a significant predictor, such that TPP was more pronounced among Pan-green than among Pan-blue camp voters (code 1) and among partisans than among independent voters (code 2), whereas voter ambivalence was not a significant factor. As noted, this result partly reflects the underestimation among Ma supporters of the influence of negative Tsai coverage on them.

To answer Research Question 1, multiple regressions also explored which factors might predict actions against biased news media. Prior research suggests that if voters perceive that election coverage is biased toward their supported candidates, they express more support for restricting campaign information (Wei, Chia, et al., 2011). In line with findings that suggest news credibility can explain different responses by Ma and Tsai's supporters, this variable appeared in the analysis, too. The results in Table 8 reveal that when news credibility was not in the equation (Model 1), ambivalent voters expressed greater action intentions against biased news media than Ma supporters, whereas Tsai voters expressed greater action intentions than ambivalent voters. When news credibility perceptions entered the equation (Models 2 and 3), ambivalent voters still expressed greater action intentions than Ma supporters, but the difference with Tsai supporters was not significant; that is, Tsai supporters' actions might be explained by their perceptions of news credibility, though this factor cannot fully account for ambivalent voters' actions. Because ambivalent voters are open to persuasion, they might have greater appreciation for news coverage and expect that it will not be biased or misleading. Therefore, they express greater intentions to act against news media with unfair coverage. The results also show that perceived influence on the self offers a positive predictor of such behaviors, but TPP does not.

TABLE 8 Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Actions Against Biased News Media

Predictor	Intended actions against biased news media					
	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β
Step 1	.01		.01		.01	
Age		.02		.02		.02
Gender		-.01		-.01		-.01
Step 2	.07**		.07**		.07**	
Attention		.01		.02		.02
Elaboration		.07		.07		.07
Concern		.18**		.16**		.16**
News credibility		-.13**		-.13**		
Step 3	.02**		.02*		.02*	
Party code 1 ^a		.01		.02		.02
Party code 2		-.02		-.02		-.02
Ambivalence code 1 ^b		-.17**		-.16**		-.16**
Ambivalence code 2		.12*		.11		.11
Step 4	.02**		.02**		.01	
Influence on the self		.10*		.11*		
Influence on others		.05		.05		
TPP						-.05
Total R ²	.09**		.10**		.09**	

Notes. *N* = 646, not including indifferent voters.

^aTwo orthogonal contrasts codes were created for party identification (1, -1, 0 and .5, .5, -1 for Pan-blue camp, Pan-green camp, and independent voters). The first code specified the difference between Pan-blue and Pan-green camps, and the second difference distinguished between partisans and independent voters.

^bTwo effects codes were created for voter ambivalence (1, 0, -1 and 0, 1, -1 for univalent Ma supporters, univalent Tsai supporters, and ambivalent voters). The first code specified the difference between Ma supporters and ambivalent voters, and the second code specified the difference between Tsai supporters and ambivalent voters.

p* < .05. *p* < .01.

DISCUSSION

Findings and Contributions

This study extends ambivalent attitude literature by demonstrating that voting ambivalence can predict voters’ perceived vulnerability to campaign coverage. This extension advances ambivalent literature to a new domain; it also adds to perceived influence and TPP literature. Prior research has failed to confirm an influence of political ideology on the TPP of campaign communications, such as political advertising (e.g., Lovejoy et al., 2010) or polls (e.g., Wei, Chia, et al., 2011). However, the lack of findings should not be taken to mean that voter differences are not critical factors. This study shows that that voter ambivalence is a consistent predictor of the perceived influence of campaign information on the self, as well as of the self–other vulnerability

discrepancy. Drawing on motivated reasoning literature, this study argues that because ambivalent voters need information to facilitate their decision making and reduce the discomfort they suffer due to their ambivalent states, they welcome campaign information, including news coverage. In turn, they infer a greater influence of such information on themselves, which implies a narrower self–other vulnerability gap. Ambivalent voters' estimates of the perceived influence on others do not differ from those of univalent voters. Rather, the perceptual gap results mainly from variation in the perceived influences on the self. This finding supports the idea that ambivalent voters are more likely to find news useful for themselves and, in comparison with univalent voters, infer greater influence on themselves but not on others.

The findings also clearly depict how univalent voters infer the influences of election news, in line with motivated reasoning literature. Their inferences vary as a function of the desirability of the influence, which is determined by the target and valence of the coverage. Dissonance avoidance emerges as a self-serving motive that explains the interactive effect of these two factors; that is, to avoid cognitive dissonance, univalent voters perceive that attitude-incongruent information (positive coverage of opposing candidates, negative information about supported candidates) has little effect on them.

The gap in perceived influence related to positive and negative coverage of Ma was significant for Tsai supporters, whereas the perceptual difference between positive and negative coverage of Tsai was not significant for Ma supporters. This result may reflect the perceptions of Tsai's supporters, namely, that their candidate was not favored by the press. Because they perceived that their candidate was at a disadvantage, Tsai's supporters likely were more motivated to express self-serving opinions and perceive enhanced influences of negative Ma coverage on themselves. Alternatively, Ma was the incumbent, and his supporters may have possessed stronger beliefs in his chances of winning, which could have reduced their self-serving bias. Supporters of the challenger instead seem more likely to highlight the pronounced effects of negative coverage, to address their concerns about the viability of their candidate. Additional research, thus, might systematically examine the moderating influence of perceived winning chances when testing for perceived media influences.

Perceived news credibility is negatively associated with actions against news media that present biased election coverage, whereas perceived influence of election coverage on the self is positively associated with such actions. Controlling for the influence of news credibility, ambivalent voters expressed greater intentions to engage in actions against biased news media than Ma supporters; in contrast, their intentions were similar in degree to those of Tsai supporters, though likely for different reasons. Ambivalent voters who perceive greater media effects care more about whether the election coverage is fair and take actions to achieve this state, whereas supporters of Tsai, the challenger, perceive greater media hostility toward

their favored candidate and thus are motivated to take action. This is also in line with Jensen and Hurley (2005), who applied Downs's (1957) idea about rational voters to argue that people with TPP act rationally, in that they do not act unless necessary.

Further Research Directions

This study examines campaign coverage provided on television, in newspapers, online, and in debate-related news coverage. Because people generally believe it is more desirable to be affected by news than by other campaign information, such as political advertising, ambivalent voters may find more value in this information and infer their greater susceptibility to it. However, if ambivalent voters glean more information value from campaign information, they seemingly also should infer a greater influence of less desirable political advertising than do univalent voters. Further research should explore this possibility.

Whereas this study explored the perceived influence of election coverage in general, the political ideology of news media often is salient to Taiwanese audiences. Pan-blue camp voters tend to tune in to certain news channels for their daily news feed, whereas Pan-green camp voters prefer other news channels. As Perloff (1993) finds, self–other discrepancies in perceived vulnerability grow when the message source exhibits a negative bias. The perceived influence of news coverage thus should vary, depending on whether the news comes from a channel or newspaper with an ideology opposite the voter's own. Research can explore this possibility.

This study extends prior political psychology literature by showing that voting ambivalence is an important individual factor in an election context. Different types of ambivalence appear in prior literature, such as ambivalent attitudes toward each candidate (Lavine, 2001) or each party (Basinger & Lavine, 2005); comparative candidate ambivalence, which derives from the relative number of positive and negative thoughts about competing candidates (Lavine, 2001); and comparative party ambivalence, related to the relative number of positive and negative reactions toward competing parties (Basinger & Lavine, 2005). In addition to individual-level ambivalence, social network ambivalence derives from conflicting opinions offered by political discussants (Nir, 2005). Research should explore these other types of ambivalence and how they influence perceived media effects.

Limitations and Generalizability Concerns

The findings should be interpreted within the study's limitations. For example, people may answer online surveys simply to obtain rewards. The reported online survey did not include attention check questions and could

not detect those who might click randomly just to get through the questionnaire so that they could qualify for a gift drawing.

The findings suggest that in countries marked by voting ambivalence, such as those with two competing parties, greater susceptibility to persuasion should emerge among ambivalent voters than among univalent voters. Nevertheless, generalizing these findings to countries other than Taiwan should be done with caution because even countries with two competing parties may vary in terms of other important characteristics. First, among the respondents in this study, 35% were ambivalent voters, a percentage higher than that in the United States. For example, Lavine (2001) finds that across presidential elections, approximately 30% of U.S. voters were ambivalent. Second, voting rates in presidential elections are very high in Taiwan, averaging 77.94%. Thus, more voters in Taiwan may be motivated to reach a decision, such that they might be more likely to experience voting ambivalence.

Moreover, this study recruited students from three university databases. Although the analyses only included responses from eligible voters and age (20–59 years) did not appear to be a significant predictor, the average age of the sample was younger than the population average. Young voters may be more torn between candidates because their ideologies have not solidified yet, in which case they represent an ideal sample to test for differences between ambivalent and univalent voters. However, because responses from young voters may differ from those of older voters, caution is required before generalizing these findings to the whole population.

More than two thirds of Taiwan's young people, 19–22 years, were enrolled in college in 2012 (Department of Household Registration Affairs, 2014; Ministry of Education, 2014a); however, the three universities selected for this study might not perfectly represent all university students or young voters in Taiwan. The samples came from two public universities and one private university, yet, public universities account for only one third of all schools in Taiwan (Ministry of Education, 2014b). Because the responses from this set of respondents might not represent all young voters, caution is required when interpreting the findings. Overall, the results suggest that it is important to probe for voter ambivalence; further research should continue to examine this construct.

NOTES

1. This article does not use the term “swing voters” to refer to ambivalent voters, because, in prior literature, swing voters include both ambivalent and indifferent voters, and voters who swing across elections might not be torn between two choices in any particular election (Mayer, 2007).
2. The question was as follows: “During the presidential campaign period, there is positive coverage of candidates (e.g., Ma's new achievement in diplomatic relations, Tsai's leader-

- ship in DPP reform and Soong's accomplishment when he served as the mayor). . . . Please rate the degree to which positive coverage of Ma affects your election decision/Please rate the degree to which positive coverage of Ma affects others' election decision/Please rate the degree to which positive coverage of Tsai affects your election decision/Please rate the degree to which positive coverage of Tsai affects others' election decision."
3. The question was: "During the presidential campaign period, there is negative coverage of candidates (e.g., Ma broke his promises made in past elections, Tsai's proposed policies are mere election rhetoric and low in feasibility and Soong's financial scandals). . . . Please rate the degree to which positive coverage of Ma affects your election decision/Please rate the degree to which positive coverage of Ma affects others' election decision/Please rate the degree to which positive coverage of Tsai affects your election decision/Please rate the degree to which positive coverage of Tsai affects others' election decision."

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