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Social identity uncertainty during the Greek financial crisis: The role of media narratives

Two studies set against the complex sociopolitical backdrop of the Greek Financial Crisis (2009-2018) examined the role played by media narratives as intragroup communication within Greek society in framing social identity uncertainty and the desired position of the country in the wider intergroup (European) context. The extent of identity-uncertainty produced by the media regarding Greek national identity, future, and relations with the EU was measured in Study 1 ($N = 298$) and manipulated in Study 2 ($N = 293$). Study 1 found that exposure to ideologically discordant media messages heightened uncertainty about national identity among right- and left-leaning Greeks. Study 2 found that the type of media chosen (systemic vs. anti-systemic) mediated Greek nationalists' positions on Grexit, especially under heightened identity-uncertainty. Implications of the role of the media as influential ingroup sources in providing valuable social identity information, especially during a crisis, are discussed.

Key words: intergroup communication, identity-uncertainty, media narratives, intragroup communication, political attitudes

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During a crisis, intergroup communication, or communication that flows within the group and other groups as well as from influential ingroup and outgroup sources, plays an important role in framing and making sense of the crisis for group members. During a national crisis, for instance, when nations struggle with questions about their future, intergroup communication becomes especially pertinent in understanding social identity concerns pertaining to normative fit and ingroup future. For example, the European Union (EU) has faced similar crises in recent times with respect to the integration of member states and immigrants into the larger superordinate union (e.g., Croucher, 2017). When such crises unfold, the role of crisis communication (e.g., Diers-Lawson, 2017) becomes especially important. One important source of intergroup information within a crisis and how it impacts one's social identity is the media. The media serves as a vital source of normative information while group members seek ingroup media sources to confirm their existing attitudes and seek positive social identity validating information (e.g., Lin & Haridakis, 2017). In the current study, we examined the role of the media as a source of intergroup communication in the midst of the Greek financial crisis. We examined whether exposure to outgroup media sources in the midst of a national crisis heightened social identity uncertainty about one's national identity and its future.

The Greek Financial Crisis that occurred between the years of 2009 to 2018 brought up several political, economic, and identity-related policy concerns for Greek citizens (e.g., Chrysochoou et al., 2013; Gardikiotis et al., 2017; Mari et al., 2017). The crisis ignited discussions around Grexit – the possibility of Greece exiting the Eurozone, the monetary union of 19 member states of the EU that had adopted the euro as their currency – thereby raising questions and concerns about Greek national identity and what it would mean to be Greek in the future. Other related issues discussed in Greek and international media highlighted Greece's economic relationship with the larger international community (i.e., negotiations with Greece's international lenders regarding debt relief and possible austerity measures) and whether Greece should seek economic help from other nations (e.g., Russia and China). Media narratives also focused on issues of border control and the entry of immigrants into Greece. Such rhetoric, whether focused on Greece's status within the EU or its financial relationship with the EU and lenders, consistently drew attention to questions of who we are as Greek nationals, and where we stand in relation to others, thereby highlighting concerns about the distinctiveness of Greek social identity within the superordinate EU identity and the broader international context.

In this context, we examined the impact of media messages and rhetoric that consistently highlighted concerns regarding the future of Greek national identity. We were interested in whether media messages in the context of such a crisis could elevate uncertainty regarding one's social identity – about what it means to be a member of a group, how one stands in relations to others, and what the future holds for the members of the group. These media messages are conceived

as intragroup communication within Greek society where normative positions are discussed and negotiated (Hogg & Giles, 2012) and the outcomes and the effects of such communication can affect national identification itself as well as the perceived standing of the country in the broader European intergroup context. We draw on uncertainty-identity theory (e.g., Hogg, 2000, 2007, 2012, 2021a, 2021b) as our guiding theoretical framework in order to examine whether distinctive media sources, namely, pro-system or normative versus anti-system or non-normative media narratives, impacted identity-uncertainty differently. Systemic media sources during the Greek financial crisis supported and advocated majority, right-leaning narratives, whereas anti-systemic sources presented minority, left-leaning perspectives that questioned the normative narratives. We examined the extent to which exposure to media sources that went against one's dominant worldview produced identity-uncertainty about one's Greek identity. We predicted that when compared with their ideological counterparts, those who typically chose systemic media sources would feel especially uncertain about their Greek identity when exposed to anti-systemic media sources, and vice versa for those who typically chose anti-systemic media sources.

We conducted two studies to examine how Greeks with diverse ideological stances (left vs. right) who chose different media sources responded when they felt uncertain about their Greek identity. We examined how identity-uncertainty in this context was associated with support for different policy issues that were of prime importance in Greece at the time this study was conducted (e.g., attitudes toward Grexit, economic help from other nations and the EU, border control, and austerity measures that were to be imposed on Greece).

In Study 1, we measured media-produced identity-uncertainty regarding what it means to be Greek and the future of Greece. In Study 2, we experimentally manipulated media-produced identity-uncertainty. In Study 1, we examined whether exposure to ideologically discordant media heightened uncertainty about Greek identity among left- versus right-leaning Greeks. We also reported how national identification, political ideology, and identity-uncertainty produced by the media related to attitudes to different policy-based issues that impacted Greece during the crisis (e.g., Grexit). Study 2 focused on Greek nationalism, which was measured as a composite of political ideology and national identification. We examined whether the type of media chosen mediated Greek nationalists' (right-leaning Greeks who identified strongly with a Greek identity) attitudes toward Grexit under conditions of high versus low identity-uncertainty.

In the next sections, we review the literature on uncertainty-identity theory and its application to this research. We follow with a review of previous research on implications of exposure to different types of media sources.

Uncertainty-identity Theory

News media narratives in Greece during the financial crisis were predominated by questions regarding Greece's potential separation from the Eurozone and the economic and national future of Greece. We expected that such a narrative in the midst of a crisis that brings with it the possibility of rapid changes would be accompanied by a strong sense of uncertainty about what it means to be Greek within the larger context of the EU. Uncertainty-identity theory (e.g., Hogg, 2021a, 2021b) explains how uncertainty about the self and one's identity is a highly aversive feeling that individuals strive to reduce. One way in which identity-uncertainty can be reduced by looking to a social identity or group membership. According to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner et al., 1987; see also Hogg, 2018a; Abrams & Hogg, 2010; Hogg & Abrams, 1988), when individuals identify strongly with groups and these group memberships are salient, they come to frame the sense of self and act as guides in driving thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and worldview.

Of course, while individuals seek groups to manage uncertainty about the self, potential changes to the group, its standing in relation to superordinate groups, and shifts in relations with other groups should impact how the self is framed in relation to social identity. Thus, possible upheaval and uncertainty regarding the position of the groups that individuals strongly identify with should provoke uncertain about identity (e.g., Wagoner et al., 2017). This is what we expected in the context of the Greek financial crisis.

While societal crises and the potential changes they bring can raise identity-uncertainty, we specifically examined the role played by the media in framing narratives that highlight such changes and raise questions about social identity, especially during a period of crises. One way of gaining information about identity is through communication that flows within the group, especially from influential ingroup sources which act as an important means of conveying rich social identity-related information (see Belavadi, 2017; Hogg & Giles, 2012, for a discussion of norm talk). In the context of intergroup crises, when questions regarding what it means to be a member of a group and what the group stands for are rife, influential and trusted sources, such as ingroup leaders, by emphasizing that they are one of us, communicate social identity-rich information and reiterate the group's central attributes by embodying them (Hogg, 2018b).

Media communication from trusted ingroup sources serves a similar function by presenting information regarding who we are and what we stand for in relation to the larger intergroup landscape. We expected that Greeks who were confronted with a national and financial crisis would seek relief from identity-uncertainty in media sources that were consistent with their political ideology while exposure to media sources that were discordant with their political ideology would enhance identity-uncertainty. The reason for the latter prediction was that during a crisis is, exposure to an ingroup source that goes against one's political ideology should be especially disconcerting. According to uncertainty-identity theory, uncertainty about

the self and identity drives individuals to seek comfort in ultra-cohesive, tight-knit narratives that are based on singular worldviews with little inherent diversity and diffusion (e.g., Hogg et al., 2010; Hogg, 2021a). Thus, diverse opinions that disagree with a singular worldview should be especially unwelcome in the context of a crisis.

Systemic and Anti-systemic Media Sources

In the current study, we examined the influence of two types of media sources that we categorized as (a) systemic (majority media sources that are consistent with the normative, right leaning narrative), and (b) anti-systemic (minority media sources that question the normative narrative and lean toward the left of the political ideology continuum). During a crisis, when questions about social identity are salient, we expected that exposure to ingroup voices on the other end of the ideological continuum would be especially likely to raise uncertainty about one's identity by questioning one's worldview. A media source on the opposite end of the ideological continuum is still an ingroup source, and therefore credible. However, exposure to an ingroup-discordant stance should be especially disconcerting during a crisis. When identity-uncertainty is high, individuals prefer their ingroups to band together, tolerate differences within the ingroup to a lesser extent, and prefer a singular worldview (e.g., Hogg et al., 2010). Disagreement within the ingroup in the form of ideologically discordant positions should fuel greater identity-uncertainty as a group in crisis struggles to deal with constant change and instability.

Research on selective exposure to media sources has shown that individuals selectively choose to expose themselves to attitude-consistent media sources as a means to validate their worldview and the self, while media sources that are inconsistent with one's worldview are avoided (see, e.g., Fischer et al., 2005; Hart et al., 2009). Exposure to attitude-discordant media is aversive as it produces cognitive dissonance and invalidates one's worldview. People are typically driven to preserve their attitudes from challenge at the cost of gaining a valid view of reality by avoiding information that challenges their attitudes while seeking information that confirms it (see, e.g., Festinger, 1957; Hart et al., 2009; Olson & Stone, 2005), also known as the confirmation bias. This phenomenon is likely to be exaggerated when media sources are polarized to partisan extremes.

Partisan rhetoric highlights divisions between the ingroup and the outgroup, and a lack of consensus is emphasized. We argue that media messages on the left and the right that take partisan and polarized stances in the context of a crisis such as the Greek financial crisis, should develop loyal follower bases who depend on these sources for important identity-related information. Exposure to the opposite side of the partisan divide should then produce a sense of uncertainty about one's identity. While previous research has examined dissonance and discomfort caused by exposure to attitude-discordant information, we built on this literature to examine whether exposure to attitude- or ideology-discordant information

also produces the aversive state of uncertainty about one's identity and its related worldview. Thus, exposure to information that invalidates one's normative ingroup stance should drive one to feel uncertain about oneself and one's social identity.

The Current Study

We present two studies that were conducted during the financial crisis in Greece. Both studies were conducted during April and May of 2015, a few months before the third bailout program (memorandum) was agreed upon between the Greek government and international lenders. This was a period of increased conflict and frustration as the economic and social crisis had already lasted five years. Public discourse was dominated by the dilemma of either accepting or rejecting yet another bailout program with harsh terms proposed by the lenders.

Drawing from this context of crisis wherein media narratives actively contested and debated issues related to economic-, national-, and identity-related concerns, we examined how exposure to intragroup, ideologically discordant media shaped the experience of social identity-uncertainty. In Study 1, we expected that right-leaning Greeks who typically chose normative, majority, right-leaning media sources (systemic media) would feel especially uncertain about their Greek identity when exposed to non-normative left-leaning media sources (anti-systemic media). We also present data on how levels of Greek identification and political ideology related to support for different policy issues and support for different political parties, giving us a descriptive picture from the time during the Greek crisis. In Study 2, we examined the mediating role of type of media source (systemic versus anti-systemic) in shaping Greek nationalists' views on Grexit under high versus low identity-uncertainty. We predicted that Greek nationalists' (high Greek identifiers who leaned politically right) attitudes toward Grexit should be strengthened via type of media exposure, especially under conditions of high uncertainty.

In both studies, we measured Greeks' national identification, self-reported political ideology, support for different policy issues (e.g., Grexit, attitudes toward economic help), support for different political parties, and the type of media that they chose. There was one difference between the two studies. In Study 1, we measured identity-uncertainty, that is, the extent to which news media made Greeks feel uncertain about their national identity, while in Study 2, we experimentally manipulated identity-uncertainty.

Study 1

In Study 1, we tested whether exposure to ideologically discordant media sources would be associated with an increase in identity-uncertainty. We also aimed to understand how Greeks across different sides of the ideological continuum stood on different policy issues and support for different political parties.

Method

Participants and Design

Participants were Greek citizens and included 146 males and 178 females ($N = 324$, $M_{\text{age}} = 26.34$, $SD = 8.71$) recruited from the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. Study 1 employed a correlational design and measured: (a) national identification, (b) political ideology, (c) political party support, (d) uncertainty produced by the media, (e) support for various political issues, and (f) choice of media source.

We conducted a power analysis to assess the adequacy of our sample size. Our final sample size comprised 298 participants. In coding the variable of media source, those who listed an equal number of systemic and anti-systemic media sources were dropped from further analyses ($N = 26$), giving us a final sample size of 298. Using the *pwr2ppl* (Aberson, 2019) R package, we found that given our sample size and an $\alpha = .05$, power for the main effect of political ideology of 0.97, power for the main effect of media source was low (0.05), while for the interaction between ideology and media source which framed our main hypothesis in the study, we found power of 0.77. Thus, we had a sufficient sample size to proceed with our analysis to test a moderation hypothesis.

Procedure and Materials

The study was introduced as aiming to understand Greek citizens' opinions and attitudes toward various political issues during the Greek financial crisis. Once participants consented to participate in the study, the following study materials were presented.

Identification with Greece. Seven items drawn from previous research on social identity theory (e.g., Hains et al., 1997; Hogg & Hains, 1996; Hogg et al., 1998; Hogg et al., 2007) were adapted to the study's context to measure the extent of identification with the Greek identity (e.g., How central is being Greek to your sense of who you are? How important is being Greek to you? To what extent do you feel a sense of belonging with other Greeks?). Participants responded on a rating scale ranging from 1 (*not very much*) to 9 (*very much*), $\alpha = .92$.

Political Ideology. One item was developed to measure where participants positioned themselves on the ideological continuum, from left to right. Participants responded by rating their political ideology on a rating scale ranging from 1 (*far left*) to 9 (*far right*).

Party Support. Participants indicated the extent to which they supported seven different political parties (i.e., Syriza, New Democracy, Golden Dawn, River, KKE, Independent Greek, and the Panhellenic Social Movement) on 7 items (e.g., Overall, how much do you support the River Party?). Participants responded on a rating scale ranging from 1 (*not very much*) to 9 (*very much*).

Uncertainty Produced by the Media. Drawing on previous uncertainty-identity theory research (Choi & Hogg, 2020; Hogg et al., 2007; Hohman et al., 2010; Sherman et al., 2009), seven items were adapted to measure the extent to which the news media made Greeks feel uncertain about Greek identity and the future of Greece (e.g., How uncertain does news media make you feel about Greece's position in the EU? How uncertain does news media make you feel about what it means to be Greek? How uncertain does news media make you feel about Greece's position in the Eurozone?). Participants responded on a rating scale ranging from 1 (*not very uncertain*) to 9 (*very uncertain*), $\alpha = .92$.

Policy Support. Twelve items developed for this study by the authors measured the extent to which participants supported versus opposed policy issues that confronted Greece at the time of the crisis (austerity, negotiations with lenders, Greek autonomy over its economy, Greek autonomy over its borders, Grexit, economic help from lenders and other countries, and debt forgiveness, e.g., How strongly do you oppose or support Greece's exit from the monetary union? How strongly do you oppose or support Greek control over its borders? How strongly do you oppose or support the austerity program?). Participants responded on a rating scale ranging from 1 (*strongly oppose*) to 9 (*strongly support*).

We created three separate policy support scales. We developed the items with the specific purpose of measuring attitudes toward three pertinent issues that were actively discussed and debated in Greek media and popular rhetoric at the time and that pertained to Greece's need for autonomy, economic help from lenders, and border control. The three separate subscales we developed were (a) the Greek autonomy scale ($\alpha = .84$), (b) the economic help scale ($\alpha = .74$), and the (c) border control scale ($\alpha = .71$). Further details on the factor structures of the scales are included below.

Media Sources. Participants were asked to list a maximum of six news media sources that they typically chose to expose themselves to. A variety of media outlets consisting of newspapers (e.g., Kathimerini, Efimerida ton Syntakton), TV channels (e.g., Ert, Mega TV), and online news sites (e.g., voria.gr, Tvxs) were reported. Independent coders categorized these media outlets into systemic media that clearly supported governmental discourse (e.g., protothema.gr), and anti-systemic, media that clearly supported antigovernmental discourse (e.g., alterthes.gr) (intercoder agreement, on a sample of 20% of the material, was 90%). Media outlets that produced mixed (e.g., enikos.gr) or neutral (e.g., sport.fm) discourse were excluded from the analysis.

Finally, participants provided demographic data (gender and age) and responded to religious identity questions that asked about their religious affiliation and strength of religious identification. Participants were then debriefed and thanked for their time.

Results

In Study 1, our main prediction was that exposure to media sources from the opposite end of the ideological continuum should produce heightened uncertainty, especially given the nature of partisan media in the context of the Greek financial crisis. We had two main predictors (a) political ideology ranging from the left to the right and (b) media source which was either systemic and comprised majority right-leaning media sources or anti-systemic and anti-normative that comprised minority left-leaning media sources. Our key dependent variable was a continuous measure of the extent to which exposure to news media heightened social identity-uncertainty pertaining to one's Greek identity. We also present data on how Greek citizens across the ideological continuum and with different levels of national identification positioned themselves on various policy issues and support for different political parties.

Scales and Design

We conducted a two-way between-subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA) to test our main prediction. Media source – one of our two independent variables – was a categorical variable. Independent coders categorized the participants' responses into – systemic and anti-systemic media sources. If participants listed predominantly anti-systemic media sources, they were coded as 1, while participants who listed predominantly systemic media sources were coded as 2. As noted above, those who listed an equal number of systemic and anti-systemic media sources were removed from further analyses. We converted our second independent variable – a one-item continuous measure of political ideology – into a categorical, dichotomous variable through a median split, with the values of 1 (left) and 2 (right).

We conducted a factor analysis on the continuous measure of identity-uncertainty (7 items) – our key dependent variable. Analyses revealed a one-factor solution (one factor with an eigenvalue greater than unity and clear of the scree). A composite scale was computed by averaging item responses. Reliabilities, means, *SDs*, and intercorrelations of the variables are presented in Table 1.

We included all our 12 policy support items in one factor analysis. Four factors emerged with eigenvalues greater than 1. On further examination of the factor structure, we found that five items loaded strongly on the first factor (factor loadings > 0.5). These five items measured support (vs. opposition) for austerity, Greek control over its economy, support (vs. opposition) for a break in negotiation with lenders, and Grexit from the Eurozone. We averaged these five items to create the Greek autonomy scale. Four policy support items loaded on Factor 2 (factor loadings > 0.5) and measured support (vs. opposition) for help from international lenders and other countries and debt forgiveness. We averaged these four items to create the economic help scale. Three policy support items loaded on Factor 3 (factor loadings > 0.6) and measured support (vs. opposition)

Table 1. Study 1: Reliabilities, Ms, SDs, and Intercorrelation of Political Ideology and the Dependent Variable (Identity-Uncertainty)

Variable	α	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2
1. Political ideology (1 item)	-	4.15	1.81	-	.20**
2. Identity-uncertainty (7 items)	.92	5.52	1.75		-

for Greek control over its borders and policies to prevent immigration into Greece. We averaged these three items to create the border control scale. We found that only two items loaded strongly on Factor 4: “How strongly do you oppose or support debt-forgiveness for Greece by the creditors” and “How strongly do you oppose or support German reparations to Greece as a way to pay the debt.” Theoretically, we argued that these factors should fit well with the economic help scale. Therefore, we ran an additional factor analysis wherein we forced a three-factor solution. A more parsimonious picture emerged in this second analysis, where we found that the two abovementioned items now loaded strongly on Factor 2 (loadings > 0.7). Therefore, we retained the above three scales in further analyses.

We conducted two analyses with the demographic variables of age and gender to assess whether they should be included as covariates in further analyses. A two-way ANOVA with our predictors – political ideology and media source – as the independent variables and age as the dependent variable revealed statistically significant effects for age, such that political ideology ($F[1, 259] = 9.89, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .04$) and media source ($F[1, 259] = 4.23, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .02$) both predicted age, the mean age on the right end of the political continuum ($M = 30.48, SD = 1.51$) was significantly higher than the left end ($M = 25.02, SD = .85$), while the mean age for exposure to anti-systemic media ($M = 29.53, SD = 1.60$) was significantly higher than the mean age for exposure to systemic media ($M = 25.97, SD = .67$). We conducted a logistic regression to test whether our predictors of political ideology and media source predicted gender. We did not find statistically significant effects. Only age was included as a covariate in the test of the main hypothesis.

Media Source and Uncertainty

To test our key prediction that exposure to media messages from the opposite side of the political continuum would heighten identity-uncertainty, we conducted a two-way between-subjects ANOVA¹, wherein political ideology (left, right)

1 Additionally, we tested our central hypotheses using a multiple regression, since one of our predictors was a continuous variable that we converted into a dichotomous variable to conduct a two-way between-subjects ANOVA that helped us presents our findings with greater parsimony and clarity in Study 1. The results of the multiple regression mirrored the results from the ANOVA and indicated a statistically significant interaction between political ideology and media source to predict uncertainty, $\beta = .34, t(258) = -4.64, p < .001$.

and media source (systemic, anti-systemic) served as our predictors while identity-uncertainty produced by the media served as the dependent variable. We entered age as a covariate in the analysis and found that age did not statistically significantly predict identity-uncertainty ($p > .05$).

Results indicated that the main effect of political ideology ($F[1, 263] = 17.55, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .06$) was statistically significant, such that those on the right end of the ideological continuum ($M = 6.64, 95\% \text{ CI } [5.94, 7.34]$) experienced greater identity-uncertainty from exposure to news media compared to those on the left end of the continuum ($M = 4.93, 95\% \text{ CI } [4.54, 5.32]$). The main effect of media source was not statistically significant, $F(1, 263) = .20, p = .66, \eta_p^2 = .001$.

As predicted, we found a significant interaction between media source and political ideology in predicting the extent of identity-uncertainty produced by news media, $F(1, 263) = 9.67, p = .002, \eta_p^2 = .04$. An analysis of simple main effects (see Figure 1) indicated that those on the right end of the ideological continuum reported feeling significantly more uncertain about their Greek identity when they chose anti-systemic news media ($M = 7.37, 95\% \text{ CI } [4.48, 1.49]$) compared to those on the left end of the political continuum ($M = 4.38, 95\% \text{ CI } [4.48, 1.49]$). Moreover, those who leaned right felt more uncertain when they chose anti-systemic media ($M = 7.37, 95\% \text{ CI } [.055, 2.86]$) compared to when they chose systemic media ($M = 5.92, 95\% \text{ CI } [.055, 2.86]$). Among those who leaned left, those who chose systemic media reported feeling significantly more uncertain about their Greek identity ($M = 5.47, 95\% \text{ CI } [.31, 1.88]$) compared to those who chose anti-systemic media ($M = 4.38, 95\% \text{ CI } [.31, 1.88]$). No statistically significant difference emerged in the extent of identity-uncertainty

Figure 1. Study 1: Identity-Uncertainty as a Function of Political Ideology, Moderated by Media Source ($\pm 1SD$).

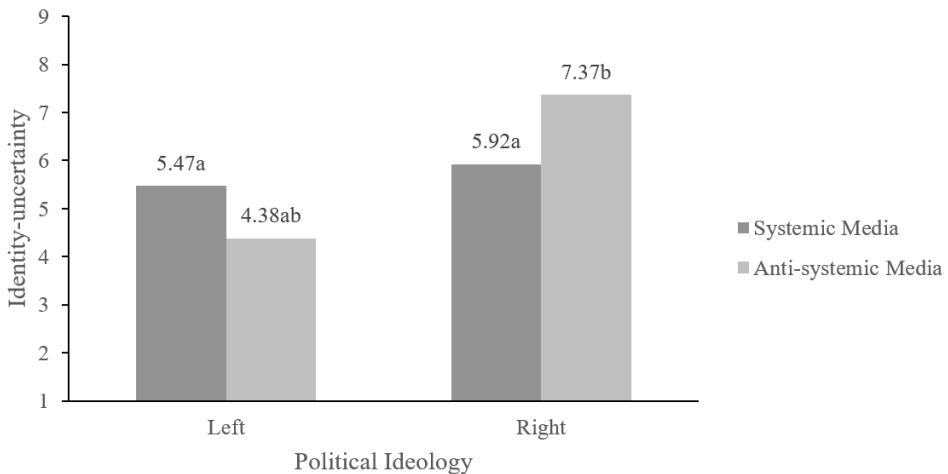


Table 2. Study 1: Intercorrelations of Policy Support Variables with National Identification, Identity-Uncertainty, and Ideology

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Greek identification	1	.20**	.45**	-.28**	.33**	.49**
2. Identity-uncertainty		1	.20**	-.16**	.08	.13*
3. Political ideology			1	-.30**	-.00	.52**
4. Greek autonomy				1	.19**	-.19**
5. Economic help					1	.16**
6. Border control						1

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$

Table 3. Study 1: Intercorrelations of Party Support Variables with National Identification, Identity-Uncertainty, and Ideology

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Greek identification	1	.20**	.45**	-.04	.29**	.25**	.32**	.24**	.21**	.11*
2. Identity-uncertainty		1	.20**	-.05	-.02	.13*	.00	.09	.05	.09
3. Political ideology			1	-.45**	.29**	.13*	.61**	.27**	.30**	-.23**
4. Communist Party				1	-.12*	.16**	-.25**	-.07	-.12*	.24**
5. Golden Dawn					1	.31**	.07	.26**	.01	.01
6. Independent						1	.07	.26**	.07	.31**
7. New Democracy							1	.27**	.41**	-.34**
8. Panhellenic (Pasok)								1	.55**	-.01
9. River									1	-.09
10. Syriza										1

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$

between those on the left ($M = 5.47$, 95% CI [-1.04, .17]) and the right ($M = 5.92$, 95% CI [-1.04, .17]) when they chose systemic media.

National Identification, Policy Support, and Party Affiliations

In addition to our key hypothesis regarding the interaction between media source and political ideology in predicting identity-uncertainty, in Study 1, we also examined the relationships between policy support and political party support variables with national identification, identity-uncertainty, and political ideology (see Tables 2 and 3). Table 2 shows that high identifying Greeks, those who leaned right, and felt high identity-uncertainty were less likely to seek Greek autonomy from the EU, while they indicated support for greater Greek border control. Those who identified strongly with a Greek identity also supported more international economic help for Greece. Table 3 shows that those who identified more strongly with a Greek identity were more likely to lean right on the ideological continuum and indicated greater support for the following political parties: New Democracy, Golden Dawn, River, Panhellenic Socialist Movement (Pasok) and the Independent parties, while those who leaned left were more likely to favor Syriza and the Communist party.

Discussion

Findings from Study 1 supported our main prediction that exposure to media sources from the opposite end of the ideological continuum heightens uncertainty regarding one's social identity, especially in the context of a crisis. Research on selective exposure has examined a sense of aversiveness and discomfort that accompanies exposure to attitudinally discordant media communication. We built on these findings to demonstrate that exposure to ingroup media that argues an ideologically contrary position also raises uncertainty about one's social identity. Right-leaning Greeks who typically chose systemic or normative media sources reported feeling most uncertain when they chose anti-systemic news media. Similarly, left-leaning Greeks who typically chose anti-systemic news media reported feeling more uncertain when they chose systemic news media compared to anti-systemic media. This sense of uncertainty was especially heightened for right-leaning Greeks when they chose anti-systemic media, as majority media sources were systemic and thereby normative.

We also examined how political ideology, identity-uncertainty, and national identification related to political party support and policy support items pertaining to economic help, Greek autonomy, and border control. Overall, we found that those on the right end of the ideological continuum and high Greek identifiers were less likely to favor Greece's exit and autonomy from the monetary union. In Study 2, we built on these relationships to examine whether attitudes toward Grexit – one of the predominant issues during the crisis in news media – were strengthened by Greek nationalists' choice of news media under high versus low identity-uncertainty.

Study 2

In Study 2, our main aim was to introduce an experimental manipulation of media produced identity-uncertainty. With this experimental manipulation, we aimed to understand where identity-uncertain versus certain Greek nationalists (high identifiers who leaned right on the ideological continuum) positioned themselves on the issue of Grexit, which dominated media rhetoric at the time of data collection. In Study 1, through an examination of the intercorrelations between the policy support, national identification, and political ideology measures (see Table 2), we found that Greeks who identified strongly with a Greek identity and leaned right were less likely to support Greek autonomy and Grexit. Building on these findings, in Study 2, we created a composite variable of national identification and political ideology to measure Greek nationalism and aimed to examine whether the type of media (systemic vs. anti-systemic) that Greek nationalists (high, low) chose mediated their attitudes toward Grexit under high versus low identity-uncertainty. Thus, while in Study 1, we examined the extent of identity-uncertainty experienced by right- versus left-leaning Greeks when exposed to systemic versus anti-systemic media, in Study 2, we built on findings from Study 1 to examine

whether the experience of identity-uncertainty shaped attitudes toward important policy issues through exposure to systemic versus anti-systemic media.

Method

Participants and Design

Participants were Greek citizens and included 107 males and 186 females ($N = 293$, $M_{age} = 23.01$, $SD = 5.30$) from the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. Study 2 had one manipulated variable (identity-uncertainty). The measured variables were: national identification, political ideology, media source, and attitudes toward Grexit.

We conducted two separate power analyses to assess if we had adequate sample size using the *pwr2ppl* (Aberson, 2019) R package. To test our hypotheses, we conducted two mediation analyses – one within the high identity-uncertainty condition and one within the low identity-uncertainty condition. In the high identity-uncertainty condition ($N = 148$), we found that power for the total mediation was .70. In the low identity-uncertainty condition ($N = 145$), we found that power for the total mediation was .64. While power in the low identity-uncertainty condition was lower than expected, we proceeded with the analyses, as our key prediction centered on the high identity-uncertainty condition.

Procedure and Materials

Similar to Study 1, Study 2 was introduced to participants as aiming to understand Greeks' opinions and attitudes toward the ongoing Greek financial crisis. Once participants consented to participating in the study, they were presented with the study materials. The measured variables were identical to the ones used in Study 1, that is, Greek national identification (seven items, $\alpha = .93$), political ideology (one item), and our main dependent variable, attitudes toward Grexit or Greek autonomy (five items, $\alpha = .82$), which included the same items as in Study 1 and measured attitudes toward Greece's exit from the Eurozone and the monetary union, support (vs. opposition) for break in negotiations with lenders, and Greek control over its economy. Similar to Study 1, participants wrote down six news media sources that they predominantly chose.

The novel contribution of Study 2 was to introduce an experimental manipulation of identity-uncertainty produced by exposure to news media. The manipulation was introduced before the five attitudes toward Grexit items were presented and participants were randomly assigned to either the high or the low identity-uncertainty condition. In the high identity-uncertainty condition, participants were asked to write down three ways in which news media made them feel uncertain about who they are, their future, their Greek identity, and the future of Greece. In the low identity-uncertainty condition, they listed three ways in which news media made them feel certain about who they are, their future, their Greek identity, and the future of Greece. Similar experimental manipulations of identity-uncertainty have been used in previous research on uncertainty-identity

theory (e.g., Belavadi & Hogg, 2016; Hohman et al. 2010; Sherman et al., 2009).

Finally, participants responded to demographic questions about age, gender, and religious identification, were debriefed and thanked for their participation.

Results

In Study 2, we tested the hypothesis that the type of media chosen (systemic vs. anti-systemic) would mediate the relationship between nationalism and attitudes toward Grexit differently under high versus low identity-uncertainty. We experimentally manipulated one variable – identity-uncertainty produced by the media, while nationalism, choice of media source, and attitudes toward Grexit were measured.

Scales and Measures

The test of our mediation model included nationalism as the predictor, media source (systemic vs. anti-systemic media) as the mediator, and attitudes toward Grexit was our criterion variable. We used the number of systematic versus anti-systematic media listed by the participants as the mediator variables. In Study 2, we wished to test a mediation hypothesis. Therefore, we used a continuous measure of systemic and anti-systemic media sources to test our prediction using path analysis. We examined two mediation models, one within high identity-uncertainty and one within low identity-uncertainty. Media sources were categorized as systemic or anti-systemic by coders. Next, the number of systemic and anti-systemic sources mentioned by each participant was counted. Unlike in Study 1, none of the participants mentioned an equal number of systemic and anti-systemic sources. The nationalism measure ($\alpha = .92$) was created as a composite variable by averaging responses on the national identification measure (7 items) and the single-item political ideology measure. A factor analysis with the national identification and political ideology measures indicated that one clear factor with an eigenvalue greater than unity emerged from the scree. The factor loadings for each item on the single factor were greater than 0.50.

We created a composite variable of five items that assessed attitudes toward Grexit and Greek autonomy. These items assessed support versus opposition for austerity, a break in negotiations with lenders, Greek control over its economy, Greece's exit from the monetary union, and Greece's exit from the European Union ($\alpha = .82$). Factor analysis with the five items revealed that one clear factor emerged from the scree. Reliabilities, means, *SDs*, and intercorrelations of the variables are presented in Table 4.

Media Source, Identity-Uncertainty, and Grexit

To test our mediation hypothesis, we used AMOS and conducted a path

Table 4. Study 2: Reliabilities, *M*, *SD*s, and Intercorrelation of Nationalism and the Dependent Variable (Attitudes Toward Grexit)

Variable	α	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2
1. Nationalism (8 items)	.92	5.62	1.63	-	-.24**
2. Attitudes toward Grexit (5 items)	.82	4.83	1.73		-

Note. Means take values between 1 and 9, with 9 indicating more of the feature being described.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$

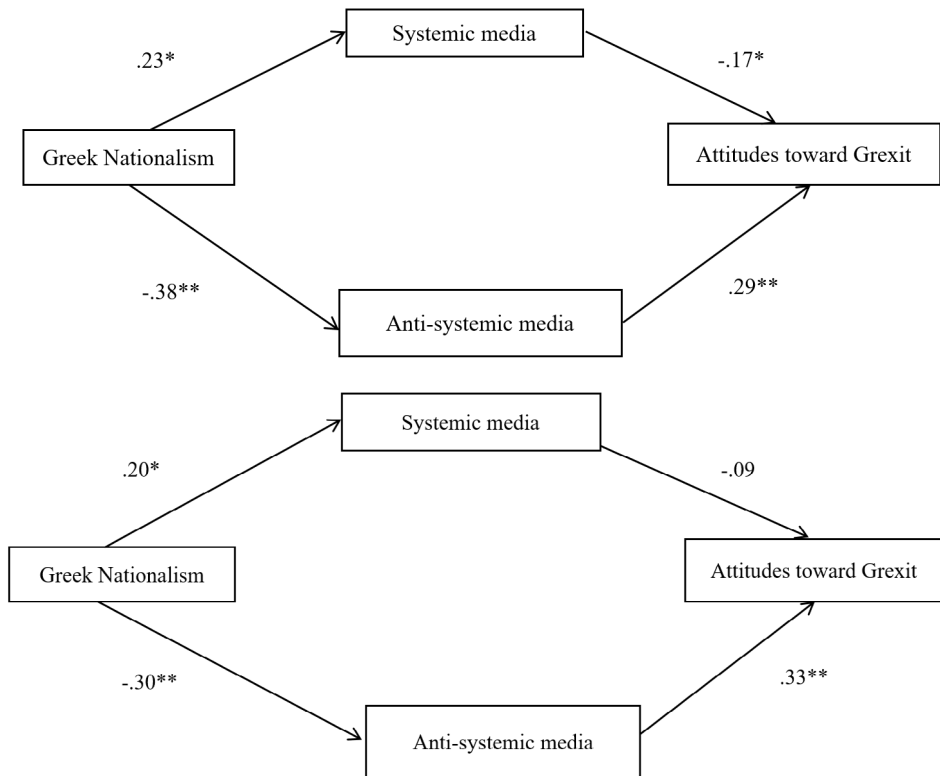
analysis. We tested two mediation models (see Figure 2) – one under high identity-uncertainty and one under low identity-uncertainty. Under high identity-uncertainty, the fit indices indicated a good fit for the model, $\chi^2 / df(2) = 2.43$, $p = .29$, CFI = .99, TLI = .97, RMSEA = .04. Figure 2, Panel A shows the relationships between the variables. We found that all paths were statistically significant ($ps < .05$), such that those who scored high on nationalism were more likely to choose systemic media and the choice of systemic media was related to greater opposition of Grexit under high identity-uncertainty. High nationalists were less likely to choose anti-systemic media, and the choice of anti-systemic media predicted greater support for Grexit under high identity-uncertainty.

Under conditions of low identity-uncertainty, the fit indices again indicated a good fit for the model, $\chi^2 / df(2) = 1.20$, $p = .55$, CFI = 1, TLI = 1.07, RMSEA = .00. Figure 2, Panel B shows the relationships between the variables. We found that all paths were statistically significant ($ps < .05$) except for the path from choice of systemic media to attitudes toward Grexit. Similar to the high uncertainty condition, nationalists were more likely to choose systemic media and less likely to choose anti-systemic media, and those who chose anti-systemic media were more likely to support Grexit.

Discussion

Building on the intercorrelations between policy support items with national identification and political ideology that we examined in Study 1, we aimed to understand how Greek nationalism – a composite variable of political ideology and national identity – related to support versus opposition for one of the key political issues during the Greek crisis, namely, Grexit. We were interested in understanding how the relationship between nationalism and attitudes toward Grexit were framed by the mediating role of type of news media under low and high identity-uncertainty produced by the media. A test of our model indicated that under conditions of heightened uncertainty, the type of media exposure did mediate the relationship between Greek nationalism and attitudes toward Grexit. Greek nationalists who typically chose system supporting media sources were more likely to oppose Grexit, whereas those who were low on nationalism and more likely to choose anti-systemic or non-normative media sources were more likely to support Grexit.

Figure 2. Mediation Analysis Testing the Indirect Effect of Greek Nationalism on Attitudes Toward Grexit Through Choice of Media Source Within the High Uncertainty Condition (Top Panel) and the Low Uncertainty Condition (Bottom Panel)



General Discussion

We aimed to present a picture of the political situation in Greece during the 2009-2018 financial crisis, especially with regard to whether media-related communication can make people feel uncertain about their social identity in the midst of a national crisis. Media messages during this period consisted of intragroup communication that constructed and negotiated the normative policy decisions Greek society should make in the face of the crisis it faced within a hostile intergroup international context. The ways in which identity-uncertainty is shaped by choice of different news media (Study 1) and the role identity-uncertainty plays in shaping attitudes toward identity-relevant issues through choice of news media (Study 2) was of special interest in two studies. In Study 1, we examined whether the type of news media chosen moderated the relationship between political ideology and extent of uncertainty experienced about one's Greek identity and its future. In Study 2, we experimentally manipulated identity-uncertainty produced by news media and

examined the mediating role of the type of news media in shaping attitudes toward Grexit under high and low identity-uncertainty.

We specifically focused on Grexit since it was one of the political issues that dominated media rhetoric and narratives at the time the study was conducted (April/May 2015). The issue of Grexit especially pertains to social identity concerns as questions about whether one's group should remain a part of the superordinate identity (the Eurozone), as opposed to returning to the national currency and leaving the superordinate identity should raise uncertainty about fundamental identity-related questions. We also chose to focus on two specific types of news media categories – systemic or normative media sources and anti-systemic or non-normative media sources.

During a crisis in which uncertainty about social identity is elevated, we typically look to influential ingroup sources, such as ingroup media sources, that provide rich social identity-related information (Belavadi & Hogg, 2019; Hogg & Giles, 2012). Research has shown that during a national crisis, group members seek social media to gain valuable information about the group, and such media also helps mobilize and organize group members toward collective action and political participation (Gardikiotis et al., 2018). Resolving uncertainty and seeking valuable group-related information involves trusted ingroup sources. In such contexts, exposure to news media sources that are ideologically discordant, albeit still ingroup sources, should make one feel especially uncertain about oneself and one's social identity.

Previous selective exposure research shows that individuals seek information that is attitudinally consistent to validate their worldview. We built on this work and demonstrated that exposure to media sources that are typically chosen by ingroup members on the other end of the ideological continuum and are attitudinally inconsistent with one's worldview also relates to heightened identity-uncertainty. Salient social identities help shape our worldview and inform us of the place we occupy in relation to others, and exposure to ideologically discordant information does appear to heighten social identity-uncertainty.

Our findings in Study 1 demonstrated that ideologically right-leaning Greeks who chose predominantly systemic news media sources when compared with left-leaning Greeks reported greater identity-uncertainty about their Greek identity when they chose anti-systemic news media sources. The mean for identity-uncertainty was highest for right-leaning Greeks who chose anti-systemic sources. On the other hand, ideologically left-leaning Greeks felt more uncertain when they chose systemic news media sources compared to anti-systemic news media sources. Thus, choice of media sources that are ideologically discordant, but typically chosen by ingroup members on the other end of the ideological continuum, heightens uncertainty about one's social identity through challenges to one's dominant worldview, especially in the midst of a national crisis.

In Study 1, we also examined how political ideology, Greek identification, and identity-uncertainty correlated with Greeks' positions on various political

issues that were discussed frequently in the news media during the financial crisis. The issues we examined centered on Greece's quest for financial and national autonomy, that is, separation from the EU, Greek control of its borders, and seeking economic help and a break in the negotiations with the EU. These correlations overall indicated that right-leaning, high identifying Greeks were less likely to seek Greek autonomy from the EU. However, they wanted more border control for Greece, such that they opposed asylum seekers and immigration into Greece.

Such attitudes are consistent with the dominant narrative in systemic and normative media sources in Greece that portray immigrants as either threats to public health and national security or as victims who are dependent on the nation's resources (Kalfeli et al., 2022).

Bivariate correlations in Study 1 indicated that political ideology and national identification had similar relationships with Greeks' stances on various political issues. Therefore, in Study 2, we combined the two variables into a composite variable of Greek nationalism. We found that Greek nationalism did predict attitudes toward Grexit indirectly via type of media chosen (systemic vs. anti-systemic) when identity-uncertainty produced by the media was high. Greek nationalists who were more likely to choose systemic or normative news media, were less likely to seek Grexit when highly uncertain about their Greek identity.

In previous research, Gardikiotis et al. (2017) found that when Greeks felt emotions such as anger, they were more likely to seek Grexit, whereas when they experienced fear and helplessness, they were less likely to seek Grexit. While identity-uncertainty is distinctive from the experience of fear and helplessness, we can speculate that when highly uncertain about one's identity, a sense of helplessness dominates. Greek nationalists possibly saw Greek identity as fused or closely tied with the superordinate EU identity. Thus, when uncertain about their Greek identity and exposed to systemic media, they were more likely to seek to maintain ties with the superordinate identity rather than disturb status quo. This indirect relationship between nationalism and opposition of Grexit via choice of systemic media was not statistically significant under low identity-uncertainty.

In two studies, we described Greek attitudes towards some of the dominant political issues at the time of the financial crisis in Greece. Our aim was to present the ways in which normative talk that flows from influential ingroup sources in the midst of a crisis that involves the group can heighten social identity-uncertainty and the implications such uncertainty has for shaping group members' attitudes toward important group-related issues.

Our findings build on previous research on selective exposure and the role of the media (e.g., see Hart et al., 2009) and demonstrate that while ingroup media narratives function as important sources of normative information and social identity validation, exposure to outgroup media narratives in the midst of a crisis also heightens identity-uncertainty about who we are and where we are headed as a group. Our findings also add to the literature on crisis communication (e.g., Diers-Lawson, 2017) by highlighting that in times of major upheaval,

exposure to outgroup media sources can indeed enhance identity-uncertainty. The processes through which exposure to specific sources of information can enhance identity-uncertainty and the implications that it has for the future of the group, its members, and the crisis situation itself can benefit from future research. Our findings also highlight how subgroups within a larger group respond when exposed to communication from the opposite side, especially in the context of a crisis wherein divisions between groups are already highlighted. As our findings show, exposure to information from an opposing subgroup raises identity-uncertainty, especially when questions about ingroup position within a larger superordinate identity are being raised.

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Conflict of Interest Disclosure

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Research Ethics Statement

Institutional ethical approval for the current study was granted by the Claremont Graduate University.

Authorship Details

Sucharita Belavadi: research concept and design, data analysis and interpretation, writing the article, critical revision of the article, final approval of the article.

Antonis Gardikiotis: research concept and design, collection and/or assembly of data, data analysis and interpretation, writing the article, critical revision of the article, final approval of the article.

Michael A. Hogg: research concept and design, data analysis and interpretation, writing the article, critical revision of the article, final approval of the article.

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