



The Role of Social Identity in the Spread of Outgroup-Sanctioning Content Online

Jino Kwon, William Brady, Andrea Pereira, and Jay Van Bavel
New York University

bradywilliamj@gmail.com

Introduction

- Discussions of political ideas that strike at our deeply held intuitions about what is right and wrong increasingly occur in online social networks.
 - What type of moralized content is most likely to spread through online social networks?
- Moral contagion: Moral emotion expression plays a key role in the diffusion of moralized content in online networks (Brady et al., 2017).
- Then, *Why* are people prone to sharing moral-emotional content?
- Social identity processes may play a role in the moral contagion effect; we are motivated to uphold beliefs and attitudes central to our group identities, and this is especially true when our group identities are made salient. On social media, our political identities are hyper salient.

Hypothesis

Hypothesis : people who are more strongly identified with their political group will be more likely to engage with moral emotional content.

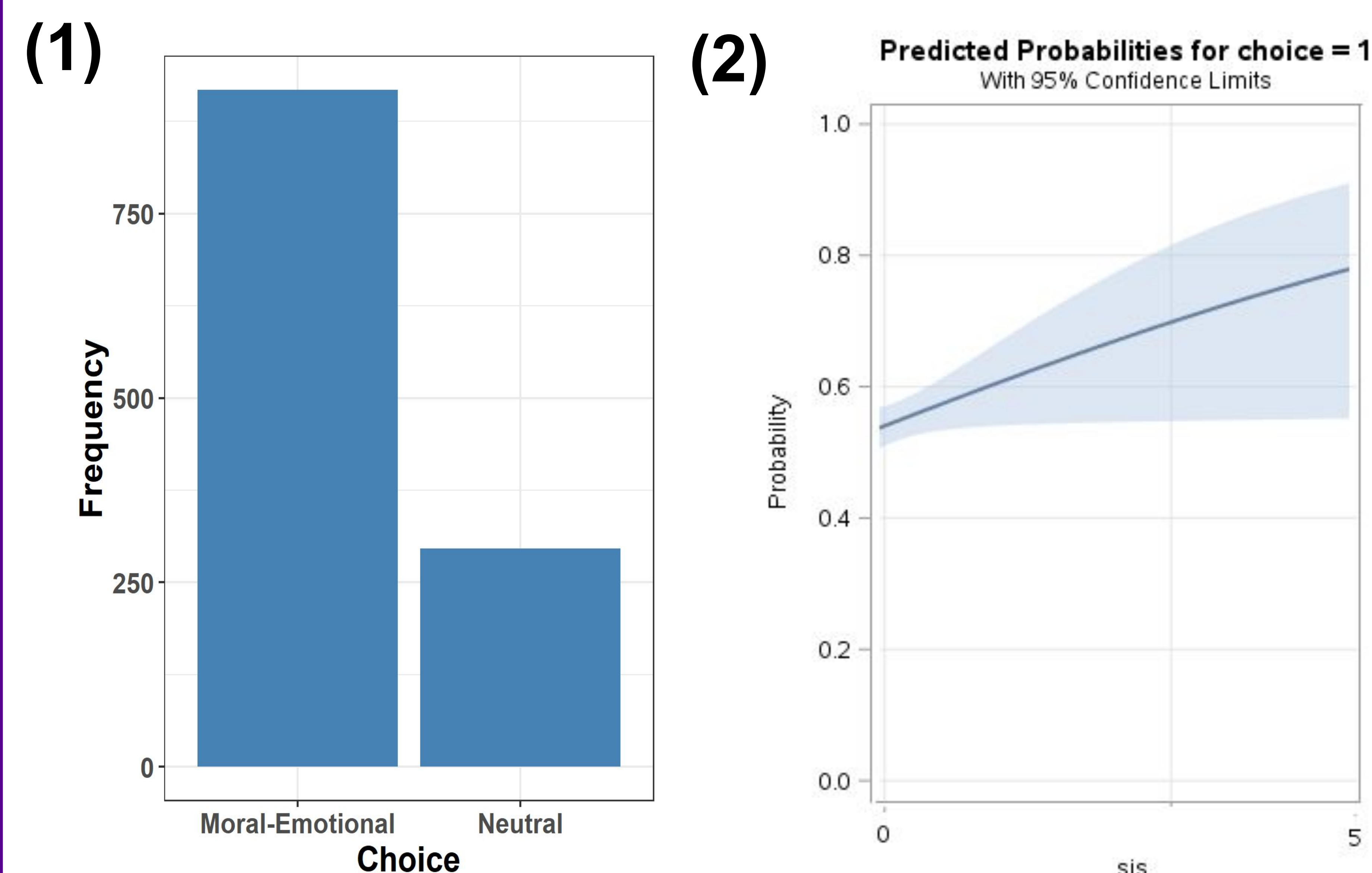
Method

- Participants: 350 mTurkers (196 Females, $M_{age} = 39.69$)
 - 162 Democrats, 188 Republicans
- Political identity strength (sis) measurement based on Leach et al. (2008)
 - 14 items, $\alpha = .95$. Average items together, 1-7 score possible. $M = 4.89$
- The main task was to choose one message in pair that the participants would share to their friends on social media.
 - Participants exposed to ideologically-congruent messages about polarizing topics: Gun control, climate change, healthcare, Trump/Clinton.

Results

- Participants were 24% more likely to choose moral-emotional message than neutral message (causal test of moral contagion effect), $p < .001$
- Political identity strength positively associated with decision to share moral-emotional message, $p = .016$
 - Effect holds when statistically adjusting for attitudes towards each message topic

Results



Discussion

- Expressing moral emotions online may serve Identity maintenance functions (Abrams, 1992; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Tetlock et al., 2000)
 - Protect us from threats to moral values sacred to group identity
 - Affirm our group identity and boost our self-integrity
- Future work will explore whether people are more likely to choose moral-emotional message when exposed to political messages that either threaten or affirm their political identities.

Stimuli

* Liberal message pair

If you had to choose one, which message would you be more likely to share to your friends on social media?

The hatred spewed by Trump on social media and in his speeches is wrong for a #President of the U.S.

The rhetoric spoken by Trump on social media and in his speeches is strange for a #President of the U.S.

* Conservative message pair

If you had to choose one, which message would you be more likely to share to your friends on social media?

Shame on Hillary Clinton for lying to the American people throughout her entire campaign #election

Hillary Clinton didn't tell the truth to the American people throughout her entire campaign #election

* Political Identity Strength (sis) measurement

Please indicate the extent you which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

| | Disagree strongly | Disagree moderately | Disagree slightly | Neither agree not disagree | Agree slightly | Agree moderately | Agree strongly |
|--|-------------------|---------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|----------------|------------------|----------------|
| I feel a bond with the Democratic party | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| I feel solidarity with the Democratic party | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| I feel committed to the Democratic party | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| I am glad to be a Democrat | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| I think that Democrats have a lot to be proud of | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |