

Original Research

What Makes Political Rumors Contagious: Third-Person Effect of Political Rumor Dissemination on SNS via Dual Information Processing Routes

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the psychological and cognitive mechanisms underlying political rumor dissemination on SNS in South Korea by synthesizing three theoretical frameworks: framing, the third-person effect (TPE), and the elaboration likelihood model (ELM). We conducted an online experiment (N=800) examining how different rumor frames (character vs. competence) influence rumor dissemination. The results demonstrate that participants exposed to character-framed rumors, compared to competence-framed ones, were more likely to exhibit TPE, perceiving others as more susceptible to the rumor's influence than themselves. Path analysis revealed significant indirect effects, with character framing influencing SNS dissemination intention through TPE and both peripheral and central routes of ELM. These findings advance our theoretical understanding of rumor dissemination by revealing the complex interplay between message framing, perceived influence on others, and dual information processing routes. The study also enriches the literature on political rumor framing effects by demonstrating how different trait qualifications shape sharing behavior on social media, suggesting that character-framed political rumors may be particularly influential in digital environments.

KEYWORDS

political rumor, SNS, third person effect, elaboration likelihood mode, frame

Political rumors have been on the rise in recent years with the flood of disinformation and fake news that are often disguised as real news (Freelon & Wells, 2020). Political rumors tend to reach out more widely, more rapidly, and more deeply through SNS, as evidenced in recent presidential elections in the United States (Vosoughi et al., 2018). Moreover, it can be argued that these political rumors can lead to social turmoil by prompting wrong decision-making, as these rumors typically provide inaccurate information with citizens (Berinsky, 2017).

Out of these concerns, series of studies attended to antecedents or dynamics of political rumors that may underline their rapid dissemination (Kwak et al., 2020; Tandoc et al., 2019). Previous studies have shown that individuals indeed tend to accept rumors easily and share them with others in such conditions as when they receive political rumors from their acquaintances or when the target of political rumor has an incongruous ideological stance (Garrett, 2011; Hutchings et al., 2021). Further, SNS has become a catalyst for propagating toxic political rumors with ease, ultimately undermining the health of a democratic society (Shin et al., 2018). Despite these escalating perils, the dynamics of political rumor dissemination has not been fully explored theoretically. Notably, few studies have attended to psychological mechanisms under which individuals purport to spread political rumors on SNS.

To fill this void, we aim to uncover psychological and cognitive mechanisms that can elucidate how political rumors are spread on SNS while drawing on solid theoretical footings of framing, the third person effect (TPE), and the elaboration likelihood model (ELM). More specifically, TPE, which posits that individuals tend to perceive others as being more influenced by media messages than they are themselves (Davison, 1983), offers valuable insights into how political rumors are assessed based on their anticipated consequences. In addition, ELM can elucidate how the processing of a rumor message through a particular pathway affects an individual's decision to spread it. By conducting an original online experiment, we show that political rumors that are framed to highlight a candidate's character rather than competence immediately produce the perception that others are more likely to be impacted. The present study also demonstrates that TPE subsequently augments individuals' propensity to spread political rumors on SNS indirectly through the peripheral as well as the central routes of ELM.

Rumor Dissemination on SNS

Rumors refer to fact claims about individuals, groups, events and institutions that have not yet been validated (Sunstein, 2014) but have earned credibility, not because direct evidence is accumulated to endorse them, but because they are shared among a wide range of individuals (Fine & Ellis, 2013). Rumors are characterized by two features (Berinsky, 2017). First, rumors are statements that lack specific standards of evidence (Fine & Ellis, 2013; Jerit & Zhao, 2020). Political rumors, therefore, are distinguished from "warranted beliefs" (Keeley, 1999). Second, rumors nonetheless acquire notable influence through widespread social transmission (Berinsky, 2017). The development of communication technologies has made the expansion and reproduction of political rumors easier than ever. As political rumors are replicated and spread through an extensive range of social networks, political rumors can have the noteworthy potential to sway and create public opinion.

Recently, SNS has become a powerful vehicle to accelerate the spread of political rumors. Numerous studies have theorized the role of technological affordances and audiences in how information on SNS is transmitted and accepted (Sundar, 2008; Walther, 2017). More germane to the current research, Oh et al. (2013) noted the remarkable influence of source ambiguity, content ambiguity, and anxiety on rumor mongering on media with a surprisingly little comparable effect of social ties on the spreading of rumors. As such, it is conceivable that the ambiguity of the source as well as sheer volume of content on SNS may have fueled the dissemination of malicious rumors.

Frames in Media's Coverage of Political Rumors

According to Entman (1993), "[t]o frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text

in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (p. 52). Framing pertains to how an issue or an event is presented by the media, thereby engendering a certain interpretation (Scheufele, 2000). Thus, news framing can influence the way audience members appraise an issue or an event by highlighting certain aspects (Scheufele, 2000). In this vein, how a political candidate is framed does not only paint citizens’ assessment (Cho, 2005; Shen, 2004) but also affect their tendency to share news about that candidate (Bøggild et al., 2021).

Recent advances in framing theory underscore its critical role in political communication, particularly in shaping not only what audiences think about, but also how they think about it (Chong & Druckman, 2007). In addition, Scheufele and Iyengar (2017) stress that framing is not static but adapts to evolving media landscapes and audience perceptions, underscoring the importance of considering contemporary dynamics in the analysis of media effects. Meanwhile, news media can cover stories about a political candidate in light of two distinct aspects, namely, image or issue (Roddy & Garramone, 1988; Schenck-Hamlin et al., 2000). The image coverage focuses on character-related qualities, whereas the issue coverage emphasizes candidates’ positions on policy, governmental action, and civic affairs (Kaid & Johnston, 1991). Similarly, traits of a political candidate can be divided into two dimensions: personality-based and performance-based (Kinder et al., 1980). Johnston (2002) also identified two essential personality considerations of political actors: “*Character*, the political actor’s integrity and empathy; and *competence*, the actor’s intellectual and inspirational attributes” (p. 166). Bittner (2011) aptly summarized trait qualifications of political leaders: *character*-related traits such as empathy, warmth, and *compassion* and *competence*-related traits such as intelligence and strength of leadership.

These previous studies lend plausibility to the idea that news coverage of political rumors can be classified according to its emphasis either on a politician’s character or competence; further, these different foci of news reports can embody distinctive frames deeply entrenched in media coverage of political rumors. In line with this notion, we categorize news media’s frames of rumor coverage either into *character*-emphasized political rumors or *competence*-emphasized political rumors. Drawing on this typology, we strive to uncover differential effects of character- or competence-framed rumors on their diffusion. On the other hand, theories of framing explain the role of selection and salience in promoting a specific interpretation or a moral evaluation of the item described (Entman, 1993). Taken together, it is conceivable that a distinctive frame of political rumor can lead to a distinguishable interpretation, as it can make certain aspects of a candidate more salient and nonequivalent.

Impact of Character-Framed Political Rumors on TPE

The third-person effect (TPE) posits that individuals tend to believe others are more influenced by media messages than themselves, particularly for socially undesirable content (Davison, 1983; Tsfati & Cohen, 2005). Recent studies have explored TPE in various contexts. In the realm of social media, Lee and Yeon (2022) found that individuals with low political trust and high political self-efficacy are more likely to exhibit stronger third-person perception (TTP) of fake news effects and are less likely to share fake news than others. Understanding privacy risks, Chen and Atkin (2020) revealed users perceive greater privacy risks for others than for themselves, with social distance, perceived privacy knowledge, and online privacy experiences serving as significant predictors of these perceptions. In health communication, Siegenthaler and Fahr, (2023) explored the effects of narrative voice

in explainer videos about work-related stress, finding that narrative voice impacts identification with characters and attitudes towards health recommendations.

As described above, framing plays a crucial role in shaping public perception (Entman, 1993). Political rumors can be framed in terms of a candidate's character or competence (Johnston, 2002; Kinder et al., 1980). Character-framed rumors focus on personal traits, while competence-framed rumors emphasize leadership and policy-related skills. Research has shown that framing can influence the magnitude of TPE. For example, Lancendorfer (2005) explored how political ads framed around character (personal) vs. competence attitudes elicit different behavioral responses among voters. This study's findings suggest that character-based attributions, which elicit emotional reactions, lead to stronger actions, aligning with TPE where individuals act based on their perception that others are more influenced by emotionally charged rumors. In the similar context, Tutmann (2016) demonstrated how emotional framing (character-based) tends to invoke stronger behavioral responses compared to competence-based framing, which may relate to the stronger TPT seen in emotionally charged character-based rumors. Similarly, Wei et al. (2011) demonstrated that the framing of political attack ads influenced the extent of TPE. Building on these findings about framing effects on TPE, it is important to consider how different types of political information, particularly those related to character versus competence, may differentially impact third-person perceptions.

The psychological mechanisms underlying TPE, such as ego enhancement (Perloff, 1989) and biased optimism (Gunther & Mundy, 1993), may be more pronounced when dealing with character-related information. This aligns with research by Hoorens and Ruiter (1996), who found that people tend to believe they are less susceptible to persuasion attempts targeting personality traits compared to those targeting

competence-related attributes. Moreover, Funk (1999) demonstrated that character assessments often play a larger role in voters' overall evaluations of political candidates than issue-based assessments. However, voters typically claim to prioritize competence-related factors in their decision-making (Fiorina, 1988). This discrepancy suggests that individuals may underestimate the influence of character-related information on themselves while overestimating its effect on others. Jang and Kim (2018) also found that the perceived influence of rumors on others was greater for character-attacking rumors compared to policy-related rumors. This finding directly supports the notion that character-framed political information may elicit stronger TPE.

We argue that when political rumors are framed negatively about a candidate's trait qualification, exposure to those rumors can trigger TPE, perhaps due to ego enhancement or biased optimism. This notion is reinforced by the findings of Tal-Or and Tsfati (2016), who showed that TPE can be intensified when individuals perceive the content to be particularly biased. Character framing can prompt a higher level of TPE than the competence counterpart, given that individuals who think themselves to be more rational than others may believe that the former is less relevant for the evaluation of a candidate as compared with the latter and thus conclude that the former is more likely to affect others than themselves.

While character and competence are both critical considerations in selecting candidates, voters may be inclined to believe that character affects others more, whereas competence influences themselves more (Cappella & Li, 2023; Green, 2024). This perception may stem from a desire to present their decisions as rational and based on logical evaluation, rather than being driven by emotional considerations. This bias is also consistent with the ego-enhancement strategy, in which individuals strive to maintain a positive self-image by emphasizing their

rationality (Gunther & Mundy, 1993; Perloff, 1989). Supporting this line of reasoning, Lau and Redlawsk (2001) found that voters often employ cognitive heuristics to simplify political decision-making, frequently focusing on perceived competence to reinforce an image of rational decision-making. Similarly, Fiorina (1988) observed that voters who consider themselves rational tend to prioritize candidate qualities such as competence and leadership over personality. Moreover, Sun et al. (2008) suggests that TPE is often heightened when content is perceived as undermining social norms, a phenomenon particularly pertinent to character-based political rumors. As such, we hypothesize that:

- H1. The character-framed political rumor will prompt a higher level of TPE than the competence-framed counterpart.

TPE and ELM

Ego enhancement, which motivates individuals to evaluate themselves positively, is one of the main facilitators of TPE (Perloff, 1999). This self-overestimation bias is also likely to reinforce TPE of political rumors. Given that others are deemed less reasonable than themselves, people may be driven to believe that political rumors on social media—i.e., those highlighting presumably less relevant information in determining a candidate's capacity—have a greater impact on others than on themselves. Recent research suggests that TPE is particularly potent when content is perceived as threatening or socially undesirable, thereby further amplifying the belief that others are more susceptible to its influence (Jang & Kim, 2018).

Meanwhile, the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) is a dual-process theory of persuasion that explains how attitudes are formed and changed (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986a). The model posits two routes to persuasion: the central route, involving high elaboration and critical thinking, and the peripheral route, relying on simple cues

or heuristics. In applying this model to research, it's crucial to understand that certain commonly measured variables do not directly indicate the processing route. Perceived argument strength, which measures how persuasive participants find a message, does not necessarily indicate central route processing. Similarly, emotional responses to a message can occur in both central and peripheral processing and don't inherently indicate engagement in either route. Therefore, researchers must be cautious not to infer processing routes solely from these measures, as neither perceived argument strength nor emotional responses directly indicate which route a participant is using.

The ELM framework provides a valuable lens through which to examine the spread and impact of misinformation, particularly in the context of fake news and political rumors, as demonstrated by several recent studies. For example, Osatuyi and Hughes (2018) analyzed that fake news often uses peripheral cues and negative affective content, potentially influencing readers through the peripheral route of persuasion. Weeks and Garrett (2014) found that political rumors significantly influenced the 2008 U.S. presidential election by reinforcing biases through motivated reasoning. Seo et al. (2012) developed an approach to identify rumors and their sources in social networks, emphasizing the need for interventions to counteract misinformation spread. Kwak et al. (2020) also examined instant messaging platforms increased political participation but not political knowledge, potentially facilitating rumor spread through the peripheral route. Hosni and Li (2020) proposed a dynamic blocking period approach to minimize the influence of malicious rumors during breaking news events, aiming to disrupt rapid dissemination of unverified information.

The synthesis of the literature on TPE and ELM suggests that the perception about rumors' effects on others can influence which information processing route is taken. Given that character-

framed political rumors tend to exaggerate relatively less integral aspects of candidates such as trustworthiness or likability (Homer & Batra, 1994), those cues may fall short of forming solid reasonable arguments (Bittner, 2011). In line with TPE's role in ego enhancement (Perloff, 1989), individuals may believe that emotionally charged, less rational political rumors will have a greater impact on others than on themselves, as such rumors are perceived to be less relevant to their own voting considerations. TPE can then significantly shape how these cues are processed.¹ In particular, when individuals view themselves as less impacted by a certain message, their motivation to engage deeply with the content diminishes, leading them to favor the peripheral route of processing. This relationship between perceived relevance and processing route is critical because it underscores how TPE may predispose individuals to engage superficially with political rumors, thereby reinforcing reliance on peripheral cues over central processing (Tormala & Petty, 2004). For example, younger generations might immediately experience TPE in response to a message about healthcare policy, deeming it less relevant to them. This perception may then prompt them to process the message heuristically via the peripheral route. Consequently, TPE can play a critical role in shaping how individuals assess a message or rumor. Specifically, when people perceive a message as likely to have a greater impact on others than on themselves, they may process the information less critically, aligning more with peripheral route processing as they allocate fewer cognitive resources to analyze

content deemed less personally relevant.

However, the relationship between TPE and central route processing in ELM is more nuanced and warrants further exploration. Notably, the literature suggests that central and peripheral routes are not mutually exclusive. Petty and Cacioppo (1986a) recognized that while heuristic cues often drive initial message processing, deeper, more effortful cognitive engagement can occur when the message aligns with personally significant attitudes. Slater and Rouner's (2002) extension of the ELM further emphasizes that engagement with a narrative itself can facilitate more thorough processing, even via the central route, when the content resonates meaningfully with the audience. Therefore, while we hypothesize a positive association between TPE and peripheral processing, this does not imply a straightforward inverse or absence of association with central route processing. Rather, the link between TPE and central route processing may vary based on additional factors, such as personal relevance or motivation, which extend beyond the scope of TPE alone. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis and research question:

H2. TPE of the character-framed political rumor compared to competence-framed political rumor will be more associated with a response indicative of more superficial processing linked to the peripheral route.

RQ1. Will TPE of the character-framed political rumor compared to competence-framed political rumor be more associated with

¹ It is conceivable that message processing could serve as a precursor to TPE, as the evaluation of a message could logically precede an individual's perception of its impact. In addition, research has shown that low-quality messages may increase the likelihood of TPE (Duck et al., 1995). Our focus, however, is on the self-enhancement bias and preconceptions about a message's relevance that typically occur immediately upon encountering a message, prior to any deeper processing (Kwan et al., 2004; Zhao & Cai, 2008). Thus, we primarily examine how this bias, which is a core component of TPE, influences the mode of message evaluation, rather than how the outcome of message processing shapes an individual's perception of its impact on others. For example, if a message is perceived as less relevant—such as a rumor about a character—an individual may quickly conclude that it will have a greater impact on others than on themselves. This perception can then dampen their motivation to engage in deep processing, leading them to opt for a more superficial, heuristic-based approach. This early-stage bias toward TPE can thus play a critical role in determining the depth of message processing.

a response indicative of more effortful processing linked to the central route?

ELM and Dissemination of Political Rumors

The extant literature on ELM suggests that individuals tend to treat political rumors as peripheral cues, given that those are usually challenging and ambiguous to authenticate in fuzzy situations (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986a). As individuals engage in less scrutiny of message content, they tend to focus on peripheral cues such as source credibility and attractiveness when processing that information (Pornpitakpan, 2004). In particular, voters typically put limited cognitive effort toward political rumors focusing on the personality or character aspect of a candidate. This is consistent with the findings of Albarracín and Vargas (2010), who noted that individuals are less likely to engage in in-depth processing when the content lacks direct relevance to their immediate concerns or interests. As such, it can be inferred from ELM that political rumors emphasizing distinct dimension of a candidate may be handled through a different message processing route. Particularly germane to the present study, Homer and Batra (1994) noted that individuals process character-based political messages via the peripheral route, given that those tend to necessitate an individual's vigorous curiosity or complex cognitive abilities to a lesser degree.

Meanwhile, numerous studies have highlighted the significance of source credibility and attractiveness, key catalysts of the peripheral route, in individual's intention to disseminate (Shin et al., 2018) and forward message on SNS (Yan & Huang, 2014). ELM has identified source credibility (Pornpitakpan, 2004) and attractiveness (Shavitt et al., 1994) as important cues of the peripheral route. Individuals who process information peripherally are more susceptible to social validation cues and emotional responses (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986a), which

have been identified as crucial determinants of SNS sharing behavior (Heimbach & Hinz, 2018). This creates a self-reinforcing cycle, as described by Vosoughi et al. (2018). The peripheral processing of political rumors facilitates their rapid dissemination through SNS, while social proof generated by this sharing further encourages peripheral processing and subsequent dissemination. The immediacy and emotional nature of peripheral processing thus serves as facilitating factor for the dissemination of rumors in SNS environments where rapid, affect-driven decisions are the norm (Qiu et al., 2017).

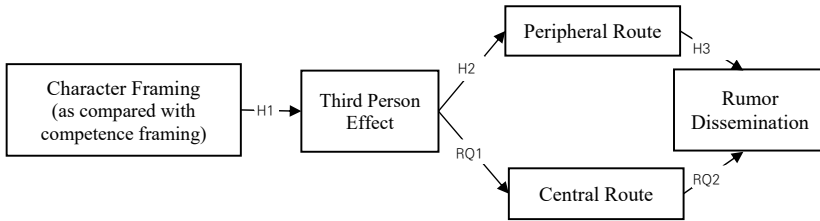
In accordance with this line of reason, political rumors that prioritize peripheral cues, such as a candidate's credibility and attractiveness, are included to be processed through peripheral route and subsequently shared on SNS. This is due to the fact that these elements directly engage with the heuristic processing mechanisms that drive SNS sharing behavior (Pennycook & Rand, 2019). In brief, the peripheral route may play a pivotal role in the dissemination of political rumors on SNS. Yet, the dissemination of rumors via the central route remains uncertain. Thus, we put forth the following hypothesis and the research question:

H3. The peripheral route is significantly more linked to the intention to disseminate the character-framed political rumor compared to competence-framed political rumor on SNS.

RQ2. Will the central route be more related to the intention to disseminate the character-framed political rumor compared to competence-framed political rumor on SNS?

Collectively, the synthesis of framing, TPE, and ELM allows us to postulate the following hypothesis and the research question concerning the indirect effects of rumor frame emphasizing a

Figure 1. *Conceptual Model*



Note. Hypotheses and research questions about indirect relationships are as follows; H4: H1→H2→H3, RQ3: H1→RQ1→RQ2

candidate’s character via TPE and dual routes of message processing:

H4. The character-framed political rumor compared to competence-framed political rumor will be more linked to the intention to disseminate it on SNS indirectly via TPE and a response indicative of more superficial processing linked to the peripheral route.

RQ3. Will character-framed political rumor compared to competence-framed political rumor be more linked to the intention to disseminate it on SNS indirectly via TPE and a response indicative of more effortful processing linked to the central route?

METHOD

Sample Profile

We conducted an online experiment² in South

Korea. The total sample size was 800, collected by an established research firm, *Macromill Embrain*. The demographic characteristics of 800 respondents were as follows. 50% ($n = 400$) were males. Their ages were stratified to match 20% for the respective age group: 19–29 20% ($n = 160$), 30–39 20% ($n = 160$), 40–49 20% ($n = 160$), 50–59 20% ($n = 160$), more than 60 ($n = 160$). More than half of the respondents had a bachelor’s degree (56.8%; $n = 454$), followed by some college 17.4% ($n = 139$), high school 16.1% ($n = 129$), beyond bachelor’s degree 8.1% ($n = 65$), and less than high school 1.6% ($n = 13$).

Procedure and Stimuli

This study’s online experiment was based on a 2×2 (rumor frame type x ideological stance of the rumor target) factorial design experiment, allowing participants to be randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions (see Figure 2 for the stimuli used): the competence-framed rumor about a conservative candidate (n

² This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical guidelines for social science research. Although formal IRB approval was not obtained, strict ethical standards were maintained throughout the research process. All participants provided informed consent prior to participation and were made aware of the study’s purpose, procedures, and their rights as research participants. To protect participant privacy, all data were collected anonymously and stored securely. The study posed minimal risk to participants, and they were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The research procedures adhered to standard ethical practices for research, including voluntary participation, confidentiality protection, and appropriate data management protocols.

Figure 2. Stimuli

뉴스룸 속보 정치 경제 사회 생활/문화 세계 IT/과학 오디션인 포토 TV 영향스

안남일보
[단독]보수 아이콘 박성배 유력 대선후보, '안남시 재정부도 책임 의혹' 휩싸여
 기사일련 2019-01-30 17:21 | 기사내용 | 스포츠 | 인물특가 | 일반

▶ 1.3M

【충남=안남일보】 발문영 기자 = 보수 정당의 차기 대권후보인 박성배 전 안남시장의 안남시 재정개발 사업 관련 보수계 대선전에 대한 책임 의혹이 커지고 있다.

박 전 시장이 재직하던 지난 2013년부터 시작된 용남 지역 재정개발사업은 현재 도시보상금 주안 이후 단적으로 중단된 상태다. 용남 지역은 '유망도시'가 되면서 무주택자 수요가 있다. 게다가 무려 4조원대의 사업 진행상황 조기에 종료하면서 시의 부채는 급증하였다. 결국 안남시는 20조원에 달하는 빚에 허덕이다 사업 진행 5년 만에 재정부도를 선언하였다.



지역의 안남시와 용남지역의 도시개발은 현재 무주택자 수요 증가로 인해 계속되고 있다.

최근 내부 문건을 통해 박 전 시장이 용기 앞에서 용남지역의 도시개발 사업의 진행상황에 대해 언급한 사실이 드러났다. 또한 박 시장의 내부자거 "박 전 시장이 자신 대신 기도를 위해 건설사들과 협력 용남지역 도시개발을 강행했다" 결국 수 조원의 부채를 남겼으며, 자신의 용기 중에 부도가 타지는 것을 막고자 지자체의 보조금과 시민단체 후원금 등 7조원에 달하는 국세세금을 재정개발 사업에 쏟아 부었다고 폭로했다. 폭로에 여파는 박 전 시장의 책임으로 고스란히 이어지고 있다.

한편, 박 전 시장의 대선 캠프 윤승호 부대변인은 재정개발사업 책임 의혹에 대해 "국회발의 법의 중의 기운이, 재정개발 사업에 대한 논의를 진행한 것"이라며 "주안보상금 이후가 본격적으로 실시된 시기라는 차이는 전혀 없는데 차이는 차이에 관한 내용은 충분히 가능한 일"이며 "국민세금으로 안남시의 부채를 막으려 했다는 내용은 완전히 잘못"이라고 밝혔다.

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공유하기 | 트위터 | 페이스북 | 카카오톡으로 | 댓글 | 인쇄

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뉴스룸 속보 정치 경제 사회 생활/문화 세계 IT/과학 오디션인 포토 TV 영향스


안남일보
[단독]진보 아이콘 박성배 유력 대선후보, '안남시 불법 위장전입 의혹' 휩싸여
 기사일련 2019-01-30 17:21 | 기사내용 | 스포츠 | 인물특가 | 일반

▶ 1.3M

【충남=안남일보】 발문영 기자 = 보수 정당의 차기 대권후보인 박성배 전 안남시장의 안남시 재정개발 사업 관련 분권 분규를 위해 배우자와 자녀의 위장전입 의혹이 커지고 있다.

박 전 시장이 재직하던 지난 2013년부터 시작된 용남 지역 재정개발사업 과정에서 위장전입, 시유주택 등 불법을 통해 분양권을 취득한 사례가 적발되었다.

계가 경찰 수사 결과, 총 150 건의 분양권 불법취득 사례 중 위장전입은 약 절반에 달하는 것으로 나타났다. 이같은 진문 보고자가 뒤늦게 수사처를 수차례로 위장전입으로 분양권을 불법 취득했다는 것으로 드러났다.



지역의 안남시와 용남지역의 도시개발은 현재 무주택자 수요 증가로 인해 계속되고 있다.

최근, 내부 문건을 통해 박 전 시장이 부도도 아파트가 들어올 것으로 예상한 주거지역 정보를 시공사와 중개업으로부터 미리 얻은 사실이 드러났다. 또한, 박 시장의 내부자거 "박 전 시장이 재정개발 사업 발진 전 자신의 배우자와 대학생 딸을 분양 지역의 주소 등 무이전에 등록하는 등의 방법으로 분양권을 취득하고 있었다. 이후에는 전한 보고자를 고충해 총 8차례로 위장전입을 시도했다"고 폭로하면서 박 전 시장의 분양권 취득과 부동산 투기를 위한 불법 위장전입 의혹에 참여했다고 밝혔다.

한편, 박 전 시장의 대선캠프 윤승호 부대변인은 위장전입 의혹에 대해 "수준 주거단지의 개발에 대한 내용은 건설사와 중개업으로부터 분양받은 것"이라며 "현재 미래와 땅의 주소지도 해당 지자체는 전혀 관계없는 차이에 관한 내용은 충분히 가능한 일"이며 "공공의 재산인 조사를 통해 재정개발 사업의 위장전입 배반에 대한 사실 관계가 정확히 밝혀질 바란다"고 밝혔다.

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안남일보
[단독]진보 아이콘 박성배 유력 대선후보, '안남시 재정부도 책임 의혹' 휩싸여
 기사일련 2019-01-30 17:21 | 기사내용 | 스포츠 | 인물특가 | 일반

▶ 1.3M

【충남=안남일보】 발문영 기자 = 진보 정당의 차기 대권후보인 박성배 전 안남시장의 안남시 재정개발 사업 관련 보수계 대선전에 대한 책임 의혹이 커지고 있다.

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지역의 안남시와 용남지역의 도시개발은 현재 무주택자 수요 증가로 인해 계속되고 있다.

최근 내부 문건을 통해 박 전 시장이 용기 앞에서 용남지역의 도시개발 사업의 진행상황에 대해 언급한 사실이 드러났다. 또한 박 시장의 내부자거 "박 전 시장이 자신 대신 기도를 위해 건설사들과 협력 용남지역 도시개발을 강행했다" 결국 수 조원의 부채를 남겼으며, 자신의 용기 중에 부도가 타지는 것을 막고자 지자체의 보조금과 시민단체 후원금 등 7조원에 달하는 국세세금을 재정개발 사업에 쏟아 부었다고 폭로했다. 폭로에 여파는 박 전 시장의 책임으로 고스란히 이어지고 있다.

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= 200); the competence-framed rumor about a liberal candidate ($n = 200$); the character-framed rumor about a conservative candidate ($n = 200$); and the character-framed rumor framed negatively about a liberal candidate ($n = 200$).

Two distinct frames of rumors were manipulated, i.e., competence and character framing, with

a format of a newspaper article. Each article featured a fictitious candidate's rumor about a housing redevelopment project in a fictional city, *Annam*, South Korea, but details varied depending on the type of frame. The article with competence framing stated that "Candidate Park misled finances of the Annam city with a *wrong*

redevelopment policy at the time he served as the mayor of the city,” using the tone of “*failure* of redevelopment project,” “pushing the project *inappropriately*,” and “he left trillions of dollars in debt due to this policy failure.” On the other hand, character framing incorporates an article stating that candidate Park falsely claimed his family’s residence for real estate speculation during the reconstruction plan when he served as the city’s mayor, using the sentence such as “candidate Park attempted to *fraudulently register* the address of his spouse and daughter in the redevelopment area for property speculation.”³

Each of these manipulated articles were produced in two versions to take into account the target candidate’s political ideological position, thereby constituting a total of four articles. To manipulate the target candidate’s political ideological position, the name of the candidate in the article’s title was prefixed with the words “*Conservative Icon*” or “*Liberal Icon*.” Also, the first sentence of each article included phrases such as “the *conservative* party’s next presidential candidate Park” or “the *liberal* party’s next presidential candidate Park.” Finally, all articles added photo of a fictitious apartment building related to the redevelopment project within the range of 630 to 635 characters (excluding space) to control for extraneous variables, except rumor framing and candidate’s ideology. Participants read one of the four articles that matched the experimental condition to which they were allotted to read for about 30 seconds and answered the corresponding questions. It took about 15 to 20 minutes until the final response.

Measures

Third Person Effect

To measure TPE, participants were asked to report how much they think the article they read affected (1) others and (2) people with a different political orientation. The specific measurement items were composed of “The article I read will affect the opinion of others, not me” and “the article I read will affect the opinion of people with different political orientations,” measured on a seven-point scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. Each item was adapted from a prior work (Tsay-Vogel, 2015). The two items were averaged ($M = 4.87$; $SD = 1.07$; inter-item $r = .55$) to form an index of TPE.

Responses indicative of Central Route and Peripheral Route Processing of ELM

In our study, we used perceived argument quality as a response indicative of more effortful processing linked to the central route, because changes in perceived argument quality tend to denote an individual’s engagement in more in-depth processing via the central route (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986a, 1986b). Participants were asked to evaluate the article they read in terms of how informative, persuasive, and valuable it was. Specifically, the measurement included three items: “The article I read was valuable,” “informative,” and “persuasive” (Bhattacharjee & Sanford, 2006). Responses to these items were averaged on a seven-point scale to reflect the perceived argument quality of the article ($M = 4.65$; $SD = 1.17$; $\alpha = .90$).

On the other hand, the peripheral route requires less cognitive effort than the central route and message processing is typically determined by

³ We acknowledge the potential overlap between framing and content, as both can influence how information is processed by the audience. However, the key distinction in this study lies in our focus on framing as a mechanism for influencing perception, while keeping the core issue—real estate—consistent across news articles. In other words, framing was operationalized not by altering the underlying issue about the political candidate, which is the central element of the content, but by emphasizing different attributes (e.g., character vs. competence). By framing the same issue in different ways, we aimed to demonstrate how framing can lead to varying interpretations, independent of the content itself.

simple cues such as source credibility, the length of message, or emotional cues out of the message rather than the message's argument (Morris et al., 2005; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986b). In addition, the tonality in rumor articles can also be regarded as one of the peripheral cues because it can stimulate a participant's emotions and prevent the elaborated processing of the article's argument (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986a). Thus, changes in affective response to a given rumor frame can serve as a key indicator denoting more superficial processing linked to the peripheral route (Lee & Yeon, 2022). To create an index of a response indicating peripheral processing, participants rated the degree to which the article they read was shocking, extreme, or irritating. Responses were measured on a seven-point scale and averaged ($M = 4.40$; $SD = 1.19$; $\alpha = .78$).

Intention to Disseminate Rumor on SNS

To measure the intention to disseminate rumors, participants reported the extent to which they agree on the following two items on a seven-point scale, ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*—"I will post the article I read through online sites" and "I will share the article I read via my personal sites" (Kwon & Rao, 2017). The responses on these items were averaged to measure the intention to disseminate rumors on SNS ($M = 2.75$; $SD = 1.42$; inter-item $r = .86$).

Individual Political Ideology

A respondent's ideological stance was used as a covariate. To measure a respondent's political ideology, participants were asked to report their ideological stance on the scale ranging from 0 (*very liberal*) to 10 (*very conservative*). Those who responded 0 to 4 were treated as "liberal voters" ($n = 318$); those responding 6 to 10 were categorized as "conservative voters" ($n = 226$); those responding at 5 were classified as "centrist voters" ($n = 256$). Accordingly, two dummy variables for liberal and conservative voters, with the centrist voters as the reference group, were

incorporated for the analysis.

Manipulation Check

After participants read the assigned article, they answered the questions asking about weaknesses of the candidate covered in the article. A total of six items were measured on a seven-point scale, ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. Among those, three items were related to the lack of the candidate's competence such as "poor job performance" ($M = 5.22$; $SD = 1.24$; $\alpha = .83$). The remaining three items considered the lack of a candidate's character traits such as "the lack of morality" ($M = 5.53$; $SD = 1.19$; $\alpha = .86$). The result of an independent T-test indicates that the mean of perceived candidate's weaknesses concerning his competency is higher in the competence framing group ($M = 5.69$; $SD = .94$) than in the character framing counterpart ($M = 4.74$; $SD = 1.32$); $t(798) = -11.73$; $p = .001$. Those who are assigned to the character framing group ($M = 5.80$; $SD = 1.08$) showed a higher level of perception that the article they read addressed the lack of a candidate's character as compared to those who read the competence frame article ($M = 5.26$; $SD = 1.24$); $t(798) = 6.64$; $p = .001$. These results confirm that each article was perceived to deal with the weaknesses of the candidate according to the assigned type of rumor framing, thus confirming that the stimuli were successfully manipulated.

Analytical Procedures

To probe the effect of rumor frame on its dissemination on SNS through TPE and ELM, this study conducted a path analysis utilizing *lavaan* package in the R software while using *boot* package to conduct bootstrapping with 5,000 samples in the same software. In a path model, the dummy variable for character framing (competence framing as a reference group) is our independent variable while TPE, argument

quality and emotional responses are mediators. Our outcome variable is rumor dissemination. Two dummy variables for conservative and liberal voters were entered as covariates in this model.

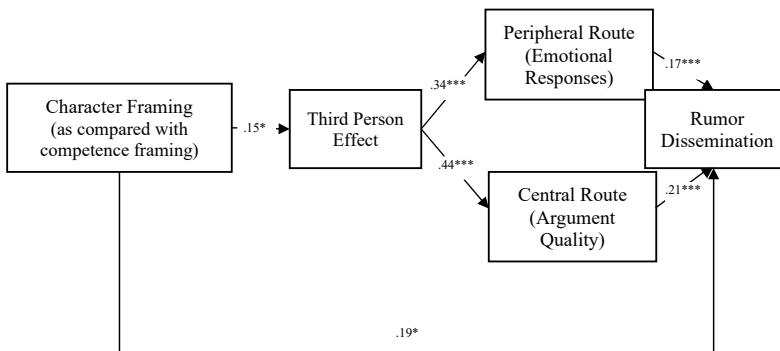
RESULTS

The model fit indicates that the data fit the model well ($\chi^2 = 13.292$; $df = 6$; $p < .05$, CFI = .986; RMSEA = .039; TLI = .937). With the analytical model, we can first explore direct relationships the character frame (as compared with the competence counterpart) can have with TPE (H1). The model also permits us to examine the respective path from TPE to the peripheral route (H2) and the central route (RQ1). We also delve into how each route of ELM, namely the peripheral route (H3) and the central route (RQ2), is linked to dissemination intention on SNS. The results are summarized in Figure 3.

First, character framing (as compared with competence framing) is significantly associated with greater TPE ($b = 0.15$; $p < .05$). Concretely, TPE showed a significant link to the peripheral

route ($b = .337$; $p < .001$) and the central route ($b = .438$; $p < .001$). The peripheral route then predicted increased intention for dissemination on SNS ($b = .170$; $p < .001$). The central route is also significantly associated with SNS rumor dissemination intention ($b = .207$; $p < .001$). Collectively, these findings imply that how political rumor is framed can shape the intention to disseminate it on SNS through diverse psychological and cognitive mechanisms (see Table 1). More precisely, the results demonstrate that the effect of the rumor that is framed to emphasize a candidate's character on its dissemination on SNS can be indirect through TPE and then via the peripheral route successively, supporting H4 (character framing \rightarrow TPE \rightarrow peripheral route \rightarrow intention for rumor dissemination on SNS: $b = .009$; CI = [.001, .022]). Further, the results regarding RQ3 illustrate that the indirect effect of the character-framed rumor on its dissemination on SNS can be through TPE and then also via the central route (character framing \rightarrow TPE \rightarrow central route \rightarrow intention for rumor dissemination on SNS: $b = .014$; CI = [.001, .034]).

Figure 3. Direct and Indirect Effects of Character-Framed Political Rumors on SNS Dissemination via TPE and ELMs



Note. $N = 800$; Unstandardized coefficients are shown

*** $p < .001$.

Table 1. Indirect Effects of Character Framing on Intention for Rumor Dissemination on SNS via Third Person Effects, Peripheral Route, and Central Route (N = 800)

Indirect effects			<i>b</i>	Boot <i>SE</i>	95 BCa CI Boot	
Independent variable	Mediating variables				LLCI	ULCI
H4: Character framing	TPE	Peripheral route	.009	.005	.001	.022
RQ3: Character framing	TPE	Central route	.014	.008	.001	.034

Note. BootLLCI and BootULCI are the lower and upper limits of 95 BCa confidence intervals based on the bootstrapping of 5,000 samples; *b* = unstandardized coefficient.

DISCUSSION

While synthesizing theoretical considerations of framing, TPE, and ELM, this study aimed to uncover through what psychological mechanisms and cognitive pathways individuals tend to spread political rumors on social media. The findings demonstrate that framing political rumors with an emphasis on a candidate's character rather than competence can augment an individual's intention for dissemination on SNS by inducing TPE and the subsequent processing of a rumor via the peripheral route and central route. The results delineated here do offer rich implications for related literature.

To begin, the finding regarding the relationship between rumor frames and TPE revealed that individuals exposed to the character-framed political rumor were likely to perceive that its effect would be greater on others than on themselves. TPE explains that individuals believe that others are more swayed and influenced than themselves by socially undesirable media content, given that they tend to think of themselves as more rational and logical than others (Corbu et al., 2020; Rojas et al., 1996). Applying this proposition of TPE to these results, it can be deduced that individuals may deem character-framed political rumor as socially undesirable as compared to a competence-framed counterpart and are therefore directed to believe that the former exerts greater influence on others than on themselves.

Another crucial finding is that the rumor frame stressing a candidate's character that was shown to prompt TPE fueled the intent for its dissemination on SNS through the peripheral route. People who encounter political rumor emphasizing the character aspect of a candidate may first believe that they are sensible enough not to be affected and further reason that this type of story is not worth their cognitive effort to probe it. They are likely to understand the character-framed rumor as largely irrelevant to be lightly treated via the peripheral route (O'Keefe, 2008). Homer and Batra (1994) also support this reasoning that character-based political messages are handled through the peripheral route. This study further documented that even those messages processed via the peripheral route are more likely to be shared on SNS. People may regard a candidate's traits such as enthusiasm and empathy that are embedded in character-framed rumors as heuristic cues; yet they may still purport to spread those rumors while treating them as peripheral cues without any extended cognitive efforts.

Interestingly, our findings reveal a positive relationship between TPE and central route processing, indicating that, under certain conditions, audiences perceiving a high impact on others may still engage in more effortful cognitive processing. While this result appears counterintuitive to the traditional TPE framework, which suggests that high TPE leads to lower personal engagement, it aligns with research showing that heightened perceptions

of influence on others can sometimes prompt individuals to critically consider a message—particularly if they feel motivated to understand its broader implications (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986a). A plausible explanation is that individuals experiencing high TPE may adopt central processing as a vigilance mechanism, driven by a desire to assess the content's potential societal impact thoroughly. Instead of dismissing such messages as irrelevant, they may engage more deeply to evaluate their influence and, perhaps, to mitigate perceived risks to the public. This interpretation aligns with ELM extensions (e.g., Slater & Rouner, 2002), which suggest that motivation and perceived social consequences can encourage deeper engagement through the central route. Consequently, while our initial rationale anticipated peripheral processing as the primary outcome of high TPE, our findings suggest a more nuanced relationship, where central route processing may also be activated depending on situational factors such as perceived societal importance or responsibility. Ultimately, these insights advance the theoretical connection between TPE and ELM by demonstrating a more complex interplay between perceived societal impact and cognitive processing routes in the dissemination of political rumors.

Relatedly, our findings show that both central and peripheral routes positively mediated the link between TPE and intentions to disseminate political rumors on social media. This result suggests that, in the context of political rumors, the motivation to share content may depend more on ideological alignment or perceived societal impact than on the specific depth of cognitive processing. This finding is particularly relevant for character-focused political information, which can simultaneously evoke both heuristic and more thoughtful engagement. More specifically, these findings imply that people may find character-framed political rumors to contain critical information worth sharing, even if they perceive such rumors as affecting others more strongly

than themselves. This trend may be particularly pronounced during election periods, where voters have heightened motivation to scrutinize detailed information about candidates. People may recognize that even seemingly minor adverse character rumors could shape electoral outcomes, prompting additional attention and a more thorough evaluation.

Overall, these results indicate that individuals can process character-framed political rumors through both peripheral and central routes, consistent with research showing that dual information processing routes are not strictly exclusive (Lee & Yeon, 2022). In essence, audiences may find character-framed political rumors both provocative and informative, even when they are perceived to influence others more strongly than themselves.

While these findings offer valuable insights into the processing and dissemination of character-framed rumors, it is important to consider alternative explanations that may further elucidate this phenomenon. Character-based rumors often evoke intense feelings such as indignation or moral outrage (Molina et al., 2021). These emotions could function as potent cues, signaling the rumor's significance irrespective of its factual importance. This aligns with the affect heuristic in decision-making, where emotional responses guide judgments of importance and risk (Pennycook et al., 2021). The emotional engagement might account for the observation of both peripheral route and central route mediation in rumor dissemination. The visceral reaction to character attacks could prompt hasty, emotion-driven decisions to share information (peripheral route) (Li et al., 2023), while also motivating a more thorough examination of the implications of rumors (central route) (Marett & Joshi, 2009). Thus, the emotional aspect of character-framed rumors may serve to enhance their perceived value and shareability. Future research should explicitly measure emotional responses to different types of political rumors to clarify affect's

role in rumor dissemination dynamics.

Meanwhile, the positive effects observed in both the central and peripheral routes with respect to rumor dissemination indicate that political rumors give rise to a complex array of sharing motivations. The peripheral route is associated with immediate emotional responses and social variation, which drive sharing behavior (Vosoughi et al., 2018). Concurrently, the central route is driven by a tendency to consider the political implications and perceived societal importance of the rumor, which motivates its dissemination (Slater & Rouner, 2002). This dual effect is evident in politics, where emotional engagement and rational analysis play a part in the processing and dissemination of information. This perspective recognizes that the dissemination of political rumors is a more intricate process than previously assumed, driven by both emotional responses and rational assessments of the message's importance.

We can derive theoretical implications of the current study from the key findings summarized above. First, this study elucidates the psychological and cognitive mechanisms individuals rely on when they decide to spread political rumors on SNS by uncovering various paths leading to dissemination. To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first attempt to synthesize theories of framing, TPE, and ELM to investigate individuals' intention to spread political rumors on social media. Although several studies focused on the spread of political rumors, they simply attended to a particular premise (TPE: Corbu et al., 2020; ELM: Liu et al., 2014; Oh et al., 2013) without linking theoretical considerations to uncover complex dynamics of rumor dissemination.

Second, this study enriches our understanding about framing effects of political rumors, suggesting that political rumors framed to emphasize a candidate's character rather than competence can fundamentally shape voters' perceptions about that candidate, given that

those stories are likely to be shared on SNS. It can be inferred then that just as news framing of a candidate has an impact on his or her assessment (Cho, 2005), framing of rumors regarding a candidate's trait qualification does too. A steady stream of research (Bittner, 2011; Johnston, 2002) identified two distinct trait qualifications of a candidate, yet we further extended this line of work by showing that a particular rumor frame can have an impact on voters' perceptions about a candidate more strongly.

Third, the present study contributes to the theoretical notions of TPE and ELM by shedding light on how people process and share rumor stories on social media. Our study demonstrated that character-framed rumors are more likely to be spread on SNS first by giving people the perception that others are impacted more strongly than themselves and then by rendering them to process those stories via the peripheral and the central routes of ELM.

Nonetheless, the findings and implications of the current study should be interpreted with some caveats. Our research only highlighted a candidate's negative aspects in rumor frames. However, messages can be framed positively to stress either the benefits gained or the negative consequences avoided if one accepts a course of action (Van Kerrebroeck et al., 2017). In light of this notion, future research can compare the effects of positively and negatively framed political rumors. Since this study directly compared the rumor frames of character and competence, each frame's net effect is not accurately disentangled. Future studies can measure the net effect of each rumor frame by incorporating the control group.

Relatedly, given that our study employed a single-frame, single-shot design, it is important to consider the ecological validity of the news stories used for manipulation. While this approach was chosen to isolate the influence of a specific frame on audience perceptions, we acknowledge that real-world news environments often feature multiple, competing frames within and across

news stories, collectively shaping how audiences process and interpret information. Future research can, thus, explore how such multiple, competing frames within and across news stories interact to influence audience perceptions. Furthermore, the manipulation checks suggest that both frames may have primed perceptions of the candidate's weaknesses in terms of character and competence. This indicates a potential interplay between character and competence framings in the influence of political rumors, which warrants further study in the future.

In addition, the present study was unable to establish a definitive causal relationship between TPE and ELM. While our focus was on how TPE influences an individual's approach to rumor processing, it remains conceivable that message processing *per se* could precede and influence the development of TPE. Therefore, future research should explore the causal flow between the perception of a message's impact and the manner in which the message is processed.

We also acknowledge that our measures of ELM reflect participants' cognitive and affective responses rather than directly assessing the processing pathways (central or peripheral), although these reactions may still be indicative of the type of processing participants engaged in. To address this limitation, future research should incorporate more direct measures of cognitive processing, such as thought listing or message elaboration indices, to more accurately capture the specific processing routes involved.

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