

“Embarrassed, Frustrated, Unfairly Judged”

**EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEDIA FRAMES OF
WELFARE RECIPIENTS AND RECIPIENT BEHAVIOR**

SARA WESOLEK

SENIOR INDEPENDENT STUDY

DEPARTMENTS OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND SOCIOLOGY

CULTURE TRENDS

SNAP beneficiaries threaten to ransack stores over government shutdown

One mother claims taxpayers must feed her children as SNAP benefits face cuts



By **Alba Cuebas-Fantauzzi** · Fox News

Published October 31, 2025 2:16pm EDT

Source: *archive.today*

Research question:

How do media portrayals of welfare recipients and perceived judgement affect recipient behavior?

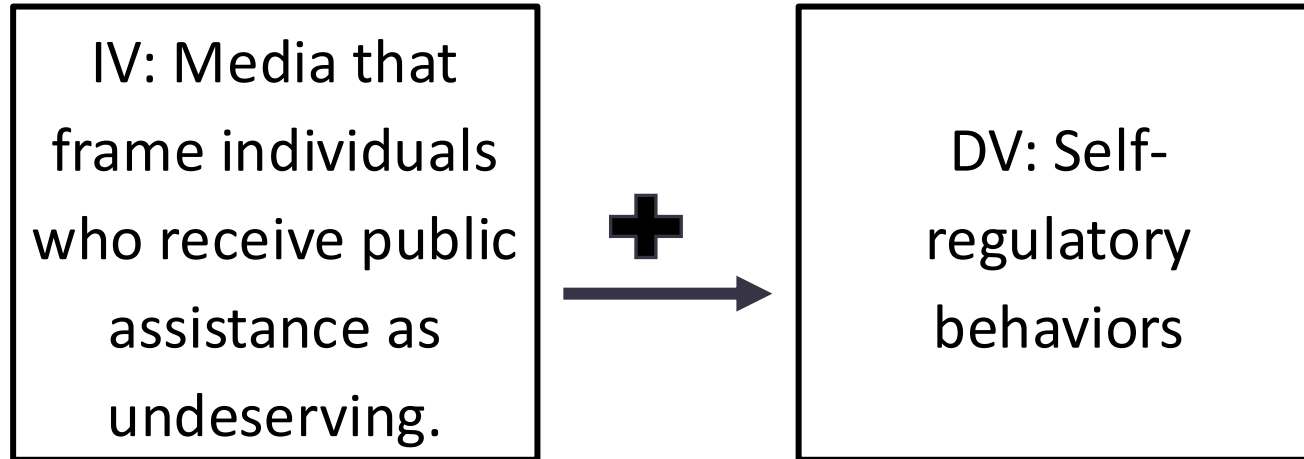
Literature & Theory

1. Defining the Welfare State
2. Neoliberalism and the Selective Welfare State
3. Macro-actors influencing micro-actors
4. Media framing

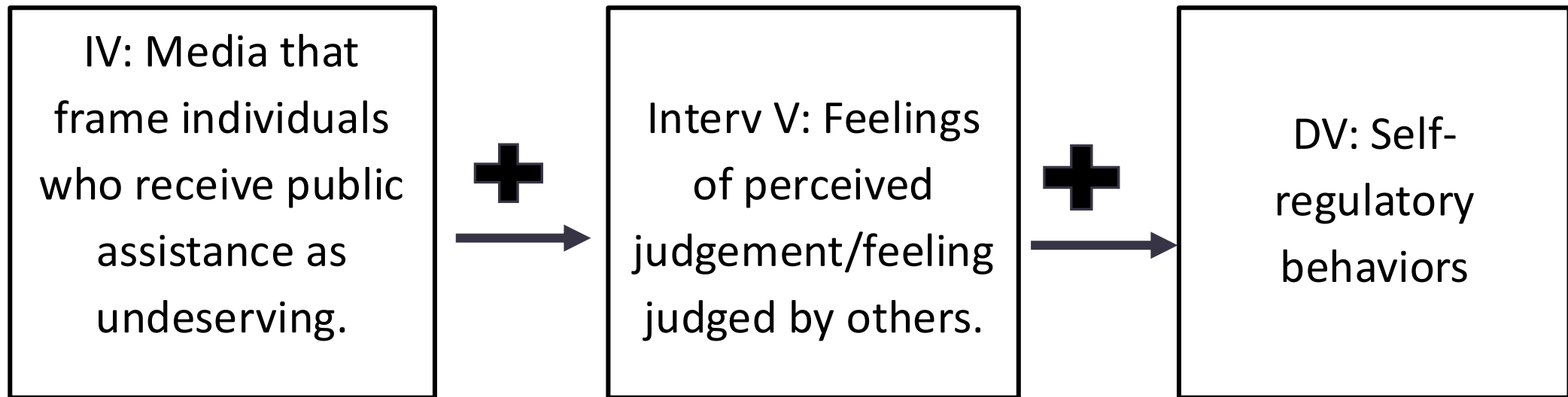
- Institutional actors
- Discipline
- Expectations
- Widespread surveillance
- Changes to individual performance
- Micro-interactions

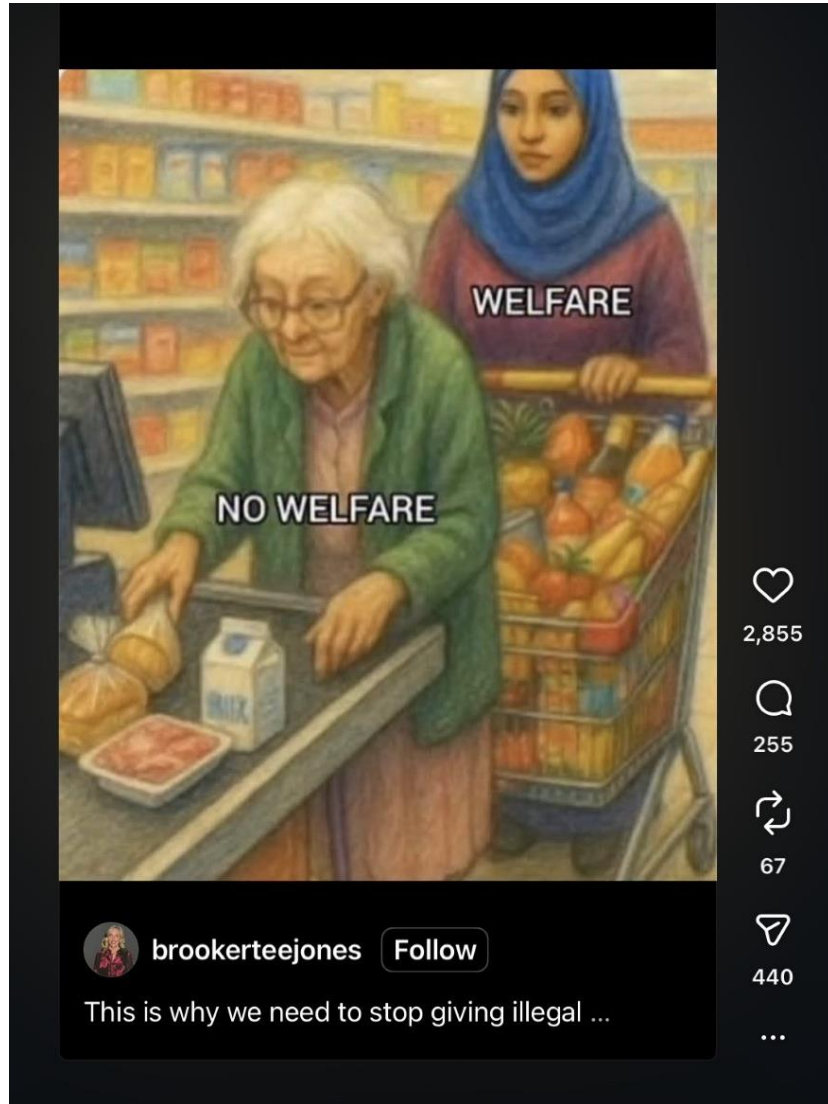
How do media portrayals of welfare recipients and perceived judgement affect recipient behavior?

H1:



H2:





Source: @brookerteejones on Instagram

Methodology

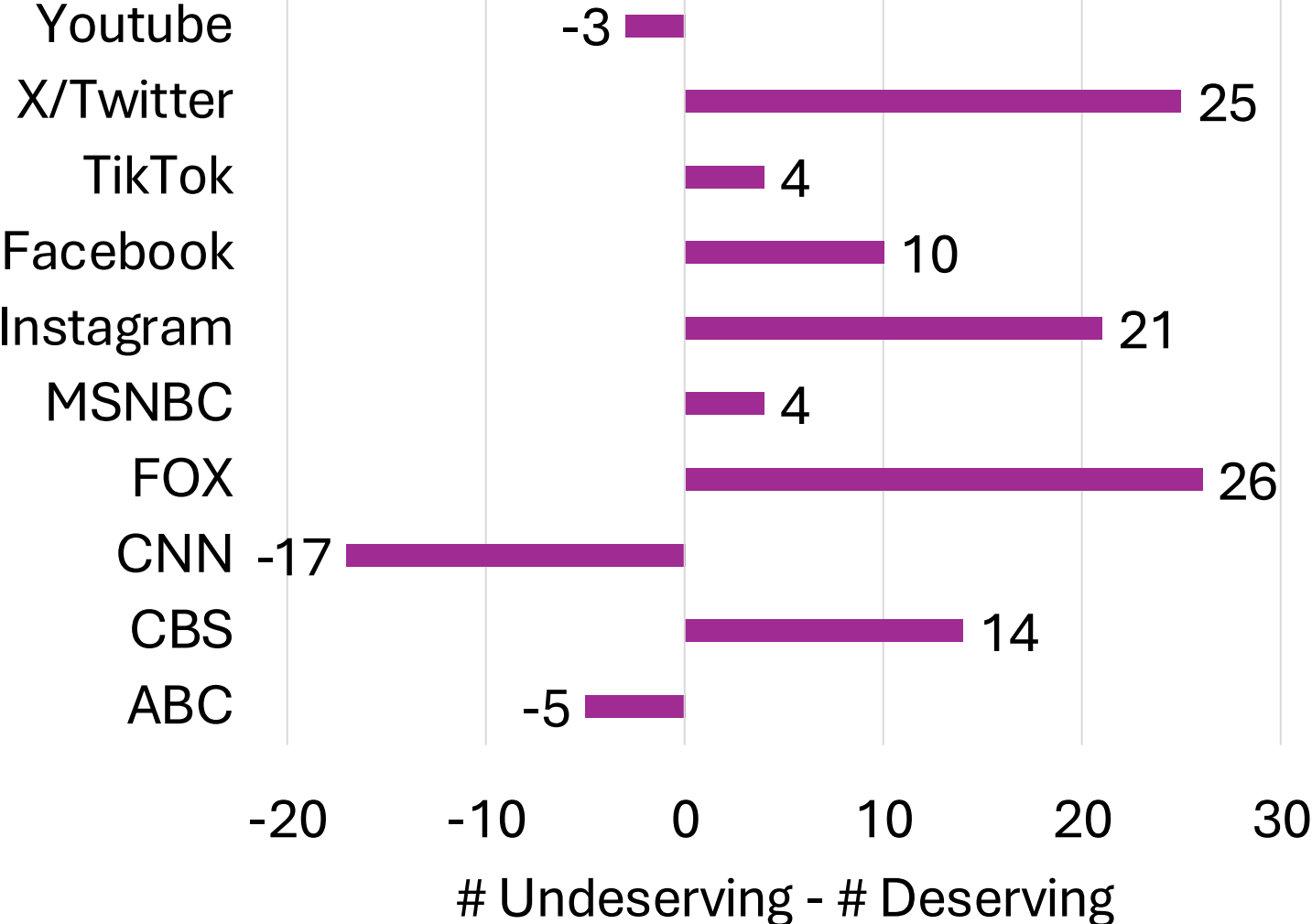
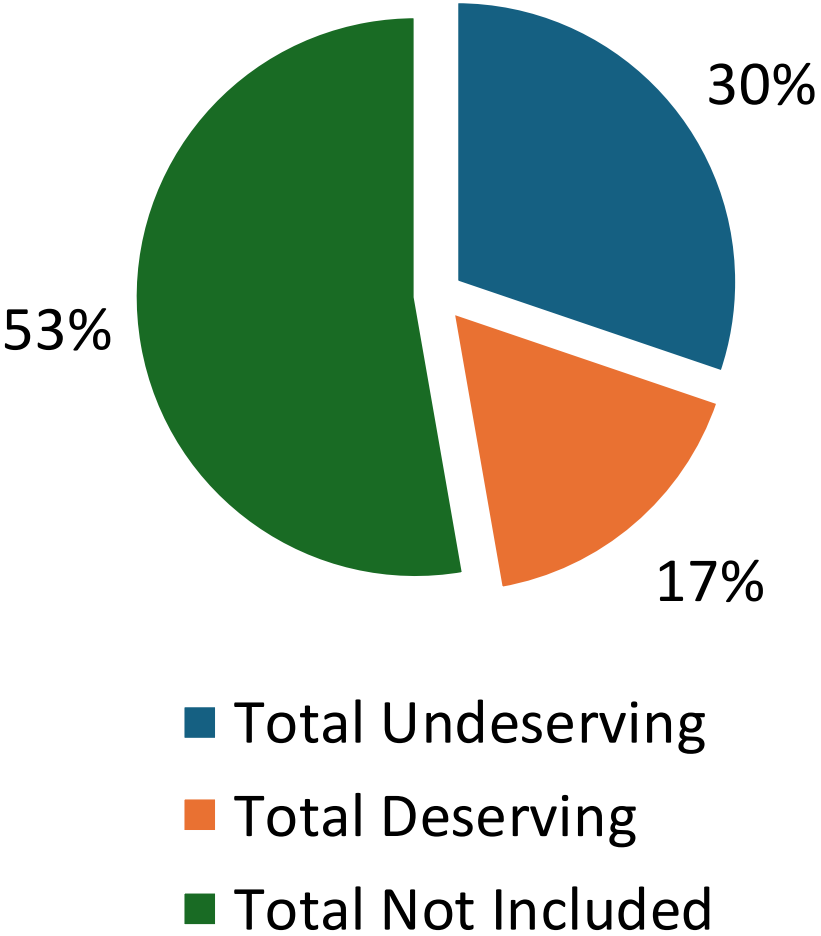
Survey (small-*n* comparative study) → **DV & Interv V**

- 50-participant survey of current recipients

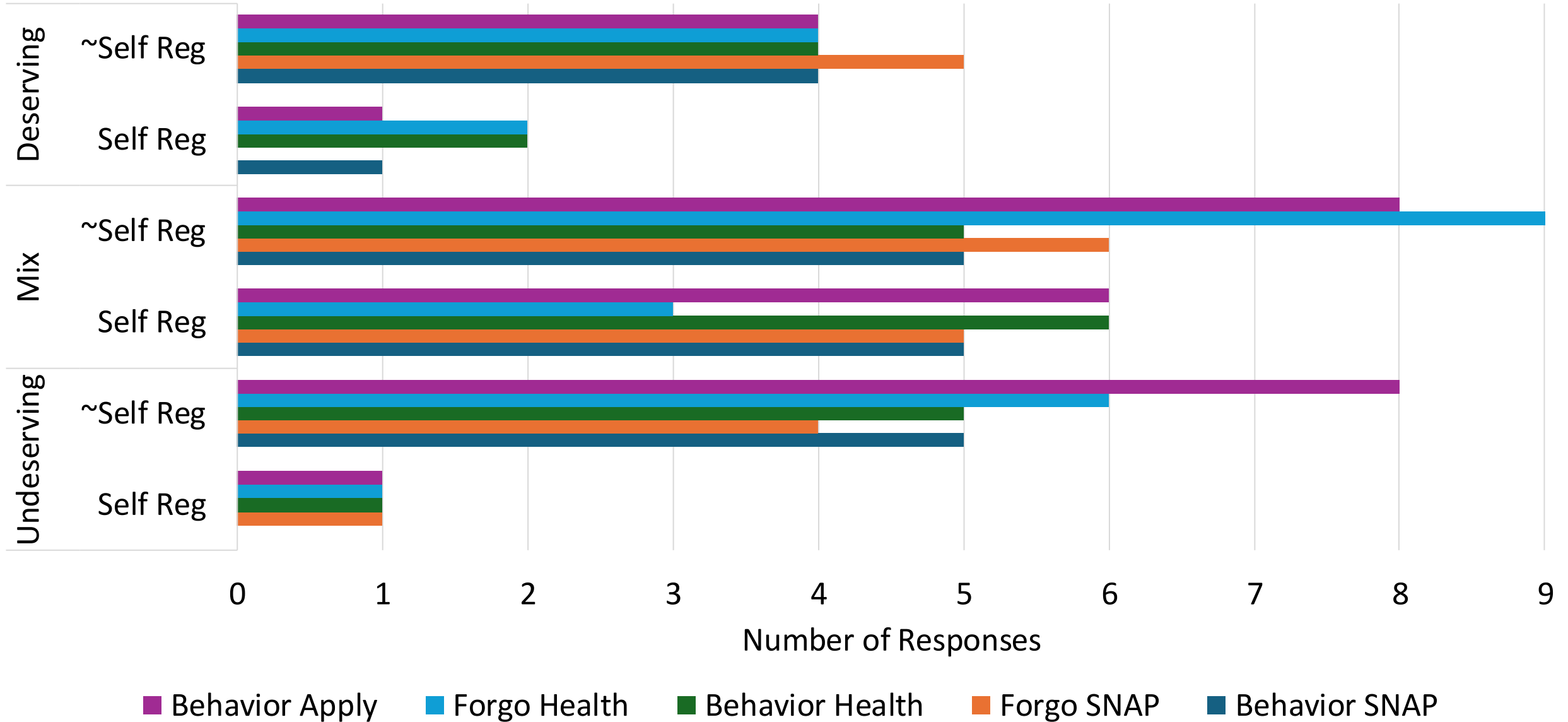
Latent content analysis (observational) → **IV**

- 599 posts on news platforms and social media

(Un)deservingness in Media:

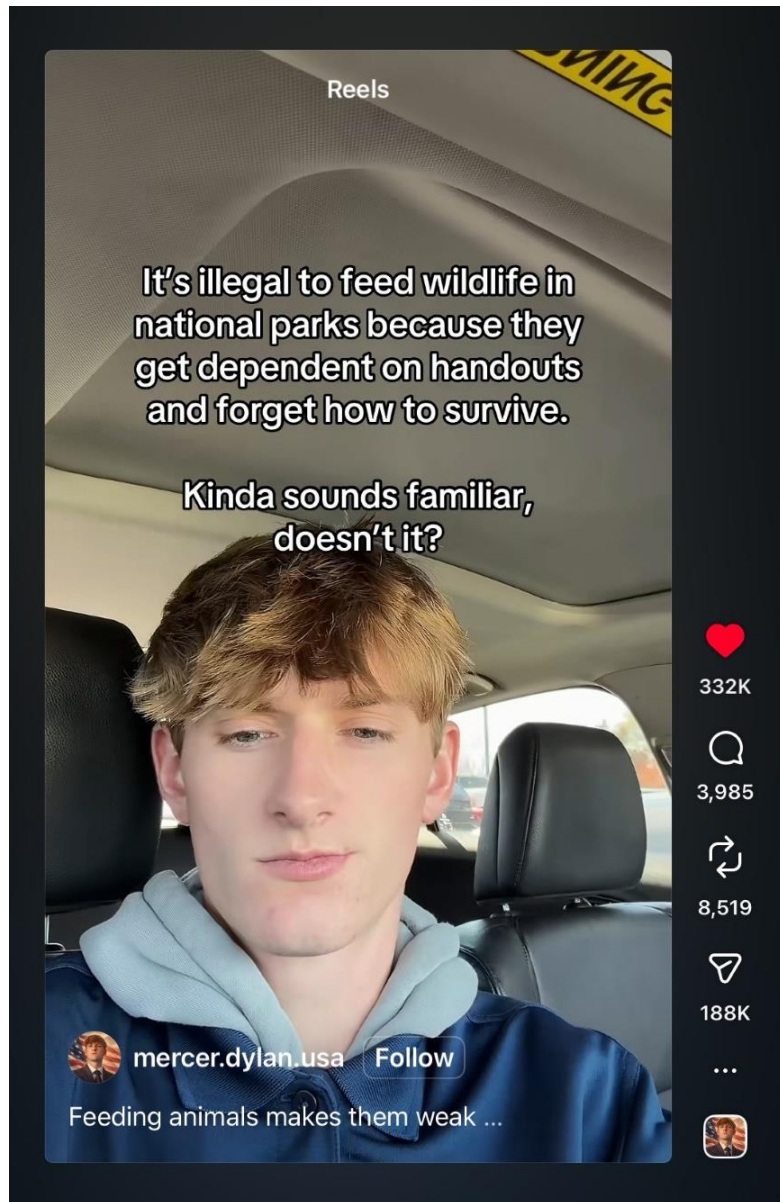


Media Consumption and Self-Regulation



Perceived Judgement and Self-Regulation

Judgement Scenario	Response to Judgement Scenario	Response to Behavior Scenario	"Behavior Health"	"Forgo Health"	"Behavior Apply"
"Judge During Use"	~Judged	~Self Reg	0.9	1	0.857
		Self Reg	0	0	0.071
	Judged	~Self Reg	0.4	0.68	0.429
		Self Reg	0.44	0.28	0.357
"Judge Character Apply"	~Judged	~Self Reg	0.786	0.857	0.938
		Self Reg	0.071	0.071	0
	Judged	~Self Reg	0.375	0.625	0.346
		Self Reg	0.333	0.208	0.385
"Judge Appearance Apply"	~Judged	~Self Reg	0.818	0.818	1
		Self Reg	0.091	0.182	0
	Judged	~Self Reg	0.4	0.68	0.321
		Self Reg	0.48	0.2	0.464
"Judge Apply Luxuries"	~Judged	~Self Reg	0.8	0.8	0.875
		Self Reg	0.2	0	0.125
	Judged	~Self Reg	0.543	0.8	0.564
		Self Reg	0.286	0.171	0.282



Source: @mercer.dylan.usa on Instagram

Implications

H1 not supported

H2 somewhat supported

Close ended study – limits generalizability

Emphasize own deservingness

- Competition

Humane discussions about government assistance

“[Cake mix] isnt a survival need so they dont deserve to spend other peoples money on recreational use.”

PARTICIPANT #20 IN RESPONSE TO: “A WALMART CASHIER REFUSES TO LET YOU USE SNAP ASSISTANCE TO PURCHASE A CAKE MIX FOR A FRIEND’S BIRTHDAY.”

“Slightly angry. Everyone I live with is on assistance, and doesn't even make an attempt to get a job unlike me.”

PARTICIPANT #5 RESPONDING TO: “A LOVED ONE MAKES A JOKE THAT THEY PAY FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE WITHOUT GETTING ANYTHING BACK FROM YOU.”

“I would feel judged, I would feel unworthy of the doctor’s time and feel some shame.”

PARTICIPANT #1 RESPONDING TO: “WHEN YOU GO FOR A REGULAR CHECK-UP, THE DOCTOR STARTS TREATING YOU DIFFERENTLY AFTER YOU PRESENT YOUR MEDICAID INSURANCE.”

Thank you to everyone
who made this project
possible.
