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America's Declining Trust in Government

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Introduction

Distrust in government has become a rising issue over the years. Much of the U.S. population doesn't trust the government, whether it be corrupt officials or the actions and activities the government partakes in. Media has become such a vital part of the world today, and has allowed for more of the American population to receive news almost immediately. Media has become one of, if not the most, powerful tool in shedding light on particular issues and setting the public agenda. Additionally, one of the biggest consumers of media in the country is America's youth, and this contributes to America's youth having a greater distrust in government. With our political environment as polarized as it is today, party and ideology play an important role in one's view of the government and its actions. Partisan media helps feed into this by constantly attacking the other side and creating echo-chambers and divides that consumers easily fall prey to. Media, age, and party/ideology all play an important role in shaping one's view of the government. This is an incredibly important topic right now because the American population's trust in government has direct and crucial implications for our democracy and society.

Hypotheses

- H1:** Higher media exposure leads to higher levels of distrust in government.
- H2:** America's youth has a higher level of distrust in government.
- H3:** Political party/ideology has an impact on trust in government.

A Review of the Literature

Media-effects theory

- Claims media influences public opinion through *agenda setting*
- Media doesn't tell people what to think but what to think about
- Especially prevalent during election season - campaign ads and opinion shows praise and attack candidates
- Negative ads attack politicians from other parties - attempt to influence public opinion on that candidate
- Shape public opinion on gov officials before they enter office
- More media exposure = more likely to see attacks on candidates which can lead them to distrust a candidate before they're even elected

Selective exposure/ Echo-chamber

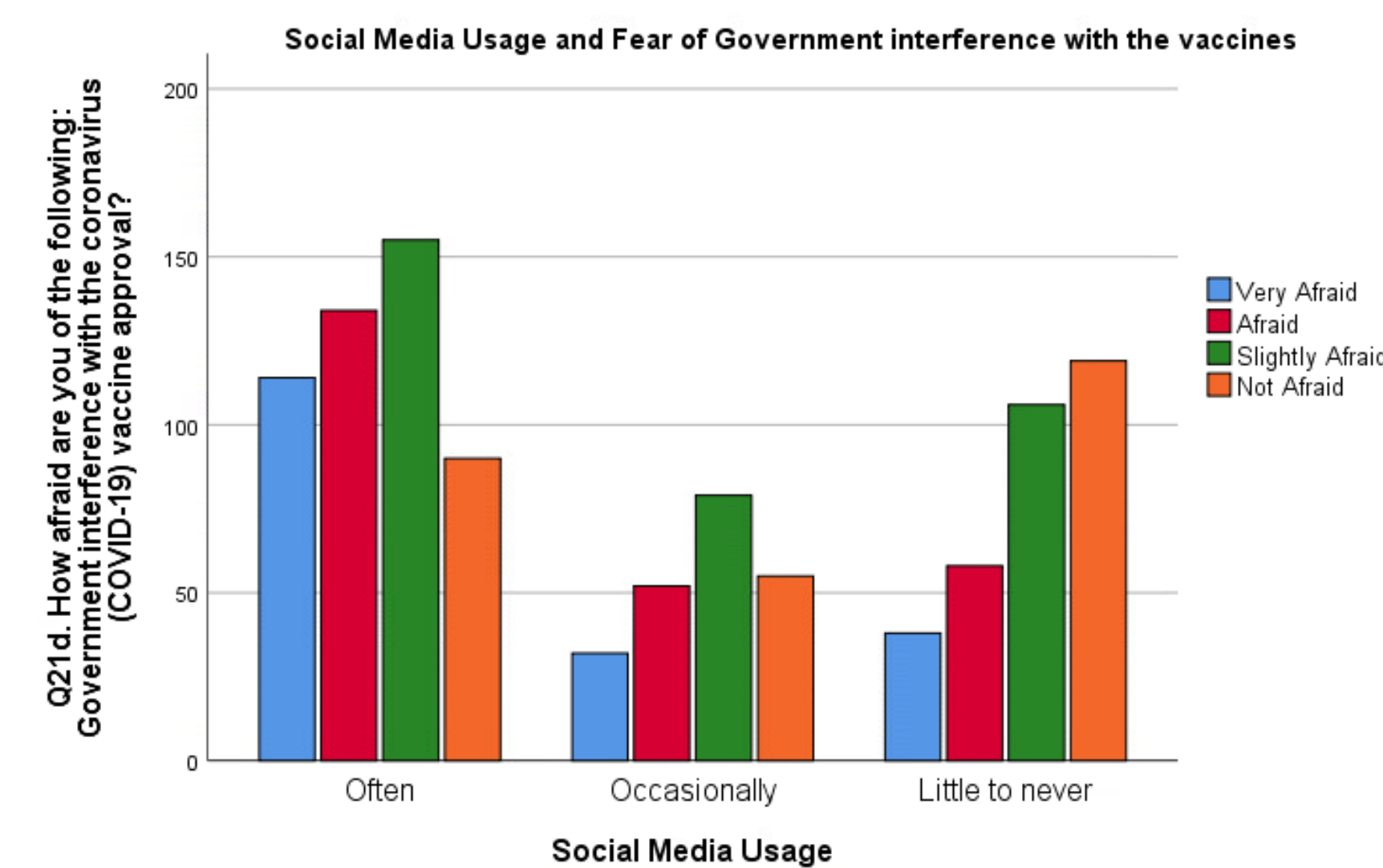
- People seek out info that reinforces their beliefs
- Rise in partisan news allows people to get their info from ideologically consistent sources
- Ability to focus on one ideology leaves no room for diversification/opposing views → fall deeper into beliefs without room for contradiction
- Closed off to whole story by only choosing to hear one side
- Partisan media will attack gov officials and the administration with selective info to shape the story according to its viewers, meaning those who engage in selective exposure will think negatively about the event or person

Identity vs Performance

- Performance theory: people have negative attitude towards gov because it does not perform well
 - micro-performance - admin, functioning of politicians
 - macro-performance - inflation, unemployment, GNP growth
- Identity theory: individualization, modernity & post-modernity, evolutions in interpersonal trust & social capital
- Home-team hypothesis: a person distrusts government because they voted for the present opposition parties

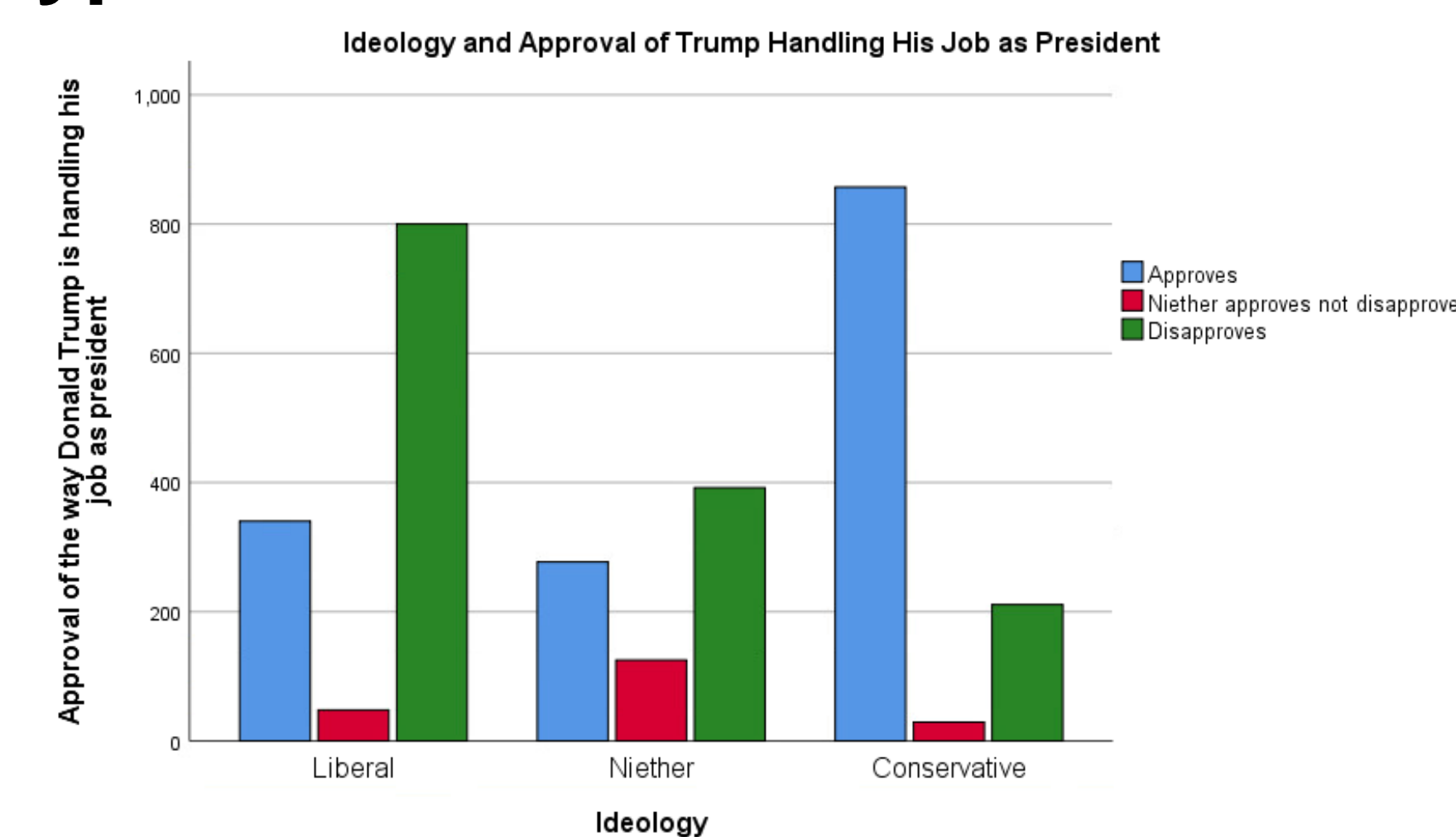
Data and Results

Hypothesis 1



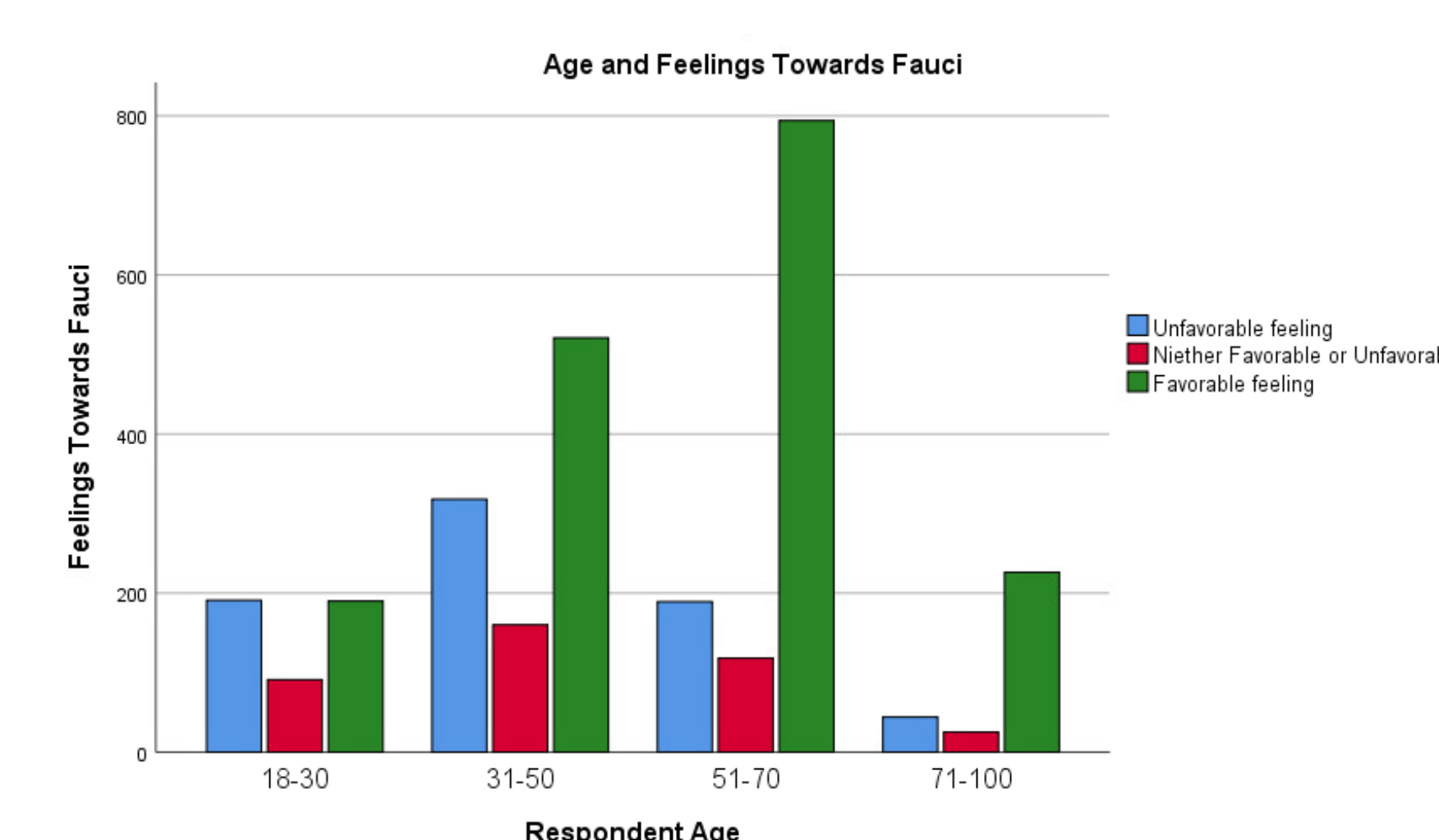
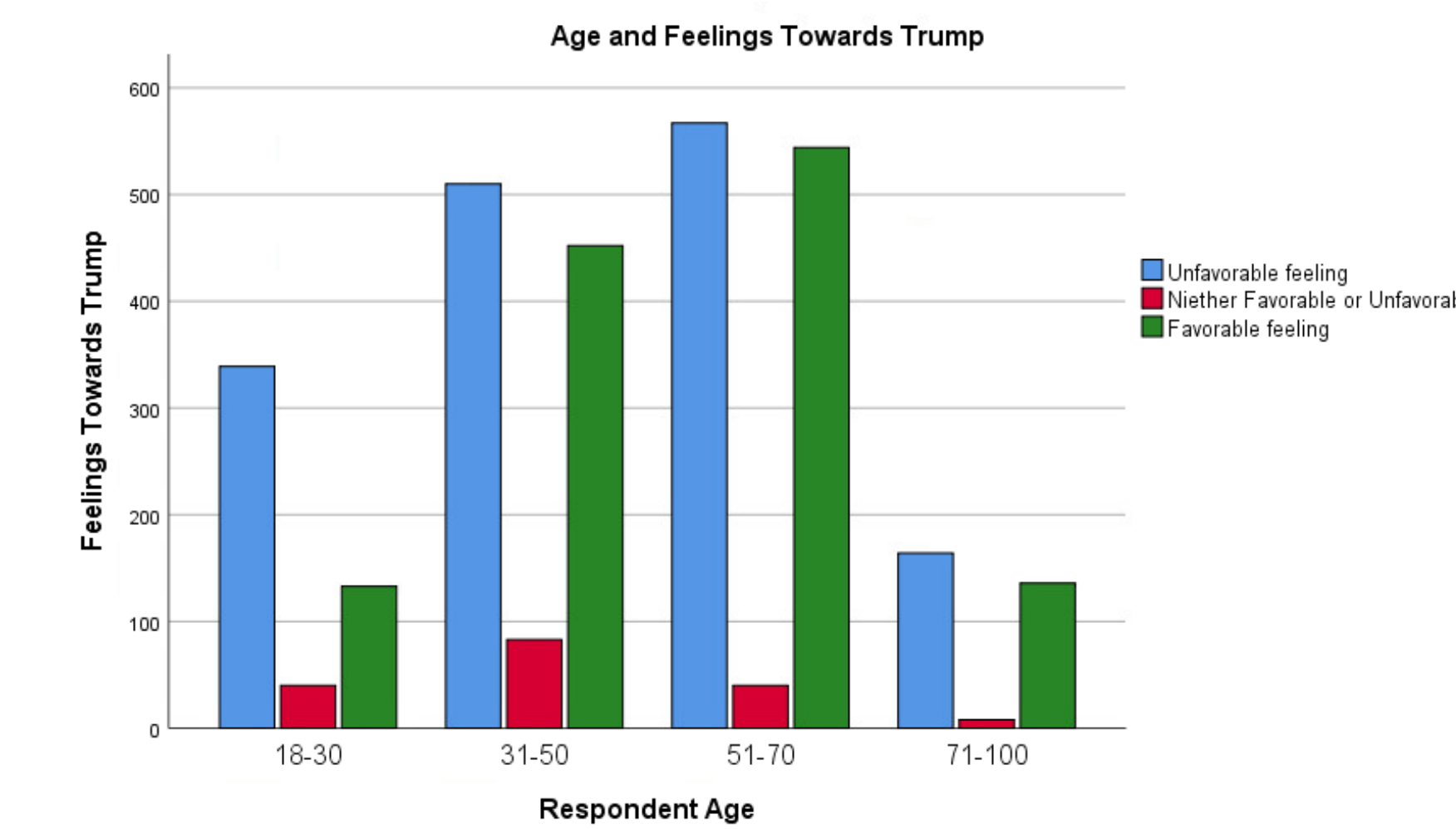
Hypothesis 1's crosstab results show that social media does have an impact on people's fear of government intervention with vaccine approval. Those who use social media often were more afraid of government intervention while those who use social media little to none were not as afraid. 62% of those who use social media often reported that they were very afraid of government intervention with vaccine approval.

Hypothesis 3



Hypothesis 3's crosstab results show that ideology has a significant impact on perception of the government. Those who identify as conservative overwhelmingly approved of the way Donald Trump handled his job as President, with 58% reporting so, while 57% of those who identify as liberal disapprove of the way Trump handled his job.

Hypothesis 2



Hypothesis 2's crosstab results turned out somewhat inconclusive. The numbers for approval and disapproval for Donald Trump were across the board for all age ranges, and there was no clear pattern or correlation between age and feelings toward the President at the time. In fact, most age ranges were pretty even in responding with favorable or unfavorable.

The crosstab results with feelings towards Dr. Fauci were also slightly inconclusive, the only difference from the Trump results being that older respondents had more favorable feelings towards Dr. Fauci than younger respondents. There was an overwhelming majority of respondents in the 50-71 age range that reported favorable feelings towards Dr. Fauci, while respondents aged 18-30 were even with favorable and unfavorable

Conclusions

Hypothesis 1

The crosstabs results for media and trust in government show that there is a significant relationship between the two, and overall support my hypothesis that more media exposure leads to greater levels of distrust in government. Those who got their news from social media often had higher levels of fear that the government would interfere with COVID-19 vaccine approvals than those who got their news from social media little to not at all. Those who consumed social media more trusted the government less when it came to their health and safety regarding the COVID-19 pandemic.

Hypothesis 2

The results for my second hypothesis turned out primarily inconclusive, and do not really support my second hypothesis. There were no conclusive results between age and feelings towards Trump. In terms of age and feelings towards Dr. Fauci, the crosstabs show that those who are older in age are more likely to have favorable feelings towards Dr. Fauci than not and than younger respondents. Overall, however, despite what I have found in review of the literature and the belief I held based on logic and critical thinking, age and trust in government do not seem to have a significant relationship based on the data.

Hypothesis 3

The results from the crosstabs regarding ideology and trust in government support my third hypothesis and show that there is a significant relationship between the two. Those who identify as conservative reported an overwhelming approval for the way Trump handled his job as President, while most of those who identified as liberal reported disapproval. This supports my hypothesis that each party has an overwhelming distrust for the other and their actions.

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