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Communicative Antecedents of Political Persuasion: Political Discussion, Citizen News Creation, and the Moderating Role of Strength of Partisanship

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Although much attention has been paid to how media use and interpersonal discussion motivate people to engage in political persuasion, and despite recent efforts to study the role of digital media technologies, less is known about the *creation* of news and public affairs content online. This study sheds light on how online content creation works alongside other communicative behaviors, such as news use and political discussion, to affect attempted political persuasion. Using two-wave panel survey data, we find that political discussion and citizen news creation mediate the relationships between online and traditional news use, on one hand, and attempted persuasion, on the other. Furthermore, strength of partisanship moderates the relationship between content creation and attempted persuasion. Findings are discussed in light of their implications for the political communication and public sphere processes.

Pluralism, in its various forms—political, ideological, religious, or cultural, among others—represents a challenge for modern democratic societies (Bohman, 2003). Diverse societies potentially face fragmentation and polarization along such lines of cleavage, and normatively these social cleavages should be bridged with respect for political justice and democratic principles (Gutmann & Thompson, 2009) in order to maintain a space for critical engagement among citizens (Bohman, 2003).

The present study examines attempted political persuasion—both online and offline—which is considered to be an indicator of (uncomfortable) discussion across lines of political difference, as well as a critical benchmark of engagement among citizens. Attempted persuasion potentially contributes to bridging social cleavages in heterogeneous societies (Bohman, 2003; Mutz, Sniderman, & Brody, 1996; Thorson, 2012; Weeks, Ardèvol-Abreu, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2015).

Specifically, it seeks to better understand how the creation of news and public affairs content by regular citizens influences attempted political persuasion alongside other communicative antecedents, including news use and political discussion. Using a two-wave panel design, we assess attempted persuasion as a behavioral outcome resulting from these communication behaviors. The article then investigates the role of strength of partisanship in moderating these relationships. Finally, employing structural equation modeling, it tests a theoretical model of the process of attempted persuasion. Overall, this article highlights the role of news content creation in promoting political persuasion, and it points toward a conditional influence moderated by strength of partisanship.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Citizen News Creation

Technological developments have led to profound changes in the traditional mass media–audience relationship. By taking advantage of the so-called *Web 2.0* tools, such as blogs and social media, citizens—or "the people formerly known as the audience" (Rosen, 2006)—now have the ability to create and share online content. Although most of this content is connected to people's private spheres of interests (Hargittai & Walejko, 2008; Jönsson & Örnebring, 2011), many Internet users are also becoming more actively involved in news creation and amateur news reporting (Carr, Barnidge, Lee, & Tsang, 2014; Pew, 2014).

Of interest, professional and citizen journalism are forging links of mutual influence. Thus, it is not uncommon for "citizen journalists" to cooperate with corporate media by providing raw material that will be further filtered or edited by professional journalists (e.g., pictures or videos from a crisis or disaster; see Allan & Thorsen, 2009; Carpenter, 2008; Kurpius, Metzgar, & Rowley, 2010). But besides this cooperation between traditional media and ordinary citizens, the concept of *citizen journalism* mainly encompasses the creation (or reinterpretation) of news-related content outside mainstream media institutions (Goode, 2009). Blogs and social media are the main platforms to sidestep the media, blurring boundaries between producers and users of news content (Dylko & McCluskey, 2012; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2011), leading some to label these influential content creators as *prosumers* (Ritzer, Dean, & Jurgenson, 2012; Weeks et al., 2015). This symbiotic relationship between traditional and citizen news suggests that active online news content creators also tend to be consumers of news media (Weeks et al., 2015). However, the influence of news consumption on citizen news creation has not been sufficiently examined in the literature. We therefore pose our first set of hypotheses:

> H1: Traditional news use (H1a) and Internet news use (H1b) will be positively related to citizen news creation.

The often public (or semipublic) character of blogs and social media, together with the virtually limitless space of the Internet for commenting, posting, and tweeting, might offer more opportunities to news content creators to persuade others (Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2010; Kim, Wyatt, & Katz, 1999). Citizen news often provides more than pure information and enters the realm of interpretation and opinion, allowing content creators to spread their own views of the sociopolitical realities (Andrews, 2003; Anstead & O'Loughlin, 2011).

There is some preliminary evidence that citizen journalism might supplement face-to-face conversations as a setting for persuasion (Kavanaugh et al., 2006;

Weeks et al., 2015). On one hand, research shows that one of the main reasons news content creators gather and disseminate information is to inform, educate, and influence others (Anstead & O'Loughlin, 2011; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2011). On the other hand, and perhaps most important, citizen-created news content seems to be influential among the public, at least in certain situations and under certain conditions. For example, during the 2012 U.S. presidential debates, some nonelite Twitter users behaved as opinion leaders in the *Twittersphere* by spreading politically related content that attracted considerable attention from Twitter users (Freelon & Karpf, 2015). Similarly, the "Bullygate" scandal[1] involving the British prime minister catalyzed a hybridized news cycle in which "motivated and strategically oriented" bloggers and citizen activists used online tools to influence both the media and the public agenda (Chadwick, 2011, p. 19). Based on these observations, we expect that creators of citizen news should be more likely to use the content they produce as a tool to exercise their influence. More formally,

> H2: Citizen news creation will be positively related to attempts to persuade others politically.

Implicit in the previous line of reasoning is the indirect relationship between news media use (both traditional and online) and attempts to persuade others politically via citizen news creation. In the framework of the *communication mediation model*, news content creation would behave as a mediating mechanism between the reception of the message (news media stimuli) and the subsequent response (attempted persuasion, in our model; McLeod, Kosicki, & McLeod, 1994). In the current hybrid news system, this indirect relationship may be understood as a consequence of the symbiotic relationships between professional and citizen reporters: Professional journalists use citizen news content, and citizen journalists source from professional media (Chadwick, 2011; Messner & DiStaso, 2008). It is not uncommon that citizen journalists analyze, (re)interpret, or react to mainstream news content. In other words, they use traditional news as the raw material for creating, advancing, or contesting "specific news frames or even entire stories" (Chadwick, 2011, p. 8). Thus, for example, a large-audience TV British political debate show (*BBC Question Time*) has proven to boost political debate and content creation on Twitter, allowing citizens to express dissatisfaction with political leaders and call for political action (Anstead & O'Loughlin, 2011, p. 19).

However, other perspectives would suggest that the hyperfragmentation of communication channels and the increased use of politically biased niche media could polarize content creators (Bennett & Manheim, 2006; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Sunstein, 2001), contributing to the emergence of balkanized communities, or "echo chambers" of political homophily where persuasion attempts would be unlikely to occur (Bennett & Manheim, 2006). From this perspective,

content creators would use their actions as a tool to confirm their prior inclinations (Adamic & Glance, 2005; Colleoni, Rozza, & Arvidsson, 2014). Based on these conflicting observations, we ask our first research question:

RQ1: Does citizen news creation mediate the relationship between (a) traditional news use and (b) Internet news use on attempts to persuade others?

Political Discussion

Political discussion has been long considered an essential feature of democracy on the grounds of its obvious linkages with deliberation, negotiation, and group decision (Arendt, 1958). Citizens conversations about political issues and questions of common concern, unlike the normative ideal of deliberation, "are [mostly] spontaneous, unstructured and without clear goals" (Conover, Searing, & Crewe, 2002, p. 24). Political talk generally arises from engagement with information about current events of collective concern so that the factual information and arguments provided by the news media constitute the "raw material" that fuels this kind of conversation (Mondak, 2010, p. 94). Frequent media users are thus more likely to engage in discussions about politically relevant issues because the information and arguments about the social world they get from the news act as stimuli for political conversation (McLeod, Scheufele, & Moy, 1999; Moeller, de Vreese, Esser, & Kunz, 2014; Thorson, 2012). Conversely, those who opt out of using news media will be less likely to come across information about politics and public issues and will therefore be less likely to engage in political discussion. Extensive empirical literature has found this to be the case both online and offline (see, e.g., Cho et al., 2009; Kim et al., 1999). Because these relationships have been sufficiently tested in previous studies, they are included in the theoretical model presented in this study, but they are not formally hypothesized (see a similar approach in Brosius & Weimann, 1996; Shah & Scheufele, 2006).

Small-group discussions present an opportunity to critically engage with other citizens and persuade them. Previous studies show that the desire to persuade others is one of the three most common motivations for citizens to discuss politics, together with the willingness to learn and the desire to express oneself politically (Conover et al., 2002; Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1991). Overall, to attempt to persuade, an individual must (a) maintain some kind of dialogue or discussion with others, (b) encounter different or alternative viewpoints in those discussions, and (c) consciously try to change the other discussants' political views (Thorson, 2012). With this theoretical perspective in mind, we expect that those who engage in political discussions more often should be more likely to use those discussions as a forum for persuasion.

H3: Political discussion will be positively related to attempts to persuade others politically.

Similar to citizen news creation, political discussion might behave as a mediator between news use (both traditional and online) and attempts to persuade others politically. As already mentioned, news exposure boosts political discussion, because the media provide factual information and arguments about the social world, in addition to reassuring people in their own ability to understand and discuss current events. This increased frequency of political discussion cultivated through media use would increase attempts to persuade others in time. Under the cognitive mediation model, political discussion is a "reasoning device," a process analogous to cognitive elaboration that allows individuals to reflect on the media content and better organize their ideas (see Cho et al., 2009; Eveland, 2004; Jung, Kim, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2011). According to this theorization, news media use would indirectly encourage persuasion attempts via political discussion.

However, analogous to the mediating role of citizen news creation, it has also been argued that recent technological and behavioral changes are negatively affecting both peer group interaction and social processes of meaning making beyond the influence of the news media (Bennett & Manheim, 2006; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Sunstein, 2001). According to this line of thought, the ability of the news media to *microtarget* congenial messages to specific audiences, together with the social isolation of individuals, could be minimizing the frequency and importance of civic political talk, exposure to dissimilar views, and discussion across lines of difference (Bennett & Manheim, 2006; Garrett, 2009). Following this logic, higher levels of exposure to news would lead not to attempts to persuade others via political discussion but to an increased effect of the media messages on the individuals' attitudes and opinions (a *one-step-flow of communication*, in the words of Bennett & Manheim, 2006). Given the conflicting theoretical perspectives on this subject, we pose the following research question:

RQ2: Does political discussion mediate the relationships between (a) traditional news use and (b) Internet news use on attempts to persuade others?

Strength of Partisanship

Social identity theory addresses the formation and change of the self-concept as a result of group memberships and intergroup relations (Hogg, 2006; Stets & Burke, 2000). Early work defined social identity as "the individual's knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of this group membership" (Tajfel, 1972, p. 292). In this light, party identification, or the individual's affective orientation to a political party (Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1980, p. 121), can be considered

as a group-based identity that, when activated, is influential on certain perceptions and behaviors (Brown, 1999; Greene, 1999; Stets & Burke, 2000). More recent approaches from social identity theory suggest that group members make biased intergroup evaluations that favor the in-group ("we" and "us") over the out-group ("them"; Brown, 1999; Hogg, 2006; Mullen, Brown, & Smith, 1992). From a behavioral perspective, in-group members are prone to participate in the group's culture and to engage in actions that improve the group's relative position vis-à-vis out-groups (Brown, 1999; Stets & Burke, 2000).

On these grounds, strong partisans might perceive their group's (*their* political party's) beliefs as more *correct* than those held by out-group members (see Greene, 1999). Also, because the performance of a party is often assessed in terms of public support (which is connected to electoral success and, ultimately, to power), one could predict that strong political partisans will be more likely to engage in political persuasion. If they succeed in their attempted persuasion, *their* political party—or at least their party's positions—will enjoy more public support. Based on these theoretical and empirical insights, we expect strong partisans to be more prone to show strategic orientations in their conversations (see also Habermas, 1984; Rojas, 2008), seeing discussion and content creation as an opportunity to persuade others. More formally:

H4: Strength of partisanship will moderate the relationship between political discussion and attempts to persuade others.

H5: Strength of partisanship will moderate the relationship between citizen news creation and attempts to persuade others.

METHODS

Sample

The data used in this study are from a survey conducted by the Digital Media Research Program (DRMP) at the University of Texas at Austin. We employed a longitudinal design of two waves with a 3-month follow-up. Longitudinal studies are appropriate for "describing processes over time" (Babbie & Mouton, 2001, p. 104). Because our theoretical and empirical models assume a particular direction of effects (i.e., that attempted political persuasion is cultivated through news media use, citizen news creation, and political discussion), our design is more suitable to explore time-order effects and to better test these causal processes.

The media-polling group A.C. Nielsen was hired to provide a sample of individuals from a volunteer, online opt-in panel comprising 200,000 adult residents in the United States. For the first wave (W^1), conducted in December 2013, 5,000 panelists were selected by employing a stratified random sampling strategy so that the initial sample matched the U.S. Census statistics for age, gender, education, and income

(a relatively common procedure in previous studies, e.g., Bode, Vraga, Borah, & Shah, 2014; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009). Questionnaires for both waves were loaded into Qualtrics' proprietary web-based survey tool. Out of these initially selected 5,000 panelists, 1,813 respondents provided valid information, for a response rate of 34.6% (American Association of Public Opinion Research, 2011, p. 45). In February 2014, the second wave of the survey was sent to the same 1,813 respondents, of which 1,024 reanswered the questionnaire (retention rate of 57%). The final sample is very much like the general population of the United States, and it is comparable to other samples used in previous studies and reports.

Endogenous Variables

Attempts to Persuade.   Building on previous measures of the concept (e.g., Jacobs, Cook, & Delli Carpini, 2009; Weeks et al., 2015), an index was created based on four questions intended to capture the respondents' frequency of attempted persuasion in social and political matters. Respondents were asked how often, from 1 (*never*) to 10 (*all the time*), they tried to persuade their friends and acquaintances "about social causes," "about political causes," "to vote," and "about a political candidate" (W[1] Cronbach's α = .93, M = 2.53, SD = 2.27; W[2] Cronbach's α = .92, M = 2.49, SD = 2.27).

Citizen News Creation.   This variable includes four items aimed at capturing information about respondents' behaviors related to online news or political content creation (Holton, Coddington, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2013; Weeks et al., 2015). To measure this construct, respondents were asked how often, from 1 (*never*) to 10 (*all the time*), they "take part in posting or sharing photos, videos, memes, or gifs created by [them] that relate to current events or politics," "create and upload [their] own videos," "upload [their] own photos (to services like Instagram, Pinterest, or Facebook)," and "write posts on [their] own blog" (W[1] Cronbach's α = .78, M = 2.16, SD = 1.67).

Frequency of Political Discussion.   This variable measures respondents' frequency of political talk with people with whom they have more or less close relationships (Eveland & Shah, 2003; Shah, Cho, Eveland, & Kwak, 2005). We asked participants about the frequency with which they talk about politics or public affairs online and offline, from 1 (*never*) to 10 (*all the time*), with "spouse or partner," "family and relatives," "friends," "acquaintances," and "strangers" (five items averaged scale, W[1] Cronbach's α = .80, M = 4.00, SD = 2.04; W[2] Cronbach's α = .79, M = 3.91, SD = 2.48).

Exogenous Variables

Internet News Use.   This variable taps the overall frequency of Internet use for getting news (Bachmann & Gil de Zúñiga, 2013; Hardy & Scheufele, 2005). Because Internet users get news from a variety of traditional and alternative sources, we tried to be as comprehensive as possible by asking respondents for their frequency not only of use of "online news sites" but also of "citizen journalism sites (e.g. CNN's iReport, examiner.com)," "hyperlocal news sites (e.g., Patch.com or other sites dedicated to news in [their] local community)," "news aggregators," "Twitter for news," and "Facebook for news" (six items averaged scale from 1 [*never*] to 10 [*all the time*]; W[1] Cronbach's α = .69, *M* = 2.54, *SD* = 1.50).

Traditional News Use.   Following previous work (Bachmann & Gil de Zúñiga, 2013; Hardy & Scheufele, 2005), this variable measures the frequency of use of a variety of traditional news media. Respondents were asked how often, from 1 (*never*) to 10 (*all the time*), they get news from "national newspapers," "local newspapers," "radio," "network TV," and "local television (local affiliate stations)." Respondents were also asked about their overall frequency of use of "print" and "radio" for news. The frequency of use of TV for getting news was measured in detail with the following four questions: "How often do you watch CNN?" "How often do you watch Fox News?" "How often do you watch MSNBC?" and "How often do you watch BBC" (11 items averaged scale; W[1] Cronbach's α = .76, *M* = 4.42, *SD* = 1.65).

Control Variables

Trust in Traditional Media.   Given that previous studies have identified a relationship between media trust and some of our endogenous variables, our models include trust in traditional media as a control. More specifically, an individual's level of trust in news media has been shown to predict the creation of both general content and news in the online arena (Holton, Coddington, Lewis, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2015). Similarly, trust in online news seems to have a positive effect on online political discussion (Mou, Atkin, & Fu, 2011). Based on previous operationalizations of media trust (Tsfati & Arieli, 2014), respondents were asked about their level of trust, from 1 (*do not trust*) to 10 (*trust completely*), in "mainstream news media" and "news aggregators (e.g., Google News, etc.)" (W[1] Spearman-Brown coefficient = .48, *M* = 5.00, *SD* = 1.96).

Strength of Partisanship.   This variable taps respondents' strength of party identification, whether supporting Republicans or Democrats (see Eveland & Shah, 2003, for a similar measure). Respondents were first asked to rate their

degree of sympathy for the two major parties in the United States (from 1 [*strong Republican*] through 6 [*Independent*] up to 11 [*strong Democrat*]). This single item was then folded into a 6-point scale measuring respondents' level of party identification, toward either the Republican Party or the Democratic Party, from 0 (*no identification at all*) to 5 (*total identification with either of the two parties*; W[1], M = 2.10, SD = 1.88).

Political Knowledge.   Based on previous research (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996), this index consisted of eight questions (see the appendix) that assessed respondents' level of awareness of current policy issues, as well as their knowledge of the U.S. political system and its institutional rules. Correct replies to all these questions were then recoded as 1, whereas incorrect or unanswered ones were recoded as 0, which allowed us to create an additive index of political knowledge (W[1] Cronbach's α = .75; M = 4.57; SD = 2.17).

Discussion Network Size.   Previous studies have found that online "influentials" have a larger political discussion network (Kavanaugh et al., 2006). We asked participants to indicate the number of people they "talked to face-to-face or over the phone about politics or public affairs" and "talked to via the Internet, including e-mail, chat rooms, social networking sites, and micro-blogging sites" about politics or public affairs. An additive index was created. Because the resulting variable was skewed (W[1] M = 4.36, Mdn = 1.00, SD = 16.89, skewness = 10.86), the final variable was transformed with a natural logarithm (W[1] M = .33, Mdn = .24, SD = .37, skewness = 1.32).

Internal Political Efficacy.   Previous research has found a reciprocal relationship between political efficacy and self-perceptions of opinion leadership (Shah & Scheufele, 2006). We asked respondents to rate their degree of agreement from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 10 (*strongly agree*) with the following questions: "I have a good understanding of the important political issues facing our country" and "I consider myself well qualified to participate in politics" (W[1] Spearman-Brown coefficient = .87, M = 5.35, SD = 2.55).

Demographics.   Models also included a set of demographic variables measured with single items such as gender (49.7% female), age (M = 52.71, SD = 14.77), race (77.9% Whites), education (1 [*less than high school*] to 8 [*doctoral degree*], M = 3.61, Mdn = some college), and income (1 [*less than $10,000*] to 8 [*$200,000 or more*]; M = 4.46, Mdn = $50,000–$59,999).

Statistical Analyses

Cross-sectional (W[1]) and panel autoregressive ordinary least squares regressions were conducted to test the hypotheses. Next, the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2013) was used to test moderation between production of citizen

TABLE 1
Autoregressive Regression Models Predicting Attempts to Persuade

Variable	Attempts to Persuade W²	
	Without Interaction	With Interaction
Block 1: Demographics W[1]		
Age	.047	.047
Gender (1 = female)	−.001	.002
Education	−.011	−.011
Income	−.052*	−.051*
Race (1 = White)	−.002	−.003
ΔR^2	1.8%	1.8%
Block 2: Sociopolitical antecedents W[1]		
Internal efficacy	.014	.019
Discussion network size	.065*	.063*
Political knowledge	.062*	.063*
Strength of partisanship	.043	.002
Trust in traditional media	−.090***	−.094***
ΔR^2	21.1%	21.1%
Block 3 (autoregressive) W[1]		
Attempts to persuade	.516***	.513***
ΔR^2	25.9%	25.9%
Block 4: Interaction with news W[1]		
Traditional news media use	.026	.024
Internet use for news	.132***	.132***
ΔR^2	2.6%	3.0%
Block 5: Mediators W[1]		
Citizen news creation	.114***	.046
Political discussion	.062*	.081*
ΔR^2	1.0%	1.0%
Block 6: Moderation effects W1		
Citizen News Creation × Strength of Partisanship	—	.121**
Discussion × Strength of Partisanship	—	−.046
ΔR^2	—	0.3%
Total R^2	52.4%	52.7%

Note. Cell entries are final-entry standardized beta coefficients from an autoregressive ordinary least squares regression. Sample size = 1,000. To maximize statistical power, missing values on variables have been replaced with the mean. W[1] = Wave 1; W[2] = Wave 2.
  *p < .05. **p < .10. ***p < .001, two-tailed.

journalism and strength of partisanship. Finally, structural equation modeling (SEM) was also employed to (a) jointly test the effect of our independent variables on discussion frequency and attempts to persuade; (b) examine the causal order of discussion frequency and attempts to persuade others; and (c) test for indirect effects of different uses of news media on attempts to persuade through frequency of political discussion as an overall theoretical structure on the communicative effects of news use, political discussion, and creation of news content on political persuasion.

RESULTS

H2 predicted a positive relationship between citizen news creation and persuasion attempts. As Table 1 (first column) shows, we found empirical support for this hypothesis. Those who create news-related content will be more likely to attempt to persuade others politically in the future ($â = .114, p < .001$). Similarly, the third hypothesis predicted that political discussion would be positively related to attempts to persuade others over time. Results also provide empirical support for H3. Those who discuss politics and public affairs more frequently will be more likely to attempt to persuade others politically at a later time ($â = .062, p < .05$). Of the remaining variables in the model, discussion network size ($â = .065, p < .05$) and political knowledge ($â = .062, p < .05$) were positively related with persuasion attempts, whereas income ($â = -.052, p < .05$) and trust in traditional media ($â = -.090, p < .001$) were negative predictors. Somewhat unexpectedly, the model also revealed a direct effect of Internet use for news on attempted persuasion ($â = .132, p < .001$). This result indicates that using the Internet for informational purposes, without the hypothesized intervention of political discussion and citizen news creation, predicts attempted persuasion over time. As a whole, the model explains a 52.4% of the variance of the dependent variable.

The first research question asked about the role of citizen news creation as a mediator between news use (either via traditional media [RQ1a] or the Internet [RQ1b]) and attempts to persuade others. Similarly, RQ2 explored the mediating role of political discussion in the relationship between news use and attempted persuasion. SEM was used to test these possible indirect relationships in a single model (see Figure 1 and Table 2; bootstrapped 1,000 iterations), $\chi^2(1) = 2.69$, $p = .101$; root mean square error of approximation < 0.05, comparative fit index $= 0.997$, Tucker–Lewis index $= 0.972$, standardized root mean square residual $= .010$, with citizen news creation ($R^2 = .224$), political discussion frequency ($R^2 = .088$), and attempt to persuade others ($R^2 = .161$) as endogenous variables. The model shows that both traditional news use (RQ1a; $â = .024, p < .01$) and
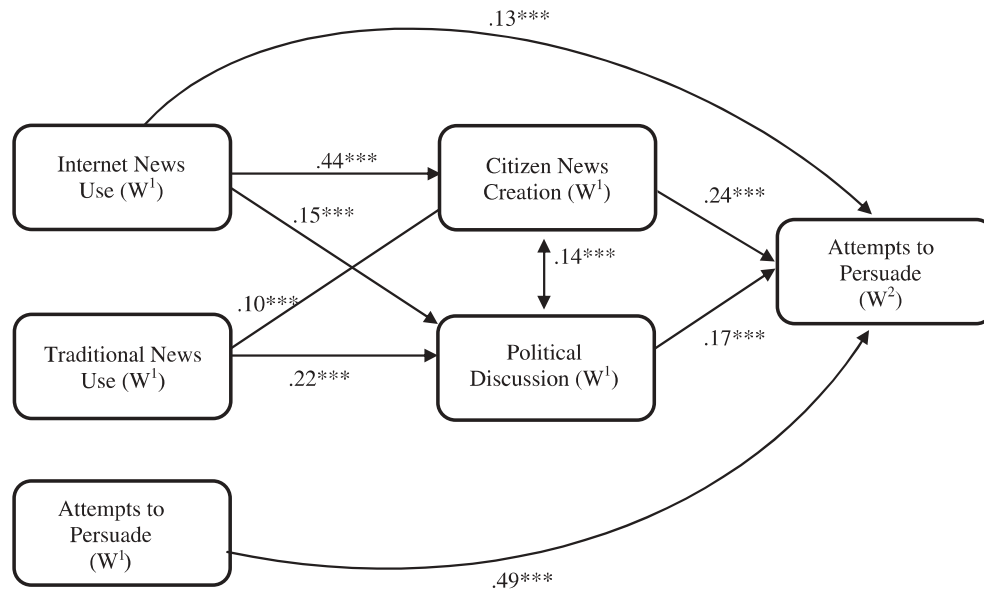
FIGURE 1 Autoregressive structural equation model of Internet use for news and traditional media use on political discussion, citizen news creation, and attempts to persuade others politically.
Note. $N = 1,000$. Continuous path entries are standardized structural equation modeling coefficients. The model controls for demographic variables (age, gender, education, income, and race), political orientations (internal efficacy, political knowledge, strength of partisanship, and trust in traditional news media), and discussion network size. To maximize statistical power, missing values on variables have been replaced with the mean. The model includes indirect effects on attempts to persuade (W^2; see Table 2). Model goodness of fit: $\chi^2(1) = 2.69$, $p = .101$; root mean square error of approximation $< .05$, comparative fit index $= .997$, Tucker–Lewis index $= .972$, standardized root mean square residual $= .010$. Explained variance of criterion variables: citizen news creation (W^1), $R^2 = .224$; political discussion (W^2), $R^2 = .088$; attempts to persuade (W^2), $R^2 = .161$.

Internet news use (RQ1b; $\hat{a} = .105$, $p < .001$) are indirectly related to attempts to persuade others via citizen news creation (see Table 2). We found a similar pattern of results for discussion. Political discussion mediates the relationship between traditional news use and attempts to persuade others (RQ2a; $\hat{a} = .037$, $p < .001$), and also between Internet news use and persuasion attempts (RQ2b; $\hat{a} = .025$, $p < .001$). Also in Figure 1, and consistent with extant literature (e.g., Weeks et al., 2015), results from SEM support our set of hypotheses about the connections between news use and citizen news creation. Specifically, those who use traditional (H1a) and Internet (H1b) sources of news more frequently are more inclined to create citizen news (H1a, $\hat{a} = .10$, $p < .001$; H1b, $\hat{a} = .44$, $p < .001$).

The final hypotheses predicted that strength of partisanship[2] would moderate the relationships between (a) political discussion and persuasion attempts (H4) and (b) citizen news creation and persuasion attempts (H5). To test these hypotheses, we included both interaction terms in an autoregressive model—controlling for prior levels of attempted persuasion others politically in Wave 1

TABLE 2
Indirect Effects of Traditional News Use (W^1) and Internet News Use (W^1) on Attempts to Persuade (W^2)

Indirect Effects	Point Estimate
Internet news use (W^1) → Citizen news creation (W^1) → Attempts to persuade (W^2)	.105***
Internet news use (W^1) → Political discussion frequency (W^1) → Attempts to persuade (W^2)	.025***
Traditional news use (W^1) → Citizen news creation (W^1) → Attempts to persuade (W^2)	.024**
Traditional news use (W^1) → Political discussion frequency (W^1) → Attempts to persuade (W^2)	.037***

Note. Indirect effects calculated from the model shown in Figure 1. Standardized coefficients are reported. $N = 1,000$. W^1 = Wave 1; W^2 = Wave 2.
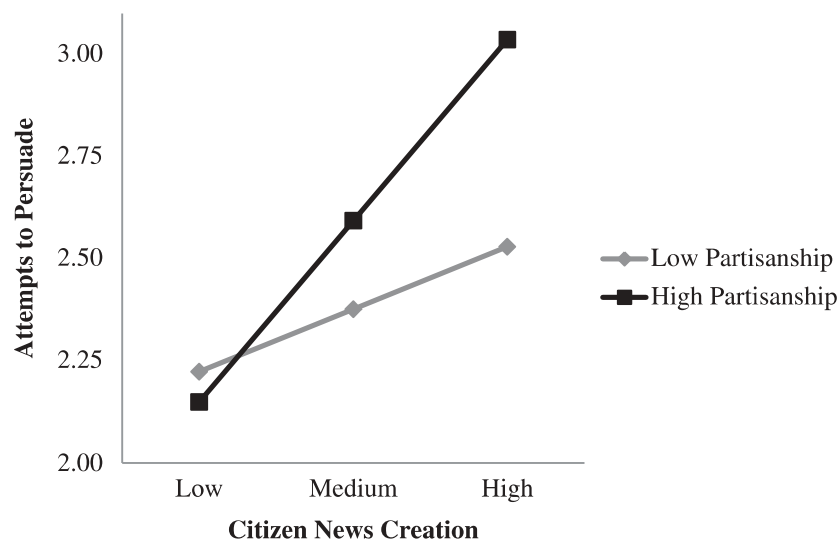
**$p < .01$, two-tailed. ***$p < .001$.

FIGURE 2 Interaction between production of citizen journalism and strength of partisanship on attempts to persuade others (Wave 2).
Note, The R^2 increase due to interaction is statistically significant, $F(1, 947) = 8.390$, $p = .004$. $N = 964$. Interaction estimated from model shown in Table 1 (second column). Values for the moderator are the mean and ± 1 SD from the mean.

(see Jöreskog, 1979)—predicting attempts to persuade (see Table 1, second column). We found that strength of partisanship moderates the relationship between citizen news creation and attempted persuasion (H4, â $= .121$, $p < .001$; see Table 1 and Figure 2). Thus, within the group of highly active citizen news creators, higher levels of partisanship lead to an increased

frequency of attempts to persuade others politically compared to those who score lower on partisanship. However, we did not find empirical support for H3: Partisanship does not moderate the relationship between political discussion and attempts to persuade others (â = −.046, *ns*).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Social heterogeneity presents a challenge for modern democratic societies, especially when it results in ideological or political polarization. This article studies attempted political persuasion as a proxy for critical engagement among citizens (Mutz et al., 1996; Thorson, 2012), because it represents a form of deliberation and discussion across political differences that can help to bridge social cleavages in the interest of developing a cohesive society. We theorize that citizen news creation cultivates the tendency to engage in attempted persuasion alongside other communicative habits such as news media use and political discussion, and this analysis sheds more light on these processes.

Results show that, as with political discussion, citizen news creation exerts a positive influence on attempted persuasion. Just as engaging in political discussion with others makes it more likely that people will attempt to change their counterpart's views, creating online news content also makes it more likely that people will engage in attempted persuasion, probably because changing minds—among other motivations—is a primary motivation for citizen news creation (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2011). These results run counter to claims that online media promote political "echo chambers" with minimum exposure to different ideas (see, e.g., Adamic & Glance, 2005; Colleoni et al., 2014). Our results show that political discussion (in both online and offline environments) and online citizen news creation may provide forums where different political views and ideas are spread, exchanged, and scrutinized. In turn, these communicative environments promote attempted persuasion as communicators engage with the other side.

Also of importance, this study showed that both political discussion and citizen news creation mediate the relationship between news use (online and offline) and persuasion attempts. Contrary to what some scholars proposed (e.g., Bennett & Manheim, 2006), our findings point toward the importance of social processes of meaning making through communication beyond attention to the news media. Active discussants and news content creators, who are also avid consumers of news, typically lead these social communication processes. Therefore, these results provide support for the idea that online behaviors such as discussion and citizen news creation increasingly supplement face-to-face communication as tools for opinion leaders to exert their influence, an observation that fits with prior research (e.g., Kavanaugh et al., 2006; Weeks et al., 2015).

We also found a nonhypothesized direct influence of Internet use for news on attempted persuasion. This positive, nonmediated relationship was not observed for traditional news use, however. Although further research should clarify these disparate effects, one explanation is that the online arena—different from the offline media environment—provides immediate channels and tools for persuasive activities. Thus, for example, social media allow citizens to engage in attempted persuasion without creating any content at all (e.g., by retweeting a persuasive message created by others, uploading a picture or a video created by others that relate to politics, sharing a link to a specific piece of news, etc.). Likewise, when consuming Internet news, readers encounter new possibilities to persuade fellow readers as they may pursue so in the comments sections of many online news sites. Therefore, this direct effect could be, in fact, mediated by political *expression* and not by content creation or discussion (see Gil de Zúñiga, Molyneux, & Zheng, 2014; Pingree, 2007).

This study also found that strength of partisanship moderates the relationship between citizen news creation and attempted persuasion. Compared to independent or weak partisans, strong partisans who are also active content creators tend to engage in attempted persuasion more often. This could be because political partisans tend to hold stronger views (Hong & Rojas, 2016; Lee, 2012) and might therefore be more likely to take positions in their online content. Thus, although citizen news creation may promote the crossing of ideological lines, it doesn't necessarily do so in a neutral, nonpartisan way. Rather, it provides opportunities for partisans to engage in broader political conversations with the other side in an effort to convince them of their own point of view.

These results help to clarify questions on whether citizen news creation contributes to a more deliberative and democratic society by encouraging conversations with the other side, and future research should explore the outcomes of these attempts to change others' minds, including the conditions in which attempted persuasion is successful, examining, for example, source credibility, closeness, or familiarity (Dubois & Gaffney, 2014). Similarly, different operationalizations of the exogenous and mediating variables in the study leave room for further research. Alternative models testing differences between online versus offline political talk, discussion with strong versus weak ties, or social media versus traditional news media use may offer new and important insights.

Another question for future research is whether the persuaders themselves are affected by attempting to persuade other people. In other words, the "sender effects" (Pingree, 2007). Meanwhile, a related question concerns the degree of political difference between persuader and persuadee. It may be the case, for example, that persuasion attempts in face-to-face versus online environments are characterized by different degrees of political divergence between persuader

and persuadee, and the magnitude of these differences could affect the outcome of the attempted persuasion because they provide different likelihoods that a message falls within an individual's "latitude of acceptance" (Griffin & Ledbetter, 2014; Sherif & Hovland, 1961).

A number of caveats should be noted when interpreting the results of this study. The first concerns our measure of citizen news creation. Although one of the questions of this composite variable asked respondents about their frequency of posting or sharing *news-related content*—photos, videos, memes, or gifs—created by themselves, the rest of the questions asked participants about their frequency of creation and distribution of online content (videos, photos, and blog entries, respectively) without specifying whether this content was related to current events. Nevertheless, because our dependent variable is attempts to persuade others *politically*, one can be reasonably sure that a more refined and focused measurement of citizen news creation would only increase its effect on persuasion attempts. Also with regard to citizen news, it should be noted that our measure of the construct focuses on the production of *original* content (blog entries, photos, videos, memes, and gifs). Other previous and less restrictive approaches have, however, included forms of collaboration in the news process in which no new material is created (e.g., linking, commenting on the posts created by others, retweeting, reposting, etc.; Goode, 2009; Nip, 2006). Our circumscribed conception of citizen news could explain, at least partially, that the mean value of this variable in our sample is relatively low, compared to other variables in the study. Future research should, however, continue to improve the operationalization and measurement of the construct.

Another qualification comes from the use of an opt-in Internet panel that might not constitute a fully representative sample of the U.S. population. However, the sample is demographically comparable to the U.S. Census in terms of age, gender, education, and income. In addition, the use of online samples such as that described in this article has become relatively frequent in communication research, and recent reports show that when the purpose of the study is to explain theoretical relationships, model estimates obtained from online panels are comparable to those based on probability samples (see Baker et al., 2013; Eckman, 2016).

Despite these limitations, this article contributes to a better understanding of predispositions and communicative behaviors that precede persuasion attempts. The study of behaviors such as these, which indicate instances of crossing social and political cleavages, is particularly important at a time when some social trends—media fragmentation, lifestyle mobility, and decline in formal group involvement—seem to threaten social cohesion in democratic societies. The present study calls into question the idea that content creation occurs in political "echo chambers" of like-minded individuals that provide few opportunities for

diverse discussion. Rather, it shows that citizen news creators tend to engage the other side by attempting to persuade them to change their views. These practices may therefore contribute to social mediation processes in which political information is (re-) interpreted and political meaning is (re-) developed, at times, with reinvigorating persuasive influence.

Notes

1. The "Bullygate" scandal refers to a series of allegations against British Prime Minister Gordon Brown regarding the mistreatment—bullying—of staff at 10 Downing Street. Such accusations included harassment, intimidation, and even episodes of physical violence toward some of Labour MP's aides. The scandal was first reported by *Observer* journalist Andrew Rawsley in February 2010 and shortly afterward further supported by an antibullying charity linked to the Conservative Party called the National Bullying Helpline ("Ann Widdecombe Resigns," 2010, Wintour, 2010). Doubts about the veracity of the accusations, scarcity of evidences, and alleged political motivations on the part of the charity resulted in a rapid decline in media and public attention to the issue (Chadwick, 2011; Dejevsky, 2010).
2. This study also tested several alternative moderating effects on the relationships between communicative behaviors (i.e., citizen news creation and political discussion) on attempted persuasion. Specifically, we assessed the moderating roles of trust in traditional media, political knowledge, and internal political efficacy by conducting ordinary least squares autoregressive models predicting attempted persuasion over time. However, none of the preceding variables moderate these relationships.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire: Items Measuring Political Knowledge

Here are some questions to which not everyone may know the answers. If there are some you don't know the answer to, just select "Don't know" and move on to the next one. Please do not discuss these questions with others or look them up on the web.

1. What job or political office does Joe Biden currently hold? (open-ended)

2. What job or political office does John Roberts currently hold? (open-ended)

3. For how many years is a United States Senator elected—that is, how many years are there in one full term of office for a U.S. Senator?

a) 2   b) 4   c) **6**   d) 8   e) Don't know

4. On which of the following does the U.S. federal government currently spend the least?

a) **Foreign aid**   b) Medicare   c) National defense   d) Social Security   e) Don't know

5. Do you happen to know whether the immigration bill before Congress was introduced by:

a) A group of Republican   b) A group of Democratic   c) **A mix of Republican and**   d) Don't know
Senators   Senators   **Democratic Senators**

6. Do you happen to know what the ruling of the Supreme Court about Obamacare was?

a) **Individual mandate is**   b) Individual mandate is   c) Individual mandate is   d) Individual mandate is unconstitutional,   e) Don't know
constitutional, 5–4   unconstitutional, 5–4   constitutional, unanimous   unanimous decision
vote   vote   decision

7. Which organization's documents were released by Edward Snowden?

a) FBI   b) **NSA**   c) IRS   d) CIA   e. Don't know

8. Recently, the UN and US were in negotiations with the Syrian government over the removal of:

a) **Chemical weapons**   b) Nuclear weapons   c) Illicit drugs   d) Al Qaeda operatives   e) Don't know

Note. Correct answers are in boldface.