

Hostile Media Perceptions, Presumed Media Influence, and Political Talk: Expanding the Corrective Action Hypothesis

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Abstract

The corrective action hypothesis predicts that hostile media perceptions and presumed media influence will be positively related to expressive political behaviors. According to this hypothesis, the presumed influence of biased media makes people attempt to “correct” perceived “wrongs” by voicing their own opinions in the public sphere. This study predicts that people with higher levels of hostile media perceptions and presumed media influence will talk politics more often and will seek out a wider array of viewpoints in political conversation. Analysis of survey data from a national representative sample of adults in Colombia largely supports these hypotheses, and also shows that presumed media influence mediates the relationship between hostile media perceptions and political talk diversity.

Media have always given us something to talk about. Whether about the latest political campaign, celebrity scandal, or great athletic feat, media provide information that shapes many of our conversations. Media give us fodder for small talk, topics on which to connect with others, and social context that helps us shape our identities. Yet, people do not passively accept information from the media, but rather actively interpret and relate it to their preexisting beliefs. As such, some people talk to “correct” information they encounter. A passionate sports fan might offer reasons why his or her favorite team will win, despite what the media or the oddsmakers say. A staunch environmentalist may argue that a new mining technique is dangerous, despite the news media’s “balanced” stories. A political partisan may complain of the “biased media” and attempt to convince you of the merits of various alternative or partisan media outlets.

The last example is the most relevant to this study. People often make judgments about the political leanings of the media as a social institution (Ladd, 2012), and many people also presume that the media will influence others (Gunther & Storey, 2003). Whether these perceptions are right or wrong, people may alter their behavior in some way to anticipate the effects of biased information on others. This article examines “corrective action” (Rojas, 2010), a specific type of behavior where people seek to voice their own opinions to correct the “wrongs” they perceive in the public sphere. While previous corrective action research has examined various online and offline expressive behaviors (Rojas, 2010), this article focuses on interpersonal political talk. Drawing from the corrective action hypothesis, we predict that people with higher levels of hostile media perceptions (HMP) and presumed media influence (PMI) will talk politics more often and will be more likely to seek out people on “the other side.”

Concepts and Theory

Political Talk

This article examines the relationships among HMP, PMI, and political talk. Political talk figures prominently in deliberative and participatory democratic theories (Mutz, 2006). While deliberative theorists focus on civility and variety in political discussion (Habermas, 1989), deliberative discussion rarely occurs in daily life (Mutz, 2006). Political talk refers to informal political conversation that occurs in daily social settings (Conover, Searing, & Crewe, 2002), but it is not to be confused with sociable conversation that does not involve politics (Eveland, Morey, & Hutchens, 2011). Therefore, political talk, as a concept, is perhaps more useful than deliberation for examining common social interactions (Eveland et al., 2011; Mutz, 2006).

While some scholars have considered political talk a form of political participation (e.g., Bakker & de Vreese, 2011; Kenski & Stroud, 2006), others have considered it a variable that facilitates media’s influence on political attitudes and behavior (e.g., McLeod, Scheufele, & Moy, 1999; Shah et al., 2007), or as a variable that otherwise relates to political participation (e.g., McClurg, 2006; Mutz, 2006; Puig-i-Abril & Rojas, 2007). While deliberative theory considers political discussion to be central to democratic legitimization (Habermas, 1989), participatory theory considers the ways in which political talk engages people with political institutions (Barber, 1984). Generally, research shows that political talk helps people integrate political information (Shah et al., 2007), influences political attitudes and preferences (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1987), contributes to political learning (Eveland, 2004), and helps people to form political identities (Walsh, 2004). However, empirical evidence about the relationship between political talk diversity and political

participation largely conflicts. While some research shows a negative relationship between “cross-cutting” talk and participation (Mutz, 2006), other studies show a positive relationship between disagreement in talk and participation (Ikeda & Boase, 2011), while still more studies show a relationship conditional on social context (McClurg, 2006).

Hostile Media Perceptions

Hostile media perceptions are phenomena in which people perceive media as biased against their point of view. Experiments show that people on both sides of political and social issues see bias in news coverage. For example, both pro-Arab and pro-Israeli student groups perceived media coverage about the Beirut massacre as biased against their side (Vallone, Ross & Lepper, 1985). Experiments replicated these initial findings (Perloff, 1989), and showed HMP evidence about different issues and among nonpartisans (Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1994). To this point, most evidence indicates that HMP results from selective categorization, where people “incorrectly” categorize arguments as biased when they are neutral (Schmitt, Gunther, & Liebhart, 2004). The media’s perceived reach (Gunther & Schmitt, 2004), or group membership salience (Ariyanto, Hornsey, & Gallois, 2007; Reid, 2012), likely brings about this selective categorization process. Generally, research demonstrates that people who are highly involved in politics are more likely to have HMP (Gunther, Miller, & Liebhart, 2009); however, nonpartisans might also experience perceptions of media bias (Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1994; Gunther & Christen, 2002). With the rise of partisan media, scholars have observed relative HMP, where people perceive more bias in media that does not share their political perspective (Coe et al., 2008; Gunther & Christen, 2002; Gunther, Christen, Liebhart, & Chia, 2001).

People often make judgments about the political leanings of the media as a social institution. Ladd (2012) argues that despite the proliferation of “alternative” and “partisan” news media in recent decades, people still consider “major news organizations and journalists that aspire to the standards of professional journalism” as the “mainstream” or “institutional” media (p. 93). He shows that survey responses about different terms (e.g., the “media” versus the “press”) and average scores on attitudinal measures about the media are fairly consistent across survey samples. Therefore, he concludes, people have a clear conceptualization of what “the media” means in surveys, and they have consistent attitudes toward the media as a social institution. Thus, it makes sense to measure HMP in terms of the media as a social institution.

Scholars originally conceptualized HMP as reactions to specific stimuli about specific political and social issues (Vallone et al., 1985). Much of the HMP literature has been devoted to observing reactions to controversial issues like the Arab–Israeli conflict (e.g., Vallone et al., 1985), genetically modified

foods (e.g., [Gunther & Schmitt, 2004](#)), or primate research (e.g., [Gunther & Christen, 2002](#)). Other studies have measured HMP general terms (e.g., [Eveland & Shah, 2003](#); [Ho et al., 2011](#); [Reid, 2012](#); [Rojas, 2010](#)). These measurements capture perceptions of bias in the media as a social institution. Yet another group of studies conceptualizes HMP as the relationship between personal opinion and perceived media position (e.g., [Gunther & Christen, 2002](#); [Gunther et al., 2001](#)). This method gave rise to another group of studies that computes HMP as the difference between the self and the media into a single variable, conceptualizing perceived ideological distance between the self and the media as perceived media hostility ([Rojas, 2010](#), [Wojcieszak, 2010](#)). These studies measure HMP as the difference between personal and perceived media ideology, and the current study uses similar measurements of HMP for both general and issue-specific perceptions of the media.

Presumed Media Influence

Presumed media influence has its roots in the third-person effect literature, which proposes people perceive that media have greater influence on others than on themselves, and these perceptions impact their behavior ([Perloff, 1993](#)). [Gunther and Storey \(2003\)](#) argue that “the third-person effect is just a special case” of a generalized effect they call PMI (p. 201). Unlike the third-person effect, PMI does not rely on self–other perceptual difference. Rather, the influence of presumed influence model simply relies on perceptions of media influence on others, and generally proposes that PMI can affect individuals’ perceptions, attitudes, and behavior. Drawing the “persuasive press inference” ([Gunther, 1998](#)), these scholars argue that many attitudinal and behavioral outcomes are not dependent on a perceived self–other influence gap, but also result simply from perceived media effects on others.

Subsequent research provides correlative evidence in support of these propositions, and experimental research confirms the theorized perceptions-to-behavior causal order ([Tal-Or, Cohen, Tsfati, & Gunther, 2010](#)). Much of the PMI literature focuses on health and sex-related attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors. For example, research has shown that PMI relates to negative female body image ([Park, 2005](#)), positive attitudes toward smoking ([Gunther, Bolt, Borzekowski, Liebhart, & Dillard, 2006](#)), and positive attitudes toward sex among adolescents ([Chia, 2006](#)). Other PMI literature examines groups subject to media coverage, such as politicians ([Cohen, Tsfati, & Sheaffer, 2008](#)) and scientists ([Tsfati, Cohen, & Gunther, 2011](#)). [Tsfati and Cohen \(2005\)](#) show that perceived negative coverage of Israeli settlers makes those settlers more willing to forcibly resist the government. [Tsfati \(2007\)](#), on the other hand, shows a different reaction among minority Arab groups in Israel, who feel more alienated as a result of PMI. Interestingly, these studies highlight

the potential for different behavioral reactions among different groups in different contexts, even within the same country.

Corrective Action

The corrective action hypothesis can be found in Davison's (1983) seminal article outlining the third-person effect, where he shares the anecdote of a political campaign volunteer who, on discovering a leaflet for the opposing candidate in his mailbox, felt the need to take "counteraction" by distributing leaflets in support of his own candidate (p. 2). This anecdote is but one of several Davison offers, and his examples of preventative behavior inspired research that largely overshadows the study of corrective behavior in the third-person literature. Specifically, a large body of research has established that third-person perceptions can make someone more willing to censor media (e.g., McLeod, Eveland, & Nathanson, 1997; Rojas, Shah, & Faber, 1996). The presumed influence literature has largely focused on accommodating behaviors, including compliance with peer norms (Chia, 2006; Gunther et al., 2006; Park, 2005), defiance toward perceived threats (Tsfati & Cohen, 2005), or withdrawal from public discourse (Tsfati, 2007). Several of these examples also examine HMP (Tsfati, 2007; Tsfati & Cohen, 2005). Other HMP literature has shown that it is positively associated with political participation (Ho et al., 2011) and political discussion (Hwang, Pan, & Sun, 2008; Wei, Chia, & Lo, 2011).

The corrective action hypothesis (Rojas, 2010; Sun, Shen, & Pan, 2008) proposes that people who perceive media bias and influence express their own opinions in the public sphere in an attempt to "correct" perceived "wrongs." While originally conceived as a reaction to third-person perceptions (Sun et al., 2008), Rojas (2010) shows that corrective behavior also relates to HMP and PMI. Thus, the basic premise of the corrective action hypothesis is that perceptions of media bias—along with the presumed influence of media on others—motivate people to become more politically expressive. This idea draws on several important preexisting findings, including research that shows corrective responses to PMI among parents (Tsfati, Ribak, & Cohen, 2005) and in political discussion of controversial issues (Neuwirth, Frederick, & Mayo, 2002), and it has received subsequent support from research examining third-person perceptions (Lim & Golan, 2011), PMI (Wei et al., 2011), and HMP (Hwang et al., 2008; Wei et al., 2011). The hypothesis implies that HMP and PMI relate to a range of expressive behaviors, including political talk. Increasingly, people take corrective action using new communications technologies, as people are now able to engage traditional media online or to create and publish their own content (Rojas, 2010). However, people might also use longer-standing communication avenues. Perceived influence of biased media can make people "more likely to use both conventional and

emerging communication technologies to communicate their positions and compensate for these perceived biases” (Rojas, 2010, p. 344). If perceived influence of biased media motivates people to influence others’ opinions, it makes sense that these perceptions would also motivate people to engage in interpersonal political discussion.

While the PMI literature has not yet examined political talk, evidence supports the notion that political talk and HMP are related. Some studies treat political talk as an antecedent of HMP. For example, Eveland and Shah (2003) found that conversation with like-minded others predicts HMP in the United States, while Wojcieszak (2010) found that political talk diversity positively predicts HMP in Colombia. Whereas both of these studies use political talk as an antecedent of HMP, their findings make two opposite conclusions seem plausible, indicating a need for further investigation into the relationship between HMP and talk diversity in different contexts. Other studies have treated political talk as an outcome of HMP. For example, survey research has shown that perceived media–self difference is associated with online political discussion (Hwang, Schmierbach, Paek, Gil de Zúñiga, & Shah et al., 2006), while experimental research shows that HMP leads people to engage in political discussion (Hwang et al., 2008). Clearly, the literature conflicts about whether to consider political talk an antecedent or an outcome of perceptions. However, it is theoretically plausible that political talk results from perceptions. According to the corrective action perspective, people seek out opportunities for political expression in response to HMP and PMI. However, it is also important to recognize that political talk might also precede perceptions of media bias. In an effort to sort out the circularity in these relationships, we distinguish between network characteristics, which are more or less stable attributes of interpersonal networks, and political talk behavior, which could result from perceptions about the media. However, owing to cross-sectional nature of this research we do not make claims about causality, but rather construct a set of relationships that align with explicit theoretical propositions.

The size of a person’s network is considered a structural characteristic of his or her interpersonal network (McClurg, 2006; Rojas, 2008). Research has found that people with larger talk networks are more engaged with politics and communities (e.g., McClurg, 2006) because they are more well-connected and have more opportunities to participate. Given the lack of research specifically devoted to the relationships between network size and HMP and PMI, we have presented research questions rather than formal hypotheses about these relationships:

RQ1: What is the relationship between political talk network size and HMP?

RQ2: What is the relationship between political talk network size and PMI?

Other dimensions of political talk, such as political talk frequency, go beyond structural characteristics of the network, and more closely fit the description of behaviors. Certainly, how often a person discusses politics is related to the size of his or her network. However, talk frequency more directly measures the act of discussion rather than of any characteristic of the network itself. The same is true for the diversity of viewpoints one encounters. While political talk diversity is certainly related to the makeup of one's network, the amount of disagreement a person experiences in political talk results from active anticipation of encounters with politically different others (Green, Visser, & Tetlock, 2000; Mutz, 2006). Understanding that the frequency and diversity of discussion are behavioral rather than socio-structural phenomena, the logic of the corrective action hypothesis may be extended to these variables. If perceived media bias and influence are positively associated with political expression, HMP and PMI should be positively related to political talk frequency and diversity, controlling for an individual's talk network size:

- H1: HMP will be positively related to political talk frequency.
- H2: PMI will be positively related to political talk frequency.
- H3: HMP will be positively related to political talk diversity.
- H4: PMI will be positively related to political talk diversity.

Finally, this research addresses the need to establish how HMP and PMI work together to affect political expression. While Rojas (2010) found no evidence of an interaction effect between HMP and PMI, theories of cognitive integration bias and previous research suggest PMI might mediate the relationship between HMP and expression. Negativity bias is a phenomenon in which people give more weight to negative information than to positive information (Skowronski & Carlston, 1989). People give more cognitive effort while processing informational cues that are extreme or negative (Rozin & Royzman, 2001; Skowronski & Carlston, 1989), including information that is inconsistent with preexisting preferences (Ditto, Scepanski, Munro, Apanovitch, & Lockhart, 1998). Applied to HMP, negativity bias implies that people will give more weight to media content they perceive as hostile, which could lead them to presume the media are influential on others. Further, these perceptions could work together to influence political expression. Evidence shows that PMI facilitates the impact of HMP on self-image. For example, in the Gaza settler case, Tsfaty & Cohen (2005) show a counterbalancing mediated relationship between HMP and PMI on perceived self-image. The Arab minority case also shows that PMI mediates the influence of HMP on perceived image (Tsfaty, 2007), but this time HMP and PMI work together. In the United States, research has shown a positive relationship between HMP and PMI (Watson & Riffe, 2012). These studies highlight

how the relationship between HMP and PMI behaves differently in different contexts, suggesting a need for additional research into how these variables work together to affect perceptions and behavior.

RQ3: Does PMI mediate the relationship between HMP and (a) political talk frequency or (b) political talk diversity?

Context of the Study

The corrective action hypothesis was developed and tested using survey data collected in Colombia (Rojas, 2010). This study uses more current data from a national representative sample of Colombian adults in urban areas. Hence, these data provide an excellent opportunity to expand the theory of corrective action and examine new observable implications. In Colombia, citizens are beginning to peacefully reengage in political processes in the aftermath of >50 years of political and drug-related violence. However, its violent and polarizing history has resulted in relatively low levels of trust in these processes and in the government. In response, efforts have arisen to promote transparency and responsiveness in local government, particularly in urban areas (Rojas, 2010). Colombia therefore provides an interesting context to look at how perceptions of media bias and influence relate to political expression. More fundamentally, this research examines a snapshot of how the media relate to political engagement during a period of substantial political change and the emergence of a stabilizing democracy.

Methods

Data and Analysis

This study relies on national survey data collected between July 29 and August 20, 2010 in 10 cities in Colombia, as part of a biennial study of communication and political attitudes in Colombia. The sample was designed to represent Colombia's adult urban population—76% of Colombia's 44.5 million inhabitants live in urban areas. Survey respondents were selected using a multistep stratified random sample procedure that selected households randomly based on city size and census data. Once the number of households was allocated for a given city, a number of city blocks were selected randomly according to housing district and strata. Then, individual households were randomly selected within each block. Finally, the study used the “adult in the household who most recently celebrated a birthday” technique to identify an individual respondent at random. Up to three visits to each household were made (if needed) to increase participation in the survey. A local professional polling firm, *Deproyectos Limitada*, collected the data and 1064 face-to-face completed responses were obtained for a response rate of 85%.

The analysis first uses ordinary least squares (OLS) multiple regression to assess the relationships between political talk network size and HMP and PMI, respectively. The next set of models then assess the relationships between HMP and two behavioral dimensions of political talk: political talk frequency and political talk diversity. Next, the PMI variable is added to the models to illustrate what happens to the first set of relationships when this variable is included. Each of these analyses is repeated using issue-specific measures about the guerilla issue in Colombia to gain additional leverage over the research problem. Finally, bootstrapping mediation tests (e.g., Preacher & Hayes, 2008) assess the mediating influence of PMI on the relationship between HMP and political talk. The models control for political talk network size, news media exposure, strength of partisanship, political interest, political knowledge, and demographic variables.

Measures

Political talk frequency and diversity. Two dimensions of political talk were analyzed as behavioral outcomes: political talk frequency and political talk diversity. Political talk frequency was measured with four questions on 6-point scales (0 = never, 5 = very frequently) asking how often respondents talk politics with family members, coworkers, neighbors, and friends ($\alpha = .764$). The variable averaged the four scores for each respondent, and ranges from 0 to 5 (mean [M] = 1.85, standard deviation [SD] = 1.35). Political talk diversity was measured using a single survey item measured on a 6-point scale ($M = 2.30$, $SD = 1.75$). The item asked how often respondents talk with people who hold different ideas than themselves. The survey also contained measurements of political talk diversity specific to the guerrilla issue. A single survey item, measured on a 6-point scale, asked how frequently respondents talk with people who disagree about the solution to the guerrilla problem ($M = 1.86$, $SD = 1.67$).

Hostile media perceptions. The HMP variable was computed as the absolute value of the difference between perceived media ideology and personal ideology. Respondents were asked to rate the ideology of the media and themselves on an 11-point scale (0 = very liberal, 5 = neutral, 10 = very conservative). The scores for personal ideology were subtracted from the scores for media ideology, and the absolute value was taken capture the distance between the scores ($M = 1.51$, $SD = 1.95$). More than half of respondents reported at least some level of HMP (about 54%), and a one-sample t -test shows that the mean is statistically different from zero [$t(1004) = 24.55$, $p < .001$]. The survey also contained items asking about individuals' and the media's stance on the guerrilla issue. In Colombia, opinions are divided about whether to use military force to end the guerrilla problem or to find a peaceful solution. The issue therefore provides another level of observation and gives

the study additional leverage over the research problem. Respondents were asked to rate their own opinion and the opinion of the media on the guerrilla issue on a 7-point scale (1 = military solution, 7 = negotiation process). The absolute value of the difference between the personal and media scores was computed ($M = 1.95$, $SD = 1.97$), and the mean is significantly different from zero [$t(812) = 28.18$, $p < .001$].

Presumed media influence. The analyses use both multi-issue and issue-specific PMI variables. The multi-issue PMI variable was created from two survey items asking respondents about the guerrilla issue and the gay marriage issue in Colombia. Respondents were asked to rate how influential they think the media are on others about these issues on 6-point scales (0 = little influence, 5 = a lot of influence). The two items were averaged to create the final variable ($M = 3.15$, $SD = 1.49$). The issue-specific PMI variable is comprised only of the scores for the guerrilla issue ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 1.72$).

Political talk network size. Political talk network size was measured with four questions asking respondents the number of family members, coworkers, neighbors, and friends who are their political discussion partners. An additive index was created to capture the absolute size of respondent's talk networks ($\alpha = .66$). Answers ranged from 0 to 100 ($M = 8.71$, $SD = 11.30$).

News media exposure. Exposure to "mainstream" news media was measured in terms of frequency of exposure (0 = never, 5 = very frequently). Ten survey items using 6-point scales asked about attention to national, regional, or local news on television and in newspapers, as well as political talk shows, news magazines, televised election debates, and political ads. These items were combined into a single additive index ranging from 0 to 50 ($\alpha = .75$, $M = 27.30$, $SD = 9.65$), which is a justifiable method given the generalized measurements of HMP and PMI.

Political orientations. The analyses control for three political orientations variables: strength of partisanship, political interest, and political knowledge. The strength of partisanship variable was created using a single survey item that asked respondents to rate the strength of their party identification ("strong" or "not that strong"). Respondents did not answer this question if they responded "none" to the preceding survey item that asked them to identify with a party (the item included five named parties, plus "other"). Those who answered "none" to that question received a score of "0" on the strength of partisanship variable, while those who named a party and moved on to the next question received values of "0.05" for an answer of "not that strong," and "1" for an answer of "strong." This method results in a three-point scale for strength of partisanship (1 = strong, 0.5 = not that strong, 0 = nonpartisan). Nonpartisans represent the modal score (39.2%). Another 32.7% are weak partisans, while 28.1% are strong partisan identifiers. The political interest

variable was created by averaging scores on three survey items asking about respondents' interest in local or regional, national, and international politics (0 = none, 5 = a lot). The final variable has a mean of 2.23 ($SD = 1.62$; $\alpha = .92$). The political knowledge variable was created by adding respondents' scores on 10 factual knowledge questions about national and world politics and current affairs (1 = correct, 0 = incorrect or don't know). The final variable ranges from 0 to 10 and has a mean of 3.63 ($SD = 2.10$).

Demographics. The models control for gender, age, education, and socioeconomic status. Of the respondents, 51.7% were female and 48.3% were male. The average age of the respondents is 41.63 years old. Education was measured on an 8-point scale, ranging from none to postgraduate, and including "incomplete" options for primary school, secondary school, and university ($M = 4.83$, $SD = 1.48$). Socioeconomic status was measured with a proxy: the Colombian system of national household energy levels, which ranges from 1 to 6 ($M = 2.88$; $SD = 1.07$). This scale measures the physical size of the house based on energy consumption.

Results

Political talk network size. The first set of OLS regression models presented in Table 1 illustrates the relationships between political talk network size and HMP. The first model shows that political talk network size is positively related to the general HMP variable ($\beta = .10$, $p < .01$), but not the issue-specific variable. These results provide some modest evidence of a positive relationship between a person's network size and HMP. These analyses were repeated using PMI as dependent variables. Political talk network size is positively related to both the multi-issue ($\beta = .12$, $p < .001$) and issue-specific PMI variables ($\beta = .14$, $p < .001$). These results provide strong evidence of the relationship between network size and PMI, while both sets of results for network size underscore the need to control for this variable in when assessing the behavioral outcomes.

Political talk frequency. The models presented in Table 2 assess the relationships between HMP and political talk frequency (H1) with the general and issue-specific measures of HMP. Furthermore, Table 2 presents models that add the PMI variables to assess the direct relationships between these variables and the outcomes (H2), as well as to observe what happens to the HMP coefficients when the PMI variables are added. The first model shows that HMP is not related to talk frequency above and beyond the control variables. This result probably occurs because of the inclusion of the talk network size variable ($\beta = .44$, $p < .001$) explains a good deal of the variance in the outcome ($R^2 = .46$). Despite this relatively high hurdle, the multi-issue

Table 1

Results from OLS regression analyses showing the relationships between political talk network size and hostile media perceptions, as well as presumed media influence

Predictor	Hostile media perceptions	Hostile media perceptions (Guerrilla)	Presumed media influence	Presumed media influence (Guerrilla)
Age	.01	.14****	-.04	-.05
Education	.02	.06	.04	-.02
Household energy stratum	-.06	-.08**	-.06	-.02
Gender (1 = female)	-.02	-.07*	-.06*	-.02
Political interest	.01	-.10**	.17****	.16****
Political knowledge	.06	.06	.01	.07*
Partisanship strength	.02	-.04	.05	.05
News exposure	.05	.09**	-.01	-.03
Political talk network size	.10***	.05	.12****	.14****
R ²	.03	.04	.08	.08
F statistic	3.01***	3.83****	9.43****	8.90****
N	977	798	1023	1000

Note. Table reports standardized beta coefficients from OLS regression analyses, and reports *p*-values as follows: **p* < .10, ***p* < .05, ****p* < .01, *****p* < .001 (two-tailed tests).

PMI variable is significantly related to talk frequency in the next model ($\beta = .11, p < .001$). Taken together, these models suggest a relationship between PMI and talk frequency, but not between HMP and talk frequency.

However, the next two models in Table 2, which use the issue-specific HMP and PMI variables, tell a different story. In the first of these models, HMP is positively related to talk frequency ($\beta = .06, p < .05$). The addition of the PMI variable in the second model reduces the coefficient for HMP slightly ($\beta = .05$), but enough to increase the *p*-value to above .05. As with the general models, the PMI variable is more strongly related to the outcome ($\beta = .11, p < .001$). Taken together, these models provide some evidence of positive relationships with political talk frequency for both HMP and PMI, lending mixed support for H1 and strong support for H2.

Political talk diversity. Table 2 also shows the models for political talk diversity. Because of the availability of an issue-specific talk diversity variable, this dependent variable is analyzed as a function of the issue-specific HMP and PMI variables. With political talk diversity, we observe a much stronger relationship for HMP than with talk frequency (H3), with a positive coefficient of .06 ($p < .05$). This relationship disappears in the next model once the multi-issue PMI variable is added ($\beta = .05, n.s.$), while PMI itself (H4) exhibits a positive relationship with talk diversity ($\beta = .11, p < .05$). These results lend support to H3 and H4, and suggest the possibility that PMI mediates the

Table 2
Results from OLS regression analyses showing the relationships between hostile media perceptions and presumed media influence with political talk frequency and political talk diversity

Predictor	Political talk frequency	Political talk diversity	Political talk diversity (Guerrilla)
Age	-.07**	-.06*	-.03
Education	.02	.02	.02
Household energy stratum	-.01	.00	.01
Gender (1 = female)	-.09***	-.09***	-.02
Political interest	.15***	.13***	.09***
Political knowledge	-.02	-.03	-.03
Partisanship strength	.11***	.12***	.02
News exposure	.21***	.21***	.23***
Political talk network size	.44***	.45***	.26***
Hostile media perceptions	.00	.06**	.05
Hostile media perceptions (Guerrilla)			.10***
Presumed media influence			.11***
Presumed media influence (Guerrilla)			.14***
R^2	.46	.44	.24
F statistic	82.08***	75.66***	25.56***
N	972	962	925
		790	759
		58.25***	17.69***
		61.42***	18.33***
		797	752

Note. Table reports standardized beta coefficients from OLS regression analyses, and reports p -values as follows: * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$, **** $p < .001$ (two-tailed tests).

relationship between HMP and talk diversity. At the issue-specific level, both HMP and PMI show strong relationships with talk diversity. In the first issue-specific model shown in Table 2, the coefficient for HMP is .10 ($p < .01$), and while it is reduced in the next model, it remains significant ($\beta = .08$, $p < .05$). Meanwhile, the coefficient for PMI in the second issue-specific model is once again relatively strong ($\beta = .14$, $p < .001$). These results are consistent with the predictions that HMP and PMI would be positively related to political talk diversity, lending strong support to H3 and H4.

Testing mediation. Table 3 presents results from a bootstrapping methods mediation analysis using OLS estimation (see Preacher & Hayes, 2008). The computer program drew 1000 samples from the data set and derived asymptotic point estimates and confidence intervals for direct, indirect, and

Table 3
Results from mediation analyses showing how presumed media influence affects the relationships between hostile media perceptions and political talk frequency and diversity

Relationship	β (SE)
Hostile media perceptions \rightarrow political talk frequency	
Direct effect	-.01 (.02)
Presumed media influence (indirect effect)	.01 (.00)**
Total effect	.00 (.02)
R^2	.47****
N	962
Hostile media perceptions (Guerrilla) \rightarrow political talk frequency	
Direct effect	.03 (.02)*
Presumed media influence (indirect effect)	.00 (.00)
Total effect	.04 (.02)*
R^2	.45****
N	790
Hostile media perceptions \rightarrow political talk diversity	
Direct effect	.04 (.03)
Presumed media influence (indirect effect)	.01 (.00)**
Total effect	.05 (.03)*
R^2	.24****
N	925
Hostile media perceptions (Guerrilla) \rightarrow political talk diversity (Guerrilla)	
Direct effect	.07 (.03)**
Presumed media influence (indirect effect)	.01 (.01)*
Total effect	.08 (.03)***
R^2	.21****
N	752

Note. Table reports unstandardized OLS beta coefficients and standard errors from bootstrapping methods mediation analyses, and indicates p -values as follows: * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$, **** $p < .001$ (two-tailed tests). Models control for age, education, household energy stratum, gender (1 = female), political interest, political knowledge, partisanship strength, news exposure, and political talk network size.

total “effects” while controlling for all of the same variables as the models above. Generally, the results show much stronger evidence for mediation in the talk diversity models than in the talk frequency models. For example, given the relationship between HMP and talk diversity illustrated in [Tables 2 and 3](#) shows evidence that PMI fully mediates this relationship. The direct relationship with HMP is nonsignificant in this analysis, while the indirect relationship through PMI is significant ($\beta = .01$, standard error $[SE] = .00$, $p < .05$), as is the “total effect” of HMP on talk diversity ($\beta = .05$, $SE = .03$, $p < .06$). At the issue-specific level, we observe partial mediation (i.e. “direct and indirect effects”). Here, the direct relationship with HMP is significant ($\beta = .07$, $SE = .03$, $p < .05$), while the indirect relationship through PMI is marginal ($\beta = .01$, $SE = .01$, $p < .10$). The “total effect” of HMP at the issue-specific level is $.08$ ($SE = .03$, $p < .01$). The case for mediation for the talk frequency variable is much weaker. For example, the first model in [Table 3](#) assessing the relationships of the general HMP and multi-issue PMI variables shows only a small indirect relationship through PMI ($\beta = .01$, $SE = .00$, $p < .05$), which is not surprising given that the analysis in [Table 2](#) also shows no direct relationship between HMP and talk frequency. Meanwhile, the issue-specific model shows only a marginal and direct relationship for HMP (total effect = $.04$, $SE = .02$, $p < .10$). All in all, these results lend support to the idea that PMI mediates the relationship between HMP and political talk diversity, but not the relationship between HMP and political talk frequency.

Discussion

Generally, these results support the corrective action hypothesis ([Rojas, 2010](#); [Sun et al., 2008](#)). In this sample, people who think the media are biased and influential talk politics more often and seek out the other side more. Thus, the study establishes relationships that provide new evidence for corrective action that may prove useful for future research. This study also contributes to the literature specifically examining HMP and political talk, supporting the idea that these variables are related ([Eveland & Shah, 2003](#), [Hwang et al., 2006, 2008](#); [Wojcieszak, 2010](#)). Previous findings conflict with regard to the relationship between HMP and political talk diversity. For example, [Eveland and Shah \(2003\)](#) found that HMP was related to talking politics with like-minded others in the United States, whereas [Wojcieszak \(2010\)](#) came to the opposite conclusion in Colombia. Our results, which differentiate between structural aspects of conversation and its behavioral components, fit better with the latter study ([Wojcieszak, 2010](#)) and support the conclusion that HMP and political talk diversity are positively related in Colombia. It seems likely that political context probably explains many of the differences between Colombia and the United States. After decades of violence, perhaps

Colombians have embraced discussion with the other side as a way to resolve conflict rather than avoiding it. Social norms are other likely causes of the differences. Perhaps Colombians are simply more comfortable than Americans discussing politics with differently minded others.

This study also lends support for the idea that PMI mediates the relationship between HMP and a variety of outcomes (Tsfati, 2007; Tsfati & Cohen, 2005). According to theories of negativity bias, this occurs because people give more weight to information they perceive as inconsistent with their preexisting beliefs (Ditto et al., 1998), and therefore believe others are more influenced by it. This causal process, of course, is to be taken merely as a proposition, as other plausible theories about these concepts exist. In fact, Gunther and Schmitt (2004) have shown that the perceived reach of media moderates HMP, suggesting not only an interactive relationship but also that HMP and PMI may occur at the same point in time. While we acknowledge this alternative explanation, conflicts in the literature and empirical evidence suggest that more research is necessary to determine the nature of these relationships.

There are also plausible alternatives to the conclusion that people who perceive media bias and influence seek out the other side more in political talk. These competing explanations focus on perceptions of political talk (e.g., Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1987). Because HMP have sensitized people to perceive hostility in commonly held viewpoints expressed in the media, they may either become more aware of different viewpoints that already exist within their discussion networks, or they may perceive more diversity than actually exists. In either scenario, it is not that people seek out more political difference, but rather that they perceive more. The difference between seeking out different discussion partners and becoming sensitized to political difference seems an important distinction. If the first possibility is true, HMP and PMI relate to seeking out more interactions with people who hold different viewpoints. If the latter possibility is true, HMP and PMI merely narrow the range of views people see as acceptable.

Clearly, these competing interpretations point toward different conclusions about the impact of HMP and PMI on democracy. However, most of the literature has focused on negative democratic outcomes. For example, previous studies have examined the misperception of public opinion (Gunther & Christen, 2002), social alienation (Tsfati, 2007), indignation (Hwang et al, 2008), and even violent resistance to authority (Tsfati & Cohen, 2005). On the other hand, this study highlights the potential for beneficial behavioral correlates of HMP and PMI (see also, Wei, Chia, & Lo, 2011; Rojas, 2010). Colombians who think the media are biased and influential talk politics more often and, perhaps, seek out more political difference. This conclusion could be interpreted as standing at odds with spiral of silence theory

(Noelle-Neumann, 1974), which predicts that people who think they are in the minority will be less likely to express themselves. While previous literature has shown evidence of expression dampening effects (Tsfati, 2007), this research points toward the opposite conclusion (see also, Hwang et al., 2008). Again, perhaps the difference between the studies lies in the context. Tsfati (2007) examines a minority group that perceived the threat of social marginalization. By contrast, this study does not examine a specific social group.

Another potentially encouraging extension of these results is that HMP and PMI may contribute indirectly to political tolerance. While this idea may seem counterintuitive at first, Mutz (2006) shows that political disagreement in discussion promotes awareness of opposing rationales. According to this theory, disagreement promotes tolerance through awareness, which may translate into recognition of civil liberties for opposing political groups (Mutz, 2006, p. 85). Therefore, even while people may think the media are biased, if it gets them talking to new and different people they may develop tolerance for political difference. In a nation like Colombia that has a history of political violence, the notion that the media could indirectly promote tolerance is a promising idea for the future of its democracy. On the other hand, perhaps conversation geared toward corrective action rather than toward political listening and understanding the other side does not result in increased tolerance. Research has shown that strategic political conversation does not result in the same democratic benefits as conversation oriented toward understanding (Rojas, 2008). Future corrective action research should focus on differentiating between strategic and understanding orientations toward political talk, and include outcomes such as political tolerance.

Extending the results of this study to political participation offers less clear implications. Some research shows that disagreement in political talk is negatively related to political participation, especially among the conflict-avoidant (Mutz, 2006). According to this line of thinking, disagreement leads to attitudinal ambivalence and the perception of social cross-pressures, both of which suppress participation. On the other hand, other research shows a positive relationship between disagreement in talk and participation (Ikeda & Boase, 2011), perhaps because discussion with diverse others reminds us of our own political predispositions.

Several important limitations temper the conclusions of this study. These data are not able to establish causal order. Rather, the analysis has assembled a snap shot of relationships ordered by theoretically driven assumptions. While efforts have been made to distinguish between political talk network characteristics and political talk behavior, we make no claims about whether political talk precedes or results from perceptions of the media. Because the previous literature on HMP and political talk conflicts about whether to include talk as a predictor (e.g., Eveland & Shah, 2003; Wojcieszak, 2010) or as an outcome

of HMP (e.g., Hwang et al., 2008), future research should focus on sorting out the causal problem inherent in these relationships. A closely related issue concerns mediation, which implies a process that occurs over time. Given the cross-sectional nature of these data, the results of these tests must be interpreted with caution, as we make no claims of causality or about time-related processes. Further limitations stem from the measurement of HMP. Because the study uses a measurement based on ideological difference, its results are not precisely analogous to studies using other measurements. Rather, the results best fit with a group of studies that uses difference-based measurements of HMP (e.g., Rojas, 2010; Wojcieszak, 2010). Future research should attempt to replicate these findings with measures used for HMP in other studies. Finally, a related limitation is that people who scored on the extreme ends of the personal ideology scale have the potential to get a higher score on the HMP scale than those in the middle of the ideology scale.

Despite these limitations, this study provides further empirical evidence of a social phenomenon many of us have experienced. Whether about politics or entertainment, some conversation about the media is aimed at correcting perceived bias and influence. This study provides empirical evidence of relationships that illustrate this corrective action phenomenon, showing how in Colombia, people who perceive media bias and influence talk politics more often and seek out political difference. In a nation that has emerged from decades of political violence, these findings highlight the potential for conversation to overcome violence as way of expressing political disagreement and, potentially, discovering solutions to common problems.

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