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Abstract

Audience participation with digital news content has become a central feature of news consumption. These participatory news behaviors – commenting on, sharing, and “liking” news stories – have implications for both newsreaders and producers of news. This dissertation tests a structural model of commenting behavior using survey data (N = 335). The model builds on suggestions of a connection between hostile-media effects and commenting. This study adds newsworthiness to the structural equation, hypothesizing that newsworthiness increases readers’ perceptions that an article will influence other readers. These relationships should increase hostile-media effects, and, therefore, a reader’s likelihood of commenting. The model tested had indicators of good fit, although hostile-media effects did not play a prominent role in the structural model. Readers, rather, were more likely to comment if they found the article threatened norms – a dimension of newsworthiness – and if they had routinely commented on news stories prior to the study. The study also revealed that readers are more likely to comment if they are male, and if they believe their comments can influence the conversation.

READERS' PERCEPTIONS OF NEWSWORTHINESS AND BIAS AS FACTORS IN
PARTICIPATION WITH DIGITAL NEWS CONTENT

by

Greg Munno

B.A., Oberlin College, 1995
E.M.P.A., Syracuse University, 2010

Dissertation

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Mass Communications

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The comments left by readers on digital news stories provide a unique juxtaposition of media content (the story), and a tangible artifact of that content's effect on the audience (the comments themselves). This makes comments, I believe, fertile ground for communication research. Comments, and therefore commentators, are also of central concern to media organizations. Comments have the potential to increase the metrics – such as clicks and “stickiness,” (the amount of time a reader spends on a web page) – that news sites use to attract advertisers. Additionally, comments on news stories, be they directly on a news platform or on a social media site such as Facebook or Twitter, have become part of our public discourse. Commenting features on websites provide a venue for policy discussion and debate at the bottom of news articles that, ideally, inform that debate.

Yet concerns abound about the lack of reader engagement on some stories, and about the excessively vitriolic commentary on others. Why do some stories elicit comments, while others do not? Why do some readers choose to comment, while others refrain from doing so?

Those questions inspired this study. This dissertation tests a model that predicts when readers are more likely to comment. Specifically, it suggests that readers are more likely to comment when they (1) have a strong position on the issue examined in the news story, (2) believe the story is newsworthy, (3) think the story will influence others who read it, and (4) perceive the story as biased against their position.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a comment as “a verbal or written remark expressing an opinion or reaction” (OED¹, 2017, online resource). In this study, comments refer specifically to written remarks made on digital platforms (websites, mobile applications, social media sites, etc.) by readers in response, or reaction, to news stories. Commenting, in this study,

is simply the act of leaving any remark in reaction to a digital news story. A 2016 Pew Research Center study found that about 37 percent of digital newsreaders comment on stories (Mitchell, A., Gottfried, J., Barthel, M., & Shearer, E., 2016).

Studies of comments can examine what motivates frequent commentators, how comments on a story effect subsequent readers, what types of content trigger comments, and whether a reader is likely to comment on stories in the future. To help avoid confusion, when I discuss respondents' past commenting behavior, I use the phrase "past comments." When I discuss studies that examine how readers react to the presence of comments (which I do not examine in this study but does warrant some discussion), I use the phrase "existing comments." When I discuss respondents actually leaving a comment (which is one of the dependent variables in this study), I use the phrase "actual comment." When I discuss respondents' likelihood of commenting on a story if they encountered a similar story on a real news platform (the other dependent variable used in the structural models), I use the phrase "likelihood of commenting."

Concerns about the quality and effects of online comments have generated interest in the phenomenon and have created a rare dialog between scholars and practitioners that make the study of comments relevant and timely. For example, when the website for the magazine *Popular Science* disabled its commenting function (LaBarre, 2013), it cited communication research by a team from the University of Wisconsin-Madison that studied the effect of comments on perceptions that nanotechnology was risky (Anderson, Brossard, Scheufele, Xenos & Ladwig, 2013).

The Wisconsin team exposed respondents to neutral stories about nanotechnology, some with comments the researchers deemed "civil" and others "uncivil." They note that incivility has been on the rise both online and in the broader society (Anderson, et al., 2013; citing Mutz &

Reeves, 2005). The scholars never fully define a “civil” comment, but define uncivil ones as “offensive discussion that impedes the democratic ideal of deliberation” (Anderson, et al., 2013, p. 375; citing Papacharissi, 2004; Shils, 1992). Anderson and colleagues note that incivility online can range from irrelevant comments, to name-calling, to threats.

The Anderson study found that participants in the uncivil comment condition perceived nanotechnology to be riskier than those in the civil condition (Anderson, Brossard, Scheufele, Xenos, & Ladwig, 2013, p. 381). The authors write:

The most striking—and perhaps most unsettling—aspect of our study is that the actual blog post about the topic of nanotechnology was neutral, with equal amounts of risk and benefit information across conditions. The incivility instigated by lay (albeit fictional) online users induced an increase in polarization of risk perception about nanotechnology. This study’s findings suggest perceptions towards science are shaped in the online blog setting not only by “top-down information,” but by others’ civil or uncivil viewpoints, as well. While the Internet opens new doors for public deliberation of emerging technologies, it also gives new voice to nonexpert, and sometimes rude, individuals (Anderson, Brossard, Scheufele, Xenos & Ladwig, 2013, pp. 382-383).

A Neiman Lab report found that at least six other media organization, from Reuters to *The Chicago Sun-Times*, joined *Popular Science* in pulling the plug on reader comments in 2013 and 2014 (Ellis, 2015). The report found that most of these organizations have nonetheless allowed comments on their social-media sites such as Facebook and Twitter, encourage their reporters to join those conversations, and consider doing so important means of distributing content and establishing reader loyalty.

Political polarization makes reader comments important for reasons beyond the economic concerns of media outlets. Political polarization is often discussed, but seldom defined. A research team out of Germany offers a simple and helpful definition saying, “more political polarization simply means that there are fewer citizens in the center and more (at) the extremes” (Bernhardt, Krasa, & Mattias, 2006, p. 10). The Pew Research Center (2014) measures political

polarization several ways. It has a 10-item political ideology scale, for instance, that places people on a “consistently liberal” to “consistently conservative” scale, and compares the distribution overtime. In 1994, 3% of Americans had consistently liberal views, 7% consistently conservative, and 49% mixed, with the reminder falling somewhere right or left of center but not at the extremes (Dimock, Doherty, Kiley, & Oats, 2014, p. 11). By 2014, Pew found, 12% had consistently liberal political positions, 9% consistently conservative, and 38% mixed.

Political polarization also suggests an unwillingness or inability to compromise, which Pew operationalizes as the number of Democrats and Republicans who view the opposing political party as a “threat to the nation’s well-being” (Dimock, et al., 2014, p. 7). Pew also looks at the distance between the median Democrat and Republican on its 10-item political ideology scale. By both measures, again, political polarization is increasing (Dimock, et al., 2014, pp. 6 & 7). In other words, as complex issues such as climate change emerge that require thoughtful public debate and collective action, our ability as a society to have constructive discussion and reach consensus may be waning.

The media’s role in creating these divisions is of increasing interest, as is the potential role the media could play in reversing the trend of polarization (Tsfati, Stroud, & Chotiner, 2014; Lelkes, Iyengar, & Sood, 2013; Hart & Nisbet, 2012). Reader comments could be part of a larger political discourse that could help close political divides through the sharing of different life experiences and perspectives. Alternatively, as the editors of *Popular Science* and Reuters found, reader comments could harden positions and undermine the value people place in having political conversations at all.

Scholars and practitioners see public input as essential. Barack Obama, for instance, wrote at the beginning of his presidency, “public engagement enhances the Government's

effectiveness and improves the quality of its decisions. Knowledge is widely dispersed in society, and public officials benefit from having access to that dispersed knowledge” (Obama, 2008, online resource). If government can gain public input in a deliberative, constructive fashion, there is hope that some of our democracy’s ills can be addressed (Nabatchi, Gastil, Weiksner & Leighninger, 2012; Nabatchi, 2010; Levine, Fung & Gastil, 2005).

Publishing news on digital platforms as compared to traditional print and broadcast distribution channels creates the potential for reaching more people over a wider geographic area for less money. To produce a newspaper, trees must be cut, paper must be made, shipped to the press, run through the press, and finally delivered individually to each reader. To broadcast, you need an FCC license. Digital news organizations incur none of these expenses. Anyone with an Internet connection can access content, and produce it.

Digital news also allows the audience to participate with content beyond just reading it. Online news consumers can comment on stories, share them on social media or via email, and “like” stories, either directly on the news organization’s platform, or on extensions of that platform on social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter.

The functionality of digital news sites creates the potential for discussion about public policy directly embedded into a journalistic environment. The article ideally informs the discussion, and the discussion ideally suggests avenues for further journalistic exploration. As Schudson (2011, p. 3, emphasis added) writes, “Journalism is the business or practice of regularly producing and disseminating information about contemporary affairs of public interest and importance ... *so as to publicly include that audience in a discourse* taken to be publicly important.”

Summary of Theoretical Basis and Proposed Extensions

Vallone, Ross, and Lepper (1985, pp. 584-585) proposed the hostile-media effect to explain their finding that partisans from both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict differently evaluated the same neutral news report, each finding it biased against their side. Respondents also recalled the information in the report differently, apparently focusing on the parts that they thought favorable to the other side. Vallone and his colleagues attributed this to a cognitive bias – a predisposition in our thinking hardwired into the human brain – to attack information that threatens our worldview to discredit that information. In other words, rather than compel readers to reconsider their own positions, the respondents in the study sought to dismiss the information they disliked in the news report as biased and not credible.

Scholars have become interested in the hostile-media finding both for what it might tell us about the functioning of the human brain (what is the underlying cause and purpose of the hostile-media phenomenon?), as well as the larger effect such a bias has on people and societies. For instance, Tsfati and Cohen (2005) found that strong political views helped create the perception that media reports were biased against their respondents' positions, which further led to distrust in media and in democratic processes more broadly.

Meanwhile, Rojas (2010) has proposed that hostile-media reactions may compel readers to comment on news articles. He suggests that commenting is a way for partisans to counter information in the article they see as contrary to their position. That may in part explain why so many comments seem so angry (see, for instance, Ackermann, 2010). Rojas writes that “hostile-media perceptions are consistently related to a series of offline and online behaviors (including commenting on forums) that seek to ... ‘correct’ what are seen as potential biases in the public sphere” (Rojas, 2010, p. 343).

One of the interesting dimensions of the hostile-media effect is that, at first glance, it contradicts other cognitive biases that suggest humans have a penchant to see the world as more favorable to them rather than less, through mechanisms such as assimilation bias and selective exposure (Gunther & Schmitt, 2004). This may help explain why hostile-media effects seem to disappear under certain circumstances. For instance, respondents have found less bias in articles they thought were written by authors, such as students, who are unlikely to be widely read (Gunther & Schmitt, 2004). This suggests that cues about the legitimacy, popularity, and reach of a news platform may enhance or decrease the hostile-media effect. Mapping these cues can help scholars better understand the effect and the role it plays in relation to other cognitive processes.

A cue researchers have not yet explored in depth is the *newsworthiness* of the article. Shoemaker (1996) has proposed that humans are hardwired to pay attention to newsworthy developments in the environment. Building off Lasswell's surveillance function, Shoemaker posits that the information we scan the environment for – and seek to transmit to others (or learn from others) – is biologically and culturally derived. Therefore, definitions of newsworthiness should be relatively similar among people in a given culture. As Shoemaker writes in a 2006 (p. 105) commentary, “The term news is a primitive construct – one that requires no definition in ordinary conversation, because everyone knows what it is.”

So, if (1) the potential reach of a story is a key determinant of the hostile-media effect, and (2) we all have a similar predisposition to pay attention to certain types of news events and stories, then, I propose that (3) there should be a link between perceptions of newsworthiness, perceptions an article has reach, and the hostile-media effect.

Shoemaker has been interested in what constitutes newsworthiness since her days as a doctoral student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. It was there that she started to explore

the connection between deviance and newsworthiness, writing her dissertation on the news media's coverage of deviant political groups (see, for instance, Shoemaker, 1984). Shoemaker eventually developed seven indicators of newsworthiness, three dealing with various dimensions of deviance, and four dealing with more culturally situated variables such as the effect of any given event on the politics and economics of the country. In 2006, Shoemaker and Cohen published a multi-national study examining the correlation between the seven dimensions of newsworthiness that Shoemaker had developed, and the prominence of news stories in newspapers, on the radio, and on television. The initial results of that study led Shoemaker and Cohen to create a new construct, complexity, which expresses the different ways a story can be newsworthy. They suggest, and find evidence for, an approach that defines newsworthiness as the extent to which all seven indicators come into play for any given event. The more indicators present, the more complex the event, and the more newsworthy journalists and the audience will perceive that event.

This dissertation examines how closely the respondents' evaluation of a story's complexity matches the respondents' evaluation of the story's newsworthiness. It then tests both complexity and newsworthiness in models that include perceptions of media bias on the dependent variables of whether a subject actually commented on the news story, and whether they would be likely to comment in the future on a similar story if encountered on an actual news site.

Vallone, Ross, and Lepper (1985) do not explicitly define media bias in their original hostile-media study. They had subjects rate news content as neutral, or as favorable or unfavorable to their position. Other scholars use a "biased in favor" to "biased against" scale, again without explicitly defining the concept for their subjects or other scholars. So the issue in

hostile-media effect research isn't biases in news content, but rather a disposition on the part of certain audience members to see bias in neutral news coverage.

In this study, I examine how respondents themselves think about bias by using a standard hostile-media measure of perceived bias (how favorable the respondents see the story toward one side or the other), and compare that measure to the respondents' evaluations of the news stories as fair, balanced, and accurate.

Overview of Design

This dissertation tests a structural model to predict commenting behavior that includes the subject's position on the issue examined in the story, as well as the subject's perception of a story's newsworthiness, complexity, and influence on others. The study uses both a direct measure of commenting (did the subject actually comment on the story) and an indirect measure (did the subjects believe they were likely to comment if they encountered the story on a real news site).

I built the data-collection instrument, a questionnaire, using the survey platform Qualtrics.¹ The questionnaire had three parts. It started with a series of questions about the respondents, including socio-economic variables, measures of the respondents' past commenting

¹ I originally designed the study as a between-subject experiment. There were to be two groups: "high-newsworthiness" vs. "low newsworthiness." The experiment randomly assigned subjects to read one of two sets of news articles. The articles mirrored each other. For example, both groups read a story about a Pew Research Center gun attitude survey. Both stories had the same facts and quotes, the same number of paragraphs, etc. However, I ordered the facts and quotes from "most interesting and newsworthy" to "least interesting and newsworthy" in the high-newsworthy group, and did the opposite for the low-newsworthy group. Unfortunately, the manipulation failed: the two groups did not see a difference in the stories. Pre-testing indicated the two subject groups would find one set of stories more newsworthy than the other, although the pre-test difference was not as robust as desired. However, I did not want to manipulate the stimulus further at the expense of keeping each story as factually equivalent and as unbiased as possible – two other key considerations in the pre-test. Ultimately, the actual experiment found no difference between the two conditions on *any* of the variables in the model. That allowed me to collapse the data into one group, transforming this study into a survey.

behavior, and measures used to establish whether the respondent favored policies that restrict access to guns (gun control), or favored policies that allowed for easy access to guns (gun rights).

The questionnaire then randomly assigned respondents to read three of six articles on guns and gun policy. One article, for instance, reported on the results of a Pew Research Center study about American's attitudes toward guns (see Appendix I for questionnaire and the full text of all six articles.) The questionnaire also randomly organized the order of the articles. The articles were embedded within the data-collection instrument itself, which did not look like a realistic news platform, as I wanted respondents to react to the stories, not to the platform. The stories were simply presented as text, with a comment box underneath.

After reading one of the stories and commenting in the box if they desired, the respondents clicked "next" and answered questions about the story. Post-story exposure questions measured the seven complexity constructs, perceived general newsworthiness, perceptions of how much bias (and in what direction) respondents found in the story, and perceptions about the likelihood that the respondent would comment on the same story if encountered on an actual digital news platform.

I selected gun policy as subject around which to build the stimulus stories for several reasons. First, the issue elicits strong opinions from many Americans on both sides of the issue, which is optimal for any hostile-media effects study. Second, firms such as the Pew Research Center regularly conduct surveys of people's attitudes towards guns, aiding in the development of questions that categorized respondents' attitudes on guns, gun policy, gun rights, and gun control. Finally, gun policy stories also formed the basis of a previous study I designed, increasing my knowledge and comfort in creating stimulus materials on this topic (Chung,

Munno & Moritz, 2015).²

Respondents were recruited using the online-labor marketplace MechanicalTurk, which is run by Amazon. On MechanicalTurk, “requesters” post tasks for completion, estimating how much time those tasks take to complete, and specifying monetary compensation. The requesters are essentially bidding for workers’ time. The workers then select the tasks they want to complete, complete those tasks, and get paid if the requester finds the work has been acceptably completed.

² I was the lead author on this study in developing the first version of it, which I presented to the International Communications Association in 2013 (Munno, Chung & Moritz, 2013). My co-author, Myojung Chung, then took the lead in formatting the study for submission to various journals, and assumed the role of lead author. It is the version of the study published in *Human Computer Interaction* that I cite throughout this study (Chung, Munno & Moritz, 2015).

Chapter 2: Theory

News Consumption & Participation

The Reuters Institute (2017) found that online news consumption overtook television as the most popular news platform in 2013, and it has widened the gap since. Certainly, much of the news online originates from legacy news organizations, meaning some people may be consuming similar information in the digital realm as they would have on traditional print and broadcast platforms. Yet consuming news online may well be a different experience regardless of whether the content still emanates from news legacy organizations. Indeed, the very fact that the audience consumes news digitally makes participatory behaviors such as commenting possible. There are off-line corollaries to these digital behaviors, such as letters to the editor and “water cooler” talk about the news. However, given the prevalence of digital consumption, it makes sense to study people’s reactions to news in the digital context.

The Pew Research Center has done two in-depth studies of digital news consumption in recent years, one in 2010, prior to this study, and one in 2016, after the data for this study were collected (Purcell, Rainie, Mitchell, Rosenstiel & Olmstead, 2010; Mitchell, A., Gottfried, J., Barthel, M., & Shearer, E., 2016). In both cases, Pew found that digital news consumption was increasing, apparently driven by participatory behaviors. The 2010 study authors write, “news consumption is a socially-engaging and socially-driven activity, especially online. The public is clearly part of the news process now” (Purcell, et al., p. 4). The 2016 study found that 81% of Americans get at least some of their news online. Meanwhile, 62% of the total participants (and 84% of 18-to-29 year olds) got news by following links from social-media sites. Although it is beyond the scope of this study, the fact that so many news consumers find news stories on social-media sites helps underscore the importance of comments. On a digital news platform such as

NYTimes.com, the stories precede the comments. On social media sites, comments about stories that people link to and share often precede the story itself, almost enveloping the story, and literally framing it. So, the reaction to the story potentially becomes as important as the story itself.

Pew found that 75% of online readers follow links to stories, 52% share links to news articles by email and on social networking sites, and about 31% comment (Purcell, et al., 2010). Those numbers are all a bit higher in the 2016 study. A survey research team from the University Texas–Austin found even more robust commenting behavior, with 55% of Americans surveyed indicating they commented online, and 78% saying they read comments, at least at occasionally (Stroud, Duyn, & Peacock, 2016, p. 1). The more time consuming and cognitively demanding the participatory behavior, then, the less likely a news consumer is to engage in that behavior.

Santana (2010) found that 95% of American newspapers with online websites allow readers to comment, a result of comment sections being both popular and profitable. Goode (2009) sees the audience's growing influence as an important check on the power of elites, calling it a democratizing force. Although the number of commentators is relatively low – about 25% of online readers in the Pew study – the number of news consumers who read comments is far greater (Diakopoulos & Naaman, 2011, p. 136).

Concerns about comments abound. Diakopoulos and Naaman (2011) found that readers of the *Sacramento Bee's* online site considered many of the comments offensive. Journalists at the paper expressed concerns about “personal attacks on sources or reporters, flaming, propagation of misinformation, and the tarnishing the reputation of the paper” (Diakopoulos & Naaman, 2011, online resource). Jim Brady, the first executive editor of WashingtonPost.com, initially said he hoped comments on the platform would “build a community to talk about the

news and not just read it” (Howell, 2007, online resource). Later, he said the conversation turned out to be “more of a free for all” than a constructive conversation (Howell, 2007, online resource). Kristina Ackermann (2010, p. 44), managing editor of the trade magazine *Editor & Publisher*, writes,

In theory, the ability to comment gives readers, bloggers, and citizen journalists the chance to chime in on a story: to check facts, clarify points, share personal experiences, even pick a side and argue their case. All this while boosting the number of clicks on the paper’s website, making it more appealing to advertisers. The hiccup in this theory is ... newspapers have opened themselves up to hate-filled rants and profanity-laden arguments that would make even the saltiest of sailors blush.

More recently, as part of the *Engaging News Project*, researchers at the University of Texas at Austin surveyed thousands of Americans about their views of comment sections, as well as interviewed journalists about their views of comments sections.

Comments posted on online news stories and news organizations’ social media sites have become a ubiquitous part of journalism today. Hundreds or even thousands of comments are often posted in response to a single story, and all too often these comments are laced with personal attacks, profanity, insults, or name-calling. (Chen & Pain, 2016; also see <https://engagingnewsproject.org/research/>)

There is mounting evidence that comments change readers’ interpretation of the information in news stories (Thorson, Vraga, & Ekdale, 2010; Anderson, Brossard, Scheufele, Xenos & Ladwig, 2013). Some news outlets have recently unplugged their comment sections, and others are considering various levels of facilitation, moderation, or outright restriction on commentary (LaBarre, 2013; Beaujon, 2012).

Nonetheless, fears of angering readers by suppressing comments and losing the revenue they generate are keeping these rollbacks in check (Beaujon, 2012). Indeed, some news outlets have begun evaluating reporters based on the number of comments their stories receive (Benton,

2014). Moritz and Munno (2012) found that some story frames – specifically, those that focused on blame – generated more comments than others did. If reporters get kudos for comments from their bosses, will they select story topics and frames more likely to trigger comments? Although I do not address that question in this dissertation, I hope to address it in the future.

The importance of comments goes beyond the developing digital business model for news organizations. Comments are dialogic, and that makes them different from other online behaviors scholars have broadly dubbed as participatory, such as sharing, tagging, and liking content. Discourse has long been recognized as necessary to a well-functioning democracy that is seen as legitimate to its citizens. So, too, has the press's role in informing, sparking, capturing, and hosting those discussions (Lasswell, 1941; Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm, 1956; Habermas, 1996; Schudson, 2011).

As Lasswell (1941, p. 81) writes, “democracy depends on talk.” With more and more discourse taking place online, the tenor and inclusiveness of that debate may have significant influence on the quality of our national discourse (Gimmler, 2001; Habermas, 2006). This is particularly important now as political polarization grows and trust in government diminishes (Nabatchi, 2010).

Scholars and practitioners are finding that smart interventions can help make comment sections more deliberative and civil. For instance, after a redesign of its comment section in 2012, *The New York Times* received more comments, and found it had to eliminate fewer comments for violating its standards (Muddiman & Stroud, 2016). A 2015 study also found that when journalists participated in conversations on their news organizations' Facebook pages, it made those conversations more civil and relevant to the news story (Stroud, Scacco, Muddiman, & Curry, 2015).

Thus, new, participatory, online news consumption behaviors like commenting are changing our national discourse, creating new challenges and opportunities for the press, opening the door to participation for some citizens, and perhaps closing it for others. It is also providing a new frontier for examining, expanding, and challenging traditional communication theories that examine the processes and effects of news creation and dissemination as linear, unidirectional, and largely within the control of stable organizations (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009; Schudson, 2011).

Hostile-Media Perception

The hostile-media hypothesis predicts that people with strong attitudes and group identifications tend to perceive news stories as biased against their side of a social issue, even if the report is largely fair, balanced, and accurate. In a 2015 retrospective of hostile-media research, Perloff (2015, p. 705) states, “there is consensus that the hostile media effect involves divergent perceptions of neutral, balanced, and evenhanded media content.” He adds that the research is inherently problematic in that “news is never perfectly neutral or objective” (p. 705). However, he finds the research interesting in that it has demonstrated a “tendency of different groups of individuals to perceive the same or conceptually similar content in strikingly different ways (p. 705). Perloff (2015, p. 703) says, “hostile media perceptions, hostile media biases, and the hostile media effect” are conceptually equivalent and used interchangeably, with “hostile media effect” the most common term, perhaps because it “cuts to the heart of the mass communication research enterprise and captures the theoretically intriguing aspect of the hostile media phenomenon.”

Vallone and his colleagues (1985) proposed the hostile-media effect and found evidence for it in an experimental study about partisan perceptions of news coverage of the 1982 Beirut

massacre. Perloff (1989) replicated the effect in an ensuing experimental study on the same Middle East conflict, and found that both pro-Israeli and pro-Arab partisans evaluated the same news report, designed by the researchers to be neutral, as biased against their side.

Since then, scholars have done a series of studies on the hostile-media effect. Giner-Sorolla and Chaiken (1994) used abortion as the stimulus but only found limited evidence for the phenomenon, which they attributed to a lack of emotional involvement of participants in the issue. Dalton, Beck, and Huckfeldt (1998) found stronger evidence supporting the hostile-media effect in their study of information flows in the 1992 presidential election. Christen, Kannaovakun, and Gunther (2002) investigated partisan perceptions of media coverage of the 1997 Teamsters Union strike against United Parcel Service, and once again found a tendency for people on both sides of the issue to evaluate news reports as biased against their side. Perloff (2015) notes that researchers have demonstrated the hostile media effect using many topics in stimulus construction, including social, political and even sports-related issues. The topic itself does not seem to be the issue. Rather, hostile-media effects seem to depend on the level of involvement (or partisanship) of the subject and on cues in the stimulus causing subjects to believe that it will reach and influence other people.

Involvement

A meta-analysis of hostile-media research found an average effect size of $r = .296$ (Hansen & Kim, 2011). Hansen and Kim explored three moderators often used in hostile-media research: involvement, medium, and method. Method is simply the type of study performed; the study did not find method to be a significant moderator. Medium – online versus television, for instance – was also not significant. However, involvement was ($B = .176$).

Involvement is a key hostile-media concept. Gunther, Christen, Liebhart, and Chia (2001, p. 296) define the hostile-media effect as “the tendency for people who are highly involved in an issue to see news coverage of that issue as biased ... against their own point of view.” But as Perloff (2015) notes, involvement is a tricky to define. Scholars have used simple measures such as partisanship, as well as measures of the strength of a subject’s belief on a certain issue, to more complex measures of how much a subject’s identity is defined by the issue under discussion.

In the present study, the main measure of involvement is a six-item scale (later reduced to five) that measures the subject’s strength of position on the issue. Two other measures are also used – a straightforward “conservative to liberal” political ideology scale, and an “importance of gun policy” measure. I discuss all three in greater depth under “Methods.”

The Third-Person Effect, Presumed Media Influence & Reach

Media consumers make assumptions about how the media they consume affects themselves and others. Interest in this phenomenon originates with third-person effect researchers (Barnidge & Rojas, 2014; Perloff, 1993). First proposed by sociologist W. Phillips Davison (1983), the third-person effect consists of two hypotheses: (a) people tend to assume that others are more vulnerable to persuasive media messages than they are; and (b) such perceptions lead people to behave in ways they would not have otherwise, because they are concerned about the predicted effects (McLeod, Detenber, & Eveland, 2001). For the past 30 years, the third-person effect has generated substantial research interest. Ample support for the effect has been found in a variety of contexts, including news (Salwen & Dupagne, 1999), commercial content (Gunther & Thorson, 1992), health (Henriksen & Flora, 1999), and entertainment (Gunther, 1995; Salwen & Dupagne, 1999).

A rich body of literature about the third-person effect has delved into the behavioral consequences of self-other discrepancies. Studies support the hypothesis that perceptions of a harmful media effect on others can compel people to support things such as restrictions on pornography (Gunther, 1995; Salwen & Dupagne, 1999), television violence (Salwen & Dupagne, 1999), anti-social rap music (McLeod et al., 1997), and liquor and gambling commercials (Shah, Faber & Youn, 1999). Conditions that influence the magnitude of the third-person effect have also been examined extensively, such as desirability of the message (Perloff, 1999), social distance (Gunther, 1991; Perloff, 1999), individual and group differences (Paul, Salwen & Dupagne, 1999), and the level of involvement with a topic (Vallone, Ross & Lepper, 1985).

Among these conditions, a person's involvement with the topic also relates to the hostile-media effect. An important factor that enhances third-person effect on the individual level is "ego-involvement," which can be defined as possession of strong opinion or attitudes on a certain issue (Perloff, 2002). Perloff (1989) pointed out this connection between the third-person effect and the hostile-media perception, showing that partisan participants in his study believed that media coverage could sway an audience to have an unfavorable attitude toward their side, and favorable attitude toward the opposing position.

Scholars have linked hostile-media and third-person effects via the theoretical concept of perceived reach, or influence, terms that are often used interchangeably. I understand the terms to be closely related, but dissimilar: a newspaper article is of more concern to partisans than a student essay because it will have greater influence; it has greater influence, in part, because it has greater reach (see Gunther, 1991).

In this study, the focus is influence itself, not reach. The study does not present articles

on an actual news platform, so respondents would most likely correctly assume the articles have low reach. Rather, this study examines whether the strength of a subject's position, and the perceived newsworthiness of the article in question, helps predict increased perceptions that the article would influence others *if published on an actual news site*.

Influence might help explain the potential contradiction between the hostile-media phenomenon and assimilation bias, the tendency for people to interpret relatively neutral information as favorable to their position. Gunther, Miller, and Liebhart (2009) examined this question in an experiment, setting up a "low reach" condition, and a "mass media" condition. They did not find strong hostile-media reactions in either condition, but they did find less assimilation in the mass-media condition. As the team writes,

The low-reach condition produced solid evidence of assimilation. This particular finding, the low-reach result, is unsurprising and is consistent with past research on the assimilation bias. In assimilation studies, information was typically presented in the form of reports and other small-audience vehicles, and partisan respondents rated it as favorable, rather than hostile, to their own positions. Seen from that perspective, progressively less assimilation in the moderate- and high-reach conditions is consistent with the reach hypothesis even though those judgments do not cross the line into hostile territory. This result is a variant on the so-called relative hostile media effect, which proposes that meaningful predictors of perceptions of hostile bias will produce more unfavorable, or at least less agreeable, perceptions of content" (Gunther, et al., 2009, pp. 758-759).

Perloff (2015, p. 710) therefore concludes that, "hostile media effects should emerge when participants are estimating effects on others of a large-reach, mass-mediated message, but biased assimilation should occur when participants are judging the impact of a low-reach message."

Historically, most scholarship dealing with both third-person and hostile-media effects has focused on how an audience receives and interprets messages. The research has dealt primarily with the attitudes of the audience – for example, their support for the censorship of pornography because of its perceived effect (Tal-Or, Cohen, Tsifti & Gunther, 2010). However,

there is a growing body of research into how the third-person effect and the hostile-media effect work together to influence audience behaviors, going beyond audience beliefs about media content to examine the actions of the audience based on these beliefs (Sun, Shen & Pan, 2008).

Corrective Action & Comments

Scholars have suggested that audience members who perceive media content as biased (hostile-media effect), and who believe it will have a large effect on others (third-person effect), are often motivated to take corrective action (Rojas, 2010). Rojas defines corrective actions as behaviors by some audience members to counter the influence of a media reports on other audience members. Rojas (2010, p. 347) writes that “corrective behaviors are political behaviors that are reactive, based on perceptions of media and media effects, and seek to influence the public sphere. ... People would engage in reactive actions to have their owns views be heard and counterbalance those perceived media effects.” For Rojas, examples of corrective action include, among others, writing a letter to the editor and posting public comments to a social-media platform or in the story’s comment section. The public aspect of the action is important since the behavior is meant to counter the media message. Simply stated, people must see it. The growth of the internet and social media have increased the platforms and venues for audience members to take potential corrective actions (Bowman & Willis, 2003).

Barnidge and Rojas (2014) trace the idea of corrective action back to Davison’s original 1983 article articulating the third-person effect. In that piece, Davison (1983, p. 2, emphasis added) tells the following story about a political partisan:

Two days before the election a leaflet supporting the rival candidate appeared in his mailbox. He was impressed with its quality. It would undoubtedly swing a lot of votes. Some *counteraction* would have to be taken. Without thinking further, he procured a pile of political literature from his own party's local office and spent the rest of the day distributing it door to door.

Barnidge and Rojas note that other aspects of the third-person effect Davison describes received more attention than this counter, or corrective, action. However, Sun, Shen, and Pan (2008) found that third-person effects – the assumption that media will influence others more than yourself – positively predict support for both restrictive actions (such as supporting censorship of pornography) and corrective actions (such as writing critical reviews of television shows the subjects thought would negatively influence others.) Similarly, Lim and Golan (2011) found that if people believe they are able to influence others, they are more likely to take corrective action in the social-media sphere. Even if a specific population is not the target of a message, people within that population can still be indirectly influenced by the messages content and assume that the message will have an influence on others. Barnidge and Rojas (2014), using national survey data collected in Columbia, found that presumed media influence helped predict the frequency with which respondents engaged in political discussions, but it did not find support that hostile-media effects contributed to the effect, somewhat in opposition to Rojas' 2010 study. Feldman, Hart, Leiserowitz, Maibach, and Roser-Renouf (2015), however, found in their study that hostile-media perceptions had a direct association with climate activism.

Promotional Action

Scholars have suggested that, when audience members feel media content reinforces their worldview, some members of that audience may take promotional actions. The explosion of online tools and social-media platforms allows audience members to recommend stories to their friends and followers (Hermida, Fletcher, Korell & Logan, 2012). The most purely promotional action online is “liking” a story. Sharing is also likely mostly promotional, although it may occasionally be corrective as some audience members may share a story they feel is damaging to mobilize action against it.

Likewise, commenting can either be promotional or corrective, and of course could be neither: A comment may simply ask a question and does not have to have an agenda that seeks to influence how others interpret the story or issue. Thus, online actions are not always overtly negative, and the same comments section that can be filled with corrective actions can also be filled with promotional ones – people agreeing with the story and using social media to share it, and advance their point of view. While research in this area is growing, there is a gap in the literature in understanding how promotional actions can be seen when examined through the lens of third-person and hostile-media effects.

The shifting focus from perceptions to behaviors has also inspired research that examines third-person and hostile-media effects on partisan news content, as opposed to deliberately neutral news content (Arceneaux, Johnson, & Murphy, 2012). The Arceneaux study found that stories that reinforce the reader’s worldview – pro-attitudinal – are more likely to trigger promotional action than neutral stories. Meanwhile, stories that challenge the reader’s worldview – which they label as counter-attitudinal – are more likely to trigger corrective action.

In this study, I test hypotheses that respondents are more likely to comment and “dislike” a story when they view the story as biased against their positions, and more likely to share and like a story when they view it as neutral or in favor of their position.

Newsworthiness, Deviance & Complexity

Why are humans attracted to news in the first place? For Shoemaker (1996), it comes down to evolution. She argues that we are “hardwired for news” in much the way we are hardwired to scan our environment for threats and opportunities, as Lasswell (1960) suggests. Our ancestors who scanned the environment for threats and opportunities out-performed those who did not, helping the former to procreate more, pass down their generic heritage, and further

reinforce surveillance mechanisms in the human brain. Our sense of “newsworthiness” – of what’s worth paying attention to and sharing with others – is closely related and also biologically determined, Shoemaker theorizes (1996). She elaborates that humans are hardwired to pay attention to departures from the expected (deviance), which trigger the surveillance function and capture our attention. As such, deviant people and events are newsworthy.

Shoemaker has a nuanced conception of what constitutes deviance, breaking it into three components (Shoemaker, Chang, & Brendlinger, 1987; Shoemaker, Danielian, and Brendlinger, 1991; Shoemaker & Cohen, 2006; Shoemaker, Johnson, Seo, & Wang, 2010). First, there is *statistical deviance*, which includes things that are unusual and novel, from “man bites dog” to a baseball player flirting with hitting .400 for a season. Second, there is *social change deviance*, which captures the potential for an event to upend the status quo. Finally, there is *normative deviance*, which deals with events that depart from laws and norms – what laypersons normally think of deviance. A story with any one of these factors could be newsworthy. A story with all three types of deviance is likely more newsworthy. For example, President Bill Clinton was impeached by the House of Representatives, an extremely rare event (statistical deviance). The impeachment threatened the status quo and raised the specter of a democratically elected administration being removed from power (social-change deviance). And the facts surrounding the case were salacious, involving sex and adultery and some rather kinky behavior in the Oval Office (normative deviance). Accordingly, it was a huge story, with Pew (1999) finding that it ranked in the top 10 most closely followed stories in both 1998 and 1999.

Deviance interacts with another Shoemaker construct, social significance, to make a story of particular interest to specific people, at specific times, and in specific places. Social significance is both the importance of, and interest in, an event to an individual or group of

individuals (Shoemaker, Danielian & Brendlinger, 1991, p. 783). Not surprisingly, deviance and social significance often correlate, as people's interest in the subject matter increases as the story's deviance also increases. People may also see more deviance in stories in which they already have a high interest. A gun-rights supporter, for instance, may see more social change potential in any story about guns than an audience member less attuned to that issue.

Shoemaker and Cohen (2006) delineate four dimensions of social significance: Political, economic, cultural, and public. *Political significance* consists of anything involving the political system, such as elections and the creation of new laws. *Economic significance* covers topics such as business, employment, and trade. *Cultural significance* includes elements of national identity, language, and values, as well as cultural institutions such as churches and arts organizations. *Public significance* "relates to events that affect the well-being of the citizenry, including issues of health, the environment, and natural disasters" (Shoemaker & Cohen, 2006, p. 65).

Stories can be more or less deviant and more or less socially significant on any of the seven dimensions outlined above (statistical, normative and social change deviance; political, cultural, economic, and public significance). Stories can also have more than one dimension of deviance or significance. When they do, they become more *complex*. Shoemaker and Cohen (2006) suggest that the more complex (i.e., the more dimensions of deviance and significance it has) the more newsworthy it becomes. *Complexity*, in essence, is the extent to which an event, person, or idea touches on multiple aspects of an individual's life. "We conceive of complexity as a theoretical continuum that describes the extent to which a potentially newsworthy event, person, or idea affects people's construction of social reality, both by assessing the parts of the social world impacted and the extent to which the event, person, or idea is of innate interest to people" (Shoemaker & Cohen, 2006, p. 339). For Shoemaker, complexity is the

operationalization of newsworthiness. Therefore, they are largely synonymous (personal communication, 2017). I use the terms similarly. However, in addition to operationalizing and measuring all seven dimensions of Shoemaker's complexity-newsworthiness construct, I also ask respondents directly whether they found the stories they read newsworthy.³ That allows me to test how closely the complexity scale correlates with the direct measure of newsworthiness (H1), and to test to see which one performs better in the structural model at predicting perceived story bias, perceived influence on others, and likelihood that the respondent would comment. For the direct measure, I simply ask the respondents to indicate on a scale the extent to which the stories they read in the survey instrument are, or are not, newsworthy, without offering the respondents any definition of the construct.

Shoemaker suspects other dimensions of newsworthiness exist and await discovery, and that those additional dimensions should further illuminate the connection between complexity and newsworthiness. Shoemaker and Cohen, like other scholars, also note that what becomes *news* (an artifact that the news media actually produce) is not the same as newsworthiness. As Shoemaker (2006, p. 106) writes, "News is a commodity. It can be bought, sold, and traded. Journalists manufacture the news. Public relations firms manipulate the news. The audience consumes the news. Advertisers pay to place their products next to the news. News travels by word of mouth, across the Internet and other mass media."

Newsworthiness, on the other hand, consists of elements, factors, or dimensions of an event that make it likely to grab our attention and become news (Caple & Bednarek, 2013). The more newsworthy an event, the more it vies for our attention (and that of news producers),

³ Measured on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) scale in reaction to the statement: "The story is newsworthy."

putting pressure on the news selection “gate” and increasing the chance that the event is selected for publication and becomes “news” (Shoemaker, Johnson & Riccio, 2017). The factors that make an item newsworthy are often called “news values” or “news judgments,” and scholars believe these factors likely shape not only news selection, but also its presentation and dissemination. The more news values a story has (the more newsworthy it is), the more likely it is to be considered news and selected for publication (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Caple & Bednarek, 2013). Additionally, Galtung and Ruge (1965) suggest, the elements that make the event newsworthy will be the most clearly and prominently presented in the news report, and the more newsworthy the audience finds the report, the more likely that audience and other news organization will aid in the report’s distribution.

Other factors certainly come into play in news selection, such as wanting to have a publication that appeals to a broad audience, some of whom might value sports, fashion, and other lifestyle and entertainment coverage more than news. Some of these factors might be platform specific. For instance, Niblock and Machin (2007) note how strict time limits affect news selection on radio. And there are, of course, many ways of talking about newsworthiness and labeling news values. Caple and Bednarek (2013) list more than 100 possible news values (pp. 18-29), but also note “much overlap between lists of news values” (p. 5). For instance, the tendency of news reports (and news consumers) to focus on celebrities, the powerful, and elites, are three ways of saying that the media focus on people of prominence.

Reporters themselves often talk of newsworthiness as a function of constructs such as proximity, impact, relevance, timeliness, conflict, and novelty (Lloyd & Guzzo, 2008; Chang, Shoemaker & Brendlinger, 1987; Yan & Bissell, 2015). It is relatively easy to see how those fit into Shoemaker’s deviance and social significance constructs. For instance, novelty is captured

in the operationalization of statistical deviance, impact in the social significance and social change constructs, proximity in social significance, and conflict by normative deviance.

As Shoemaker and Cohen (2006, p. 341, emphasis theirs) write, “in essence, *newsworthiness* is the extent to which information about an event, person, or idea touches various parts of a person’s social reality, and this is true whether that person sends the information, or receives it.”

Hypotheses & Theoretical Models

Based on the theories explored in this literature review, this dissertation proposes and explores eighteen hypotheses. The first six hypotheses relate to complexity and newsworthiness, corrective and promotional action, the third-person effect, the hostile-media effect, and bias, balance, fairness, and accuracy. The remaining hypotheses related to relationships that I specify in my theoretical models, which are discussed below. The hypotheses include:

Complexity & Newsworthiness

- H1** Complexity is a way of measuring newsworthiness. The two measures will be highly correlated, with each predicting the other.

Corrective and Promotional Action

- H2** Respondents will be more likely to (a) like a story, and (b) share a story when they find it favorable to their position.
- H3** Respondents will be more likely to (a) dislike a story, and (b) comment on a story if they find it biased against their position.

Third-Person Effect

- H4** Respondents will assess stories they see as favorable to their position as having more of an effect on themselves than others.
- H5** Respondents will assess stories they see as biased against their position as having more of an effect on others than themselves.

Hostile-Media Effect

- H6** The stronger a respondent's position on gun policy, the greater the likelihood the respondent will assess stories as biased against their position.

Bias, Balance, Fairness, and Accuracy

- R1** What is the relationship between respondent's assessment that a story is biased, and their assessments of the story being fair, balanced and accurate?
- R2** Which of the measures – fair, balanced, accurate – best predicts bias?

Relationships Specified in the Model

Each path in the model represents a bivariate hypothesis. Structural equation modeling also compares the goodness of fit of the theoretical and data models, giving us an overall test of the model. SEM provides coefficients that measure the strength of each relationship while taking all the other relations into consideration.

Therefore:

- H7** The more complex respondents rate a story, the more likely they are

(a) to actually comment on the story on the survey, and to (b) indicate a strong likelihood that they would comment on the story if encountered on an actual news site

H8 The stronger the respondents' views on gun policy, the more likely they (a) will actually comment on the story in the survey, and (b) would be likely to comment on the story if encountered on an actual news site.

H9 Men are more likely to (a) actually comment on the news stories in the survey than women and those who identify another gender, and (b) indicate they would likely comment on the news stories if encountered the story on an actual news website.

H10 The more often respondents' comment on news stories in general (past comments), the more likely they are to (a) actually comment on the news stories in this study, and (b) indicate that they would be likely to comment on the story if encountered on an actual news site.

H11 The higher the respondents' incomes, the more likely they are to (a) comment on the stories in the study and (b) indicate that they would comment on the story if encountered on an actual news site.

H12 The more respondents find a story biased against their position, the more likely they are to (a) comment on it and (b) indicate that they would comment on the story if encountered on an actual news site.

H13 The more respondents believe a story will influence others, the more likely they are to (a) comment on it and (b) indicate that they would comment on the story if encountered on an actual news site.

H14 The more complex respondents rate a story, the more likely the subject is to believe it will influence others.

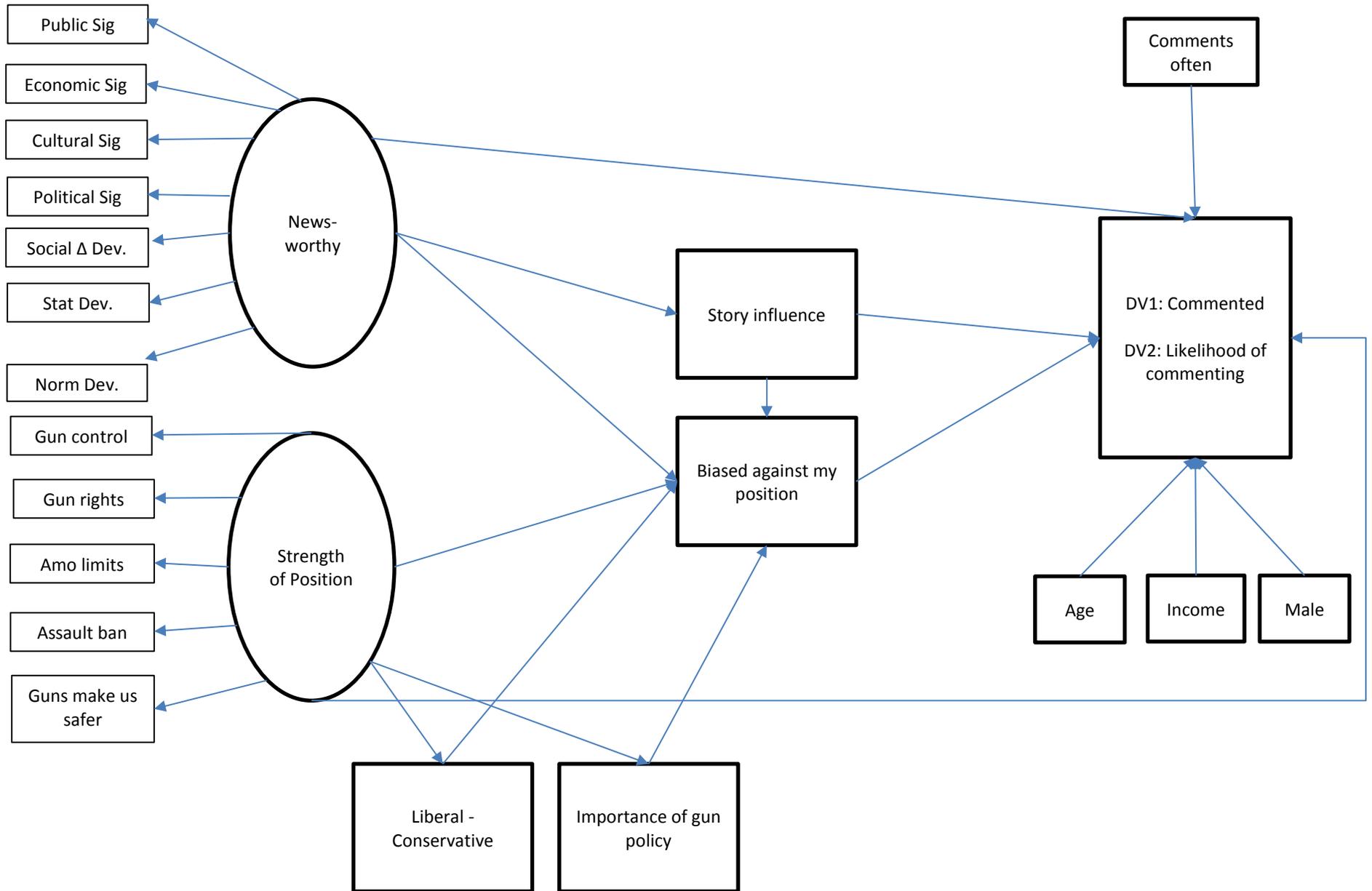
H15 The more complex respondents rate a story, the more likely the subject is to find the story bias against their position.

- H16** The stronger respondents' positions on guns, the more likely they are to find the story biased against their position.
- H17** The more extreme respondents' political orientation, the more likely they are to find the story biased against their position.
- H18** The more important respondents consider the issue of guns, the more likely they are to find the story biased against their position.

From these hypotheses, I developed and tested two theoretical models. The first model (see Figure 1) examines actual commenting behavior. The second model (see Figure 2) examines the likelihood of commenting. Note that complexity ended up having two factors as normative deviance did not factor with the other measures. In accordance with structural equation modeling procedures, it was used separately in the model.

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Figure 1. Theoretical Model



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Chapter 3: Method

I used the Qualtrics survey platform to create the data-collection instrument (*see Appendix A*). The questionnaire had four parts: (1) the measurement of control and demographic variables, (2) exposure to three news stories about guns, randomly ordered, (3) post-exposure follow-up questions asked after each story, and (4) a few additional questions meant to inform future research projects. I describe the four sections in more depth below, including the operationalization of all variables collected, but first, I take a closer look at the development and pretesting of the news stories on guns utilized in the survey.

Stories about Guns

I exposed the survey participants to stories about guns for several reasons. To produce the hostile-media effect, the stories had to be on a subject about which at least some respondents would feel passionate. Gun control certainly meets that threshold, especially since the Sandy Hook Elementary School shootings in late 2012 and subsequent mass shootings.

I began by identifying actual news stories about guns, gun policy, and gun attitudes. I generalized the stories to appeal to a national audience, and shortened and standardized them so that each consisted of approximately six paragraphs. I altered the language to make the stories seem current regardless of when the actual news story would have been first published. The stories also were stripped of information that would identify a specific news outlet – all instead were presented as Associated Press articles.

In total, 12 potential stories were developed. A group of 14 colleagues with expertise in journalism and communication evaluated the stories to help ensure that they were fair, balanced, accurate, free of bias, and typical of an actual news report. The 14 colleagues received a survey

link that started with some questions about their own stances on guns, and then each of the 12 short stories. I had Qualtrics randomize story order to control for any order biases. I also provided a text box so my colleagues could provide insight into how I might make each story less biased and more balanced, fair, and accurate. I then ranked the stories on these dimensions, and the six stories with the highest combined scores for fairness, accuracy, balance, and lack of bias were selected for the study.

Survey Sample

I recruited participants on MechanicalTurk (<https://www.mturk.com/mturk/>), an online labor market that gives small payments to workers who complete tasks, such as completing survey questionnaires. Potential respondents were told that they would be completing a survey on the media and guns. They were not told that my primary interest was whether they would comment on the story or not. Perspective participants were told the task would take about 20 minutes, and that they would be compensated \$3 for their work.

Studies of the reliability of data collected on MechanicalTurk have varied. At least five studies have found that the data collected on MechanicalTurk matched the reliability of the data collected through more traditional methods (Holden, Dennie, & Hicks, 2013; Johnson & Borden, 2012; Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011; Mason & Suri, 2012; Paolacci, Chandler, & Ipeirotis, 2010). However, a more recent study that explicitly sought to compare the reliability of MechanicalTurk data with that collected from a random-sample survey, found that the MechanicalTurk data was less reliable (Rouse, 2015). However, Rouse (2015, p. 306) concludes that, “these results do not call into question the use of MTurk data for psychological research. As has been noted previously, this method of data collection brings many benefits.”

Experimental Procedures

MechanicalTurk workers who respond to the recruitment letter accessed the questionnaire via a Qualtrics link and then read a consent form. After agreeing to participate, the respondents answered control and demographic questions about age, gender, and whether they often comment on news stories. The questionnaire also measured their stances on a variety of gun-policy issues, their political orientation, and their party affiliation.

News Stories.

The Qualtrics questionnaire randomly assigned respondents to read three of the six news stories, each presented in random order. There were two versions of each article with each with a slightly different construction. Two of the articles were on the potential disruption of new “smart-gun” technology that prevents anyone from firing a gun other than its owner. Two were on a recent Pew survey of American attitudes towards guns. The final pair focused on Michael Bloomberg’s efforts to pass universal background check legislation. See Appendix A for the full questionnaire, which contains all the stories.

Reacting to the News Stories.

At the end of each article, respondents had the opportunity to comment, but were not required to do so. Respondents then answered a series of questions asking about the likelihood that they would comment, like, dislike, or share the story if they encountered it on an actual news platform. They then rated the story for bias, and were asked how much the article would affect them and the average American if published on an actual news site. They were also asked to rate the story along a modified version of the seven dimensions of newsworthiness from Shoemaker and Cohen (2006). I modified the measures to relate to the topic. So, for instance, the social-change deviance of the story was measured by asking respondents to indicate their level of agreement with the statement: “The story makes me think that, for better or worse, change is

coming to our nation's gun laws." Normative deviance, meanwhile, was measured by asking respondents to indicate their level of agreement with the statement: "I find the behavior or positions described in this story to violate social norms and rules that we should follow." A complete list of measures is below. Not all the measurements listed are used in the model or hypothesized about. However, all of measures included here are mentioned in the study.

Subject Variables and Measurements

Gender (categorical): What is your gender?

Male

Female

Other

Age (continuous): How many years old are you?

Income (continuous): What is your household's approximate annual income?

State (categorical): Enter the two letter postal abbreviation without periods (such as NY for New York) for the state in which you live:

Political Party (categorical):

Republican

Democrat

Third-party such as Conservative or Green

Registered to vote but not enrolled in a party

Not registered to vote

Other

Political Orientation (11-point scale extremely liberal (-5) to extremely conservative (+5):

Describe your political orientation by placing yourself on the following scale.

Strength of Position (6-item scale measure, each on measured on a 5-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree):

I support the federal assault weapons ban.

The Second Amendment provides an absolute guarantee that all individual Americans have the right to bear arms.

We would all be safer if more law-abiding citizens carried guns.

I support restrictions on ammunition purchases.

I am a strong supporter of gun rights.

I am a strong supporter of gun control.

NOTE: Items two three and five were recoded for the purposes of creating the gun-position scale. Ultimately, item No. 2 was removed from the scale to improve reliability.

Importance of issue (5-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree.) Gun policy is one of the most important issues facing America.

Pre-Stimulus Opinion of News Media (4-item measure, each on a 5-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree). Indicate how much of the time you think the news media is:

Fair

Accurate

Balanced

Unbiased

Self-Efficacy (3-item measure each on a 5-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree): On the following scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

In general, I am good at articulating my position on issues.

I am good at navigating news sites and can usually successfully share, like or comment on stories if that's my intent.

When I do comment on a news story, it affects the discussion about that story.

Comment often: (5-point scale) On the following scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

I often comment on the news stories I read.

Post-Test and Dependent Measures

Did they comment? (yes=1; no=0) Participants have the chance to leave a comment at the end of the story. The following scale was then constructed:

Did not comment on any stories

Commented on one of the stories

Commented on two of the stories

Commented on all three stories

Likelihood of participation (measured on a five-point scale after each story from strongly disagree to strongly agree): Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

If I encountered this article on an actual news web site, I would comment on it.

If I encountered this article on an actual news web site, I would “like” it or give it a “thumbs up.”

If I encountered this article on an actual news web site, I would give it a thumbs down.

If I encountered this article on an actual news web site, I would share it by emailing it to friends or colleagues or by posting it to a social network site like Facebook or Twitter.

Perceived Bias Direct (11-point scale, asked after each story): On a scale ranging from extremely biased in favor of gun rights to extremely biased in favor of gun control (with no bias as the middle point), evaluate the story you just read in terms of bias.

For analysis, this measure was multiplied with a recoded gun-position score so that negative numbers indicate the reader found the story biased in *favor* of his or her position, zero indicates no bias perceived, and a positive number indicates the reader found the story bias against his or her position.

Perceived Bias Indirect (three-item scale, each measured a 5-point strongly disagree to strongly agree scale, asked after each story): Indicate your agreement with the following:

The story was fair.

The story was balanced.

The story was accurate.

Perceived influence (5-point scale, asked after each story): If this story were published on actual news sites, how much influence do you think it would have on you and the broader audience? Indicate your answer on the scale provided.

You, yourself

The average American citizen

Newsworthiness – Direct (5-point scale, asked after each story, from strongly disagree to strongly agree).

The story is newsworthy.

Newsworthiness – Complexity Scale⁴ (7 items each measured on a 5-point scale, from strongly disagree to strongly agree, after each story): To what extent do you find that:

The story makes me think that, for better or worse, change is coming to our nation's gun laws.

I find the behavior or positions described in this story to violate social norms and rules that we should follow.⁵

⁴ Shoemaker and Cohen (2006) use content analysis to measure the number of the seven-dimensions of newsworthiness present in the news content (stories and visuals) examined in their sprawling, multinational study. Coders either found that a story had, say, statistical deviance, or found that it did not. Complexity scores in their study, then, ranged from 0 to 7. The present study is a survey. The respondents used a 1-to-5 scale to indicate how much deviance and social significance they perceived for each story embedded in the survey. The complexity measure in this study is the sum and average of those scores.

⁵ This item was not used as part of the "newsworthiness" latent variable in the structural model because it did not load on the same factors as the others. It was used in the model as its own, observed variable.

The story contains information that is usual or novel.

The story has implications for the public's well-being.

The story has implications for America's culture.

The story has implications for America's economy.

The story has implications for American politics.

Participatory Behavior (All measured on a 5-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree at end of experiment): Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

I comment on news stories to help other readers know the facts.

I comment on news stories because I like to be social online.

I comment on news stories to counter what other commentators are saying.

I comment on news stories to counter the bias in the story.

I am MORE likely to share an article that I disagree with than one that I agree with

I share articles when I think the information in them is important.

I share articles when I agree with the articles point of view.

I give stories a "thumbs up" or click "like" because I want the author of the story to know I like it.

I give stories a "thumbs up" or click "like" because I want others in my social network to know I like it.

I give stories a "thumbs up" or click "like" only when I agree with the stories point of view.

I have never commented on a news story.

I have never shared a news story.

I have never “liked” a news story.

Chapter 4: Results

Data Collection

Recruitment of MechanicalTurk workers began at 7:20 a.m. on Monday, Oct. 26, 2015. The first subject completed the experiment at 9:45 a.m. The last subject finished at 9:36 a.m. on Tuesday, Oct. 27, 2015.

In that 24-hour period, 386 people viewed and accepted the consent page. Of those, 375 people completed the experiment in an average time of 20 minutes and 50 seconds. Of the 11 who did not complete the experiment, none of them made it more than a few questions into the experiment, making it an easy decision to eliminate them from the analysis. Forty respondents did not answer every question. A comparison of those 40 respondents with the 335 that did complete the entire survey found no significant differences on measures central to this study. Because AMOS, the program used in this study to conduct structural equation modeling, will not allow for missing data, I removed the 40 incomplete experiments from the analysis. The results reported below are for the 335 complete questionnaires.

I exported the data from Qualtrics and analyzed it in Excel, SPSS, and AMOS.

Reliability Test: Gun Position Scale

A key factor in this experiment is a person's position on guns. Respondents answered six questions to determine whether they were more favorable to gun rights, gun control, or were neutral on the topic. The items were highly correlated (standardized $\alpha = .909$, **Table 1**). The scale was slightly stronger (standardized $\alpha = .918$) with one of the items – the one expressing support for the second amendment – deleted. Although a small difference, the item was removed and the five-item scale used for the remainder of the analysis. The five items were then summed and divided by five to create the gun position scale ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 1.78$). The mean indicates

the Respondents were slightly more in favor of gun control than gun rights.

Reliability Test: Complexity scale

Seven items make up the theoretical conception of complexity: normative deviance, statistical deviance, social change deviance, and the story's likely impact on culture, the economy, politics, and wellbeing.

The results of this study indicate that normative deviance plays a particularly strong role in determining whether a subject comments. That normative deviance stands out in this way is also apparent in the reliability analysis. Removing normative deviance from the scale improves its performance the most, from $\alpha = .775$ to $\alpha = .797$. Because of this and special role normative deviance seems to play commenting behavior in this study, it was used separately in the structural model, and the complexity latent variable was made up of the six other items. Those other items have a mean of 3.33 ($SD = .57$). The normative deviance measure, meanwhile, has a mean of 2.20 ($SD = .82$).

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Reliability for Scale Measures

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α
Gun Position ^a	3.28	1.78	.918
Complexity-7 ^b	3.17	0.52	.775
Complexity-6 ^c	3.33	0.57	.797
Normative Deviance	2.20	0.82	***

^a A five-item, five-point scale. A mean above 3 indicates support for gun control; means below 3 indicate support for gun rights.

^b A seven-item, five-point scale based on Shoemaker's operationalization of newsworthiness as the seven dimensions of complexity, comprised of the three deviance measures (normative, statistical, and social change) and four social significance measures (political, economic, social, and public wellbeing). ^c

^c The newsworthiness/complexity scale without normative deviance.

*** Not used in a scale so alpha does not apply.

Composition of Sample

The ages of the respondents ranged from 18 to 73, with a mean age of 38 ($SD = 11.61$) (**Table 2**). Respondents reported their household income as between \$0 and \$175,000 in 2014 ($M = \$46,559.46$, $SD = \$28,156.12$). The median was \$42,000. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that the median household income in 2014 was \$53,246.

To measure political orientation, I used a scale ranging from -5 (extremely liberal) to 5 (extremely conservative). Respondents ranged from -5 to 5, with an average of -1.13 ($SD = 2.56$). People in the sample were, on average, slightly left of center, but with considerable dispersion. Most studies find that Americans are slightly to the right of center. For instance, Gallup found that Americans were almost exactly split when asked whether they were liberal or conservative on social issues (31% liberal, 31% conservative, 38% neither), but were decidedly conservative on economic issues, with 53 percent identifying as conservative, and the rest liberal, moderate, or unsure (Jones, 2015).

[Continued below]

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations for Respondent Characteristics, $N = 335$

	M	SD
Age	37.69	11.61
Income	\$46,559.46	\$28,156.12
Political orientation ^a	-1.13	2.56
Gun Position Scale ^b	3.07	1.09
Support assault weapon ban	3.55	1.33
Support limits on ammo	3.35	1.40
Support gun control	3.20	1.36
Support gun rights	2.95	1.38
All safer if more carried	2.69	1.35
Gun Position Strength ^c	1.21	0.52
Assault Weapon Ban Strength	1.25	0.70
Restrict ammo purchases Strength	1.26	0.67
Support gun control Strength	1.16	0.74
Support gun rights Strength	1.19	0.70
Safer if more carry Strength	1.17	0.74
Support gun rights Strength	1.19	0.70
Gun policy is important ^d	3.20	1.24
Comment often on news stories ^e	2.17	1.074

^a Political orientation: From extremely liberal (-5) to extremely conservative (+5), thus the negative mean indicates a slightly liberal sample.

^b Gun Position Scale: Each measure in the scale was based on 1-to-5, “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” scale. The “support gun rights” and “we’d all be safer if more law-abiding citizens carried guns” were reverse coded when used in the scale. So, for all the measures presented here, means over 3 indicate agreement, and means under 3 indicate disagreement. The sample, then, was slightly more favorable to gun control, on average, than gun rights.

^c Gun Position Strength: For use as a latent variable in the structural model, each gun position measure was recoded into a 0-to-2 scale. The higher the number, the stronger the position, regardless of whether the position favored gun rights or gun control.

^d Gun policy is important: A 1-to-5, “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” scale in response to the statement, “gun policy is one of the most important issues facing America.” The mean over 3 suggests, on average, that respondents were slightly in agreement with the statement.

^eComment often on news stories: A 1-to-5, “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” scale in response to the statement, “I often comment on news stories.”

Respondents also answered questions about their sex, race, political party affiliation, and the state in which they live (**Table 3**). The sample was 50.1 percent male (N = 188) and 49.3 percent female (N = 185). Two respondents selected “other,” with one writing “transgender” in the provided text box, and the other leaving it blank.

Seventy-eight percent of the sample indicated they were white (N = 296), 7.5 percent Latino/Hispanic (N = 28), 6.9 percent Black/African American (N = 26), 5.3 percent Asian (N = 20), and .5 percent Native American (N = 2). Three respondents selected other, with one writing “multiple,” another “bi-racial,” and the third “I don't believe in race.”

Respondents were from 43 states, with California (N = 39), Florida (N = 27), Texas (N = 26), and New York (N = 21) represented most often. The seven states not represented in the sample are North and South Dakota, Hawaii, Montana, Vermont, and Nebraska. No respondents were from the District of Columbia.

For political party affiliation, 46.1 percent of the sample indicated they were members of the Democratic Party (N = 173) and 17.9 percent the Republican Party (N = 67). Ninety-seven respondents said they were registered to vote but not enrolled in any party (25.9%), while 4.8 percent said they belonged to third parties such as the Green Party and Conservative Party. Eleven respondents (2.9%) were not registered to vote, and 2.4 percent answered “other” (n = 9). Two of the others indicated Libertarian Party, and so are enrolled in a third-party. The other seven indicated “independent,” which can mean either a member of the Independent Party, or political independent/not enrolled in a party.

Table 3. Percentages for nominal and ordinal respondent characteristics, $N = 335$

Variable	%
Gender	
Male	50.4
Female	49.0
Other ^a	.6
Race	
White/Caucasian	78.9
Latino/Hispanic	7.8
African American/Black	6.3
Asian	6.0
Other	0.9
Native American	0.6
Party	
Democrat	45.4
Republican	17.6
Other party such as Conservative or Green	4.8
Registered to vote but not enrolled in a party	26.6
Not registered to vote	3.3
Other	2.4

^a Both respondents identified as transgendered. They were folded into the “not male” category in the creation of the dummy variable used in the SEM analysis.

Post-Story Exposure and Dependent Variables

Table 4. Means and Standard Deviations for Post-Story and Dependent Variables, $N = 335$

	M	SD
Would comment ^a	2.21	.94
Left comment ^b	1.21	1.26
Story was newsworthy	3.61	.72
Complexity	3.37	.55
Story has implications for:		
Culture	3.59	.78
Wellbeing	3.49	.74
Economy	2.73	0.91
Politics		
Deviance		
Social change	3.24	0.80
Statistical	3.17	0.72
Normative Deviance ^c	2.20	0.82
Bias Directional ^d	-0.40	1.23
Bias Absolute ^e	1.38	1.04
Bias Against My Position ^f	0.13	1.69

^a Would comment was measured on five-point, “strongly disagree to strongly agree” scale in response to the following statement: I would comment on this story if I read it on an actual news site.

^b Respondents read three stories, meaning they could comment on 0, 1, 2, or all 3 of those stories. The mean, therefore, indicates an average of just over one comment per subject.

^c Because normative deviance loads on its own factor and seems to play a special role in commenting behavior in this study, it is most often used separately from the other complexity measures.

^d On the survey, respondents used an 11-point scale (-5 to +5) to indicate how much bias they perceived in each story, and in what direction. Negative numbers equaled bias in favor of gun control, and positive numbers equaled bias in favor of gun rights. Zero would indicate no bias. The mean here, then, indicates an average perception (across all respondents and stories) that the stories were just slightly biased in favor of gun control.

^e Taking the absolute value of the directional bias measure gives us a 0-to-5 scale measure of the bias seen in the story, regardless of direction.

^f By recoding and multiplying both the bias and gun positions measures, I created a -2 to +2 scale that measure whether a respondent found the story biased either in favor or against their own position. The lower the number, the more biased *in favor* of their position. Positive numbers indicate bias against their position.

Hypothesis Testing

H1 I used bivariate analysis with Pearson's r (**Table 5**) to test this hypothesis, which predicts that complexity measures newsworthiness and, therefore, that the measures will correlate. I examined how respondent evaluations that the stories were newsworthy matched each individual measure of complexity, along with the full seven-item complexity scale, and the six-item scale utilized in the structural equation.

[Continued Below]

Table 5. Z-Score Correlations for Newsworthiness, Complexity, and the 7-Dimensions of Complexity, $N = 335$

	Newsworthy	7-item Complexity	6-item Complexity	Social Change Deviance	Normative Deviance	Statistical Deviance	Significant to Public Wellbeing	Cultural Significance	Economic Significance	Political Significance
Newsworthy	1	.539**	.582**	.419**	.011	.361**	.518**	.452**	.273**	.465**
7-item Complexity		1	.975**	.712**	.441**	.486**	.780**	.785**	.667**	.693**
6-item Complexity			1	.715**	.232**	.508**	.813**	.803**	.660**	.735**
Social Change Deviance				1	.229**	.320**	.506**	.487**	.373**	.341**
Normative Deviance					1	.076	.133*	.197**	.259**	.064
Statistical Deviance						1	.319**	.215**	.171**	.209**
Significant to Public Wellbeing							1	.727**	.365**	.564**
Cultural Significance								1	.378**	.606**
Economic Significance									1	.394**
Political Significance										1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The correlations show a robust connection between complexity newsworthiness, as would be predicted by Shoemaker's theory. Whether using all seven dimensions of the construct [$r(333) = .539, p < .001$], or the six-item scale with normative deviance removed [$r(333) = .583, p < .001$], **H1 is supported.**

H2 and H3 are the corrective- and promotional-action hypotheses, which predict that liking and sharing stories will be associated with stories that respondents see as either neutral or favorable to their positions (promotional action), while respondents would be more likely to comment on and dislike stories they find biased against their positions.

As shown in **Table 6**, the evidence is mixed. There does not appear to be any relationship between assessments of bias and either leaving a comment in the study or likelihood of commenting on the story if encountered on a news platform. There is, though, the predicted relationship between liking and bias, and disliking and bias.

The bias measure is on a -5 to +5 scale, with negative numbers indicating, counterintuitively, bias *in favor* of the respondent's position. So it makes sense that bias measured in this way would be negatively associated with liking a story [$r(333) = -.174, p = .001$] and positively associated with disliking the story [$r(333) = .233, p < .001$]. However, it is surprising to see both liking and disliking positively correlated with each other, and with sharing and commenting. In sum, **neither H2 nor H3 is supported.**

Table 6. Z-score correlations bias and participatory measures, $N = 335$

	Bias ^a	Left Comment	Would Comment	Share	Like	Dislike
Bias ^a	1	(-.016)	.021	.000	(.175 ^{**})	.233 ^{**}
Left Comment		1	.371 ^{**}	.120 [*]	.118 [*]	.103
Would Comment			1	.604 ^{**}	.651 ^{**}	.471 ^{**}
Share				1	.610 ^{**}	.445 ^{**}
Like					1	.342 ^{**}
Dislike						1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

^a The bias measure is a -5 to +5 measure, with negative numbers representing bias *in favor* of the respondent's position, and positive numbers representing bias *against* the respondents position.

NOTE: Negative numbers in parentheses.

H4 and H5 are the third-person effect hypotheses that state respondents will assess stories they see as favorable to their position as having more of an effect on themselves than others, and that they will assess stories they see as biased against their position as having more of an effect on others than themselves. The bias measure is again on a -5 to +5 scale, with negative numbers indicating bias *in favor* of the respondent's position. For the hypotheses to be fully supported, we would expect to see a negative correlation between bias and assessments of the stories' influence on the respondents themselves (H4). In other words, the more the respondents find the story bias in their favor, the more they believe it will influence them. Meanwhile, we would expect a positive correlation between bias and assessments of the stories' influence on others, so that as respondents see more bias against their position, they also see more influence on others (H5). **H4 is supported** [$r(333) = -.222, p < .001$], but **H5 is not supported**, although the difference in the *influence me* and *influence others* measures in relation to bias is in the predicted direction (see **Table 7**).

Table 7. Z-Score Correlations for Bias and Influence (Third-Person Effect), $N = 335$

	Bias ^a	Influence Me	Influence Others
Bias ^a	1	(.222**)	(.026)
Influence Me		1	.466**
Influence Others			1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

^a The bias measure is a -5 to +5 measure, with negative numbers representing bias *in favor* of the respondent's position, and positive numbers representing bias *against* the respondents position.

NOTE: Negative numbers in parentheses.

H6, the hostile-media effect hypothesis, states that the stronger a respondent's position on gun policy, the greater the likelihood the respondent will assess stories as biased against their position. The hypothesis is not supported by the data in this study. To further explore all aspects of the potential relationship, I included the *importance of gun policy* measure, as well as a respondents' *political orientation*, along with *strength of position on guns* in the bivariate analysis. Yet none of those measures had any meaningful degree of correlation with respondents' assessments of bias, as shown in Table 8. Thus, **H6 is not supported.**

Table 8. Z-Score Correlations for Bias and Position on Guns (Hostile-Media Effect)

	Bias	Gun Position	Guns Important	Political Orientation
Bias	1	.094	(.089)	(.051)
Gun Position		1	.319**	.225**
Gun Important			1	.223**
Political Orientation				1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

^a The bias measure is a -5 to +5 measure, with negative numbers representing bias in favor of the respondent's position, and positive numbers representing bias against the respondents' position.

NOTE: Negative numbers in parentheses.

R1 and R2 explore the relationship between respondents' assessments that a story is biased, and respondents' assessments of the story is fair, balanced, and accurate. For this analysis, I used the absolute value of the bias score, so instead of bias measured on a -5 (biased

in favor of my position) to +5 (biased against my position) scale, in this analysis *ABS Bias* refers to a 0-to-5 scale where the higher the number, the more biased the respondent finds in the story.

When examined individually, fair, balanced, and accurate all negatively correlate with perceptions that a story in the survey is biased, meaning the less fair, balanced, and accurate respondents rated the story, the more bias they saw in it (**Table 9**). When entered in as a block in a regression model, perceptions a story's fairness emerged as the strongest predictor (**Table 10**). The model as a whole was significant [$F(3,34) = 29.34, p < .001$], but only fairness is a significant predictor [$B = -.310, p = .004$], although balanced also approaches significance.

Table 9. Z-Score Correlations for Fair, Accurate and Balanced with Bias, $N = 335$

	ABS Bias ^a	Accurate	Balanced	Fair
ABS Bias ^a	1	(.269**)	(.435**)	(.447**)
Fair		1	.626**	.652**
Accurate			1	.877**
Balanced				1

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)

^a 0-to-5 scale with higher numbers indicating the responds found more bias in the stories.

Note: Negative numbers in parentheses.

Table 10. Unstandardized Regression Co-Efficient for Predictors of Bias, $N = 335$

	B	SE
Accurate	.059	.065
Balanced	(.200 ^b)	.103
Fair	(.310**)	.106

^a The dependent variable is the absolute value of the bias score, measured on a 0-to-5 scale with higher numbers indicating the responds found more bias in the stories.

^b Approaches significance at $p = .053$

Note: Negative numbers in parentheses.

Testing Relationships in the Structural Model

Table 11 examines the bivariate correlations between all the variables in the structural model and tests the simple hypotheses based on each path in the model.

Table 11. Z-Score Bivariate Relationships in the Structural Models, *N* = 335

	Actual Comment	Comment Likelihood	Complexity	Normative Deviance	Gun Position	Political Orientation	Guns important	Influence Others	Bias Against	Comments Often	Male	Age	Income
Actual Comment	1	.371**	.092	.035	.021	(.007)	(.010)	.087	(.016)	.208**	.046	.067	(.004)
Comment Likelihood		1	.153**	.332**	.014	.039	.117*	.182**	.021	.705**	.147**	.090	(.010)
Complexity			1	.232**	.041	(.051)	.176**	.323**	(.236**)	.060	(.073)	.040	.103
Normative Deviance				1	(.143**)	.273**	.032	.184**	.095	.225**	(.041)	.075	(.005)
Gun Position					1	(.177**)	.319**	(.021)	.094	.031	(.018)	.037	(.005)
Political Orientation						1	(.103)	.080	.208**	.037	(.008)	.161**	.155**
Gun Policy Important							1	.000	(.089)	.137*	.003	.073	.007
Influence Others								1	(.026)	.061	(.029)	(.007)	(.010)
Bias Against									1	.062	(.040)	.077	.045
Comments Often										1	.007	.097	(.002)
Male											1	(.188**)	(.055)
Age												1	.076
Income													1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Note: Negative numbers are in parentheses.

H7 states that the more complex respondents rate a story, the more likely they are (a) to actually comment on the story on the survey, and to (b) indicate a strong likelihood that they would comment on the story if encountered on an actual news site.

There was no significant relationship between actually commenting and the complexity measure, but one does emerge for the “likelihood of commenting” dependent variable [$r(333) = .153, p = .005$.] There’s also a significant relationship between the normative deviance measure and likelihood of commenting [$r(333) = .332, p < .001$.] That measure is part of Shoemaker and Cohen’s (2006) conception of complexity, but was used separately here because it loaded on a different factor from the other six-measures of complexity, and therefore not used in the latent complexity variable in the structural model. If normative deviance had been included in the complexity measure, however, it would give additional strength the complexity/likelihood of commenting relationship.

Given the mixed result on the two different dependent variables, **H7 is partially supported.**

H8 states that the stronger the respondents’ views on gun policy, the more likely they (a) will actually comment on the story in the survey, and (b) would be likely to comment on the story if encountered on an actual news site.

The data do not support this hypothesis.

H9 states that men are more likely to (a) actually comment on the news stories in the survey than women and those who identify another gender, and (b) indicate they would likely comment on the news stories if encountered the story on an actual news website.

Again, we do not see a relationship with the actual comment dependent variable, but do with the likelihood of commenting measure. Using a 0 (other) and 1 (male) coding scheme,

being male does significantly correlate with likelihood of commenting [$r(333) = .147; p = .007$]. An ANOVA by male/other was also run, again finding a difference in commenting by the two groups ANOVA [$F(333) = 7.38, p = .007$].

Given the mixed result on the two different dependent variables, **H9 is partially supported.**

H10 states that the more often respondents' comment on news stories in general (past comments), the more likely they are to (a) actually comment on the news stories in this study, and (b) indicate that they would be likely to comment on the story if encountered on an actual news site.

There is a significant relationship between past commenting behavior and both commenting dependent variables in this study. There is a moderate-to-weak correlation with actual commenting [$r(333) = .208, p < .001$] and a strong with likelihood of commenting [$R(333) = .705, p < .001$].

H10 is supported.

H11 states that the higher the respondents' incomes, the more likely they are to (a) comment on the stories in the study and (b) indicate that they would comment on the story if encountered on an actual news site.

The data do not support this hypothesis.

H12 states that the higher the respondents' incomes, the more likely they are to (a) comment on the stories in the study, and (b) indicate that they would comment on the story if encountered on an actual news site.

The data do not support this hypothesis.

H13 states that the more respondents believe a story will influence others, the more likely they are to (a) actually comment on it on the survey, and (b) indicate that they would likely comment on the story if encountered on an actual news site.

There is no relationship with the actual comment dependent variable, but a significant one with the likelihood of commenting DV [$r(333) = .182, p = .001$].

Given the mixed result on the two different dependent variables, **H13 is partially supported.**

H14 states that the more complex respondents rate a story, the more likely the subject is to believe it will influence others.

There's a moderately strong relationship between a subject's assessment of a story as complex, and the subject's assessment of the story as having an impact on others [$r(333) = .340, p < .001$].

H14 is supported.

H15 proposes that the more complex respondents rate a story, the more likely the subject is to find the story bias against their position.

There appears to be a relationship between complexity and bias, but based on the data for this study, it is not in the theorized direction. The bias measure runs from -5 (strongly bias in favor of my position to +5 (strongly bias against my position). The results [$r(333) = -.236, p < .001$] indicate that the more complex respondents saw the story, the more bias they saw it favor of their own position.

H15 is not supported.

H16 states that the stronger respondents' positions on guns, the more likely they are to find the story biased against their position. This is a re-articulation of the hostile-media

hypotheses (H3 & H4, Table 6) to fit the structural model. Once again, no relationship was found.

The data do not support this hypothesis.

H17 proposes that the more extreme respondents' political orientation, the more likely they are to find the story biased against their position.

On the bias measure, negative numbers indicate bias in favor of the subject's position, and positive numbers indicate bias against. On the political orientation measure, the higher the number, the further from center (left or right) the respondent's political views. Bivariate correlation between the two measures finds a moderate, positive relationship between the two measures [$r(333) = .208, p < .001$], indicating that as respondents get further from the political center, the more bias they saw in the stories.

H17 is supported.

H18 states that the more important respondents consider the issue of guns, the more likely they are to find the story biased against their position.

There is no relationship between these variables was found.

H18 is not supported.

Model Testing

Actual Comment.

The structural model (**Figure 3, Table 12**) is significant [$X^2(173) = 312.83, p < .001$]. This is generally not desirable in SEM, showing poor fit. However, Kenny (2015) notes that for sample size over 200, chi-square is almost always significant. In these cases, other measures of model fit are more appropriate (Kenny, 2015). This is reflected in published communication research as well. For example, Matthes and Beyer (2015) report results of models they deem to

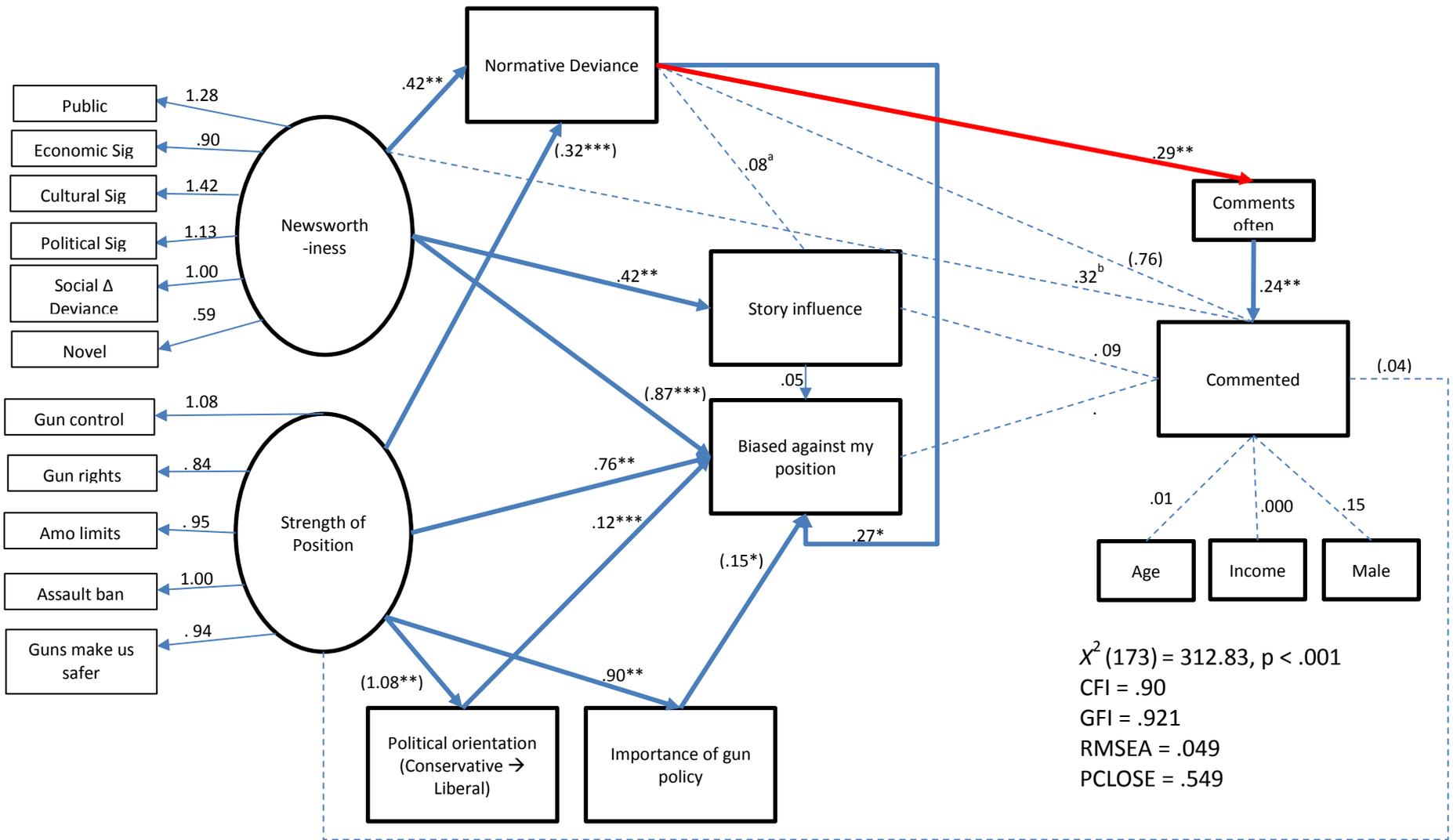
have a good fit in *Communication Research* for a study involving more than 1,000 participants. Instead of reporting chi-square as measure of model fit in their study, Matthes and Beyer rely on CFI, RMSEA and PCLOSE.

By these measures, the model in the present study has a CFI = .90, RMSEA = .049, and PCLOSE = .549. All of those measures suggest a good fitting model (Kenny, 2015; Hooper, Coughlan & Mullen, 2008).

However, I would not say that this result supports my theoretical model. Only the control variable “respondent often comments on news stories” has a significant relationship with the dependent variable (**Figure 3, Table 12**). The beta for the path between complexity and left a comment is high ($B = .321$) and approaches significance ($p = .062$), but is not significant. Therefore, despite the robust fit measures, it is hard to see the model as particularly insightful when it comes to explaining how content might trigger commenting behavior.

[Continue below]

Figure 3. Measurement Model for Actual Comment



$\chi^2 (173) = 312.83, p < .001$
 CFI = .90
 GFI = .921
 RMSEA = .049
 PCLOSE = .549

Red parameter not originally hypothesized. Bold parameters are significant. Broken line parameters are not.

^a Approaches significance at $p = .056$

^b Approaches significance at $p = .062$

Negative numbers in parentheses

Table 12. *Structural Equation Modeling Unstandardized Path Coefficients: Actual Comments, N = 335*

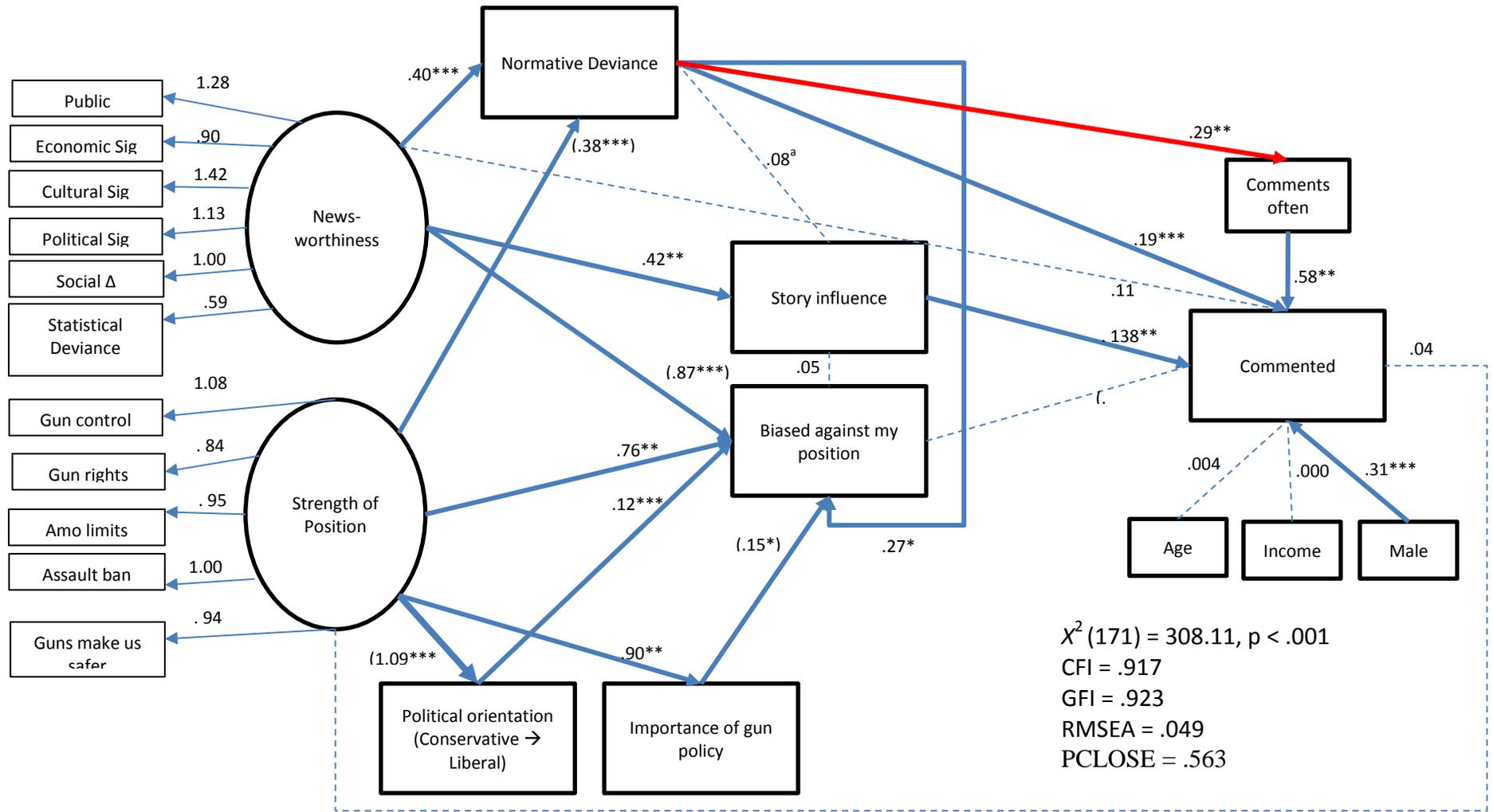
	Comment Often		Political Orientation		Guns Important		Norms		Influence Others		Biased Against		Actual Comment	
	B	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE
Norms	.295***	.069	—	—	—	—	—	—	.083	.044	.265*	.108	(.076)	.399
Gun Position	—	—	(1.082)***	.329	.897***	.159	(.317)**	.104	—	—	.758***	.219	(.023)	.162
Complexity	—	—	—	—	—	—	.421***	.100	.419***	.083	(.874)***	.210	.321	.172
Political Orientation	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	.116***	.034	—	—
Guns Important	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	(.151)*	.072	—	—
Influence Others	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	.045	.126	.089	.105
Biased Against Me	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	.003	.045
Comments Often	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	.243***	.064
Age	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	.006	.006
Male	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	.148	.134
Income	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	.000	.000

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

NOTE: Negative numbers in parentheses.

Likelihood of Commenting Model.

Figure 4. Measurement Model for Likelihood of Commenting



Red parameter not originally hypothesized. Red parameter not originally hypothesized. Bold parameters are significant. Broken line parameters are not. Negative numbers in parentheses

^a Approaches significance at p = .055

As has been the case throughout, all the statistical tests using the “likelihood of commenting” measure as the dependent variable have outperformed tests on the actual comment DV. We see similar model fit numbers [$X^2(171) = 308.11, p < .001$; CFI = .917; GFI = .923; RMSEA = .049; $p_{close} = .563$], which, given the sample size, suggest a good fitting model. Here, though, we see that more significant paths (normative deviance and sex, for instance) to the dependent variable.

See Figure 4 above and Table 13 below for specifics.

[Continue Below]

Table 13. *Structural Equation Modeling Unstandardized Path Coefficients: Likelihood of Commenting*

	Comment Often		Political Orientation		Guns Important		Norms		Influence Others		Biased Against		Likelihood of Commenting	
	B	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE
Norms	.294***	.069	—	—	—	—	—	—	.084 ^a	.043	.268*	.109	.187***	.046
Gun Position	—	—	(1.085)***	.329	.902***	.159	(.382)***	.112	—	—	.760***	.221	.043	.091
Complexity	—	—	—	—	—	—	.402***	.099	.418***	.083	(.873)***	.209	.114	.087
Guns Important	—	—	—	—	—	—	.057	.037	—	—	(.153)*	.072	.001	.030
Influence Others	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	.045	.127	.138**	.053
Biased Against Me	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	(.011)	.023
Comments Often	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	.578***	.033
Age	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	.004	.003
Male	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	.307***	.068
Income	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	.000	.000
Political Orientation	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	.116***	.034	—	—

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

^a p = .055

NOTE: Negative numbers in parentheses.

Post-Hoc Analysis

After viewing the results to the above, I wanted to do further analysis on the variable that assesses respondents' frequency of commenting on stories prior to the study. That variable was measured by a "strongly disagree to strongly agree" response scale to the statement "I often comment on news stories." The question was asked as part of a series of questions not yet utilized in this study that asked respondents to assess whether they have the skills and dispositions needed effectively comment. Those other questions include measures of (1) whether the subject believes he/she can easily navigate news web sites to like, share and comment on stories, (2) whether he/she has the ability to articulate his/her position, and (3) whether those comments are likely to influence the discussion about the story.

After testing my initial hypotheses, I used those three variables as predictors in a regression model, and "I often comment on news stories" as the dependent variable. I also included as a predictor the respondent's sex, dummy coded so that 0 = female and other and 1 = male.

The model was significant [$r = .55$; $p < .001$]. Of the predictors, "when I do comment on a news story, it affects the discussion about that story" proved to be the most significant [$B = .514$; $p < .001$]. None of the other predictors, including sex, were significant, although ability to articulate one's position approached significance ($p = .53$). See **Tables 12, 13, and 14**.

Table 14. Means and Standard Deviations for Comment Efficacy Measures, $N = 335$

	M	SD
Comment often: "I often comment on the news stories I read."	2.17	1.07
Easily navigate: "I good at navigating news sites and can usually successfully share, like or comment if that's my intent."	4.23	.78
Articulate well: "In general, I am good at articulating my position on issues."	3.76	.90
Affect conversation: "What I do comment on a news story, it affects the discussion about that story."	2.86	1.02

All measures on a 1-to-5, "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" scale.

Table 15. *Bivariate Correlations, Comment Efficacy Measures, N = 335*

	Comment often	Easily navigate	Articulate well	Affect conversation
Comment often	1	.217***	.254***	.528***
Easily navigate		1	.411***	.234***
Articulate well			1	.267***
Affect conversation				1

*** $p < .001$ for all correlations in the table.

Table 16. *Unstandardized Regression Coefficients for “Comment Often on News Stories,” N = 335*

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>
Easily navigate	.085	.070
Articulate well	.117 ^a	.062
Affect conversation	.511***	.051

^a Approaches significance at $p = .058$

*** $p < .001$

[Continue below]

Chapter 5: Discussion

Overview & Recap

Why do some people comment on news stories and others do not? Why do some stories get comments while others do not?

Those questions are central to this study. Intuitively, we can assume that *personal characteristics* such as gender, past commenting behavior, and strength of position on any given issue might play a role. Likewise, *content characteristics* such as subject of the news story, length, visuals, and newsworthiness, might influence commenting behavior. Additionally, *platform characteristics* such as ease of use, moderation, anonymity, and reputation are likely to influence whether someone comments. Then there is the interplay between these elements – for instance, between a person’s strength of position on guns and a story about gun policy – that might ultimately help determine whether a reader will comment on a digital news story.

This dissertation tested a structural model of commenting behavior that examined the personal characteristics of the respondents, such as their gender and strength of position on gun policy, and how those characteristics influenced perceptions of media bias, perceptions that a story was newsworthy and had reach, and, ultimately, whether the respondent commented.

Survey participants read three stories about gun policy to help ensure the respondents were reacting to the topic and not a peculiarity in any one story. The stories were all of equal length, and all were constructed to be as balanced, accurate, and free of bias as possible. The platform, and the survey instrument itself, were designed to be neutral and easy to use as I did not want the platform to signal any sort of journalistic slant or reputation.

This design seeks to isolate the personal characteristics of the respondents and the differing reactions they had to the news content that might help predict the dependent variables of actual comments on the survey, and the likelihood of commenting on the same news stories if

encountered on an actual news platform.

Newsworthiness

Surprisingly, scholars of commenting behavior and of hostile-media perceptions have not yet examined the newsworthiness of the event described in the story as a factor in determining these two media effects. This dissertation study tried to address that deficiency. It also tested a particular conceptualization and operationalization of newsworthiness developed by Shoemaker throughout her career and elaborated on in book form with Cohen (2006) in their extensive study, *News Around the World*.

Shoemaker posits that newsworthiness has seven dimensions – normative deviance, statistical deviance, and social change deviance, along with “social significance,” which is comprised of economic, political, social, and public significance. The results of her study with Cohen (2006) led her to conclude that the indicators might combine into a new concept she calls “complexity.” The more indicators present in a story, the more complex it is, the more it demands our attention, and, therefore, the more newsworthy the story. As such, in her conception, complexity equals newsworthiness, and I use the words interchangeably in this study.

The present study found a robust correlation between a respondent’s evaluation of a story along Shoemaker’s seven dimensions of newsworthiness and the respondent’s level of agreement with the more simplistic sentiment that “the story is newsworthy.” In other words, the higher a respondent rated a story along Shoemaker’s seven dimensions, the more a respondent also found the story to be newsworthy on the more simplistic measure. As such, the study provides evidence that Shoemaker’s operationalization of newsworthiness is a valid and sophisticated measure of newsworthiness itself. Put slightly differently, the seven dimensions of newsworthiness

Shoemaker delineates do indeed measure newsworthiness.

Given this initial result, I used Shoemaker's newsworthiness variables in the structural model instead of the more simplistic measure. Although newsworthiness did not directly predict commenting in the model, it did predict several other key relationships, including bias, influence on others, and normative deviance. Normative deviance is itself a dimension of Shoemaker's construct, but I used it separately in this study for reasons discussed earlier (mainly, that it did not factor load with the other dimensions, and therefore was not appropriate for inclusion in the newsworthiness latent variable).

Meanwhile, both normative deviance and influence did help predict the likelihood that a survey respondent would comment on the news stories presented in the study. Moreover, Shoemaker's newsworthiness variables strongly predicted both normative deviance and influence. It is clear, then, that newsworthiness is an important component in commenting behavior and should be included in future studies.

The simplest way for me to think of newsworthiness is events, people, and/or ideas that are either interesting, important, or both. Given that definition, it becomes intuitive that interesting and important stories are likely to generate many more additional reactions than stories that are neither interesting nor important. What is so powerful about Shoemaker's newsworthiness construct is that it gives us a way to both conceptualize and measure what is interesting and important about a story to humans. As such, it might help us better understand the social-psychological processes that humans undertake when determining what is and is not worthy of their attention.

In sum, this study provides evidence that readers' assessments of a stories' newsworthiness influence their assessments that a story will reach and have influence on others.

The study also provides evidence that Shoemaker's seven dimensions of newsworthiness can help researchers better understand what is really triggering perceptions that a story is newsworthy, and what aspect of that newsworthiness might be involved in triggering subsequent behaviors, such as commenting.

Predictors of Commenting

Respondents who indicated they often comment on news stories in the past also indicated they were the most likely to comment on the stories presented to them in the survey. There is, no doubt, something tautological about such a statement, and the present study uses the "comment frequently in the past" variable as a control, not as an explicit avenue for exploration.

Yet it emerged as, by far, the biggest predictor of commenting behavior in this study. I think that is interesting in and of itself. In general, those inclined to comment are most likely to comment, regardless of how strong their positions are on the given issue. Likewise, if you are disinclined to comment or not used to commenting in the past, actually commenting on a news story remains a high bar, even if you have strong positions on the issues presented in the story.

This begs a question for future investigation: why are some people more pre-disposed to comment than others? This study suggests some answers to that question. For instance, men were more likely than woman and those who identified as transgender to indicate that they would comment on the stories. Through post-hoc analysis, I found some other interesting connections to this measure, discussed under "Post-Hoc Analysis: Commenting and Self-Efficacy."

Three other variables had significant influence on the dependent variable "likelihood of commenting"⁶: Gender, influence on others, and normative deviance. I included the gender

⁶ I discuss the lack of significant predictors of the other dependent variable, actually commenting on the survey, in "Limitations."

variable because I found a similar result in unpublished, exploratory research I conducted on 2010 Pew data that asked respondents whether they commented on news stories. That analysis similarly found that men were more likely to comment than women. Dragiewicz and Burgess (2016) found that men often come to dominate twitter conversations, including one about violence against women. They describe the phenomenon as a form of *mansplaining*, “a shorthand for patronizing and condescending male behavior, and, therefore, available for repurposing in the context of men speaking for women ... on the topic of violence against women” (Dragiewicz & Burgess, 2016, p. 226). It may be that men have an inflated sense of the value and effect of expressing their opinions. Indeed, in the post-hoc analysis explored shortly, the biggest predictor of past commenting behavior was a belief that the respondent’s comments influenced the discussion on which they were commenting.

When respondents felt a story would influence others, they were more likely to indicate they would comment on it on an actual news platform. This finding gets to the heart of this study because newsworthiness, as measured by complexity, helped predict the amount of influence respondents thought the stories would have. Therefore, the more the respondents evaluated the story as newsworthy, the more they thought it would influence others, and the more likely they were to indicate that they would comment on the story on a news platform.

Why? Perhaps readers are more likely to take corrective (undermining the story) or promotional (supporting the story) action if they believe the information in the story will indeed influence others. This, essentially, is the idea promoted by Rojas in his 2010 and 2014 studies. Or perhaps people are simply more interested in taking part in conversations that they think people are likely to pay attention to or be influenced by. Or maybe it has more to do with the way the brain responds to newsworthy and complex topics, and that commenting is a way for

news consumer to help work through and consolidate their own reaction to the story. All of those explanations seem plausible. Unfortunately, I do not think the answer lies in this data set, but it is certainly something I intend to explore in the future.

Assessments of normative deviance play a key role in these relationships as well. On average, respondents rated the stories in the study as having *less* normative deviance than the other Shoemaker dimensions of statistical deviance, social change deviance, and cultural, economic, public, and political significance. Because of this, I do not think there was anything particularly normatively deviant in the stories about guns. However, the respondents that did see normative deviance in the stories were more likely to see the stories as biased against them, and more likely to indicate that they would comment if they saw the stories on a real news site.

This becomes more interesting, I think, because bias itself did not predict likelihood of commenting, nor did strength of position on guns or the other measures of complexity. But once normative deviance comes into play for a respondent, it seems to trigger subsequent reactions, including increased likelihood of commenting. It could be that threats to norms, whether real or perceived, affect people differently than threats to other systems, such as the political system, and that therefore people feel more compelled to react to that threat.

It could also be that some people are more likely to see things as normatively deviant. I find it interesting, for instance, that there is a significant relationship between respondents' perceptions that the stories were normatively deviant, and their *past* commenting behavior. Respondents rated their agreement with the statement "I often comment on news stories," before they read the stories about guns, and before they knew gun issues had anything to do with this study. Yet survey participants who agreed with that statement were often the same respondents that saw the stories as normatively deviant. It would be fascinating to see if some people simply

see more normative deviance than others, across a range of topics, and if those people are more likely to frequently comment on news stories.

Would assessments of normative deviance play as big a role in commenting if the news stories were on a different topic than guns, or if they were presented in a different format than print? My guess is that normative deviance would continue to play an outsized role in triggering subsequent behaviors such as commenting, and may in fact be a key variable in understanding the behavioral consequences of third-person and hostile-media effects in general. It will take further exploration using different stimulus materials to know for sure, but I think normative deviance has some unique characteristics that make it different from the other newsworthiness measures – hence, why it didn't factor load with those other dimensions.

Statistical deviance, or novelty, might be the purest case of “news,” of something unusual happening in the environment that draws our attention. However, those phenomena generally force immediate physical reactions – batten down the hatches, a once-in-a-century storm is approaching! – or are simple curiosities – the biggest pumpkin ever harvested! There is not a whole lot to discuss with these types of events.

Social change deviance, meanwhile, seems related to, but perhaps more innocuous than, normative deviance. For instance, the trend of young adults living at home longer seems properly classified as social change deviance, and describes a broad phenomenon that one individual is unlikely to change regardless of their reaction to news of the trend. But is that trend acceptable? Should we coddle young adults so much? Are we willing to accept that it will take longer for humans to become productive members of society? If norms about what is acceptable behavior for young adults are changing, then that is best classified as normative deviance. The change in norms is related to the broader social change. But the normative change is more personal, and

therefore might trigger issues of identity that the broader trend would not bring into play.

Norms, therefore, are tied to our identities in ways that occurrences (statistical deviance) and trends (social change deviance) are not. Because of this, threats to the norms we identify with are likely to lead to corrective actions that other signifiers of newsworthiness may not.

Post-Hoc Analysis: Commenting & Self-Efficacy

The study finds evidence that previous commenting behavior – as measured by a “strongly disagree to strongly agree” response to the statement “I often comment on news stories” – is a bigger factor in commenting than other subject characteristics, such as their position on guns, for instance. Respondents answered the question as part of a series of questions not yet utilized in this study that asked respondents to assess whether they have the skills and dispositions needed effectively comment. Those other questions include measures of (1) whether the subject believes he/she can easily navigate news web sites to like, share, and comment on stories, (2) whether he/she has the ability to articulate his/her position, and (3) whether those comments are likely to influence the discussion about the story.

After testing my initial hypotheses, I used those three variables as predictors in a regression model, with “I often comment on news stories” as the dependent variable. The model was significant (see **Table 16**). The strongest predictor of “I comment often” was the respondent’s level of agreement with the statement: “When I do comment on a news story, it affects the discussion about that story.” None of the other predictors, including gender, were significant in this particular model, although ability to articulate one’s position approached significance.

Self-efficacy – judgments about one’s own ability to perform certain tasks – is an important concept in many fields, including communication (Pajares, Prestin, Chen, & Nabi,

2009). Yet it has not, to my knowledge, been discussed as a factor in participatory news behaviors such as commenting. Although far from perfect, the questions asked in this study begin, perhaps, to articulate a construct that we could call “commenting efficacy” or “participatory efficacy.”

This study, then, provides evidence that past commenting behavior is the best indicator of future commenting behavior, and that frequent commentators may have particular beliefs about their ability to affect conversations that drives them to comment. As such, refining and utilizing measures of commenting efficacy for future studies may prove fruitful.

Limitations

This study found mixed evidence for hostile-media effect. In the structural models, strength of position correlated strongly with perceptions that the story was biased against the respondent’s position. But there was no bivariate correlation between the two constructs, and bias itself did not help predict commenting behavior.

This could be because respondents simply did not perceive much bias in the stories in general. Respondents found the stories just slightly biased in favor of gun control, with a mean of -0.39 on an 11-point scale that ranged from -5 (extremely biased in favor of gun control) and $+5$ (extremely biased in favor of gun rights). When turned into an absolute value, it became a 0-to-5 scale with higher numbers indicating more bias found in either direction. The mean was still just 1.38 (see **Table 4**).

I do not necessarily take this as evidence against hostile-media effect. Rather, I think two limitations in the study contributed to this result. One is that the sample leaned Democratic, liberal, and in favor of gun control. Meanwhile, tests by group showed that conservatives did see slightly more bias in the stories, as might be expected. America currently has a fairly lax gun-

control regime. As such, discussions of gun policy might threaten conservatives and pro-gun rights individuals more than those who favor stricter gun control. Gun-rights advocates, therefore, have more invested in maintaining the status quo. Indeed, Pew found a “gun policy activism gap,” with 45 percent of gun-rights supporters having ever taken some sort of political action to support their cause, compared to 26 percent for gun-control advocates (Dimock & Doherty, 2013, p. 9).

This is not to say that the sample was fatally flawed. There are indeed more registered Democrats than Republicans in America (Doherty & Weisel, 2015; Jones 2015). Overall, the sample was closely representative of the number of Republicans in the nation, was heavy on Democrats, and was light on independent voters (Doherty & Weisel, 2015; Jones 2015). And by a narrow margin, Americans do think it more important to control gun ownership than to protect ownership rights (Dimock & Doherty, 2013). By other measures, the sample seems broadly representative, although not perfect. It is very close in terms of the numbers of men and women (**Table 3**; Census, 2015). The sample is whiter than the nation, although not without diversity (**Table 3**; Census, 2015). Respondents hailed from 43 states, and the states that were missing are predictably small. There were also a wide-range of races, incomes, and ages (**Tables 3 and 4**).

Despite the representativeness of the sample, if more Republicans, conservatives, and respondents with strong gun-rights positions were in the sample, they likely would have rated the stories as being more biased, and, therefore, bias itself might have played a more significant role in the analysis.

Additionally, as is the case with most hostile-media effect research, the stories respondents were exposed to were designed to be neutral and without bias. After all, the hostile-media effect proposes that partisans will find bias where there is none. However, it is possible

that these stories were not only bias free, but also simply bland enough to not register as biased even amongst the true partisans in the study.

This explanation is likely given that the stories were pre-tested to avoid any bias. They were situated in a rather bland data-collection instrument (as opposed to an actual news site), and they were extremely short (about six paragraphs), making it easy for all readers of the stories to see how meticulously balanced they were. If the stories had been embedded in a more realistic-looking news platform, it might better signal to the respondents that the story will have reach and influence others, key moderators of the hostile-media effect. Longer stories also present a more complicated landscape that may make it harder for a reader or viewer to see the balance inherent in the stories. With the short stories I used, a reader can, at a glance, see that I gave each side equal weight.

Another possibility is that longer stories contain inaccuracies and biases that partisans see and that may have escaped even the best-intentioned researchers. As an example, *The New York Times* – a paper for which I have great respect – occasionally writes about Syracuse. When they do, I always find mistakes in their reporting. It is likely that there is some error in most news reports of any length and complexity, despite the reporter's best efforts to be fair, balanced, and accurate. The less the reporter knows about the subject, and the more the reader knows about the subject, the more likely it is that the reader will find something legitimately wrong with the news report. That is one reason why I recruited a lobbyist with the National Rifle Association to serve as one of my pre-testers.

Researchers have demonstrated the hostile-media effect in a variety of studies on a variety of topics. However, I still wonder if the increased knowledge of partisans allows them to see error and bias where the researchers and neutral respondents do not. This would invalidate

much of the hostile-media effect literature, which is predicated on neutral stimulus materials. As Perloff (2015, p. 705, emphasis added) writes, “there is consensus that the hostile-media effect involves divergent perceptions of neutral, balanced, and evenhanded media content, ... *although those terms are problematic in the sense that news is never perfectly neutral or objective.*”

Another limitation is that there was little evidence in support of the hypotheses that used the “actual comment” dependent variable, especially when compared to the “likelihood of commenting” dependent variable. There could be several reasons for this. One is simply that it may not have been clear to all respondents that they could comment on each story, and, conversely, it may not have been clear to all respondents that they did *not* have to comment on each story. In looking at the comments, some seemed like actual news comments, but others seemed more like respondents trying to show that they were taking the experiment seriously – which MechanicalTurk workers seek to demonstrate to ensure they are paid. I eliminated the most obvious of these comments, such as “I do not have any comment on this story,” coding that as “no comment.” However, I was reticent to make too many judgments about whether the comments left on the survey were actual reactions to the news stories, and that might have muted the results.

There was correlation between actually commenting on the data collection instrument, and a subject’s indication of how likely he or she would be to comment the story if encountered on an actual news platform. There was also correlation between the respondents’ response to the statement “I often comment on news stories” and actual comments left. Therefore, there is some indication that the “actual comment” measure is not totally bogus. However, given that the data collection instrument was not, in fact, an actual news web site, I believe the dependent variable that measures likelihood commenting is, in fact, more robust than the actual comment measure in

this study. Fortunately, it is with that second dependent variable that we find the stronger results.

Future Research

There are still several studies I could conduct based on this dataset, including a content analysis of the actual comments left, and more in-depth analysis of the sharing, liking, and disliking participatory behaviors. Additionally, I would like to further investigate this area with new studies in three broad areas: the hostile-media effect, complexity and newsworthiness, and commenting efficacy.

On the hostile-media effect, I would like to follow up with a study with longer and more in depth news stories. I would also like to include a debriefing with the respondents that would help determine whether the bias partisans find in the stories is a result of their involvement with the topic (i.e., partisanship or strength of position), or if they have used their greater knowledge of the topic to find actual problems with the story.

Additionally, I believe the construct “bias” is problematic and in of itself and worthy of further examination. Much of the hostile-media research fails to adequately define the concept, and the “bias in favor of one side, bias in favor of the other side,” scales utilized in much of the research are unidimensional. I have not seen my analysis of bias in relationship to fairness, balance, and accuracy (**Tables 9 and 10**) done elsewhere. The results are interesting, but raise more questions than they answer, in part because fairness emerges as the strongest predictor of perceived bias. To me, accuracy and balance are much easier to define. *Accuracy*, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is “correct in all details; exact” (OED², 2017, Online resource). *Balance*, meanwhile, is “an even distribution ... a situation in which different elements are equal or in the correct proportions” (OED³, 2017, Online resource). *Fair* is perhaps a bit vaguer with the Oxford English Dictionary offering, “treating people equally without favoritism or

discrimination” and “just or appropriate in the circumstances (OED⁴, 2017, Online Resource).

It is hard for me to see how something that is accurate and balanced is not also fair, as I see “treating people equally” an element of balance, and “just or appropriate” as an element of accuracy. So here again, I see some value in a hostile-media study that has a qualitative component to better understand and unpack what people mean by both bias and fairness.

Newsworthiness, meanwhile, seems to have a lot of promise as a variable in both hostile-media effect and third-person effect research. It also appears helpful in determining actual behaviors (i.e., commenting) in reaction perceived media influence. I would like to conduct subsequent studies where Shoemaker’s constructs are front and center to better delineate and discuss the relationship between her variables, evaluations of newsworthiness in general, perceptual phenomena such as hostile-media and third-person effects, and resulting behaviors such as commenting.

In the present study, I believe that I have coined the phrase “commenting efficacy.” A Google Scholar search performed on March 1, 2017, with the search terms “‘commenting self-efficacy’ or ‘commenting efficacy’” did not return any results. This is surprising given several efforts to explore the characteristics of participatory news consumption that have looked at things such as social-economic status, the uses and gratifications of commenting, and other factors. That some people think they can influence a conversation, while others doubt their ability to do so, could well prove a key factor in participatory news behaviors. I will certainly explore this further.

As for promotional behaviors, there is some evidence in this data alone (see **Table 6**, bivariate relationships, for instance) that shows a connection between favorable opinions of a news story and a likelihood of sharing and liking that story. I need to develop a better theoretical

basis for examining such variables than I have in this study, and pay more attention to how I measure those constructs. Doing so in the near future is certainly part of my research agenda.

Appendix I

Questionnaire

Informed Consent

My name is Greg Munno, a Ph.D. Candidate at the Newhouse School of Syracuse University. I am interested in learning more about how people evaluate news stories about gun policy.

To help with this research, I invite you to fill out the following survey. It will ask you for demographic information such as your age, as well as your stance of gun policy issues. You will also be asked to read and evaluate three short news stories about gun policy.

In total these tasks should take approximately 20 minutes. Involvement in the study is voluntary. This means you can choose whether to participate and that you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. It is my intention to keep individual participants' survey answers anonymous. We will not be asking for your name or email address, and we will only be analyzing and reporting the results of the survey in aggregate. Individual responses will not be reported.

However, please note that whenever one works with email or on the Internet, there is always the risk of compromising privacy, confidentiality, and/or anonymity. Your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology being used. It is important for you to understand that no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet by third parties.

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about the research, please contact me at gjmunno@syr.edu. If you rather speak with my faculty adviser, she can be reached at snowprof@syr.edu. You may also address any concerns to the Syracuse Institutional Review Board at orip@syr.edu.

By selecting "Yes" below and continuing with the survey, you are (1) certifying that you are 18 years old or older, (2) are a citizen of the United States, (3) that you have read and understand the above informed consent letter, and that (4) you are agreeing to participate in this research study.

- YES, I am at least 18 years old, a citizen of the United States, I have read and understand the above informed consent form, and I wish to proceed with the survey. (1)

To start the survey, you'll answer just a few demographic questions so we can better understand the composition of the survey sample.

What is your gender?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Other (3) _____

How many years old are you?

Select the category that best describes you.

- White/Caucasian (1)
- African American (2)
- Hispanic (3)
- Asian (4)
- Native American (5)
- Pacific Islander (6)
- Other (7) _____

What is your household's approximate annual income:

Enter the two letter postal abbreviation without periods (such as NY for New York) for the state in which you live.

Now you'll answer a few questions on how you identify politically, on your opinion of the media, and on your stances on some elements of gun policy.

Political affiliation: Select the option that best describes you:

- Republican (1)
- Democrat (2)
- Other party such as Conservative or Green (3)
- Registered to vote but not enrolled in a party (4)
- Not registered to vote (5)
- Other (6) _____

Political orientation: Describe your political orientation by placing yourself on the following scale.

- Extremely Liberal (-5)
- Liberal +4 (-4)
- Liberal +3 (-3)
- Liberal +2 (-2)
- Liberal +1 (-1)
- Neither Conservative nor Liberal (0)
- Conservative +1 (1)
- Conservative +2 (2)
- Conservative +3 (3)
- Conservative +4 (4)
- Extremely Conservative (5)

On the following scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree, indicate your level of agreement on the following statements about gun policy:

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
I support the federal assault weapons ban. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Second Amendment guarantees the right to bear arms for individual, law-abiding Americans. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I support restrictions on ammunition purchases. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
We would all be safer if more law-abiding citizens carried guns. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am a strong supporter of gun rights. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am a strong supporter control. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gun policy is one of the most important issues facing America. (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements about the new media.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
The news is generally fair. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The news is generally accurate. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
News reports are generally balanced. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
News reports are generally biased toward one side or another. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
In general, I am good at articulating my position on issues. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am good at navigating news sites and can usually successfully share, like or comment on stories if that's my intent. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I often comment on the news stories I read. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I do comment on a news story, it affects the discussion about that story. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

In this next section of the survey, you will read three short news stories and answer questions about each story immediately after reading it.

Read the news story below. Comment on it if you would like. Then click next to answer a few questions about it.

WASHINGTON (AP) -- The battle over guns in America has taken a sudden turn with the unveiling of viable “smart gun” technology.

One state already has a law on the books that would ban all other handguns in favor of these new firearms.

The uproar ignited after the company Admix unveiled its iP1 pistol, which fires only when the user is wearing a watch that sends an electronic signal to the gun.

A New Jersey law states that once “at least one manufacturer has delivered at least one production model of a personalized handgun to a registered or licensed wholesale or retail dealer in New Jersey or any other state,” a process is set in motion that outlaws the sale of all other handguns in New Jersey within three years.

That has caused gun-rights advocates to mobilize, and to successfully pressure two gun stores, one in California and one in Maryland, to cancel plans for selling the gun. Gun-control advocates have said that the gun lobby is bullying gun-store owners to keep smart guns out of the marketplace and have been ramping up their own lobbying efforts. They say smart guns would reduce accidental shootings involving children, would prevent guns from being used against their owners and would hamper illegal firearms sales.

Gun-rights advocates, meanwhile, question the reliability of the technology, and see it as impractical and potentially dangerous for home defense. They also see the tie between smart-guns and efforts to limit the sale of other guns as an infringement on their Second Amendment rights, and as part of a larger government effort to disarm Americans.

Comment:

Using the scale provided, indicate your level of agreement with the following statements about the story you just read.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
If I encountered this article on an actual news web site, I would comment on it. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I encountered this article on an actual news web site, I would “like” it or give it a “thumbs up.” (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I encountered this article on an actual news web site, I would give it a thumbs down. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

<p>If I encountered this article on an actual news web site, I would share it by emailing it to friends or colleagues or by posting it to a social network site like Facebook or Twitter. (4)</p>	○	○	○	○	○
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Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
The story was fair. (1)	○	○	○	○	○
The story was balanced. (2)	○	○	○	○	○
The story was accurate. (3)	○	○	○	○	○

Was the story biased in favor of either gun rights or control control? Please use the following scale to indicate how biased you think the story is, and in favor of which side. The further to the left of center your answer, the more biased you think the story is in favor of gun-CONTROL

advocates and positions. The further to the right of center you select, you are indicating that you found the story more favorable to gun-RIGHTS advocates and positions.

- Extremely biased in favor of GUN CONTROL (-5)
- Favorable toward GUN CONTROL +3 (-4)
- Favorable toward GUN CONTROL +2 (-3)
- Favorable toward GUN CONTROL +1 (-2)
- Favorable toward GUN CONTROL (-1)
- NOT BIASED toward either position (0)
- Favorable toward GUN RIGHTS (1)
- Favorable toward GUN RIGHTS +1 (2)
- Favorable toward GUN RIGHTS +2 (3)
- Favorable toward GUN RIGHTS +3 (4)
- Extremely biased in favor of GUN RIGHTS (5)

If this story were published on actual news sites, how much influence do you think it would have on you and the broader audience? Indicate your answer on the scale provided.

	No influence at all (1)	A little influence (2)	Moderate influence (3)	Significant influence (4)	Extreme influence (5)
How much would it influence YOU? (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How much do you think it would influence the average American? (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Just a few more questions about this story! Indicate your level of agreement with each sentence using the scale provided.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
The story is newsworthy. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The story makes me think that, for better or worse, change is coming to our nation's gun laws. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I find the behavior or positions described in this story to violate social norms and rules that we should follow. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The story contains information that is usual or novel. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The story has implications for the public's well-being. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The story has implications for America's culture. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The story has implications for America's economy. (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The story has implications for American politics. (8)	○	○	○	○	○
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Read the news story below. Comment on it if you would like. Then click next to answer a few questions about it.

WASHINGTON (AP) -- The reasons Americans give for owning guns are changing, and that could have big implications for gun policy in America.

About half (48%) of gun owners said the main reason they owned a gun was for protection, according a new report by the Pew Research Center. About 32 percent said they owned a gun for hunting. Other reasons given included target shooting (7%) and collecting (2%).

This is a dramatically different finding than a 1999 survey that found 49 percent said they owned a gun for hunting, while 26 percent said they had a gun for protection.

The poll also found that gun supporters are more politically engaged than gun opponents, which also has significant consequences for public policy.

A quarter of those who prioritized gun rights said they had, at some point, contributed money to an organization that took a position on the issue, compared with 6 percent of gun control supporters.

There was less of a gap on other activities, such as contacting public officials or expressing opinions on social media. But when all those activities were combined, gun rights proponents outnumbered gun control supporters by 45 percent to 26 percent when it came to those who said they were involved in one or more instances of activism.

Thirty-seven percent of adults reported having a gun in their household, with 24 percent saying they personally owned the gun and 13 percent saying it was owned by someone else in their home.

The survey also found that 58 percent of people who did not have a gun in their household said that having a gun would make them feel uncomfortable.

Pew released the report, "5 facts about the NRA and guns in America," on the eve of the National Rifle Association's annual meeting. It is based on a May 2014 poll.

Comment:

Using the scale provided, indicate your level of agreement with the following statements about the story you just read.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
If I encountered this article on an actual news web site, I would comment on it. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I encountered this article on an actual news web site, I would “like” it or give it a “thumbs up.” (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I encountered this article on an actual news web site, I would give it a thumbs down. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

<p>If I encountered this article on an actual news web site, I would share it by emailing it to friends or colleagues or by posting it to a social network site like Facebook or Twitter. (4)</p>	○	○	○	○	○
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Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
The story was fair. (1)	○	○	○	○	○
The story was balanced. (2)	○	○	○	○	○
The story was accurate. (3)	○	○	○	○	○

Was the story biased in favor of either gun control or control rights? Please use the following scale to indicate how biased you think the story is, and in favor of which side. The further to the left of center you select, you are indicating that you found the story more favorable to gun-

CONTROL advocates and positions. The further to the right of center you select, you are indicating that you found the story more favorable to gun-RIGHTS advocates and positions.

- Extremely biased in favor of GUN CONTROL (-5)
- Favorable toward GUN CONTROL +3 (-4)
- Favorable toward GUN CONTROL +2 (-3)
- Favorable toward GUN CONTROL +1 (-2)
- Favorable toward GUN CONTROL (-1)
- NOT BIASED toward either position (0)
- Favorable toward GUN RIGHTS (1)
- Favorable toward GUN RIGHTS +1 (2)
- Favorable toward GUN RIGHTS +2 (3)
- Favorable toward GUN RIGHTS +3 (4)
- Extremely biased in favor of GUN RIGHTS (5)

If this story were published on actual news sites, how much influence do you think it would have on you and the broader audience? Indicate your answer on the scale provided.

	No influence at all (1)	A little influence (2)	Moderate influence (3)	Significant influence (4)	Extreme influence (5)
How much would it influence YOU? (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How much do you think it would influence the average American? (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Just a few more questions about this story! Indicate your level of agreement with each sentence using the scale provided.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
The story is newsworthy. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The story makes me think that, for better or worse, change is coming to our nation's gun laws. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I find the behavior or positions described in this story to violate social norms and rules that we should follow. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The story contains information that is usual or novel. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The story has implications for the public's well-being. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The story has implications for America's culture. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The story has implications for America's economy. (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The story has implications for American politics. (8)	<input type="radio"/>				
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Read the news story below. Comment on it if you would like. Then click next to answer a few questions about it.

WASHINGTON (AP) -- Billionaire former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg has pledged \$50 million to a new campaign to establish universal background checks for all would-be gun buyers.

The campaign is the focus of a potentially powerful new coalition of gun-control advocates called Everytown for Gun Safety, which combines the efforts of Mayors Against Illegal Guns and Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America, a grassroots movement founded the day after the 2012 mass shooting in Newtown, Conn.

Gun-rights advocates say that universal background checks would be purposeless and unnecessary intrusion into every American's Second Amendment rights.

"Universal background checks are background checks on every transfer, sale, purchase, trade, gift, rental, and loan of a firearm between any and all individuals," said Marion P. Hammer, executive director of Florida Sportsmen United and a past-president of the National Rifle Association. "Imagine a grandfather who wants to give a family shotgun to his 12-year-old grandson having to do a background check on his grandson before giving him the shotgun. Or a friend having to do a background check on his lifetime best buddy before lending him a hunting rifle. That's what 'universal background checks' do. They turn traditional innocent conduct into a criminal offense."

Bloomberg said the new Everytown for Gun Safety will take a page out of the playbook of the NRA itself by holding public officials accountable for their stance on gun-related issues.

"This is the beginning of a major new campaign to reduce the gun violence that plagues communities across the country," said Bloomberg, chairman of Everytown for Gun Safety. "There is no question that more needs to be done to tackle this deadly problem, and that's why more than 1.5 million Americans, nearly 1000 mayors and moms in all 50 states have already come together to fight for common-sense reform that will respect rights and save lives."

Mayors Against Illegal Guns and Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America have been working together since December.

Comment:

Using the scale provided, indicate your level of agreement with the following statements about the story you just read.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
If I encountered this article on an actual news web site, I would comment on it. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I encountered this article on an actual news web site, I would "like" it or give it a "thumbs up." (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I encountered this article on an actual news web site, I would give it a thumbs down. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

<p>If I encountered this article on an actual news web site, I would share it by emailing it to friends or colleagues or by posting it to a social network site like Facebook or Twitter. (4)</p>	○	○	○	○	○
---	---	---	---	---	---

Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
The story was fair. (1)	○	○	○	○	○
The story was balanced. (2)	○	○	○	○	○
The story was accurate. (3)	○	○	○	○	○

Was the story biased in favor of either gun control or control rights? Please use the following scale to indicate how biased you think the story is, and in favor of which side. The further to the left of center you select, you are indicating that you found the story more favorable to gun-

CONTROL advocates and positions. The further to the right of center you select, you are indicating that you found the story more favorable to gun-RIGHTS advocates and positions.

- Extremely biased in favor of GUN CONTROL (-5)
- Favorable toward GUN CONTROL +3 (-4)
- Favorable toward GUN CONTROL +2 (-3)
- Favorable toward GUN CONTROL +1 (-2)
- Favorable toward GUN CONTROL (-1)
- NOT BIASED toward either position (0)
- Favorable toward GUN RIGHTS (1)
- Favorable toward GUN RIGHTS +1 (2)
- Favorable toward GUN RIGHTS +2 (3)
- Favorable toward GUN RIGHTS +3 (4)
- Extremely biased in favor of GUN RIGHTS (5)

If this story were published on actual news sites, how much influence do you think it would have on you and the broader audience? Indicate your answer on the scale provided.

	No influence at all (1)	A little influence (2)	Moderate influence (3)	Significant influence (4)	Extreme influence (5)
How much would it influence YOU? (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How much do you think it would influence the average American? (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Just a few more questions about this story! Indicate your level of agreement with each sentence using the scale provided.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
The story is newsworthy. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The story makes me think that, for better or worse, change is coming to our nation's gun laws. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I find the behavior or positions described in this story to violate social norms and rules that we should follow. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The story contains information that is usual or novel. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The story has implications for the public's well-being. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The story has implications for America's culture. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The story has implications for America's economy. (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The story has implications for American politics. (8)	○	○	○	○	○
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Read the news story below. Comment on it if you would like. Then click next to answer a few questions about it.

WASHINGTON (AP) -- “Smart-gun” technology has become part of the discussion in the ongoing effort to balance gun-rights and gun-control in American public policy.

The company Artimix has introduced the iP1 pistol, which fires only when the user is wearing a watch that sends an electronic signal to the gun.

A New Jersey law states that once “at least one manufacturer has delivered at least one production model of a personalized handgun to a registered or licensed wholesale or retail dealer in New Jersey or any other state,” a process is set in motion that outlaws the sale of other handguns in New Jersey within three years.

Two gun stores, one in California and one in Maryland, planned to sell the guns. Both decided not to after concerns were raised by gun-rights advocates.

Gun-control proponents have said that the gun lobby is trying to keep smart guns out of the marketplace and have begun their own lobbying efforts. They say smart guns would reduce accidental shootings involving children, would prevent guns from being used against their owners and would hamper illegal firearms sales.

Gun-rights advocates, meanwhile, question the reliability of the technology, and see it as impractical and potentially dangerous for home defense. They also see the tie between the smart-guns and efforts to limit the sale of other guns as an infringement on their Second Amendment rights and as part of a larger government effort to disarm Americans.

Comment:

Using the scale provided, indicate your level of agreement with the following statements about the story you just read.	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
If I encountered this article on an actual news web site, I would comment on it. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I encountered this article on an actual news web site, I would “like” it or give it a “thumbs up.” (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I encountered this article on an actual news web site, I would give it a thumbs down. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

<p>If I encountered this article on an actual news web site, I would share it by emailing it to friends or colleagues or by posting it to a social network site like Facebook or Twitter. (4)</p>	○	○	○	○	○
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Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
The story was fair. (1)	○	○	○	○	○
The story was balanced. (2)	○	○	○	○	○
The story was accurate. (3)	○	○	○	○	○

Was the story biased in favor of either gun control or control rights? Please use the following scale to indicate how biased you think the story is, and in favor of which side. The further to the left of center you select, you are indicating that you found the story more favorable to gun-

CONTROL advocates and positions. The further to the right of center you select, you are indicating that you found the story more favorable to gun-RIGHTS advocates and positions.

- Extremely biased in favor of GUN CONTROL (-5)
- Favorable toward GUN CONTROL +3 (-4)
- Favorable toward GUN CONTROL +2 (-3)
- Favorable toward GUN CONTROL +1 (-2)
- Favorable toward GUN CONTROL (-1)
- NOT BIASED toward either position (0)
- Favorable toward GUN RIGHTS (1)
- Favorable toward GUN RIGHTS +1 (2)
- Favorable toward GUN RIGHTS +2 (3)
- Favorable toward GUN RIGHTS +3 (4)
- Extremely biased in favor of GUN RIGHTS (5)

If this story were published on actual news sites, how much influence do you think it would have on you and the broader audience? Indicate your answer on the scale provided.

	No influence at all (1)	A little influence (2)	Moderate influence (3)	Significant influence (4)	Extreme influence (5)
How much would it influence YOU? (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How much do you think it would influence the average American? (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Just a few more questions about this story! Indicate your level of agreement with each sentence using the scale provided.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
The story is newsworthy. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The story makes me think that, for better or worse, change is coming to our nation's gun laws. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I find the behavior or positions described in this story to violate social norms and rules that we should follow. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The story contains information that is usual or novel. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The story has implications for the public's well-being. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The story has implications for America's culture. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The story has implications for America's economy. (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The story has implications for American politics. (8)	<input type="radio"/>				
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Read the news story below. Comment on it if you would like. Then click next to answer a few questions about it.

WASHINGTON (AP) -- On the eve of the National Rifle Association's annual meeting, the Pew Research Center has released "5 facts about the NRA and guns in America," based on a 2014 poll.

Thirty-seven percent of adults reported having a gun in their household, with 24 percent saying they personally owned the gun and 13 percent saying it was owned by someone else in their home.

The survey also found that 58 percent of people who did not have a gun in their household said that having a gun would make them feel uncomfortable. The reasons Americans give for owning guns are changing.

About half (48%) of gun owners said the main reason they owned a gun was for protection, according to Pew. About 32 percent said they owned a gun for hunting. Other reasons given included target shooting (7%) and collecting (2%).

A 1999 survey that found 49 percent said they owned a gun for hunting, while 26 percent said they had a gun for protection.

The poll also found that gun supporters are more politically engaged than gun opponents, which also has significant consequences for public policy.

A quarter of those who prioritized gun rights said they had, at some point, contributed money to an organization that took a position on the issue, compared with 6 percent of gun control supporters.

There was less of a gap on other activities, such as contacting public officials or expressing opinions on social media. But when all those activities were combined, gun-rights proponents outnumbered gun-control supporters by 45 percent to 26 percent when it came to those who said they were involved in one or more instances of activism.

Comment:

Using the scale provided, indicate your level of agreement with the following statements about the story you just read.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
If I encountered this article on an actual news web site, I would comment on it. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I encountered this article on an actual news web site, I would “like” it or give it a “thumbs up.” (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I encountered this article on an actual news web site, I would give it a thumbs down. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

If I encountered this article on an actual news web site, I would share it by emailing it to friends or colleagues or by posting it to a social network site like Facebook or Twitter. (4)	○	○	○	○	○
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Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
The story was fair. (1)	○	○	○	○	○
The story was balanced. (2)	○	○	○	○	○
The story was accurate. (3)	○	○	○	○	○

Was the story biased in favor of either gun control or control rights? Please use the following scale to indicate how biased you think the story is, and in favor of which side. The further to the left of center you select, you are indicating that you found the story more favorable to gun-

CONTROL advocates and positions. The further to the right of center you select, you are indicating that you found the story more favorable to gun-RIGHTS advocates and positions.

- Extremely biased in favor of GUN CONTROL (-5)
- Favorable toward GUN CONTROL +3 (-4)
- Favorable toward GUN CONTROL +2 (-3)
- Favorable toward GUN CONTROL +1 (-2)
- Favorable toward GUN CONTROL (-1)
- NOT BIASED toward either position (0)
- Favorable toward GUN RIGHTS (1)
- Favorable toward GUN RIGHTS +1 (2)
- Favorable toward GUN RIGHTS +2 (3)
- Favorable toward GUN RIGHTS +3 (4)
- Extremely biased in favor of GUN RIGHTS (5)

If this story were published on actual news sites, how much influence do you think it would have on you and the broader audience? Indicate your answer on the scale provided.

	No influence at all (1)	A little influence (2)	Moderate influence (3)	Significant influence (4)	Extreme influence (5)
How much would it influence YOU? (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How much do you think it would influence the average American? (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Just a few more questions about this story! Indicate your level of agreement with each sentence using the scale provided.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
The story is newsworthy. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The story makes me think that, for better or worse, change is coming to our nation's gun laws. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I find the behavior or positions described in this story to violate social norms and rules that we should follow. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The story contains information that is usual or novel. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The story has implications for the public's well-being. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The story has implications for America's culture. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The story has implications for America's economy. (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The story has implications for American politics. (8)	○	○	○	○	○
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Read the news story below. Comment on it if you would like. Then click next to answer a few questions about it.

WASHINGTON (AP) -- Mayors Against Illegal Guns and Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America have formed a new coalition, Everytown for Gun Safety.

The two groups have been working informally together since December. Former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg will be chairman of the new group, which will focus on creating universal background checks.

Gun-rights advocates say that universal background checks would be purposeless and unnecessary intrusion into every American's Second Amendment rights.

"Universal background checks are background checks on every transfer, sale, purchase, trade, gift, rental, and loan of a firearm between any and all individuals," said Marion P. Hammer, executive director of Florida Sportsmen United and a past-president of the National Rifle Association. "Imagine a grandfather who wants to give a family shotgun to his 12-year-old grandson having to do a background check on his grandson before giving him the shotgun. Or a friend having to do a background check on his lifetime best buddy before lending him a hunting rifle. That's what 'universal background checks' do. They turn traditional innocent conduct into a criminal offense."

Bloomberg said Everytown for Gun Safety will take a page out of the playbook of the NRA itself by holding public officials accountable for their stance on gun-related issues.

"This is the beginning of a campaign to reduce the gun violence that plagues communities across the country," said Bloomberg, a billionaire who has pledged \$50 million to the campaign. "There is no question that more needs to be done to tackle this deadly problem, and that's why more than 1.5 million Americans, nearly 1000 mayors and moms in all 50 states have already come together to fight for common-sense reform that will respect rights and save lives."

Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America is a grassroots movement founded the day after the 2012 mass shooting in Newtown, Conn.

Comment:

Using the scale provided, indicate your level of agreement with the following statements about the story you just read.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
If I encountered this article on an actual news web site, I would comment on it. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I encountered this article on an actual news web site, I would "like" it or give it a "thumbs up." (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I encountered this article on an actual news web site, I would give it a thumbs down. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

<p>If I encountered this article on an actual news web site, I would share it by emailing it to friends or colleagues or by posting it to a social network site like Facebook or Twitter. (4)</p>	○	○	○	○	○
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Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
The story was fair. (1)	○	○	○	○	○
The story was balanced. (2)	○	○	○	○	○
The story was accurate. (3)	○	○	○	○	○

Was the story biased in favor of either gun control or control rights? Please use the following scale to indicate how biased you think the story is, and in favor of which side. The further to the left of center you select, you are indicating that you found the story more favorable to gun-

CONTROL advocates and positions. The further to the right of center you select, you are indicating that you found the story more favorable to gun-RIGHTS advocates and positions.

- Extremely biased in favor of GUN CONTROL (-5)
- Favorable toward GUN CONTROL +3 (-4)
- Favorable toward GUN CONTROL +2 (-3)
- Favorable toward GUN CONTROL +1 (-2)
- Favorable toward GUN CONTROL (-1)
- NOT BIASED toward either position (0)
- Favorable toward GUN RIGHTS (1)
- Favorable toward GUN RIGHTS +1 (2)
- Favorable toward GUN RIGHTS +2 (3)
- Favorable toward GUN RIGHTS +3 (4)
- Extremely biased in favor of GUN RIGHTS (5)

If this story were published on actual news sites, how much influence do you think it would have on you and the broader audience? Indicate your answer on the scale provided.

	No influence at all (1)	A little influence (2)	Moderate influence (3)	Significant influence (4)	Extreme influence (5)
How much would it influence YOU? (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How much do you think it would influence the average American? (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Just a few more questions about this story! Indicate your level of agreement with each sentence using the scale provided.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
The story is newsworthy. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The story makes me think that, for better or worse, change is coming to our nation's gun laws. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I find the behavior or positions described in this story to violate social norms and rules that we should follow. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The story contains information that is usual or novel. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The story has implications for the public's well-being. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The story has implications for America's culture. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The story has implications for America's economy. (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The story has implications for American politics. (8)	<input type="radio"/>				
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Almost done! We just have a few more questions about commenting, liking, and sharing digital news content.

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements using the scale provided.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
I comment on news stories to help other readers know the facts. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I comment on news stories because I like to be social online. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I comment on news stories to counter what other commentators are saying. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I comment on news stories to counter the bias in the story. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am MORE likely to share an article that I disagree with than one that I agree with. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I share articles when I think the information in them is important. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I share articles when I agree with the articles point of view. (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

<p>I give stories a “thumbs up” or click “like” because I want the author of the story to know I like it. (8)</p>	<input type="radio"/>				
<p>I give stories a “thumbs up” or click “like” because I want others in my social network to know I like it. (9)</p>	<input type="radio"/>				
<p>I give stories a “thumbs up” or click “like” only when I agree with the stories point of view. (10)</p>	<input type="radio"/>				
<p>I have never commented on a news story. (11)</p>	<input type="radio"/>				
<p>I have never shared a news story. (12)</p>	<input type="radio"/>				
<p>I have never “liked” a news story. (13)</p>	<input type="radio"/>				

Thank you very much for your participation. The validation code for MechanicalTurk will appear on the next screen. But first, If you would like to leave us any additional comments, please do so below.

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Vita

EDUCATION

Newhouse School, Syracuse University, August 2011 – present

- Ph.D. Candidate.
- Dissertation: *Readers' Perceptions of Newsworthiness and Bias as Factors in Participation with Digital News Content*.
- Adviser: Dr. Pamela Shoemaker
- Catherine L. Covert Research Award (Spring 2013)
- Editorial Assistant, *Communication Research* (May 2013 – June 2014)

Maxwell School, Syracuse University, January 2010 – December 2010

- Executive Master of Public Administration
- Certificate of Advanced Study in Conflict Resolution

Oberlin College, 1991 – 1995

- Bachelor of Arts, English
- Editor-in-Chief, *The Oberlin Review*

MAJOR EMPLOYMENT

Newhouse School of Syracuse University, August 2015 – present

- *Assistant Professor* (non-tenure track) in Newspaper & Online Journalism. Teach a 3-3 that has included Web Journalism & Innovation (ICC 505), Cross Media & Digital News Writing (MAG-BDJ 200), News Writing (NEW 205), and News Reporting (NEW 305).
- *Course Developer and Lead Instructor* for Data-Driven Journalism (MNO 612) for Newhouse's Communications@Syracuse online master's program.
- For the eight completed courses, average teacher-evaluation scores range from 4.06 to 4.88 (out of 5), with five classes over 4.5.
- Final project for Web Journalism & Innovation (co-taught with Jon Glass) won AEJMC's 2016 Best of Digital Award.

Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse, Syracuse University, June 2014 – July 2015

- *Research Assistant Professor*. Responsibilities included FOIA submissions, data analysis, report and article writing, user engagement, FOIA Project blog manager, FOIA Project social media manager, and grant writing.
- Worked on successful grants to the Four Freedom Funds, the CS Fund/Warsh-Mott Legacy Fund, and the Open Government Coalition.
- Presented TRAC immigration data to the Arizona State Legislature.
- Regularly collaborated on TRAC whitepapers that were the basis of hundreds of national news reports.
- Published in the *IRE Journal*, the American Association of Law Libraries' *Spectrum*, the Knight Foundation Innovation Blog, and the FOIA Project blog.

Greg Munno Consulting, 2009 – present

- Specialize in stakeholder and social media engagement, social media policies and strategies, and digital-content production.
- *Lead trainer*, New York Community Action Leadership Retreat (2016) on interest-based problem solving.
- *Communications Consultant*, Herkimer County Public Health Department Rebranding (2014-2015). Assisted Dr. Thomas Dennison in auditing the department's communication materials and building a rebranding campaign and strategy.
- *Project Manager*, ABC Cayuga Early Childhood Development and Learning Initiative (2012-2014). Multifaceted project funded by the Allyn Foundation. Developed and analyzed a survey of Cayuga County residents, managed a coalition of health and education partners, and designed and launched a website and social media campaign.
- *Social Media Consultant*, Learner Center for Public Health Promotion (2012). Wrote social media policies, developed content and trained student producers.
- *Process Evaluator*, Jefferson Center for New Democratic Processes' Reclaim November Ohio Citizen Jury (2012).

- *Social Media Manager*. Ice House Hotel and Camels Garden Hotel (2010 – 2012). Built followers and launched targeted ad campaigns on Facebook for two luxury hotels in Telluride, Colorado.

Syracuse University, various positions, 2010 – June 2014

- *Editorial Assistant* to Dr. Pamela Shoemaker and *Communication Research* (June 2013 – June 2014): Primary liaison between Dr. Shoemaker and the authors and reviewers for *CR*, which became the top-ranked communication journal during my tenure, moving up from 6th out of 72 to 1st during the year.
- *Teaching Assistant*: Lab instructor for Multimedia Storytelling (Fall 2011 & Spring 2012), teaching Final Cut Express, Adobe Photoshop, and videography.
- *Adjunct Professor*: Instructor of record for Intermediate Reporting (Fall 2007 & Spring 2008) and Interpersonal Conflict Resolution Skills (Fall 2010). Excellent reviews from students available upon request.
- *Awards*: Full tuition and stipend awards as a Graduate Assistant, Maxwell School (Spring & Fall 2010); Teaching Assistant, Newhouse School (Fall 2011 & Spring 2012); University Fellow, Newhouse School (Fall 2012 & Spring 2013); and Editorial Assistant (June 2013 – to June 2014). Catherine L. Covert Research Award (Spring 2013)

CNY Speaks Civic Engagement Initiative, 2007 to 2011

- Co-founded this award-winning, multifaceted project as the civic engagement editor at the Syracuse *Post-Standard* (see below) in collaboration with professors Dr. Tina Nabatchi and Dr. Grant Reeher at the Maxwell School of Syracuse University.
- Using community forums, surveys, a blog, and social media, the project collected the comments and insights from more than 10,000 residents on how to improve Syracuse, resulting in the publication of the *Citizens' Agenda for Downtown Syracuse*.
- Granted a \$100,000 Chancellor's Leadership Award (co-author).
- Won the 2009 New York State Associated Press Best Online Content Award.
- Administered the project for both the newspaper, and, after taking a buyout, directly for the Maxwell School.
- Produced dozens of articles and blog posts that stemmed from the project's community engagement efforts, exploring crime, economic development, sustainability, livability, governance, and other issues.
- Grant writing, partnership building, event organizing, and the training of graduate students to serve as facilitators at our public forums were all part of the job.

The Post-Standard / Syracuse.com, Syracuse, NY, 1996 – 2009

Civic Engagement Editor, 2007-2009

- Developed and directed CNY Speaks (see above).

Government Team Leader / Assistant City Editor for Government, 2009 & 2003-2004

- Edited and managed five reporters and served as the team representative at daily content meetings with senior editors. Beats supervised included federal government, state government, Syracuse city hall, and Onondaga County government.

Revenue Generation Team Leader, 2009

- Head of an inter-departmental team that created a business plan to increase readership and advertiser appeal of the paper's *Weekend* entertainment guide.

Additional Reporting and Editing Positions, 1996-2008

- Positions included Madison County Bureau Chief, Onondaga County government reporter, Syracuse City Hall reporter, and Cayuga County crime & courts reporter.
- Madison Edition circulation grew by 5 percent during my tenure as the office's bureau chief, a time when all other editions of the paper lost readers.

Awards

- Distinguished Business Reporting Award from the New York Publishers' Association and a First Place New York Associated Press Award, both for a story that exposed how slumlords hide behind limited liability corporation laws (2007).
- Other awards include a state AP Best Online Content Award (2009), and a share of an AP first-place prize for Spot News Reporting (2007).

PEER-REVIEWED PUBLICATIONS

- Liebler, C.M., Hatef, A., & Munno, G. (2016). Domestic violence as entertainment: Gender, role congruity and reality television. *Media Report to Women*, 44 (1), 6-11 & 18-19.
- Chung, M., Munno, G., and Moritz, B. (2015). Triggering participation: Exploring the effects of third-person and hostile media perceptions on online participation. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 53, 452-461.
- Munno, G., and Nabatchi, T. (2014). Public deliberation and co-production in the political and electoral arena: A citizens' jury approach. *Journal of Public Deliberation*, 10 (1).
- Golan, G., and Munno, G. (2014). The framing of Latin America in elite U.S. media: An analysis of editorials and op-eds. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 35(1).
- Nabatchi, T., and Munno, G. (2014). Deliberative civic engagement: Connecting public voices to public governance. In P. Levine and K. Soltan (eds.), *Civic Studies*. Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities, Bringing Theory to Practice Program.

PEER-REVIEWED RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS

- Munno, G., Chung, M., and Moritz, B. (2013). Triggering participation: An experimental test of third-person and hostile-media effects on online participation. At the American Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication 2013 annual conference, Washington, D.C.

- Munno, G. (2013). Constructive online comments. Presented in September at the International Society for the Scientific Study of Subjectivity (Q Methodology) annual conference, Amsterdam, Netherlands.
- Munno, G., and Nabatchi, T. (2013). Co-production in the political and electoral arena. Presented in May to the International Institute of Administrative Sciences Study Group on Co-Production of Government Services, The Hague, Netherlands.
- Moritz, B., and Munno, G. (2013). Testing the effects of framing on reader comments. Presented in June at the International Communication Association 2013 Conference, Journalism Studies Division, London, England.
- Golan, G., and Munno, G. (2012). The framing of Latin America in elite U.S. media: An analysis of editorials and op-eds. Presented at the World Association for Public Opinion Research Conference, Bogotá, Columbia. (Presented by Golan).
- Munno, G., and Song, S. (2011). Effects of existing comments on online news articles on subsequent comments. Presented at AEJMC Mid-Winter, 2012.

OTHER CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

- Moderated the panel in honor of Dr. Shoemaker winning the Paul J. Deutschmann Award for Excellence in Research at AEJMC 2015.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS UNDER REVIEW

- Munno, G., Perez, S., and Zarett, E. (2016). An examination of journalism students' judgments about news worthiness. Under review for International Communication Association's 2017 conference.
- Dr. Gina Chen has included me as a presenter on a panel she has proposed for ICA 2017 titled, "Reinvigorating Theory in Journalism Studies: Theorizing Social Media, Big Data, and Journalism."

TRAC RESEARCH REPORTS

TRAC reports are collaborative efforts, most of which do not carry bylines. Reports I played a significant role in producing include:

- Which Judges Juggle the Most Civil Cases? New TRAC Update Reveals Answers (10/23/2014, lead author)
- As Workloads Rise in Federal Court, Judge Counts Remain Flat (10/14/2014, co-author)
- New Data on Unaccompanied Children in Immigration Court (7/15/2014, editor)

FOIA PROJECT REPORTS

Served as lead author for TRAC on its FOIA Project site. Notable pieces include:

- Key Agencies Flub Simple FOIA Request (04/24/2015, lead author)
- Vote for the Worst FOIA Failure (03/11/2015, lead author)

- FOIA Suits Jump in 2014 (12/22/2014, also appeared in the Fall 2014 issue of *IRE Journal*)
- Bitter Dispute at Heart of FOIA Suits Against Army (11/ 20/2014, lead author)

CONTRACT RESEARCH

- Munno, G. (2012). Promoting early childhood development in Cayuga County: A baseline report to the Allyn Foundation. Included survey and focus group.
- Nabatchi, T., and Munno, G. (2012). Evaluating the *Reclaim November Ohio* Citizen Jury Process. A series of six pre- and post-tests of the participants in this intensive, multi-weekend process, along with analysis and a report to the Jefferson Center for New Democratic Processes.

GRANT AWARDS

- Four Freedom Funds (2015, \$150,000) for TRAC's Immigration Project. Co-author.
- CS Fund/Warsh-Mott Legacy Fund (2015, \$100,000) for the FOIA Project. Co-author.
- Chancellor's Leadership Award (2007, \$100,000) for CNY Speaks. Co- author.

SELECT INVITED PRESENTATIONS

- TRACing the Effects of US Immigration Policy, Big Data Day, Newhouse School, April 2015.
- Presentations on data journalism and entrepreneurial journalism at SUNY New Paltz, October 2014.
- TRAC's Immigration Detainer Data, a briefing to the Arizona State Legislature, March 2014.
- Civic Education and Leadership Fellows Program, Maxwell School, November 2011, November 2012, and May 2013 panel sessions.

TRAININGS/WORKSHOPS

- Lead trainer, *Interest-based Problem Solving*, for the Maxwell School's Conflict Management Center (CMC) and PARCC (May 2016).
- Lead trainer, *Interest-based Problem Solving*, for New York State Community Action Agency (May 2016).
- Lead trainer, *Active Listening*, for New York State Community Action Agency (May 2015).
- Lead trainer, *Interest-based Problem Solving*, for the Syracuse Leadership Institute, (September 2013).
- Lead trainer, *Facilitation 101: Basic Skills*, for the Maxwell School's Conflict Management Center (CMC) and PARCC (November 2012).

- Training co-leader, *Active Listing*, for CMC and PARCC (October 2012).
- Training assistant leader, *Facilitation 101*, for CMC, PARCC, and CNY Speaks (numerous, 2009-2011).

PROFESSIONAL FACILITATIONS (other than CNY Speaks)

- Lead Facilitator, East Suburbs Community Needs Meeting hosted by the YMCA (June 2016)
- Moderator, IGNITE City Council Candidate Forum (October 2013).
- Public forum on the Cayuga County Indicators Project for the United Way of Cayuga County (November 2012).
- Joint City-County legislative session on economic development and service consolidation, for the Office of the Cayuga County Administrator (December 2012).
- Auburn City Manager Engagement Project Forums, for the Auburn *Citizen* newspaper, (March-April 2011).

ACADEMIC SERVICE

- Empire State School Press Association (ESPPA), speaker on interviewing techniques, October 2016 and 2015.
- Edward R. Murrow Program for International Journalist, speaker on journalism and democracy, 2016 (upcoming), 2015 and 2014.
- Editor, Democracy in Action, Election Day 2016 (upcoming), 2015, 2014, 2013, 2012, and 2011.
- Mirror Awards Judge, April 2016.
- Active participant in the planning and execution of the Newspaper & Online Journalism Department's first Spring Workshop, April 2016.
- Member, Newhouse Doctoral Program Review Committee (Fall 2012).
- President, Newhouse Doctoral Association. Started the Newhouse Research Blog at newhousereseach.wordpress.com (2012-2013).
- Member, Science Communication Professor Search Committee (Spring 2013—Fall 2013).
- Reviewer, Environmental Communication Division, International Communication Association (December 2012 for ICA's 2013 Conference.)

COMMUNITY SERVICE (VOLUNTEER)

- Small-table facilitator, Onondaga Lake Watershed Visioning Session, for the Onondaga Lake Partnership (June 2012).
- Co-lead facilitator, Forum on Civil Discourse, for FOCUS Greater Syracuse (February 2011).
- Community Image Study Committee Member, Onondaga Citizens League (2010).

- Web support, Auburn Community Mosaic Project (2010).
- Green Study Committee Member, Onondaga Citizens League (2009).
- Facebook development and training, Hospice of the Finger Lakes (2009).
- 40 Below, co-founder (2004).

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIP

- International Communications Association
- Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication
- Investigative Reporters and Editors
- Online News Association

COMPUTER SKILLS

- SPSS, PQ Method, Excel, and Node XL for data analysis.
- Tableau for data visualization.
- Basic coding skills in HTML, R, MySQL, and SAS.
- WordPress, Movable Type, and Cascade content management systems, among others.
- Completed trainings on Tech Smith's Morae usability testing software and the Biopac physiological monitoring system.