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The relationship between passive and active non-political social media use and political expression on Facebook and Twitter

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ABSTRACT

Departing from the conventional approach that emphasizes civic and political motives for political engagement, this study investigates how political social media behaviors—political expression—might emerge out of everyday, non-political use of the sites from an interpersonal communication perspective. Using two separate adult samples of Facebook ($n = 727$) and Twitter users ($n = 663$), this study examines how non-political, passive (NPP, consuming non-political content) and non-political, active (NPA, producing non-political content) social media use relate to expression of political voice on the sites. Findings show that only NPA use is positively associated with increased political expression, and this relationship is partially explained by political efficacy. The patterns of findings are consistent across Facebook and Twitter.

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1. Introduction

From the Arab Spring and the Occupy Wall Street movement to the Facebook campaign that led to millions of people changing their Facebook profiles to support gay rights, social media such as Facebook and Twitter have become increasingly important platforms that enable users to express their views. Following these developments, substantial research has explored the ways in which informational or political uses of social media relate to political participation (e.g., Gil de Zúñiga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012). Current research suggests that expressing political views is an important pathway to political participation beyond the web (Gil de Zúñiga, Molyneux, & Zheng, 2014; Vaccari et al., 2015).

However, using social media for informational or political purposes is less widespread than coverage of social media's role in major political events might suggest. Recent Pew Research Center data shows that about 30% of US adults report getting news from Facebook, and that 78% of these individuals are exposed to that news only incidentally—meaning they are on social media for other reasons (Matsa & Michell, 2014). Most people use social media to gratify social needs and pursue entertainment interests, rather than to access news or to pursue political ends explicitly or deliberately (e.g., Glynn, Huge, & Hoffman, 2012). Yet, little is known about whether (and, if so, how) such everyday, non-political use of social media—that is, use characterized by personal-oriented entertainment and socializing activities—is related to political behaviors on such sites.

Alongside the rise of social media, a theoretical framework has emerged that posits that mundane, non-political practices on networked digital media platforms can cultivate civic bonds and collective identity, thus serving as the first step toward political engagement (Bakardjieva, 2009; Dahlgren, 2009). This study draws on this theoretical view and further distinguishes between non-political social media use that is "passive" (i.e., consuming content) versus "active" (i.e., producing content) based on prior work (Burke, Kraut, & Marlow, 2011; Burke, Marlow, & Lento, 2010) in order to understand how non-political activities relate to political behaviors on the sites. In particular, it is hypothesized that NPA (non-political, active) use that cultivates social bonds (Ellison, Vitak, Gray, & Lampe, 2014) may foster a sense of political efficacy among users, which, in turn, faciliates political expression when opportunities arise. Conversely, these interaction-based experiences may be absent from NPP (non-political, passive) use.

Overall, this study advances existing literature on social media and political engagement by: (1) categorizing social media use as either passive consumption or active production in order to examine *how* forms of non-political use relates to political expression on social media; (2) examining the possible intervening role of political efficacy in the relationship between NPA use and political expression, thus further specifying the possible pathway from non-political social media use to political engagement; and

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(3) using two separate adult samples of Facebook and Twitter users to identify consistent patterns of results across the two sites, which can help to advance theory building regarding the uses and effects of social media.

2. Theoretical relationships between non-political and political social media use: differentiating non-political social media use into passive and active forms

The advent of social media has coincided with an important shift in conceptualizations of citizenship, moving from a "contrast" model that sees the personal and the political as two separate domains (e.g., Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001), to an "extension" model that identifies forms of political engagement in the mundane activities of everyday life (e.g., Bakardjieva, 2009; Dahlgren, 2009). Over the past decade, one prominent line of research on digital democracy has employed a "uses and gratification" approach (Blumler & Katz, 1974), suggesting that using media to gather news information leads to political or civic participation, while recreational-oriented use has insignificant or even negative impacts on political or civic engagement (e.g., Shah et al., 2001). By distinguishing sharply between personal versus political uses, however, the contrast model risks overlooking the extent to which political engagement may arise from the non-political, interpersonal communication process.

The "extension" model, on the other hand, conceptualizes political life as an extended terrain of everyday life and argues that social media-enabled practices in the personal domain of interests can bring citizens into contact with the political realm (e.g., Loader & Mercea, 2011). Dahlgren (2009) proposes the idea of "civic cultures" to capture the ways in which networked communicative practices in casual cultural spaces foster a shared sense of civic identity, which becomes, in turn, a basis for formal institutionalized political participation. Echoing this view, Bakardjieva's (2009) notion of "subactivism" posits that mundane, personal online interactions can cultivate collective identity and provide a reservoir of civic energy that can be potentially transformed into public activism. In essence, these perspectives understand the political as deeply embedded in everyday social media use, suggesting that social media use for entertainment and personal interests may lead to political use of the sites.

Indeed, for most people, engaging in politics is an incidental experience and "it is their social life as communicators that is more central and important than their lives as citizens" (Eveland, Morey, & Hutchens, 2011, p. 1083). Thus, drawing on the extension model and interpersonal communication scholarship on social media (Burke et al., 2011, 2010; Ellison et al., 2014), this study differentiates non-political use into "passive" and "active" forms to advance our understanding of *how* non-political social media use is associated with political expression on the sites. Passive use involves consumption of content (e.g., viewing posts) without direct interactions of or exchanges among users, whereas active use refers to production of content (e.g., posting comments) that facilitates exchanges with others. Increasing evidence shows that the two forms of use lead to different outcomes; for example, in the case of studies looking at how social media use affects well-being, findings suggest that while active use facilitates well-being, passive use undermines it (e.g., Deters & Mehl, 2012; Verduyn et al., 2015).

The distinction between passive and active social media use can be mapped onto two theoretical paradigms, namely, reception- and expression-effect models in political communication research (Pingree, 2007). Reception-effect models address the effects of consuming media messages and are highly influential in political communication scholarship. However, because prior work often flattened passive and active non-political media use into the singular uniform category of "recreational use," relatively little is known about how *non-political, passive* media use (NPP; consuming non-political content), in particular, is associated with political outcomes.

Expression-effect models, on the other hand, emphasize the effects produced by expressing oneself—something that has been largely unexplored in the political communication literature (Pingree, 2007). Recently, scholars have begun to focus on generic active online media use (e.g., producing music videos) and found that such use is positively linked to political participation (e.g., Ekström & Östman, 2013; Östman, 2012). This line of research suggests that social media use that is not necessarily political in nature may, nonetheless, contribute to political engagement; still, it may be too soon to conclude that *non-political, active* (NPA; producing non-political content) use, in particular, contributes to political outcomes. Because the broad conceptualization and operationalization of active media use in prior work inevitably includes use that is both active *and* political, a focused investigation of how *non-political* active social media use relates to political outcomes is essential.

In the following sections, I draw on the interpersonal communication perspective to discuss how political expression may arise from NPA social media use and the possible intervening process underlying the relationships between NPA use and political expression across two of the most widely-used social media in the U.S., namely Facebook and Twitter (Duggan, Ellison, Lampe, Lenhart, & Madden, 2015).

3. NPP and NPA use and political expression on social media

3.1. Political expression on social media

Before discussing how NPP and NPA use relate to political expression on social media, it is essential to understand the role of political expression in political participation processes and how characteristics of social media may shape political expression therein. Prior work suggests that political expression—the act of expressing political beliefs—on social media is a precursor to other forms of political participation (e.g., Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2014). As social media allow expressed ideas to reach a wide audience instantly, political expression on social media can be intensified under certain circumstances, resulting in large-scale offline political participation (e.g., Bond et al., 2012).

However, people tend to be cautious about voicing their political views in their day-to-day use of social media like Facebook (Thorson, 2014) and Twitter (Jin, 2013). A recent Pew survey shows that 86% of US adults reported willingness to have in-person conversations about the US government's surveillance program, but only 42% of Facebook and Twitter users were willing to post information relevant to this issue on these platforms (Hampton et al., 2014). Impression management literature suggests that in order to achieve desired outcomes, people modify their self-presentation and actions depending on the social contexts (Goffman, 1959). Indeed, prior work has consistently shown that offline political talk is often bounded within a more closed and private context of intimate others because political expression tends to open up risks of disrupting social relationships, and revealing social identities (e.g., Conover, Searing, & Crewe, 2002; Gerber, Huber, Doherty, & Dowling, 2012). As social media like Facebook and Twitter constitute a collapsed context that combines both intimate and distant others in one place (Marwick & boyd, 2011), users may experience intensified concerns about political expression given the difficulty of determining the potential audience of the expressed messages and the possibility of misinterpretation as messages are re-shared and searched over time (boyd, 2011). Given these uncertainties,

typical social media users may be more careful about expressing themselves politically on these platforms than in offline contexts.

3.2. Direct relationship: NPA use and political expression on social media

Because individuals may be cautious about political expression on social media, NPA use may be both directly and indirectly associated with political expression on the sites, while NPP use may not, because certain experiences resulting from NPA use may be absent from NPP use. Regarding the direct relationship, it is possible that those who actively produce non-political information are more likely to voice their political views. As noted, political expression on such sites is considered a high-risk endeavor partly due to the uncertainty of audience and contexts for reception (Thorson, 2014), but as individuals frequently share personal information in this blurred sphere, the distinctions between public and private spheres may be less important to them (Flanagin, Flanagin, & Flanagin, 2010). One survey study shows that those who frequently engage in generic active Facebook use (e.g., posting status updates and uploading photos) perceive freedom of expression as more important and have less concerns about privacy (Swigger, 2012). Thus, despite the uncertainties of political expression on social media, those who actively produce non-political content may be less concerned about the private-to-public transition and become more likely to express their political opinions on the sites when opportunities arise. In contrast, frequent *consumption* alone of non-political information may not help relieve the concerns about political expression in the collapsed contexts. As a result, NPP use may not be significantly related to political expression on these sites. The following hypothesis is thus proposed:

H1. NPA use is positively associated with political expression on social media.

3.3. Indirect relationship: NPA use, political efficacy, and political expression on social media

NPA use may also have a more indirect link to political expression on social media. NPA use that often cultivates social bonds and positive psychological states may foster a sense of political efficacy—the feeling that individual actions can influence political processes (Campbell, Gurin, & Miller, 1954). As substantial research suggests that political efficacy is a significant predictor of political engagement (e.g., Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012; 2014; Kenski & Stroud, 2006), the increased sense of political efficacy may, in turn, contribute to political expression on social media. Indeed, in Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory, self-efficacy (or general self-efficacy) that describes individuals' beliefs about their abilities to produce designated levels of performance plays a major role in shaping subsequent behaviors. Importantly, Bandura (1997) specifies that past experiences and positive emotional states are sources of efficacious beliefs, providing two possible theoretical insights into how NPA social media use might facilitate the formation of, in particular, internal political efficacy—beliefs about one's own competence to understand and participate effectively in political life (Balch, 1974).

First, NPA social media use may allow individuals to acquire experiences of mobilizing resources, leading to increased efficacy perceptions. As social media lower the cost of engaging in relationship maintenance behaviors, non-political acts on social media, such as sending birthday wishes and "liking" shared content, often facilitate further interaction, trigger norms of reciprocity, and increase perceived access to social capital (Ellison et al., 2014). It is

possible that through frequent NPA use involving exercises of resource mobilization, individuals may gain a sense of efficacy, a belief that they have the personal power to utilize network resources to produce desired outcomes.

Second, positive psychological states resulting from NPA social media use may also increase perceived self-efficacy. Past work suggests that, independent of social interaction, expression itself (e.g., expressive writing) can promote psychological well-being (Pennebaker, 1993) and are intrinsically rewarding (Tamir & Mitchell, 2012). A field experimental study revealed that independent of direct responses from Facebook friends, those who were asked to post more status updates on Facebook than they usually did for a week experienced reduced loneliness, compared to participants who received no instructions (Deters & Mehl, 2012). As NPA use may lead to positive psychological states, such as positive affect, these positive states may, in turn, induce selective recall of past successes and increase efficacious beliefs.

The experiences of resource mobilization and positive psychological states resulting from NPA social media use may enhance personal beliefs that one can manage his/her life circumstances well, which may be extended to the political realm, increasing a sense of political efficacy. Importantly, as NPA use often involves interactions with others, collective identification—the dichotomy of a "we" and a "they"—may emerge through the practice of NPA use (Bakardjieva, 2009; Dahlgren, 2009), which may help, in turn, to transform personal efficacy into collective forms of efficacy. Indeed, social cognitive theory perceives efficacy in the private domain as the foundation of efficacy in the public domain, as research suggests that self-efficacy to manage aspects of one's every day life increases beliefs that one can help make desired social changes (Fernández-Ballesteros, Díez-Nicolás, Caprara, Barbaranelli, & Bandura, 2002). In line with these perspectives, there is evidence that frequency of generating and sharing content online is positively associated with both general self-efficacy and political efficacy (Leung, 2009). Thus, it is expected that through frequent NPA use, individuals may feel a higher sense of political efficacy and, in turn, increase their political expression on social media. In contrast, because interaction-based experiences and positive states may not be available through NPP use, NPP use may not be associated with political efficacy. Thus, I hypothesize:

H2. NPA use is positively associated with political efficacy, which contributes, in turn, to political expression on social media.

Finally, I address the lack of comparative research on forms of non-political social media use and political expression by studying two of the most widely-used social media among all U.S. adults, namely Facebook and Twitter. While the networking tool sets available on Facebook and Twitter were similar at the time of the study, the two sites may have their own cultures resulting from the interaction among their users and the specific features they offer (Pasek, more, & Romer, 2009). Facebook is a SNS that is primarily used to connect with existing offline friends (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2011). In contrast, Twitter is less about connecting to existing known friends and instead resembles an information-sharing network based on common interests (Kwak, Lee, Park, & Moon, 2010; Wu, Hofman, Mason, & Watts, 2011). Given the differences, it is important to explore the role of platforms in the relationships between forms of non-political social media use and political expression because such comparisons can help identify site-level effects and assess the robustness of the findings across different platforms. However, given the lack of comparative studies and theories on how political behaviors may differ across social media platforms, it is difficult to derive specific and theoretically grounded expectations on whether and how differences across these sites may shape the relationships between NPP and NPA use

and political expression. Thus, the following research question is posed:

RQ1. Are there significant differences across Facebook and Twitter in the strength and direction of the correlations between NPP and NPA use and political expression on the sites?

4. Methods

4.1. Sample

The online survey was conducted in August 2014, using a convenient sample of adult Americans (aged 18 years and older), recruited by Qualtrics. Participants were invited to participate in the study in exchange for payments via various methods, such as web-banners, website referrals, and email invitation. The sample was comprised of two groups of participants: 727 participants who completed Facebook-use questionnaires and 633 participants who completed Twitter-use questionnaires. The median age ($Mdn = 40$; $M = 43.28$; $SD = 16.74$) of the total sample was older than the median age of the U.S. population ($Mdn = 37.7$; U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). The proportion of women (Female $= 61.4\%$) and non-Hispanic Whites (non-Hispanic Whites $= 72.6\%$) in the total sample were all higher than the U.S. population (Female $= 50.8\%$; non-Hispanic White $= 62.1\%$; U.S. Census Bureau, 2014).

4.2. Measures

4.2.1. Predictor variables
4.2.1.1. Frequency of NPP Facebook and Twitter use. Two items comprised each of the indices asking how often Facebook and Twitter participants read two types of non-political content, namely, entertainment interests (e.g., sports, movies, food, or music) and personal life (e.g., work, school, relationships, or family). The response scale for the questions ranged from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very frequently*). Composite measures of frequency of NPP Facebook and Twitter use were created by summing passive use for two non-political topics, respectively (2 items, $\alpha_{Facebook} = .64$, $M_{Facebook} = 6.05$, $SD_{Facebook} = 1.89$; $\alpha_{Twitter} = .80$, $M_{Twitter} = 6.11$, $SD_{Twitter} = 2.30$).

4.2.1.2. Frequency of NPA Facebook and Twitter use. Six items comprised each of the indices asking to what extent Facebook and Twitter participants actively engage with two types of non-political content, namely, entertainment interests (e.g., sports, movies, food, or music) and personal life (e.g., work, school, relationships, or family). For Facebook participants, three modes of active use, including "liking," "commenting on," and "posting or sharing," were asked in loops in reference to entertainment interest and personal life. Similarly, Twitter participants answered three modes of active use, including "favoriting," "@replying," and "tweeting or retweeting," in loops in reference to two topics. The response scale ranged from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very frequently*). Composite measures of frequency of NPA Facebook and Twitter use were created by summing three modes of active use for two non-political topics, respectively (6 items, $\alpha_{Facebook} = .91$, $M_{Facebook} = 16.92$, $SD_{Facebook} = 5.49$; $\alpha_{Twitter} = .94$, $M_{Twitter} = 16.72$, $SD_{Twitter} = 6.56$).

4.2.2. Outcome variable
4.2.2.1. Frequency of political expression on Facebook and Twitter. Four items comprised each of the indices asking how often Facebook and Twitter participants expressed opinions about political and social related topics (e.g., elections, government, human rights, or economics). For Facebook participants, four modes of active use, including "changing profile photos," "liking," "commenting on,"

and "posting or sharing" were asked in loops in reference to political and social issues. Similarly, Twitter participants answered four modes of active use, including "changing profile photos," "favoriting," "@replying," and "tweeting or retweeting," in loops in reference to political and social related topics. The response scale ranged from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very frequently*). Composite measures were created by summing four types of political expression, respectively (4 items, $\alpha_{Facebook} = .92$, $M_{Facebook} = 8.91$, $SD_{Facebook} = 4.11$; $\alpha_{Twitter} = .94$, $M_{Twitter} = 9.25$, $SD_{Twitter} = 4.56$).

4.2.2.2. Internal political efficacy. Prior work suggests that some items used to measure internal efficacy, such as "people like me don't have any say about what the government does" may be problematic because they may capture both internal and external political efficacy (see Morrell, 2003). Thus, some scholars (e.g., Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2014) have used a single-item measure, such as "people like me can influence the government." Following the second approach, respondents were asked, "How much do you think that people like you can influence decisions made by government officials?" on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*a great deal*) (1 item, $M_{Facebook} = 2.53$, $SD_{Facebook} = 1.11$; $M_{Twitter} = 2.68$, $SD_{Twitter} = 1.11$).

4.2.3. Control variables
4.2.3.1. News media use. As prior work has identified that news use has a positive effect on political engagement (e.g., Shah et al., 2001), this variable is included in the models as a control. Measures of news media use were adopted from Lee, Shah, and McLeod (2012). Respondents were asked to rate on a 8-point scale ranging from 0 (*0 days*) to 7 (*7 days*) how many days in the past week they consumed media content, such as "a print copy of a local newspaper" or "national nightly news on CBS, ABC, or NBC." The items were combined into an additive index (8 items, $\alpha_{Facebook} = .80$, $M_{Facebook} = 15.48$, $SD_{Facebook} = 11.81$; $\alpha_{Twitter} = .86$, $M_{Twitter} = 18.76$, $SD_{Twitter} = 14.01$).

4.2.3.2. Frequency of political information exposure on Facebook and Twitter. This study also controls for the effects of frequency of political information exposure on social media as prior work demonstrates that it has a positive effect on political expression (e.g., Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2014). To assess Facebook and Twitter users' exposure to political information on social media, they were asked to rate on a five-point scale (1 = *never*, 5 = *very frequently*) how often they read content about political and social related topics (e.g., elections, government, human rights, or economics) on Facebook and Twitter, respectively (1 item, $M_{Facebook} = 2.66$, $SD_{Facebook} = 1.17$; $M_{Twitter} = 2.70$, $SD_{Twitter} = 1.26$).

4.2.3.3. Facebook and Twitter network size. As prior work suggests that network size of social media is related to political expression (e.g., Jang, Lee, & Park, 2014), this study controls for the effects of network size to isolate potential confounding effects. Following Ellison et al. (2011), Facebook users were asked to provide an estimate of how many total Facebook friends they have, while Twitter users were asked to estimate their followers and followings (users that they follow) in an open-ended fashion. Twitter network size was calculated by summing the number of followers ($M_{Twitter} = 216.94$, $SD_{Twitter} = 870.19$) and followings ($M_{Twitter} = 175.79$, $SD_{Twitter} = 428.85$). As could be expected, the distribution of Facebook and Twitter network size was skewed ($M_{Facebook} = 199.78$, $SD_{Facebook} = 358.15$, Skewness$_{Facebook} = 7.34$; $M_{Twitter} = 396.80$, $SD_{Twitter} = 1146.93$, Skewness$_{Twitter} = 6.60$), so the measures were transformed using the natural logarithm ($M_{Facebook} = 1.93$, $SD_{Facebook} = .63$, Skewness$_{Facebook} = -.52$; $M_{Twitter} = 1.98$, $SD_{Twitter} = .73$, Skewness$_{Twitter} = .15$).

4.2.3.4. Political interest. This study controls for the influence of political interest on political expression on social media because this construct is predictive of political participation. To assess political interest, respondents were asked, "how much interest do you have in politics," ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*a great deal*) (1 item, $M_{Facebook} = 3.09$, $SD_{Facebook} = 1.17$; $M_{Twitter} = 3.17$, $SD_{Twitter} = 1.20$).

4.2.3.5. Demographics. Demographic variables, including age ($M_{Facebook} = 43.09$, $SD_{Facebook} = 16.66$; $M_{Twitter} = 40.19$, $SD_{Twitter} = 15.76$), gender (Facebook: 36% males; Twitter: 42% males), race (77% White$_{Facebook}$; 69% White$_{Twitter}$), education ($Mdn_{Facebook} =$ some college; $Mdn_{Twitter} =$ some college), and income ($Mdn_{Facebook} = \$50,000$ to $\$69,999$; $Mdn_{Twitter} = \$50,000$ to $\$69,999$) were included to control for potential confounding effects, because prior work shows that these demographic variables are predictive of political engagement (e.g., Brady, Verba, & Schlozman, 1995).

4.3. Statistical analysis

Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression was employed to address the proposed hypotheses and research question. Path analysis was conducted to investigate whether political efficacy mediates the relationship between NPA social media use and expression of political views on Facebook and Twitter, using AMOS 21. To investigate how the hypothesized associations differ across the two social media platforms, the datasets were combined. Then, a dummy variable indicating the two social media platforms and interaction terms between the dummy variable and NPP and NPA social media use were created. As Table 1 shows, because NPP and NPA use were highly correlated ($r_{Facebook} = .77$; $r_{Twitter} = .84$), following prior work (Eveland, Hayes, Shah, & Kwak, 2005; Lewis-Beck, 1980), NPP and NPA use were included in separate models to avoid any potential multicollinearity problem.

5. Results

The first hypothesis (H1) examines relationships between NPA use and political expression on social media. As expected in H1 (see Table 2, Models 2 and 4), results indicate that NPA social media use is positively related to political expression on social media. The standardized coefficients are comparable across Facebook ($\beta = .32$, $p < .001$) and Twitter users ($\beta = .30$, $p < .001$). In contrast, as shown in Table 2, Models 1 and 3, NPP use is not significantly related to political expression on Facebook ($\beta = .04$, $p = .22$) and Twitter ($\beta = .03$, $p = .40$). Together, findings show that NPA use is related to increased political expression on both Facebook and Twitter, while the relationships between NPP use and political expression are not significant across the two sites.

The second hypothesis (H2) seeks to examine the role of political efficacy in the relationship between NPA use and political expression on the sites. First, as Table 3, Models 1 and 3 show, OLS regression analyses reveal that NPP Facebook ($\beta = .03$, $p = .43$) and Twitter ($\beta = .02$, $p = .71$) use are not significantly related to political efficacy. In contrast, NPA Facebook ($\beta = .11$, $p < .05$) and Twitter ($\beta = .11$, $p < .05$) use are significantly related to increased political efficacy (see Table 3, Models 2 and 4). Second, path analysis was conducted to further investigate the structural relationships between NPA use, political efficacy, and political expression on social media. Results show that the data fits the proposed model well (χ^2 (2) = 5.060, p = .08, NFI (Normed Fit Index) = .999, CFI (Comparative Fit Index) = .999, RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation) = .033). The results of the estimation are displayed in Fig. 1. As expected, NPA use ($\beta_{Facebook} = .10$, $p < .05$; $\beta_{Twitter} = .12$, $p < .05$) is positively associated with political efficacy, which, in turn, predicts increased political expression on social media ($\beta_{Facebook} = .08$, $p < .001$; $\beta_{Twitter} = .08$, $p < .001$). The possible reversed causal relationships between the variables are further investigated. The results show that the paths from political efficacy to NPA social media use are not significant ($\beta_{Facebook} = .03$, $p = .38$; $\beta_{Twitter} = .01$, $p = .65$). Overall, there is evidence that the relationship between NPA social media use and political expression on social media is partially mediated by political efficacy.

Finally, RQ1 further explores whether the patterns of results differ by the two platforms. As Table 2, Models 5 and 6 show, the relationships between interaction terms—NPP*Social Media ($\beta = .02$, $p = .78$) and NPA*Social Media ($\beta = -.03$, $p = .65$)—and political expression are not statistically significant. Likewise, Table 3, Models 5 and 6 reveal that the associations between NPP*Social Media ($\beta = .02$, $p = .89$) and NPA*Social Media ($\beta = -.01$, $p = .96$) and political efficacy are not significantly different. Thus, results show that the patterns of results are consistent across Facebook and Twitter.

6. Discussion

In contrast to prior research that gave relatively little weight to

Table 1
Zero-order correlations among all variables.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Age												
2. Gender	−.06 (.07)											
3. Race	.22^c (.25^c)	−.05 (.00)										
4. Education	.06 (.09^a)	.05 (.10^a)	−.01 (−.05)									
5. Income	.05 (.02)	.10^b (.14^c)	.00 (.03)	.39^c (.39^c)								
6. Political Interest	.19^c (.20^c)	.19^c (.18^c)	.01 (.04)	.18^c (.28^c)	.17^c (.26^c)							
7. News Use	.14^c (.11^b)	.19^c (.27^c)	−.12^c (−.08^a)	.17^c (.21^c)	.28^c (.22^c)	.41^c (.46^c)						
8. Political Efficacy	−.04 (−.11^b)	.06 (.02)	−.10^b (−.11^b)	.08^a (.12^c)	.07 (.13^b)	.34^c (.32^c)	.27^c (.33^c)					
9. Network Size	−.43^c (−.35^c)	−.01 (.07)	−.09^a (−.14^b)	.03 (.06)	.10 (.10^c)	.00 (.13^b)	.04 (.20^c)	.14^c (.15^c)				
10. Political Information Exposure	−.12^b (−.09^c)	.07^a (.18^c)	−.04 (−.13^b)	−.03 (.12^b)	.05 (.08^a)	.35^c (.47^c)	.31^c (.48^c)	.25^c (.35^c)	.26^c (.30^c)			
11. Political Expression	−.20^c (−.18^c)	.18^c (.22^c)	−.11^b (−.19^c)	−.01 (.14^b)	.07 (.15^c)	.36^c (.41^c)	.40^c (.56^c)	.34^c (.41^c)	.31^c (.39^c)	.75^c (.80^c)		
12. NPP Use	−.32^c (−.35^c)	.02 (.12^b)	−.06 (−.17^c)	−.03 (−.01)	.04 (.08^a)	.09^a (.17^c)	.17^c (.25^c)	.41^c (.44^c)	.53^c (.55^c)	.47^c (.55^c)		
13. NPA Use	−.30^c (−.37^c)	.04 (.16^c)	−.07 (−.23)	−.05 (.00)	.05 (.12^b)	.13^b (.16^c)	.29^c (.41^c)	.23^c (.29^c)	.47^c (.55^c)	.51^c (.53^c)	.64^c (.68^c)	.77^c (.84^c)

Notes. Cell entries are two-tailed zero-order correlation coefficients. Twitter results are in parentheses.
^{a} $p < .05$, ^{b} $p < .01$, ^{c} $p < .001$.
$n_{Facebook} = 727$; $n_{Twitter} = 633$.

Table 2
Predicting political expression on social media.

	Facebook				Twitter				Interaction			
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6	
	B(SE)	β	B(SE)	β	B(SE)	β	B(SE)	β	B(SE)	β	B(SE)	β
Intercept	1.59(.67)		−.46(.60)		1.10(.64)		−1.11(.59)		1.89(.83)		−.92(.74)	
Age	−.03(.01)***	−.11	−.01(.01)*	−.06	−.03(.01)***	−.09	−.01(.01)	−.03	−.03(.01)***	−.10	−.01(.01)**	−.05
Gender (Male)	.70(.20)***	.08	.73(.18)***	.09	.36(.20)	.04	.25(.19)	.03	.58(.14)***	.07	.55(.13)***	.06
Race (White)	−.28(.23)	−.03	−.38(.21)	-.04	−.46(.22)*	-.05	−.24(.20)	−.02	−.37(.16)*	−.04	−.29(.15)*	−.03
Education	−.10(.10)	−.02	−.02(.09)	.00	−.01(.11)	.00	.12(.10)	.03	-.04(.08)	−.01	.06(.07)	.01
Income	−.07(.07)	−.02	−.05(.06)	−.02	.08(.07)	.03	.02(.07)	.01	.01(.05)	.00	-.01(.05)	.00
Political Interest	.28(.09)**	.08	.33(.09)***	.09	.01(.10)	.00	.12(.09)	.03	.15(.07)*	.04	.22(.07)**	.06
News Use	.06(.01)**	.17	.04(.01)***	.10	.07(.01)***	.22	.05(.01)***	.15	.06(.01)***	.19	.04(.01)***	.13
Social Media Network Size	.53(.17)**	.08	−.05(.16)	−.01	.64(.15)***	.11	.08(.15)	.01	.57(.12)***	.09	.00(.11)	.00
Political Info Exposure on Social Media	2.16(.10)***	.61	1.81(.09)***	.51	2.28(.11)***	.63	1.96(.01)***	.54	2.22(.08)***	.62	1.89(.07)***	.52
NPP Use	.08(.06)	.04			.05(.06)	.03			.05(.11)	.03		
NPA Use			.24(.02)***	.32			.21(.02)***	.30			.24(.04)***	.33
Social Media (Twitter)									−.41(.43)	−.05	.08(.38)	.01
Social MediaXNPP Use									.02(.07)	.02		
Social MediaXNPA Use											−.01(.02)	−.03
Adjusted R²	.63		.69		.72		.76		.67		.72	

Notes. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001. $n_{Facebook}$ = 727; $n_{Twitter}$ = 633.

Table 3
Predicting political efficacy.

	Facebook				Twitter				Interaction			
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6	
	B(SE)	β	B(SE)	β	B(SE)	β	B(SE)	β	B(SE)	β	B(SE)	β
Intercept	1.23(.27)***		1.09(.27)***		1.85(.26)***		1.68(.26)***		1.55(.33)***		1.32(.32)***	.32
Age	.00(.00)	−.04	.00(.00)	−.03	−.01(.00)**	−.14	−.01(.00)**	−.12	−.01(.00)***	−.09	−.01(.00)*	.00
Gender (Male)	−.05(.08)	−.02	−.05(.08)	−.02	−.20(.08)*	−.09	−.21(.08)*	−.09	−.12(.06)*	−.06	−.13(.06)*	.06
Race (White)	−.18(.09)	−07	−.18(.09)	−.07	−.11(.09)	−.05	−.09(.09)	−.04	−.15(.07)*	−.06	−.14(.07)*	.07
Education	.02(.04)	.02	.03(.04)	.03	.02(.05)	.02	.03(.05)	.03	.02(.03)	.02	.03(.03)	.03
Income	−.02(.03)	−.03	−.02(.03)	−.03	.02(.03)	.03	.02(.03)	.02	.00(.02)	.00	.00(.02)	.02
Political Interest	.25(.04)***	.27	.26(.04)***	.27	.17(.04)***	.18	.18(.04)***	.19	.22(.03)***	.23	.23(.03)***	.03
News Use	.01(.00)**	.13	.01(.00)**	.11	.02(.00)***	.19	.01(.00)***	.17	.01(.00)***	.16	.01(.00)***	.00
Social Media Network Size	.14(.07)	.08	.10(.07)	.05	−.02(.06)	−.02	−.07(.07)	−.05	.04(.05)	.03	.00(.05)	.05
Political Info Exposure on Social Media	.07(.04)	.07	.05(.04)	.05	.14(.04)**	.16	.12(.04)**	.13	.10(.03)**	.11	.08(.03)**	.03
NPP Use	.02(.03)	.03			.01(.02)	.02			.01(.05)	.02		
NPA Use			.02(.01)*	.11			.02(.01)*	.11			.02(.02)	.02
Social Media (Twitter)									.02(.17)	.01	.07(.17)	.17
Social MediaXNPP Use									.00(.03)	.02		
Social MediaXNPA Use											.00(.01)	.01
Adjusted R²	.18		.19		.20		.20		.18		.19	

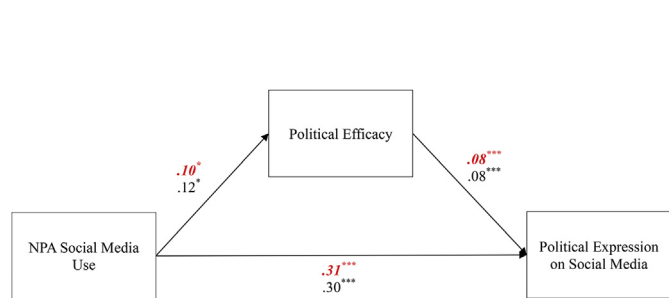Notes. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001. $n_{Facebook}$ = 727; $n_{Twitter}$ = 633.

Fig. 1. Path Analysis of Relationships between NPA Use, Political Efficacy, and Political Expression on Social Media. Notes. Path entries are standardized coefficients. Coefficients in red and italics indicate Facebook results, whereas Twitter results are represented in black. The effects of age, race, gender, education, income, news use, political interest, Facebook or Twitter network size, and political information exposure on social media are controlled. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001. $n_{Facebook}$ = 727; $n_{Twitter}$ = 633. χ^2 (2) = 5.060, p = .08, NFI (Normed Fit Index) = .999, CFI (Comparative Fit Index) = .999, RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation) = .033. Explained variance: Political efficacy R^2 $_{Facebook}$ = 17.0%, R^2 $_{Twitter}$ = .20.4%; Political expression R^2 $_{Facebook}$ = 68.3%; R^2 $_{Twitter}$ = 77.6%. (For interpretation of the references to colour in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)

the political benefits of everyday, non-political use of social technology, more recent scholarship has begun to emphasize the influence of seemingly "personal" activities on political engagement (e.g., Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2014). Extending this line of work, this study examines how non-political social media use is related to expression of political views across Facebook and Twitter. The findings presented here provide manifold implications for the literature that examines social media use and political engagement.

6.1. Findings and contributions

First, the findings of the study show that whether non-political social media use contributes to political expression depends on the nature of the activities, providing some support for the theory that political engagement may develop from everyday, non-political uses of social media. Prior work on Internet use and political outcomes often contrasts informational use (e.g., news use) with recreational use, which shows that the former is beneficial for political participation, while the latter has insignificant or negative influences on political outcomes (e.g., Shah et al., 2001). This study

takes another view that posits that political social media practices may emerge out of everyday non-political use of the sites (Dahlgren, 2009; Bakardjieva, 2009) and further differentiates non-political social media use into passive and active forms. Results show that while NPP use is not significantly related to political expression, NPA use is positively associated with political expression. To explain the results, it is possible that through frequent NPA use, individuals feel more comfortable expressing themselves politically in the collapsed social media context when opportunities arise. The positive relationship between NPA use and political expression is consistent with Walsh's (2004) ethnographic study of political talk, as she notes, "much political interaction occurs not among people who make a point to specifically talk about politics but emerges instead from the social processes of people chatting with one another" (p. 35). Overall, findings of the study highlight the role of NPA social media use in the democratic process and provide an alternative way to understand the relationship between digital media and democratic citizenship.

Second, moving beyond the direct relationship, this study further contributes to our theoretical understanding of the process underlying the relationship between NPA use and political expression. Results suggest that NPA use may help generate efficacious beliefs in the political domain, and contribute, in turn, to political expression on the sites. Because NPA use can cultivate social bonds (Ellison et al., 2014) and develop among users a sense of group identity (Bakardjieva, 2009), it is likely that these social bonds and feelings of affinity can be activated and transformed into political expression when opportunities arise (Dahlgren, 2009). Thus, findings of the study lend some support for Dahlgren (2009) and Bakardjieva's (2009) ideas that networked communicative practices for private interests can foster a shared sense of civic identity, which can become, in turn, a basis for more expressive forms of political engagement.

The third implication of the study pertains to the innovative methodology employed in the study, highlighting the benefits of a comparative approach to study the political implications of social media use. Prior social media scholarship often focuses on only one social media site (Rains & Brunner, 2015) or views social media as a homogeneous category (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2014), both of which may have limitations. When focusing on one site, there is no guarantee that the results from one site can be generalized to others (Rains & Brunner, 2015). In contrast, when treating all social media sites as a uniform category, it is unclear whether respondents were refereeing to one (and if so, which one) or multiple sites (and if so, how) when answering relevant survey questions. The comparative approach used in the study takes into account differences that may result from particular social media sites, allowing the study to make a clearer conclusion about whether the outcomes are consistent across the specific sites and helps increase the generalizability of the findings. In particular, as findings indicate that the patterns of results are consistent across Facebook and Twitter, these results may be helpful for building theories regarding uses and effects of similar social media platforms.

6.2. Limitations and future direction

Several potential limitations of this study should be noted, as they also suggest opportunities for future research. First, because only cross-sectional data is used, the results of the study indicate associations between measures but should not be interpreted as causal relationships. Future work with longitudinal data is needed to inform our understanding of the directionality of these relationships. Second, the study is limited by its sampling method and modes of data collection. As this study uses a convenient sample of online adults, the generalizability of the results is uncertain. In addition, because the study employs survey data, self-reported social media use may be subject to recall errors and social desirability bias. Future research should use other modes of data collection, such as server-level behavioral data, and compare the extent to which self-reported and server-level data align. Finally, as this study is the first step toward an understanding of the relationships between non-political social media use and political behaviors, future efforts are needed to identify the mechanisms through which NPA use fosters political expression. One possible direction is to further investigate how experiences of resource mobilization (Ellison et al., 2014) and positive emotional states (Tamir & Mitchell, 2012) may help to establish self-efficacy. Another direction is to explore the role of self-regulatory efficacy—one's capacity to resist pressure and engage in high-risk activities—in the relationship between NPA use and political expression, as political expression on social media is viewed as high-risk activities (Thorson, 2014) that may disclose social identity and disrupt social relationships. Thus, these efforts will further an understanding of how NPA use contributes to political outcomes.

7. Conclusion

Notwithstanding these limitations, this study is an important step in investigating how passive and active forms of non-political social media use are related to political expression on such sites. Using a comparative approach, results of Facebook and Twitter consistently suggest that only NPA use is positively related to political expression, and this relationship is partially explained by political efficacy. Taken together, these findings provide some support for the theoretical viewpoint that "the political [is] deeply embedded in everyday life" (Bakardjieva, 2009, p. 96), suggesting that people's private use of social media may cultivate public civic attitudes and contribute to political engagement.

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