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"CORRECTIVE" ACTIONS IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE: HOW PERCEPTIONS OF MEDIA AND MEDIA EFFECTS SHAPE POLITICAL BEHAVIORS

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ABSTRACT

This study examines whether perceptions of media influence and perceptions of media hostility towards one's views predict taking "corrective" actions to ensure that one's views are "heard" in the public sphere. Controlling for demographics, political interest, efficacy, knowledge, ideological extremity, and Internet use, this study provides evidence that both third-person perceptions and hostile media perceptions are consistently related to a series of offline and online behaviors that seek to enrich public debate and "correct" what are seen as potential biases in the public sphere. Based on a national probability sample collected in Colombia, these results offer a strong case of behavioral consequences for third-person perceptions outside the realm of willingness to censor.

Since Davison (1983) proposed a discrepancy between the perceived effects of media on others versus the perceived effects on self, and the potential behavioral consequences that this discrepancy might have, a growing body of literature has developed under the rubric of third-person effects that has tried to account for: (a) the extent of self-other discrepancies; (b) whether these discrepancies occur due to overestimations of effects on others, underestimation of effects on self, or both; (c) the contingent conditions under which these discrepancies are maximized; and (d) the behavioral consequences of such discrepancies.

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This robust body of literature has been very successful in replicating the third-person perception in a variety of topics and media (*e.g.*, Paul, Salwen, & Dupagne, 2000; Sun, Pan, & Shen, 2008). It has been quite successful in laying out some of the contingent conditions that increase or decrease the discrepancy (*e.g.*, the social distance and exposure likelihood corollaries); it has provided a range of explanations as to why the phenomena occurs; and, it has been somewhat successful in relating perceived effects with certain behavioral outcomes.

In relating behavioral outcomes to perceived media effects, researchers have for the most part focused on relating effect gaps, or presumed influences, to censorship as a response to content deemed socially harmful. More recently, certain strands of the literature have begun to show behavioral consequences beyond pro-censorship orientations in areas such as teen smoking, adolescent sexuality, forced evacuation, and Y2K preparedness.

This study seeks to expand the boundaries of perceived media influences, relating third-person perceptions of influence, as well as perceptions of media hostility, to a series of offline and online political behaviors such as expressing political views, trying to persuade others to vote for a specific candidate, posting to discussion forums, commenting online news articles, participating in rallies, attending public protests, and signing petitions. This study contends that citizens who perceive that mass media exert a disproportionate influence on public opinion, as well as those who see media content as biased against their views, will be more likely to use both conventional and emerging communication technologies to communicate their positions and compensate for these perceived biases. In order to make sure their own views are heard, they will use communication tools at their disposal to "correct" for the "powerful" effects of traditional media that would otherwise sway public opinion. Thus, it is argued that citizens "suffering" from third-person perceptions or hostile media perceptions will take action aimed at "correcting" those potential effects of media on others by engaging in a series of expressive behaviors that ultimately have the potential to enhance the public sphere.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Results of many studies have supported the general finding that people believe others are more susceptible to negative influences from mass media. This phenomenon, first described by Davison (1983) and known as the third-person effect, comprises a two-part hypothesis: (a) People tend to perceive greater media effects on others, relative to themselves (third-person perception); and (b) such perceptions can, in turn, evoke meaningful responses in the individual (third-person effects) (McLeod, Detenber, & Eveland, 2001).

During the past 25 years, research on the third-person perception has established that this discrepant perception of media effects is robust with respect to its size, persistent across contexts, and able to withstand methodological tests (David, Liu, & Myser, 2004; Paul *et al.,* 2000; Perloff, 1999). A considerable amount of research on the third-person perception has supported Davidson's (1983) contention that the phenomenon is primarily a consequence of the overestimation of media effects on others (Cohen, Mutz, Price, & Gunther, 1988; Gunther, 1991; Price, Tewksbury, & Huang, 1998). However, a few studies have suggested that underestimations of media effects on self may also be a factor (Gunther & Thorson, 1992).

More than that, studies have found support for a ''social distance corollary''. This tenet proposes that the magnitude of the third-person perception increases as ''others'' become progressively different from self, due to either the increasingly general nature of their description (*e.g.*, ''other students'' versus ''other Californians'') or because they are portrayed as out-group members, relative to the ''perceiver'' (Cohen *et al.,* 1988; Duck & Mullin, 1995; Gunther, 1991). Nevertheless, the influence of social distance isn't entirely consistent across studies (Cohen & Davis, 1991). Some researchers have argued that rather than social distance, it is likelihood of exposure that matters (Eveland & McLeod, 1999; McLeod, Eveland, & Nathanson, 1997).

The exact mechanism underlying the third-person perception is an issue of considerable debate. One prominent explanation is ''biased optimism'', or the tendency for individuals to favorably contrast their own attitudes and behaviors to those of others, due to the motivation to sustain a positive self-image. Gunther and Mundy (1993) proposed that an optimistic bias can account for many of the findings from third-person effect research, including the tendency for people to believe that others are relatively more vulnerable to harmful influences of television violence, less resistant to the persuasive appeal of advertisements, and more likely to believe inaccurate or biased information presented in news. Further support for this motivational mechanism arises from studies that have reported finding a ''reverse third-person effect'', or a larger perceived impact of mass media on one's self when compared to others when such influence was likely to be in a socially desirable direction (David, *et al.,* 2004; Gunther & Thorson, 1992; Henriksen & Flora, 1999).

However, other plausible explanations for the third-person perception have been offered. Shah, Faber and Youn (1999) proposed that the third-person discrepancy arises from a combination of two influences on perception: an affective influence associated with the perceived severity of content and a cognitive influence related to perceptions of differential susceptibility to media effects. McLeod, Detenber, and Eveland, (2001) propose that the third-person perception is a cognitive, rather than motivational phenomenon. In a study where they compare the predictors for the perceived effects of violent or misogynistic

music on the self and others, they conclude that when estimating effects on self, people use relatively complex assessments that include both the nature of the content and the perceived characteristics of the individual. In contrast, the model for influence on others was comparatively simple and hinged primarily on the perceived exposure of others to such content. More recently, Reid and colleagues offered a self-categorization perspective, which combines influences from the individual, target, and context (Reid, Byrne, Brundidge, Shoham, & Marlow, 2007; Reid & Hogg, 2005). They propose that the magnitude and direction of the third-person perception is determined by the salient social identity of the perceiver of the media message, the typicality of the perceiver within a particular social group, the relationship of the target to the perceiver in a particular context (in-group versus out-group), and judgments about normative exposure to the type of media content for their respective social groups.

Despite the accumulating evidence of the "perceptual" aspect of the third-person hypothesis across different mass media channels and genres (Perloff, 2002), less evidence exists to support its behavioral component. Possible behavioral consequences to third-person perceptions have been grouped in two general categories: prevention and accommodation (Gunther, Bolt, Borzekowski, Liebhart, & Dillard, 2006). Prevention refers to behavioral outcomes seeking to put a stop to content perceived to be damaging for certain social groups or society as a whole, and typically manifests as a willingness to censor media content (*e.g.*, Gunther, 1995; Lee & Tamborini, 2005; McLeod *et al.*, 1997; Rojas, Shah & Faber, 1996).

Accommodation, on the other hand (following Gunther, Perloff, & Tsfati, 2008), could fall into multiple categories including: compliance, defiance and withdrawal. Compliance refers to situations in which people perceiving media as altering social norms, in response alter their own behavior accordingly. Good examples of this line of reasoning are provided by Gunther *et al.*'s (2006) finding that adolescents that perceive their peers to be more affected by pro-smoking messages are more likely to start smoking, or Chia's (2006) results according to which adolescents' perceptions of the influence of media on their peers is positively related to their own sexual permissiveness.

Defiance, on the other hand, results when people attributing shifts in public opinion to media they perceive as hostile become less likely to conform to a course of action. An interesting example of a defiant accommodation is provided by Tsfati and Cohen (2005) in their account of right-wing Jewish settlers in the Gaza Strip who became increasingly willing to resist being evacuated from their homes.

Withdrawal, finally, refers to situations in which perceptions of media effects on others lead people not to act. For example, Tewksbury, Moy, and Weis (2004) found an actual decrease of preparation for Y2K among people that exhibited greater third-person perceptions, Banning (2006)

showed a reduced likelihood of voting in the 2004 presidential election among those that exhibited a greater third-person perception regarding general media effects, and Tsfati (2007) shows increased alienation among people experiencing hostile media perceptions. Potentially, certain spiral of silence results (Noelle-Neuman, 1974) could also be interpreted within this logic of withdrawal.

This study proposes a third general category of behavioral consequences. One that is reminiscent of Davison's (1983) anecdotal insight that a political leaflet put in his mailbox, by a candidate that he did not support, motivated him to do some leafleting of his own. This third category is one that is somewhat related to both prevention and accommodation, but that provides a distinct line of action: "corrective" behavior. In other words, instead of trying to prevent potential media effects by censoring media content, people would engage in reactive actions to have their owns views be heard and counterbalance those perceived media effects. In sum, corrective behaviors are political behaviors that are reactive, based on perceptions of media and media effects, and seek to influence the public sphere.

This type of "corrective" behavior can be found in Tsfati, Ribak, and Cohen's (2005) finding that parents who believe their children are more affected by violent media content are more likely to monitor their child's television viewing, while parents perceiving that other children are more influenced were more likely to monitor their children's social connections with other kids; or, in Sun, Shen, and Pan's (2008) willingness of students to engage in rectifying behaviors with respect to "reality" television shows. Also Neuwirth, Frederick, and Mayo (2002), found that people who perceive greater media effects overall, are more willing to discuss controversial issues.

This proposed line of corrective action also shares some commonality with certain accommodation responses, particularly defiance. However, in the "corrective" scenario, instead of defying actions directed at the outcomes of public opinion or public policy, as in the Tsfati and Cohen (2005) account of Jewish settlers willing to resist being evacuated from their homes, the action is directed precisely toward influencing public opinion.

A closely related phenomenon to third-person effect, one that would appear to be critical for the type of "corrective" actions considered in this study, is that of perceived hostility of media. An important body of empirical evidence suggests that when exposed to information, we are likely to process it in a way that supports our previous beliefs. This selective processing mechanism has been explained as an assimilation bias (*e.g.*, see Lord, Ross, & Lepper, 1979). However, Vallone, Ross, and Lepper (1985) describe an experiment in which news broadcasts of the Middle East conflict were shown to pro-Israeli and pro-Arab students and both groups found the newscasts to be biased in favor of the other side.

But the study went one step further. Not only did subjects see the news as biased against their cause, they also recalled the program content selectively and supposed that an undecided viewer would be swayed against their views. Vallone *et al.* (1985) explained this hostile media perception as the result of a processing of media content that was based on previous attitudes regarding media content. Gunther (1992) argues that these previous attitudes regarding media content are shaped mostly by our own involvement with an issue or group, with high involvement prompting "not only more scrutiny but more biased scrutiny of media content" (p. 161).

Gunther and Schmitt (2004), show that the hostile media perception was not found when the source of an article was thought to be a student, but appeared when the same essay was attributed to a news source, both among supporters and opponents of genetically modified. The authors have argued that this occurs due to the expected reach of the message and that people's perceptions are different when the information is only for them compared to information that is also likely to be read by "gullible others". That is, they suggest that media are perceived differently depending on the expected audience. Gunther and Liebhart (2006) extend the notion of perceived reach to that of perceived source when they found that, in addition to the reach of mass media, the attribution of content to a journalist is enough to exacerbate the hostile media phenomenon.

Based on the two notions that have been reviewed (*i.e.*, the tendency to perceive others as more affected by media content and the tendency to perceive mass media content as hostile), this research seeks to relate these perceptions to forms of "corrective" action within the public sphere. This study proposes that certain expressive behaviors constitute a fertile ground to examine the behavioral consequences of both third-person and hostile media perceptions, particularly in the new media environment of an emerging networked public sphere (Friedland, Hove, & Rojas, 2006). One where citizens "armed with easy-to-use Web publishing tools, always-on connections and increasingly powerful mobile devices have the means to become an active participant in the creation and dissemination of news and information" (Bowman & Willis, 2003, para. 4).

ANTECEDENTS OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Research that examines the antecedents of participation in communal life has consistently identified that social standing (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995) information acquisition (Gil de Zuniga, Puig-i-Abril, & Rojas, 2009; Rojas & Puig-i-Abril, 2009a; Shah, Cho, Eveland, & Kwak, 2005) and certain orientations toward politics (interest, efficacy, and knowledge; *e.g.*, see Eveland, Shah, & Kwak, 2003) all contribute to increased levels of political action.

Reviewing the literature that focuses on the antecedents of political participation exceeds the purposes of this paper. But, in order to situate the contribution of this work to the field of political participation, a brief summary of this literature is helpful.

Answers to the question of why people participate can be classified into three different perspectives: (1) people participate because of who they are; (2) because of the benefits they obtain from participating; and, (3) because they are mobilized to participate.

This first perspective of ''who we are'' includes issues of social location (education, income, and a place in a network of social relations that can be used for political purposes—*e.g.*, see Verba *et al.,* 1995); of political socialization (Smith, 1999) and identity (both at the individual and group level—*e.g.*, see Gamson's, 1992, notion of the definition of a ''we'' in opposition to a ''they''). The second perspective of benefits suggests that individuals will participate if the benefits they obtain from participating are larger than the costs associated with participation (see Riker & Ordeshook, 1968, for an overview of rational actor theories and Verba, 2003, for a critique). And finally, the third perspective suggests that people participate because they are mobilized by others to do so (see Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993, for an elite mobilization perspective and Tarrow, 1998 for a social movements perspective).

The corrective action participation that we envision in this paper corresponds more clearly with this third mobilization perspective, but is unique in that rather than being mobilized by others we are mobilized by our own perceptions of those others and how mass media might be affecting them. Along these lines, Hwang, Pan, and Sun (2008) have argued that perceived media bias can elicit negative emotions that in turn result in a willingness to engage in discursive activities.

HYPOTHESES & RESEARCH QUESTION

Previous research has provided ample evidence of the third-person perception and some evidence of behavioral consequences related to this perception. In this study a series of behaviors aimed at ''correcting'' the potential effects of media on others are considered. This study contends that people who experience third-person perceptions will be more likely to contribute to the public sphere in order to make sure their own views are heard. In essence they are ''correcting'' for the powerful media effects that could sway others away from their own views unless they take action. Using the new possibilities provided by computer mediated communication technologies, citizens can also engage in a series of expressive behaviors contributing to the debate

of issues in the public sphere. For these reasons, the following hypothesis is offered:

H1: Third-person perceptions regarding the effects of mass media on public opinion will be positively related to a series of political behaviors aimed at "correcting" available information in the public sphere including: (a) Traditional political behaviors (attending political rallies, participating in public protests, signing petitions, trying to persuade others to vote and to vote for a specific candidate); and, (b) Online political behaviors (sending e-mails to express political views, sending campaign information, trying to persuade others to vote for a specific candidate, posting to discussion forums, and commenting on online news articles).

However, certain strands in the perceived media effects literature have advocated for a broader model in which rather than focusing on the self-other discrepancy, it suffices to examine the degree to which people perceive the media to be influential (Gunther & Storey, 2003; Gunther *et al.,* 2006), and in certain cases whether this influence is actually on the self (Jensen & Hurley, 2005; Price, *et al.,* 1998). Within this logic of presumed influence it is plausible that instead of a third-person perception gap, perceptions of a powerful media in the public sphere would be enough for people to engage in corrective behaviors. That is, individuals who see mass media as influential would be more likely to take action to have their own ideas be heard in the public domain.

Furthermore, a recent comparison of measurement approaches to the third person effect (Boyle, Schmierbach, & McLeod, 2008) argues persuasively for the simultaneous inclusion in regression equations of the standard subtractive measure, alongside a summative one (the so called diamond model) as the most effective way of assessing the effects of the subtractive measure above and beyond the effects of its components (for a longer discussion on this point see Boyle *et al.,* 2008). For this reason, the following hypothesis is offered:

H2: Perceptions of powerful media effects on public opinion will be positively related to a series of political behaviors aimed at "correcting" available information in the public sphere including: (a) Traditional political behaviors; and, (b) Online political behaviors.

Within the logic of the hostile media phenomenon, it appears reasonable to expect that citizens who see media as biased against their views would be more likely to use emerging communication technologies to compensate for the perceived bias. Citizens perceiving that the ideology of mass media is distant from their own would be more likely to take matters into their own hands. In order to correct for these "biases" they will seek to infuse public debate with their own opinions, as well as make direct appeals to those others

in danger of being "biased" by the media. For these reasons, the following hypothesis is offered:

H3: Perceptions of a hostile media will be positively related to a series of political behaviors aimed at "correcting" available information in the public sphere including: (a) Traditional political behaviors; and, (b) Online political behaviors.

Finally, and if our previous hypotheses are supported by the data, it seems plausible to expect an interaction effect between perceived media hostility and perceptions of a powerful media. That is, the need to take corrective action should be amplified among those perceiving media to be hostile against their views who at the same time perceive media to be affecting others disproportionately or, in general, believe media to have powerful effects. For these reasons, the following hypothesis is offered:

H4: The effects of perceived media hostility on corrective actions will be amplified by third-person perceptions and/or perceptions of powerful media effects, including: (a) Traditional political behaviors; and, (b) Online political behaviors.

Hypotheses 1 and 2 of this study provide an interesting opportunity to asses whether, as some have argued, total expected influence of media (the self and others) is a better predictor of behavioral consequences than the traditional measure of third-person perception (others minus the self). To explore this possibility, the following research question is posed:

RQ1: If third-person perceptions and presumed influence of media both predict behavioral outcomes, which measure is a more consistent predictor of the "corrective" actions considered in this study?

METHOD

This study relied on national survey data collected between June 22 and July 10, 2006 in 13 cities in Colombia. Data collection took place approximately 1 month after the national election for president that was held May 26, 2006. The sample was designed to represent Colombia's adult urban population. Survey respondents were selected using a multi-step stratified random sample procedure that selected households randomly, proportionate to city size according to census data. Once the number of households was allocated for a given city, a number of city blocks were randomly selected proportionate to the housing districting or strata. Then individual households were randomly selected within each block. And finally, using the "adult in the household who most recently celebrated their birthday" technique, an individual respondent was randomly identified. As many as three visits to each household were made to increase participation in the survey. The data were collected by

a local professional polling firm, Deproyectos Limitada, that generated 1,009 face-to-face completed responses for a response rate of 84 percent.[1]

Criterion Variables

Offline corrective political participation was measured using five items asking respondents whether in the previous twelve months they had attended a political rally, participated in a public protest, signed a petition, tried to persuade others to vote, and tried to persuade others to vote for a specific candidate. These five dichotomous measures were combined into a single index ($M = .50$, $SD = 1.0$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .71$).

Online corrective political participation was measured using five items that examined different forms of "corrective" action that a citizen can use to engage in the online domain. These ranged from using e-mail to express political views, sending campaign information, trying to persuade others to vote for a specific candidate, posting comments in online discussion forums, and commenting on news and opinion pieces appearing in online news outlets. All items were measured using single items on a 6-point scale ranging from 0 to 5, where 0 meant "never" and 5 meant "frequently". These five measures were combined into a single index ($M = 2.01$, $SD. = 3.07$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .72$). Both the online and the offline participation measures in this study are not normally distributed (skewness 2.7 and 2.3 respectively) so these variables were transformed (square root) prior to analysis.

Control variables. Four established demographic control variables were included in our models: gender (60 percent female); age ($M = 41.5$, $SD = 16$); level of education ($M = 4.6$, $SD = 1.6$); and house stratum, a proxy measure of household income ($M = 2.8$, $SD = 1.3$). Bearing in mind that in this dataset the relationship between house stratum and participation is curvilinear (the middle class participates less than the working or the upper class (Rojas & Puig-i-Abril, 2009b), house stratum was squared so both variables can be entered into the regression models and control for its curvilinearity (Hayes, 2005).

In addition to demographics, it is plausible that regardless of perceptions of media effects, subjects who use the Internet more—for the online behaviors—are more interested in politics, have higher levels of political efficacy and knowledge, or are more extreme in their political ideologies, could engage disproportionately in the types of behaviors considered as criterion variables in this study. Consequently, measures for Internet use, political interest, political efficacy, political knowledge and ideological extremity are also included for control purposes.

[1]Response rate 4 calculated using AAPOR guidelines.

Time spent online is a concept that is increasingly harder to measure meaningfully, particularly with the advent of high-speed, "always-on" connections. However, people that spend more time online could be disproportionately engaging in the aforementioned behaviors. Given that email use is the most common online behavior, this study employs how often participants use email to remain in touch with friends and family as a proxy measure of general Internet use. This item was measured on a 6-point scale ranging from 0 to 5, where 0 meant "never" and 5 meant "frequently" ($M = 3.5$, $SD = 1.8$).

Interest in politics was measured with three items asking respondents how interested they are in local, national and international politics. These measures of political interest were rated on a 6-point scale ranging from "nothing" to "A lot" and then combined by into a single index constructed by averaging the respondent's answers ($M = 1.52$, $SD. = 1.46$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$).

Political efficacy was measured with four questions concerning respondents' assessments of their ability to influence government and solve community problems, as well as their perception regarding government's responsiveness to people's initiatives and concern for the thoughts of common people. These measures of political efficacy were rated on a 6-point scale ranging from "total disagreement" to "total agreement" and then combined into a single index constructed by averaging the respondent's answers ($M = 2.07$, $SD = 1.18$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .72$).

Political knowledge was measured with eight items that took into account "rules of the game, the substance of politics, and people and parties" (Delli-Carpini & Keeter, 1996, p. 65), adapted to the Colombian context. An additive index for political knowledge was constructed ($M = 3.5$, $SD = 2.06$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .74$).

Ideological extremity was assessed by folding a single item that asked respondents to place themselves on an 11-point political ideology scale in which 0 was labeled as "left", 5 as "center", and 10 as "right" ($M = 5.5$, $SD = 2.1$). In the folded version of this variable, an answer of 5 was recoded to 0, zeros and tens were recoded as 5 and so on ($M = 1.49$, $SD = 1.48$).

Independent Variables

Three independent variables are considered in this study: the third-person perception gap, a measure of total perceived media influence, and a measure of perceived hostility of media.

To establish the third-person perception gap, that is an appraisal of disproportionate influence, an assessment of how influential mass media are on the opinions of self ($M = 2.3$, $SD = 1.7$) was subtracted from how influential they are on the opinions of people in general ($M = 3.5$, $SD = 1.4$). Both items were measured on a 6-point scale ranging from "little influence" to "a lot of

influence". The resulting perceived influence gap variable has a mean of 1.3, with a *SD* of 1.5.

To measure total perceived effects, instead of subtracting perceived effects on self from perceived effects on others, the two measures were added (see Boyle *et al.*, 2008, for a longer discussion of the advantages of this conceptualization over the use of perceived effects on others). The resulting total perceived influence variable has a mean of 5.8, with a *SD* of 2.6. The Pearson correlation between the perceived influence gap and total perceived influence is $-.18$ ($p < .001$).

Finally, two measures were employed to establish hostile media perceptions among respondents. One item asked respondents to place themselves on an 11-point political ideology scale as described above. The other asked the respondent to place the ideology of the "leading mass media in Colombia" on a similar scale ($M = 5.6$, $SD = 2$). To establish a scale of media hostility, the personal ideological position was subtracted from the media position and the resulting absolute values of the variable were used as measure of distance between the media's perceived ideology and that of the respondent, regardless of whether the perceived slant was seen from the left or from the right. The resulting hostile media perception variable has a mean of 5.5, with a *SD* of 1.4.

In order to examine whether hostile media perceptions would interact with third-person perceptions or presumed powerful media effects, multiplicative two-way interaction terms between were created. All variables used to construct our interaction terms were standardized before the interaction terms were created.

RESULTS

In order to examine whether perceptions about media effects, as well as perceptions of media bias against one's views, predict taking "corrective" actions to ensure one's views are "heard" in the public sphere, two hierarchical regression models were performed. For analyses, demographic variables (gender, age, education, and house stratum) and a series of additional control variables (Internet use, political interest, political efficacy, political knowledge and ideological extremity) were entered as an initial block, and then the variables of interest (perceived media gap, perceived total influence, and hostile media perceptions) were entered as a second block in the equation.

The model for offline corrective political behaviors explains 14.4 percent of the variance. Upon entry, house strata ($\beta = .46$, $p < .001$), house strata^2 ($\beta = .35$, $p < .05$) political interest ($\beta = .22$, $p < .001$), political knowledge ($\beta = .16$, $p < .001$) and ideological extremity ($\beta = .10$, $p < .01$) appear as significant predictors of corrective action. Block one explains 12.4 percent of

TABLE I **Hierarchical regression model predicting "corrective" behaviors**

	Offline behaviors		*Online behaviors*	
	Block 1	*Block 2*	*Block 1*	*Block 2*
Demographics and controls				
Gender (male = 0)	−.01	.00	−.07	−.07
Age	.02	.02	−.12*	−.12*
Education	.02	.01	.14*	.14*
House strata	−.46***	−.48***	−.34	−.34
House strata²	.35**	.38**	.42	.42
Political interest	.22***	.21***	.08	.08
Political efficacy	−.03	−.03	−.03	.01
Political knowledge	.16***	.13***	.11	.06
Ideological extremity	.10**	.04	.13*	.03
Incremental R^2 (%)	12.4***			
Internet use			.13*	.14**
Incremental R^2 (%)			15.0***	
Perceptions of media effects				
Perceived influence gap		.06*		.18***
Perceived total influence		.09**		.13*
Hostile media perception		.12**		.12*
Total R^2 (%)		14.4***		20.0***

Note: Entries are standardized regression coefficients. $N = 1009$, Adult random sample (Offline), 355 subsample with Internet access, Colombia 2006.
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

incremental variance. These variables remain significant when the perception of media and media effects block is entered; with the exception of ideological extremity, that ceases to be so (Table I).

The second block in the model explains 2 percent of incremental variance with perceived influence gap ($\beta = .06$, $p < .05$), perceived total influence ($\beta = .09$, $p < .05$), and hostile media perceptions ($\beta = .12$, $p < .01$) all contributing significantly to the offline forms of political participation examined in this study.[2] As one could expect, people who are more interested in politics, have higher levels of political knowledge, or are more ideologically extreme tend to engage more in participation behaviors, such as participating in rallies, signing petitions and trying to persuade others to vote. More interestingly, people who perceive a disproportional effect of media on others, powerful media effects overall and the media as being biased against their views, tend to engage more in these corrective behaviors.

[2]Collinearity statistics show that all tolerance values are above .74 and variance inflation factors (VIF) are below 1.3, suggesting no multicollinearity problems are present.

The second set of analyses is based on the subset of the sample having Internet access (355 subjects that correspond to 35 percent of the total sample).[3] With respect to online political behaviors, the model explains 20 percent of the variance. Upon entry, age ($\beta = .12$, $p < .05$), education ($\beta = .14$, $p < .05$), internet use ($\beta = .13$, $p < .05$), and ideological extremity ($\beta = .13$, $p < .05$) are all significant predictors of online political behaviors including using e-mail to express political views, sending campaign information, trying to persuade others to vote for a specific candidate, posting comments in online discussion forums and commenting on news and opinion pieces appearing in online news outlets. This initial block explained 15 percent of incremental variance (Table I).

When the perceptions of media and media effects block is entered, these variables remain significant with the exception of ideological extremity. Regarding our variables of interest, the perceived influence gap ($\beta = .18$, $p < .001$), perceived total influence ($\beta = .13$, $p < .05$), and hostile media perceptions ($\beta = .12$, $p < .05$) are all significant predictors of online corrective behaviors.[4]

Overall, these results provide support for Hypothesis 1, according to which third-person perceptions regarding the effects of mass media on public opinion would be positively related to a series of offline (H1a) and online (H1b) behaviors aimed at "correcting" available information in the public sphere. In both models, the relationships among variables were in the expected direction and statistically significant.

These results also provide support for Hypothesis 2 and the notion that the perceived total influence of media is important in predicting the behavioral outcomes considered. In both models, the relationship was statistically significant. With regards to Hypothesis 3, according to which perceptions of a hostile media would be positively related to a series of behaviors aimed at making information available in the public sphere, the data also offer strong support. In both models, the relationship was in the expected direction and statistically significant.

To test for interactions, an alternative model was tested in which interaction terms for hostile media perceptions and perceived third-person effect or presumed powerful media were included. Neither interaction term was significant in the online and offline models, so this data offers no support for Hypothesis 4, according to which the effect of perceived hostility on expressive corrective actions would be amplified by perceptions of media effects.

With respect to research question 1 that enquired whether third-person perceptions or total presumed influence of media would be a more consistent

[3]Not surprisingly, those with Internet access in Colombia have a significantly higher SES than the full sample (education: $t = 26.56$, $p < .001$; house stratum): $t = 9.22$, $p < .001$), are younger ($t = 15.653$, $p < .001$), and tend to be male ($t = 2.66$, $p < .01$).

[4]Collinearity statistics show that all tolerance values are above .65 and VIF are below 1.5, suggesting no multicollinearity problems.

predictor of the "corrective" actions considered in this study, there is no clear answer. In both models both concepts are significantly related to the criterion variable. Furthermore, a standardized beta difference test reveals that there is no significant difference between the betas for total presumed influence and perceived influence gap. However, the fact that they are both significant in the models suggests that, rather than the either/or proposition, it might be important to consider both the effects of third-person perceptions and of presumed influence when examining political behaviors.

DISCUSSION

In sum, these results provide empirical evidence of the importance of perceptions of media effects and media bias as antecedents of expressive political action. Both in the realm of an emerging networked public sphere in which citizens can make use of new communication technologies to express their views in public and try to persuade others of their political points of views, but also under more traditional scenarios of political participation, third-person perceptions as well as hostile media perceptions emerge as consistent predictors of political action.

These findings provide fertile ground in which to continue exploring the consequences of perceived media effects and perceived media biases, while positing important normative questions for public opinion and theories on the public sphere. Results suggest that people perceiving others to be disproportionately affected by media, or media to be hostile to their views, are more likely to embrace traditional and new communication technologies to amplify their views, and in the process could potentially make the opinions of others more informed, the public sphere more vibrant, and increase their own commitment to their community.

Proponents of deliberative democracy (for a review of this literature see Delli-Carpini, Cook, & Jacobs, 2004; Rojas *et al.,* 2005) have shown how deliberation enhances consensus and peaceful conflict resolution, encourages tolerance, and makes citizens more informed, engaged, and active (Fishkin, 1995; Gastil & Dillard, 1999; Mendelberg, 2002; Mendelberg & Oleske, 2000; Price, Capella, & Nir, 2002). From a deliberative perspective, the results reported in this paper can be seen as promising for they can be related to a broader public discussion of issues.

However, these results also point out that it is precisely the people who find mass media to be hostile to their point of views, which we know from previous research tend to be those that are extremely partisan, or, those experiencing third-person perceptions, are more likely to engage in these practices—this could suggest that these efforts to "correct" public opinion might result in opinion polarization instead of public deliberation.

Whether this embracing of new expressive communication technologies by citizens results in a more vibrant public sphere or in a more polarized and fragmented public opinion is, of course, an empirical question. However, both researchers and practitioners need to keep in mind the importance of perceived effects in the design of tools that seek to enhance large-scale deliberation processes.

This study has some limitations that have to be considered when assessing its overall contribution to the field: i.e., the context of the study, the broad measures of third-person perceptions, hostile media perceptions and expressive actions online, and the cross-sectional nature of our study. While we control for many variables in our study, the causal model implied here is based on cross-sectional data, and so the argument could be made that it is actually that those who participate end up perceiving the media as more powerful or hostile. However, a recent study by Tal-Or, Cohen, and Gunther (2009), using an experimental approach (in a different context), finds support for the causal order assumed in this study. Future research based on longitudinal data needs to test for this possibility within the logic of corrective action.

In addition, future research should consider more issue specific measures both of dependent and independent variables. In addition, it would be particularly fruitful to consider the notion put forward by Jensen and Hurley (2005) of examining not only perceived influence, but also perceived potential for the behavioral reaction of others. Also, future research needs to replicate these findings in other contexts, such as ones in which other forms of political participation for people that perceive their views as extreme might be less taxing than the Colombian context.

Finally, it appears that the field of perceived media effects is ripe for the testing of a broader model that reconciles apparent contradictions between some of its elements. For example, if third-person, hostile media, persuasive press, spiral of silence, and projection biases are considered simultaneously, there seems to be inconsistencies between these expectations. If someone tends to perceive that others think like they do (projection), why would they abstain from expressing their opinion (spiral of silence)? And if the media have powerful effects (persuasive press), how is it that they can influence others but not the self (third-person)? Moreover, if others think like the self and the media has affected them, how can media be hostile to their position?

The multiple connections between these areas have been pointed out by numerous scholars (*e.g.*, see Eveland, 2002) but integrative efforts have been scarce. Gunther and Storey (2003) have developed a broader model they refer to as the "influence of presumed influence", according to which people perceive the media to have an effect on others and react to that perception. What differentiates this model from a traditional third-person effect model is that it does not rely on the self-other distinction.

Using the theoretical leverage of the persuasive press inference, Gunther and Storey (2003) provide evidence of how the perceived influence of a radio show on others can improve our perception of them, and through this improved image affect our interaction with them. Their conclusion is that assumptions of mass media influence can explain different outcomes, a statement with which we completely agree. However, by placing the emphasis exclusively on the perceived effects of the message on others, the possible self-other discrepancies are lost, and that constitutes a limitation of the presumed influence model that the results of this study illustrate.

In a similar fashion, Mutz (1998) has concentrated on perceptions of mass collectives, those anonymous others that are assessed primarily through mediated representations. Mutz (1998) provides ample evidence that perceptions of mass collectives are more important to political attitudes and behaviors than personal experiences, and we do not doubt the importance of media representations or impersonal influence. However, the emphasis on media representations should not obscure the importance of perceived public opinion, which can be distinct from mass media content, and direct our experiences as well as perceptions of self.

To address these limitations, and provide theoretical grounding for future empirical research, this study contends that an even broader model of perceived effects needs to be developed. Programmatically, it appears that the focus of this model should be threefold: on the perceived position of self, the perceived position of others, and the perceived position of the message/source to predict attitudinal and behavioral outcomes.

The underlying assumption would be that individuals assess the ''position'' (ultimately it might turn out that the accuracy of the perception might not be important) on some sort of ideological continuum of where they stand on an issue, where they perceive the media to stand on this issue, and where they perceive public opinion to be.

Based on these perceived positions, we could imagine that people make a mental triangulation, and that what has been dubbed third-person, hostile media, projection, spiral of silence, and persuasive press, are simply the different shapes of this triangulation. Clearly these propositions need refinement and empirical corroboration, but we are convinced that the empirical evidence presented in this study suggests that online expressive participatory behaviors might be the realm to conduct further tests and theorizations.

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