November 13, 2017

Dr. Jennifer Gibbs and Dr. Silvia Knobloch-Westerwick

Co-Editors, *Communication Research*

Dear Editors,

We would like to submit the attached manuscript, “The Dynamics of Message Selection in Online Political Discussion Forums: Self-Segregation or Diverse Exposure?,” to be considered for publication in *Communication Research*.

This study aims to provide a new perspective on understanding online political discussion by examining message selection in online discussion forums. Drawing on unique data from a three-wave panel survey matched with unobtrusively logged behavioral (message selection) data, our Temporal Exponential Random Graph Model (TERGM) analysis shows that message selection in an online discussion forum is largely driven by the similarity of one’s candidate evaluative criteria and various endogenous structural factors. Contrary to the notion of partisan selectivity and political echo chambers, the impact of overt partisan preference on message selection is limited. Our results suggest that social and utility considerations strongly override overt partisan considerations. We believe this study represents an important step in unraveling the ways political discussion is held in online settings, which has important implications for political communication and democracy in a digital age. We believe that our theoretical discussion, analytical approach, and results will be of a great interest to *Communication Research* readers.

In accordance with the submission guideline of CR, we confirm that our manuscript has never been published elsewhere in substantially similar form or with substantially similar content. Yet, we disclose that another manuscript drawing on the same dataset has been published in CR (article first published online April 20, 2016; <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650216644020>), entitled "Influencing Myself: Self-Reinforcement Through Online Political Expression,” by the second author of the present manuscript. The published paper (Article 2016, hereafter) is composed of two studies, the second of which is based on the dataset used in the current manuscript (Manuscript 2017, hereafter) we are now submitting. Although the two studies share the same dataset, they are clearly different in all aspects - theoretical focus, key concepts, hypotheses, the unit/level of analysis, analytical approach, and results.

Article 2016 examines the impact of online political expression on the expressers' political preferences. The frequency of political expression, the independent variable, was measured at the individual level as the number of posts each participant made on an online forum which was uniquely set up for the study. The dependent variable was the slope of change from Wave 1 to Wave 3 in self-reported candidate preference. Latent Growth Curve Modeling was used to test a hypothesis formally stated as follows: "individuals’ candidate preferences, as indicated by a differential in preferences between the two major candidates, will grow more stable as Election Day approaches (H2a), and this pattern of growing preference for one candidate over the other will grow stronger as they engage more in political expression on an online forum (H2b)."

In contrast, Manuscript 2017 examines whose messages each of the forum participants chooses to read and what explains the message selection patterns over time. Thus, dyadic level message selection (participant *i*'s click on participant *j*'s posting), measured by data logs from the discussion forum, is the dependent variable, and factors at various levels (individual motives, dyadic-level homophily, and network structures) are considered as independent variables. Because of the network nature of the key concepts, Manuscript 2017 used Temporal Exponential Random Graph Model. To summarize, the two studies are completely different, looking at different phenomena with different concepts at different levels of analysis.

Thank you in advance for your consideration; we look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

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