The Role of Political Agreement and Disagreement of News and Political Discussion on Social Media for Political Participation

Kideuk Hyun[*]
Akita International University

Abstract

This study investigates the mobilizing function of political agreement and disagreement in communition mediated by social media. Analyses of a survey found that reception of news consistent with individual political predispositions through social networking sites (SNS) positively related to political participation, whereas reception of counterattitudinal news was unrelated. Similarly, SNS- based discussion with politically agreeing others predicted political participation, whereas discussion with disagreeing people did not contribute to participation. Moreover, attitude-consistent news reception and agreement in political discussion had interactive influences, as the effects of attitude-consistent news on participation become stronger with increases in discussion with agreement. The results suggest that the mobilizing effects of social media mainly work through political agreement rather than disagreement in communication.

Keywords

differential gains, discussion networks, Facebook, political homophily, social networking sites, Twitter

* Associate Professor, Global Studies Program, Akita International University, email: kideuk.hyun@ gmail.com

Ⅰ. Introduction

A growing body of research documents that social media can encourage political engagement by serving as news channels and venues for political interactions. Compared with traditional means of political communication, social media involve unique characteristics that may promote political participation. Especially, technological features of social media can either facilitate or hinder exposure to politically agreeing or disagreeing news messages and conversation. Prior research conducted in non-SNS contexts has noted that individuals' (dis)agreement to news messages and discussants' viewpoints can have different impacts on political participation. Exposure to attitude-consistent news sources, relative to exposure to counterattitudinal or balanced news, has been reported to promote political participation (Dilliplane, 2011; Stroud, 2011). Similarly, political discussion with likeminded discussants has been found to encourage political participation whereas the mobilizing influence of discussion with non-likeminded others are being contested (e.g., Eveland & Hively, 2009; Kwak, Williams, Wang & Lee, 2005; Mutz, 2002).

Although those previous studies provide important insights about the function of political (dis)agreement of communication for participation, they have not considered changing political communication environments induced by the popularization of social media. Social media as sources of political news and information involve seemingly contradictory possibilities of exposure to political agreement or disagreement. Due to enhanced customizing functions, SNSs afford users to select news sources and political discussants that agree with their own political attitudes and

orientations (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010; Colleoni, Rozza, Arvidsson, 2014; Zhang, Seltzer, Bichard, 2013). On the other hand, SNSs may not necessarily diminish contact to politically disagreeing communication, but rather they can increase opportunities to encounter cross-cutting news and convertsation as SNSs enhance the easy access and unintended exposure to diverse and heterogeneous information and opinions (Brundidge, 2010; Kim, 2011).

Another important distinction of social media from traditional political communication means is that SNSs effectively incorporate news consumption and political discussion in the same platform, facilitating seamless switching between the two different types of communication (Brundidge, 2010). Literature from *differential gains model* has noted that the effects of news consumption on political participation tend to be amplified when individual news use is accompanied by political discussion (Hardy & Scheufele, 2005; Scheufele, 2002). Social media then can uniquely foster political participation because SNS users can easily connect news use and political discussion. However, differential gains in SNS contexts may be influenced by the extent of political congruence between news and political discussion. The interconnected communication in SNSs may promote political participation, especially when information and viewpoints from news and discussion are consistent and mutually supportive in partisan cues and tones.

Since few studies have considered the mobilizing effects of social media from the perspective of political agreement and disagreement, this study attempts to unravel potentially differential roles of political (dis) agreement in SNS-mediated news and discussion for participation. Using survey data of SNS users, this study examines the mobilizing effects of receiving politically consonant news and discussing with likeminded

individuals via social media. This investigation also considers whether counterattitudinal news reception and political discussion with disagreeing others have effects that are either parallel to or in contrast to the effects of homophilous communication. In addition, the current study tests whether consistency in partisan or ideological directions between news and conversation on SNSs interacts to produce mobilizing effects. Through these analyses, this study aims to demonstrate to what extent social media increase opportunities to encounter diverse or homogenous political information and opinions and how SNS users' political (dis)agreement to news messages and discussants' viewpoints on SNSs differently contribute to active citizenship.

Ⅱ. News reception on social media and political participation

Social media enable users to obtain news by employing various methods such as friending and following news organizations and journalists; searching specific news topics in SNSs; and receiving news, typically with hyperlinks directed to news sites, from contacts within individual networks (Purcell, Rainie, Mitchell, Rosenstiel, & Olmstead, 2010; Weeks & Holbert, 2013). The enhanced user control over news selection supported by social media can provide people unique opportunities to customize news consumption in accordance with their own interests and needs. When news choice on SNSs is determined on the basis of users' ideological and political orientations, it may generate important outcomes for political participation.

In this regard, prior investigations into the role of partisan news for political engagement provide initial theoretical grounds to explore the links between the political nature of news received via social media and participation (Brundidge, Garrett, Rojas, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2014; Dilliplane, 2011; Jamieson & Cappella, 2008; Stroud, 2011). Mainstream news media, drawing upon the objectivity model of journalism, have offered relatively balanced coverage of competing political groups and their perspectives. Because most people do not frequently engage in political discussion with politically dissimilar others, traditional news media have served as major communication channels through which individuals encounter opposing political views (Mutz & Martin, 2001). However, the rise of partisan media, such as cable TV news, talk radio, and political websites, diminishes the likelihood that people will be exposed to politically diverse perspectives, as the audience can easily seek news sources consistent with their own political predispositions (Hollander, 2008; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Stroud, 2011).

Selective exposure to news tilted toward one's political preference can encourage political participation. An analysis of cross-sectional data by Stroud (2011), for example, demonstrated that partisans who more frequently used likeminded news outlets engaged in campaign activities more actively than other partisans who used the same sources less often. Another test, using panel data by Dilliplane (2011), supported the notion that use of consonant TV news led to campaign activities, whereas use of dissonant TV news depressed participation. Partisan selfselection of news can facilitate learning views and positions taken by preferred parties and elites and can activate and reinforce preexisting political dispositions, which are closely related to political activities. It has been theorized that

likeminded news sources having clear and consistent partisan cues in content would prime audience partisan identity (Levendusky, 2013), intensify certainty about partisan beliefs (Stroud, 2011), and decrease political ambivalence (Dilliplane, 2011). Indeed, some empirical studies showed that exposure to politically consonant news induced more extreme attitudes, causing polarized opinions (Levendusky, 2013; Stroud, 2011) and increased accessibility to partisan self-concepts (Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2011).

It is still an empirical question, though, whether attitude-consistent news use via SNSs influences political participation in the same way that other partisan news sources do. Some studies noted that SNS users' political and ideological orientations affected their choice of news and information. A survey of U.S. college students found that use of social media, such as Facebook and MySpace, was positively associated with seeking news consistent with users' political viewpoints, whereas it was not related to seeking news with opposing perspectives (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010). Another study, using a U.S. adult sample, discovered a similar trend in that users of SNSs such as Facebook and Twitter were more likely to visit SNSs offering consonant views (Zhang et al., 2013). It was also found that South Korean Twitter users tended to follow news sites that reflected rather than opposed their partisan orientations (Hahn, Ryu, & Park, 2015).

Thus, the tendency to self-select news based on political homophily in SNSs may facilitate participation through the similar mechanism theorized in previous studies conducted in non-SNS contexts. The impact of attitudeconsistent news on political activities has been observed in the use of online news sources as well as traditional news outlets (Stroud,

2011). Brundidge et al. (2014) also found that the use of proattitudinal sites, such as partisan news websites and political blogs matching one's political orientations, predicted participation both online and offline. Of note, the influence of political blogs confirmed in their study suggests that similar mobilizing effects of attitudeconsistent news may occur from the use of other nontraditional, user-oriented news sources such as Facebook and Twitter. Drawing upon the mobilizing evidence of attitude-consistent news offered by various types of news media, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1. Attitude-consistent news reception via social media will be positively associated with political participation.

Social media may encourage politically consonant news reception, but they do not necessarily prevent exposure to counterattitudinal news. Although people may prefer online news and information sources that match their attitudes, they do not necessarily avoid counterattitudinal information (Garrett, 2009). In accord with the general online information-seeking pattern, Kim (2011) discovered that social media use was positively associated with exposure to politically dissonant information and opinions. Granting the common exposure to news on social media that runs counter to one's political predispositions, it is still uncertain whether exposure to counterattitudinal news would promote political activities to the same extent that attitude-consistent news does. Exposure to politically opposing news can lead people to question and challenge their existing political beliefs and standpoints (Matthes, 2012) and increase political ambivalence (Dilliplane, 2011), which may suppress participatory activities. Conversely, partisans who encounter counterattitudinal news can actively defend and

even bolster their original beliefs through motivated information processing (Taber & Lodge, 2006), which can promote participation. The lack of consensus in the extant literature raises the following research question:

RQ1. Does counterattitudinal news reception through social media relate to political participation?

III. Discussion networks on social media and political participation

As social media grow in popularity, they are becoming an important venue for political interactions among their users. Many studies showed that social media, especially when used for political purposes, contribute to political participation (Bode, Vraga, Borah, & Shah, 2014; Dimitrova, Shehata, Strömbäck, & Nord, 2014; Gil de Zúñiga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012; Yamamoto, Kushin, & Dalisay, 2013). While political use of social media can include a broad range of activities such as seeking, producing, and sharing political information and news, SNS-based political discussion in particular was found to be positively associated with political activities. Political discussion on SNSs is also common practice; a U.S. survey reported that about half of SNS users discussed news events and issues via social media (Matsa & Mitchell, 2014).

Previous studies, however, have focused mainly on the effects of overall amount of SNS use, and they have rarely explored the question of whether different compositions of political discussion networks formed in social media affect political participation. On the other hand, research

conducted in the context of interpersonal communication has long emphasized the significance of political heterogeneity or disagreement of discussion networks for participation. Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1968) originally suggested that *crosspressure* caused by the exposure to others having contradictory orientations can hinder voters' early political engagement. Building upon that notion, Mutz (2002, 2006) theorized that *cross-cutting exposure*, or exposure to viewpoints opposed to one's political predispositions during interpersonal interactions, would discourage participation as functions of increased political ambivalence and a desire to avoid interpersonal conflict.

Although Mutz's research provided the initial evidence of the demo-bilizing effects of discussion with disagreeing individuals, a number of studies have shown quite mixed results, ranging from demobilizing effects (McClurg, 2006) to mobilizing effects (Kwak et al., 2005; Scheufele, Hardy, Brossard, Waismel-Manor, & Nisbet 2006) and no effects (Eveland & Hively, 2009; Huckfeldt, Mendez, Osborn, 2004; Nir, 2005). The inconsistency in prior scholarship may be due to different conceptualization and operationalization of network heterogeneity. In particular, when studies included a broad range of social categories, such as gender, age, and race, to gauge the level of heterogeneity, they tended to find positive associations between discussion network heterogeneity or disagreement and participation (Kwak et al., 2005; Scheufele et al., 2006). Alternatively, studies that limited discussion networks to convert-sation with politically dissimilar people found negative association with participation (McClurg, 2006; Mutz, 2002).

Another important source of confusion in the literature seems to arise from the operationalization of agreeing discussion vis-à-vis disagreeing

discussion. As Eveland and Hively (2009) noted, many studies apparently regarded the relationship between discussion with agreement and discussion with disagreement as a zero-sum game in which one type of discussion sacrifices the other. Thus, discussion with agreement is often implicitly assumed to be the inverse of discussion with disagreement, and few attempts have been made to separate the roles of agreement and disagreement in discussion networks for participation. However, some studies indicated that the two different types of discussion are closely related, such that people who frequently talked about politics with likeminded others also tended to engage in political conversation with non-likeminded others (Eveland & Shah, 2003). Analyzing network disagreement or heterogeneity alone, in exclusion of network agreement or homogeneity, may confound the potentially discrete effects of the two different types of discussion on participatory activities.

Evidence from the mobilizing effects of partisan news suggests that political homophily in political discussion can have similar mobilizing effects. This argument is further supported by the observation that people potentially have a greater chance of encountering likeminded opinions and perspectives from interpersonal contacts than even from partisan news exposure (Mutz & Martin, 2001). Similar to face-to-face communication, some have noted that SNS-mediated interactions follow the tendency of political homophily, choosing network members based on political agreement rather than disagreement. Network analyses of Twitter sites, for example, documented the emergence of subgroups consisting of densely interconnected users sharing similar political ideologies and viewpoints (Colleoni et al., 2014; Himelboim, McCreery, & Smith, 2013). In this respect, SNS-based political communication networks may repeat the

preponderance of discussion with agreement commonly found in an offline setting (Mutz, 2006). However, others have challenged this view of political homophily in SNS-mediated communication, suggesting that online interaction in general (Brundidge, 2010) and SNS-based communication in particular (Kim, 2011) can expand users' exposure to politically diverse views.

Aside from the debates about the extent of political diversity in SNS-mediated communication, it is anticipated that agreement and disagreement in discussion networks may exert differential influences on users' political activities. Technological features of social media can amplify these potentially different effects by facilitating users' self-selection of discussion partners. Selection of discussants offline greatly depends on the social context in which an individual is embedded (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995). When an individual's neighborhood or workplace is predominantly populated with people who hold consonant views, for example, it may be difficult to find discussants who have opposing perspectives. Meanwhile, social media allow users to overcome these physical constraints. SNS users may more easily identify their discussants outside their immediate environment, whether based on political similarity or dissimilarity.

Against this backdrop, the extent of agreement and disagreement in political discussion on SNSs would have different associations with political participation. In a study that considered discussion with agreement and disagreement separately in an offline setting, Eveland and Hively (2009) found that the former was positively associated with political participation, whereas the latter was not significantly related to participation. In addition, exposure to attitudeconsistent information through

partisan news was found to be positively linked to participation. SNS-based discussion network agreement may exert an even stronger mobilizing influence than consonant news use because political discussion on SNSs involves interpersonal and interactive elements that may require more active engagement than simply watching partisan TV news or websites (Dimitrova et al., 2014). Mutual support among likeminded discussants on SNSs would lead users to feel more certain about their preferences, strengthen existing political attitudes, and motivate political participation.

H2. Agreement in political discussion on social media will be positively associated with political participation.

On the other hand, previous studies conducted in interpersonal contexts have shown conflicting results regarding the mobilizing effects of discussion with disagreeing others.Therefore, the following research question is asked:

RQ2. Does disagreement in political discussion on social media relate to political participation?

Ⅳ. Interactions of news reception and political discussion on social media

Communication scholars have noted news use and political discussion as two major communication factors contributing to participation. News and political conversation not only independently promote political engagement, but they also can work jointly to encourage political activities

(Hardy & Scheufele, 2005; Scheufele, 2002; Yamamoto et al., 2015). Emphasizing the imperative role of interpersonal communication in addition to news use for political involvement, Scheufele (2002) proposed the differential gains model, in which the impact of news media on participation is stronger among those who more frequently engage in political discussion with others than those who talk about politics less frequently. Supporting this notion, political conversation mediated by new media, such as online chatting (Hardy & Scheufele, 2005) and online expression, including blog and social media posting (Yamamoto et al., 2015), was found to moderate the effects of both traditional and online news on participation.

The interactive relationship between news use and discussion for participation occurs as political discussion can complement and enhance the informational effects of news media. Through political conversation, people can learn additional information necessary for participation, but often lacking in news. Mainstream news media operating under the objectivity norms, for example, tend to fail to provide sufficient mobilizing information, an area that interpersonal conversation can supplement (Scheufele, 2002). Interpersonal communication can also augment media influence by making people more engaged in the news experience. When people anticipate political discussion, they carefully attend to and process information from news media to offer news accounts and articulate their ideas to conversational partners (Scheufele, 2002). More careful processing of and elaboration on information from news media induced by inter-personal discussion can also assist in political learning (Eveland, 2004) and in developing attitudes beneficial to participation, such as opinionation (Kim, Wyatt, & Katz, 1999) and political efficacy (Jung, Kim, & Gil de

Zúñiga, 2011).

While prior studies offer a mechanism for explaining the interactive function of news and discussion for political activities, they have rarely considered how the extent of political agreement between news content and interpersonal communication relates to participation. In light of the cross-pressure argument (Lazarsfeld et al., 1968) and its extensions (Dilliplane, 2011; Mutz, 2002), it is plausible that consistency of political information gained from news media and discussants may exert interactive influence on participation. Previous studies noted that one-sided news messages such as editorials (Dalton, Beck, & Huckfeldt, 1998) and opinionated TV programs (Feldman, 2011) had stronger persuasive effects than balanced news reports with mixed or conflicting valence. Although these studies dealt with news rather than interpersonal communication, they provide indirect evidence supporting the view that consistency of message can affect political activities. In essence, the notion of cross-pressure and cross-cutting exposure concerns the demobilizing effects arising from the exposure to dissimilar or contradictory information. Taken one step further, partisan consistency between news content and interpersonal communication can matter as much as the consistency within the same communication form.

In this respect, social media may produce unique interactive effects driven by the relative ease of seeking consistency in partisan or ideological cues between news and discussion. The Internet distinguishes itself from traditional media in that the former effectively connects news consumption with discussion. Brundidge (2010) emphasized that the Internet promotes relatively easy traversing from one communication space to the other. Social media may further heighten the traversability of

political news use and conversation because news reception and political discussion can occur almost simultaneously and move back and forth effortlessly. Social media not only facilitate smooth travel between news and discussion, but also their network characteristics can lead to the uneven flow of similar or dissimilar news and viewpoints. When political homophily drives individual selection of political discussants, the SNS-mediated discussion networks will predominantly comprise those who share political predispositions. Consequently, members of discussion networks are more likely to exchange consonant, rather than dissonant, news and information with each other. Conversely, discussion networks consisting of non-likeminded groups of people will facilitate the flow of counterattitudinal news.

    H3. Attitude-consistent news reception through social media will be positively associated with agreement in political discussion networks, whereas it is negatively associated with disagreement in political discussion networks.

The close link between news reception and discussion based on political homophily can exert interactive effects on participation. Traditionally, separation between news and discussion in political communication was believed to maintain some level of exposure to politically diverse views. Even if an individual restricted political discussion to likeminded individuals, regular consumption of news was expected to lead to routine exposure to divergent views (Mutz & Martin, 2001). Potentially opposing and contradictory information from news media and interpersonal contacts can cause political ambiguity and uncertainty, which work against political involvement. In contrast, social media render it easier to select both

news and discussants aligning with users' political preferences, and ensuing clarity and consistency of information can further reinforce existing political views and attitudes, which ultimately can lead to active political engagement.

> *H4.* Agreement in political discussion networks will moderate the relationship between attitude-consistent news reception and political participation such that the positive association between attitude-consistent news reception through social media and political participation will be stronger among those who more frequently engage in political discussion with agreement than among those who engage less frequently in discussion with agreement.

V. Method

1. Sample

Data from a survey of SNS users in South Korea were employed for the present study. The broad use of social media among the public and news media in South Korea provides a proper research setting to examine the impact of SNS-based news use and discussion on political activities. South Korea ranks as one of the top countries in social media use (Pew Research Center, 2010). Many Korean news media outlets provide their audiences with partisan options representing either conservative or progressive politics, with common adoption of Facebook and Twitter for news delivery (Hahn et al., 2015). Koreans' social media use for informational and expressive purposes was also found to promote

participatory behaviors (Choi & Shin, 2016).

A national online survey was conducted in May 2014 before the nationwide local election held on June 4. From an online pool of about 1 million registered participants maintained by a South Korean survey company, adults who use Facebook and Twitter were randomly selected. Among a total of 542 participants, gender was quite evenly distributed (male = 50.4%). Survey participants in general tended to be younger ($M =$ 30.58 *years old*, $SD =$ 9.89) and better educated ($M =$ 4.68, equivalent to "community college graduate" to "some college"; $SD =$ .87) than the general population. Gender and age compositions of the sample are quite similar to the statistics reported by the Korea Information Society Development Institute (KISDI), a government-funded research organization. According to the KISDI (2013), there is virtually no gender gap among Korean SNS users: about 32% of adult males and 31% of females use social media. Younger Koreans are more likely to use social media; about 69% of people in their 20s and 47% in their 30s use social media, compared to 29% of Koreans in their 40s and 12% in their 50s who use social media.

2. Measures

SNS-mediated news reception. Attitude-consistent and counterattitudinal news reception via SNSs was assessed based on the similar measures used in previous studies (e.g., Brundidge et al., 2014; Kim, 2011). Respondents were asked to estimate, on a 10-point scale, how often they received political news consistent with their own political opinions and viewpoints through social media ($M =$ 5.76, $SD =$ 2.25). Using the same scale, counterattitudinal news reception was measured by asking how

often the respondents received political news in opposition to their own political opinions and viewpoints ($M = 5.43$, $SD = 2.15$).

SNS-mediated political discussion. Based on prior measures of offline political discussion networks (e.g., Eveland & Hively, 2009; Scheufele et al., 2006), political agreement and disagreement of SNS-based discussion networks were assessed. A respondent's political discussion with people having the same political orientations or viewpoints was considered to be agreement in discussion, whereas discussion with opposing political orientations and viewpoints was regarded as discussion with disagreement. To gauge the extent of each individual's agreement and disagreement in political discussion networks, respondents were asked to estimate, on a 10-point scale, how often they talked about politics and government affairs on social media with (1) people who are conservative; (2) people who are progressive; (3) people supportive of the ruling party; (4) people supportive of the opposition party; (5) people who agree with the respondent's political views; and (6) people who disagree with the res-pondent's political views.

Responses involving ideological leanings and party support of discussants were recoded based on a respondent's self-reported political ideology and partisanship. For example, if a respondent identified herself as a conser-vative, discussion with other conservatives was determined to be discussion with agreement, and discussion with progressives was judged to be discussion with disagreement. When respondents had no ideological leanings, their discussion with either conservative or progressive discussants were treated as mixed discussion, and discussion frequencies were multiplied by 0.5, following the similar method of Mutz and Martin (2001). Each respondent's discussion frequencies with politically agreeing

and disagreeing people were summed and then divided to create an index of agreement in political discussion ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 2.25$) and disagreement in political discussion ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 1.90$) on social media.

Political participation. Political participation was measured based on respondents' engagement in the following political activities: attending political meetings, participating in protests, joining political parties, donating money to a specific party or organization, persuading others to vote for or against a specific party or candidate, and signing petitions (1 = *Yes*, 0 = *No*). An additive participation index was created by summing all responses ($M = 1.16$, $SD = 1.65$, $\alpha = .77$).

Control variables. Political variables known to vary with partisan self-exposure and political participation were controlled. Partisanship was dummy-coded using an item that asked about respondents' party affiliations. When respondents supported any political parties in South Korea, they were coded as 1; when they reported themselves as independents, they were coded as 0 ($M = .60$, $SD = .49$). The strength of political ideology ($M = 1.82$, $SD = .88$) was assessed by folding a 7-point ideology scale (1 = strong conservative, 7 = strong progressive). Political interest was measured using a single 7-point scale ($M = 4.49$, $SD = 1.51$). Political knowledge was assessed by adding the number of correct answers to four questions about political figures and institutions in South Korea ($M = 2.48$, $SD = 1.26$, $\alpha = .61$). Offline political discussion was measured on a 10-point scale by asking how often respondents talked about politics or public affairs with others offline ($M = 5.42$, $SD = 2.23$).

For news media variables, news attention was measured using a 5-point scale (1 = *very little attention*, 5 = *very close attention*), by gauging res-

pondents' attention to newspapers ($M = 2.73$, $SD = 1.28$), TV news ($M = 3.50$, $SD = .92$), and online news ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 1.01$). In addition, partisan news media use, noted to be related to participation (Dilliplane, 2011; Stroud, 2011), was controlled. Partisan news use was measured by asking how many days a week respondents used each of the three representative conservative media (i.e., *ChosunIlbo, Dong-A Ilbo*, and *JoongAngIlbo*) and three progressive media (i.e., *Hankyoreh, Kyunghyang-Shinmun*, and *OhmyNews*) in South Korea. Frequencies of news use consistent with a respondent's political ideology were averaged to create an index of attitude-consistent news use ($M = 1.84$, $SD = 1.87$). Using the same procedures, a counterattitudinal news use index was also created ($M = 1.33$, $SD = 1.33$).

VI. Results

Bivariate correlation analyses revealed that self-selection of news and political discussants based on political homophily occurred on social media. The strength of political ideology tended to be more closely correlated with attitude-consistent news reception ($r = .23$, $p < .01$) and agreement in discussion ($r = .28$, $p < .01$) than with counterattitudinal news reception ($r = .09$, $p < .05$) and disagreement in discussion ($r = -.05$, $p = $ ns). The initial findings suggest that SNS users may prefer politically agreeing messages and viewpoints although social media can allow exposure to disagreeing communication. Correlation analyses also showed that political participation was positively and significantly related to all SNS- related variables, such as attitude-consistent news reception ($r = .35$,

$p < .01$), counterattitudinal news reception ($r = .19$, $p < .01$), agreement in political discussion ($r = .42$, $p < .01$), and disagreement in political discussion ($r = .21$, $p < .01$). Evidence was also found for a positive relationship between attitude-consistent news and counterattitudinal news reception ($r = .54$, $p < .01$). Similarly, agreement in political discussion was positively associated with disagreement in political discussion ($r = .67$, $p < .01$).

OLS regression analyses including all control variables, however, presented quite a different picture, as shown in Table 1. When attitude-consistent and counterattitudinal news reception were entered with other control variables to predict political participation, only attitude-consistent news reception ($\beta = .12$, $p < .05$) was positively related to participation. Similarly, agreement in SNS political discussion positively and significantly predicted participation ($\beta = .20$, $p < .01$), whereas disagreement in discussion was not significantly related to participation. The data confirmed the mobilizing effects of political communication on social media based on political homophily. H1 and H2 were supported.

Table 1. Regression analyses predicting the effects of news reception and political discussion via social media on political participation

	Attitude-consistent news reception	Counterattitudinal news reception
Demographic variables		
Gender (male = 1)	-.02	-.01
Age	.05	.04
Education	-.03	-.03
Income	-.01	-.02
Political variables		
Partisanship	.15**	.13**
Ideological strength	.04	.01
Political interest	.12*	.08
Political knowledge	.02	.04
Political discussion	.26***	.15*
News media variables		
Newspaper attention	-.03	-.04
TV news attention	-.08	-.08
Internet news attention	.02	.00
Attitude-consistent news	.13**	.09†
Counterattitudinal news	-.04	-.01
SNS variables		
Counterattitudinal SNS news		.03
Disagreement in SNS discussion		-.01
Attitude-consistent SNS news		.12*
Agreement in SNS discussion		.20**
Interaction		.11**
Total R2	.22***	.28***

Note. Entries are standardized coefficients.
†*p* < .10, *p* < .05, ***p* < .01, ****p* < .001

H3 posited that attitude-consistent news reception would be positively associated with agreement in political discussion and negatively associated with disagreement in discussion. The data strongly supported H3. The coefficient indicated that those who frequently talked about politics with likeminded others on SNSs tended to receive more news consistent with their political predispositions ($\beta = .47$, $p < .001$). In contrast, those who frequently discussed politics with politically disagreeing others tended to receive less attitude-consistent news ($\beta = -.30$, $p < .001$). An additional analysis to predict counterattitudinal news receptions further confirmed this trend by exhibiting the contrary pattern that disagreement in discussion was a positive predictor ($\beta = .44$, $p < .001$) and agreement in discussion was a negative predictor ($\beta = -.33$, $p < .001$). Notably, attitude-consistent news reception was found to be significantly and positively associated with counterattitudinal news reception, indicating that those who receive attitude-consistent news are also more likely to receive counterattitudinal news through social media (see Table 2).

H4 anticipated the interactive relationship between attitude-consistent news reception and agreement in SNS political discussion for political participation. Before entering the interaction term, the main effect variables were centered. As Table 1 indicates, there was a positive relationship between the interaction term and participation ($\beta = .11$, $p < .01$). Discussion with agreeing others moderated the mobilizing effects of attitude-consistent news reception such that attitudeconsistent news had a stronger impact on participation among those who frequently engaged in SNS-mediated political discussion with likeminded others. Even after controlling for counterattitudinal news reception and disagreement in discussion in the final model, the same trend of interactive influence on participation held up. H4 was supported.

Table 2. Regression analyses predicting the reception of attitude-consistent and counterattitudinal news via social media

	Attitude-consistent news reception	Counterattitudinal news reception
Demographic variables		
Gender (male = 1)	-.06*	.04
Age	-.11**	.03
Education	.04	.00
Income	-.02	.03
Political variables		
Partisanship	.01	.00
Political ideology	-.02	.05
Political interest	.02	.15**
Political knowledge	.01	-.04
Political discussion	.23***	-.10*
News media variables		
Newspaper attention	.06†	-.02
TV news attention	-.01	.04
Internet news attention	.04	-.03
Attitude-consistent news	.01	.00
Counterattitudinal news	-.03	.02
SNS variables		
Attitude-consistent SNS news		.58***
Counterattitudinal SNS news	.44***	
Agreement in SNS discussion	.47***	-.33***
Disagreement in SNS discussion	-.30***	.44***
Total R2	.56***	.41***

Note. Entries are standardized coefficients.
$^{\dagger}p < .10$, $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$

Among the control variables, partisanship ($\beta = .13$, $p < .01$) and offline political discussion ($\beta = .15$, $p < .05$) were positive predictors of participation: Partisans and people who engaged in face-to-face political discussion tended to participate more frequently. Use of attitude-consistent partisan news approached the significant level. Before entering SNS variables, attitude-consistent news reception from mainstream news media ($\beta = .13$) was significantly associated with participation at the .01 level, which is consistent with prior scholarship reporting mobilizing effects of partisan news reflecting audience political predispositions. However, the relationship was significant only at .1 level after including the SNS variables ($\beta = .09$).

Ⅶ. Discussion

This study examined the role of political agreement and disagreement of news reception and political discussion on social media for political participation. The results demonstrate that attitude-consistent news reception and political discussion with agreeing individuals contribute to participation, whereas counterattitudinal news reception and discussion with disagreeing individuals are not related to participation. These findings are consistent with previous studies conducted in non-SNS settings, which observed mobilizing effects of attitudeconsistent news (Dilliplane, 2011; Stroud, 2011) and discussion network agreement (Eveland & Hively, 2009; Mutz, 2002).

At the same time, the absence of mobilizing effects of disagreement in

political discussion contradicts some previous studies (e.g., Kawk et al., 2005; Scheufele et al., 2006). The lack of mobilizing evidence may have occurred because the present investigation considered both agreement and disagreement in discussion networks, whereas the prior research included only network disagreement or heterogeneity in the analyses. As the current study confirms, agreement and disagreement in discussion networks can be highly correlated, as those who engage in discussion with politically likeminded others tend to engage in discussion with non-likeminded others as well. Additionally, those studies that found mobilizing effects of disagreeing communication included diverse aspects of differences in discussion networks and broader civic participation, contrary to the current research that mainly focused on political differences and partici-pation.

This study also found that news reception and discussion based on political agreement operated together to lead to greater participatory activities. In particular, the influence of SNS-mediated attitude-consistent news reception on participation was stronger among those who also engaged in political discussion with politically similar others. While studies based on the differential gains model have demonstrated the interactive influence of news use and discussion in general (Scheufele, 2002), the current research adds new insights that political consistency of news and discussion can be a key factor facilitating this interactive process. Whether the interaction found in this study would be replicated in non-SNS contexts requires further investigation. At least, in a media environment characterized by partisan alignment between news and the audience, the potential interactive influence associated with partisan selection of news and discussants deserves more scholarly attention.

In this respect, social media have unique traits that can amplify the effects from mutual reinforcement of news and discussion based on political homophily. Unlike traditional channels and venues of news and discussion, social media effectively combine two major communication routes to participation in a single medium. The Internet in general affords easier crossover of news use and political discussion, as users can consume news and engage in political convertsation by posting and exchanging their opinions and ideas (Brundidge, 2010). Social media further enhance this converging function of the Internet because the nature of news received through social media is intrinsically related to the characteristics of SNS-based communication networks. Users of social media commonly receive news from their network members, who are often the users' discussion partners, further eroding the communicative boundaries between news and discussion. However, this boundary-crossing communication on SNSs may be regulated by the principle of political homophily. As this study indicates, homogenous discussion network can facilitate attitude-consistent news reception while it may impede counterattitudinal news reception.

Overall, this research extends prior scholarship on the political effects of SNS use. This study is one of the first attempts to examine the effects of political agreement and disagreement in SNS-mediated communication on participation. Although some researchers have observed the selection of information and formation of communication networks along political similarities in SNSs, few examined how this homophilous tendency relates to individual political behaviors. Addressing the gaps in the literature, this study demonstrates that the path from SNS-mediated political communication to participation materializes mainly through political

similarities rather than political differences. Social media can expand opportunities to receive and talk about diverse or contradictory news and opinions, overcoming restraints such as physical separation, psychological stress, and high information cost; and this study shows that people indeed expose themselves to political disagreement via social media. However, the lack of mobilizing effects found in this study suggests that exposure to political differences alone may not be enough to lead to more active citizenship. Future research on the political effects of social media should take into account the partisan or ideological nature of SNS-based political communication.

There are some limitations in the present study. First, self-reported measures of news reception and political discussion may not properly tap into an individual's actual communication behaviors on social media. Respondents may selectively recall news received and conversations exchanged when they are consistent with their political predispositions rather than when they are at odds. Although some scholars argue that for communication to cause any effects, perception of similarity or dissi- milarity may be more important than actual exposure (Mutz & Martin, 2001), future research need to consider devising methods to measure the extent of political homophily by directly observing individual SNS activities.

Another limitation is related to the causal direction presuming that exposure to political agreement on social media would predict political participation. It is plausible that the causal direction can be reverse such that those more active in political participation may more frequently receive attitude-consistent news and talk with likeminded individuals to reduce cognitive dissonance. It should be acknowledged that the cross-sectional data analyzed in this study does not allow making definite

conclusions about the directionality of the relationships.

Finally, this investigation did not consider the role of social contexts that may affect the composition of an individual's SNS discussion networks. Studies in offline contexts have noted that the structural and social contexts in which one is entrenched can shape the extent of political agreement and disagreement of discussion networks (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995; Scheufele et al., 2006). Scholars may investigate whether these social factors are still operating or, alternatively, whether those factors are being undermined in SNS-mediated interactions. Relatedly, future research needs to examine whether different mechanisms are at work in SNS settings. For example, a desire to avoid social conflict has been regarded as one of the reasons for the demobilizing effects of face-to-face heterogeneous discussion (Mutz, 2002), but people may not feel obliged to maintain interpersonal harmony as much in SNS-mediated communication. Also, the strengths of relationships among SNS discussants can play an important role in news reception and discussion. It is little known to what extent SNS contributes to bolstering "strong ties" or expanding "weak ties" in political communication and how the strength of SNS relationships shape individuals' communication and participatory behaviors.

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