

DIVIDED AND CROSSCUTTING BLOGOSPHERE POLITICAL DIALOGUES: REVISITING THE SPIRAL OF SILENCE AND THE BANDWAGON EFFECT

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ABSTRACT

This study revisited two traditional public opinion theories, the Spiral of Silence and the Bandwagon effect, and proposed modified versions of the reverse Spiral of Silence as an ad-hoc approach and the digressing Bandwagon effect as a post-hoc approach to examine the patterns of political opinion formation and distribution in the blogosphere. The study analyzed textual-based interactive weblog dialogues and found that political weblogs fed crosscutting views that used to be suppressed in real-world politics. There were differing degrees of suppressing Spiral of Silence and digressing Bandwagon effects across the different types of electoral, general political and non-political weblogs through the different venues of liberal, neutral, and conservative political dialogues. Politically liberal bloggers in electoral weblogs were most likely to present crosscutting views among the various types of partisan bloggers, nullifying the Spiral of Silence and Bandwagon effects. This study identified the importance of the theoretical justifications of, and alterations to, the classical approaches in the new communication and information era.

Keywords: The Spiral of Silence; The Bandwagon Effect; Political Weblog; Crosscutting Political Dialogue; Partisan Blogger

Political communication online has become a part of the inevitable political dialogue culture brought by new media technology that is instant, efficient, expressive, and individualistic (Bennett & Pfetsch, 2018; Dahlgren, 2005; Kaye & Johnson, 2002). Online political discourse has constantly changed over the last two decades, and no plausible theory yet explains the new communication dynamics thoroughly (Blumler, 2015; Mann & Stewart, 2000; Zúñiga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012). Rather, classical and traditional theories have been falsified in their applications to online communication studies due to tenacious core assumptions that are disrupted by new and unexpected online communication circumstances that are different from traditional offline communication (Chadwick, 2017; Walgrave & Aelst, 2006).

Among multiple platforms of online political communication, weblog dialogues are most likely to resemble the traditional offline political communication in terms of communication styles, patterns, and effects (Davis, 2011). Therefore, weblogs are a good place to start and investigate the applicability of classical theories in the new setting of online political discourse. Bloggers are news creators, distributors, and commentators. In the new technology communication era, political bloggers have become one of the main sources of political information (Davis, 2011; McKenna & Pole, 2007). However, heuristic academic approaches have not kept pace with the rapidly emerging political communication by the increasing number of political weblog participants. Similar to the limited academic understanding and the theoretical and methodological applications in general online communication research, the blogosphere has been randomly and sparsely explored (Bennett & Pfetsch, 2018; Sim & Hew, 2010).

The current study proposed different versions of the two traditional public discourse theories, the Spiral of Silence and the Bandwagon effect, in order to weigh their adaptability to the new political communication era. This study analyzed the patterns and dynamics of different partisan political weblogs and found evidence that the classical theories were not fully capable of providing reliable tools to explain the new types of political dialogue in the blogosphere, and thus emphasized the malleable modifications of the traditional theories to be better suited to the newly emerging virtual public sphere.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

Weblogs as Crosscutting Public Squares

Although there has been an increasing volume of descriptive studies about political communication via the Internet or social media, in general, more specific, analytical, and theory-oriented research on the different types of social media are not yet fully examined and the findings are mixed (Blumler, 2015; Sim & Hew, 2010; Wallsten, 2008). For instance, the channel of political blogs has become one of the prominent sources of political information and news and has provided a unique atmosphere and various features for political dialogues; however, it has been understood as just one kind of social media since the earliest studies on the subject (Laschever, 2017; Leccese, 2009; Wallsten, 2008). Therefore, this study specifically looks into the dynamics of political weblogs in their practical functions and theoretical meanings in current American political communication.

As a part of social media and a form of information channels, weblogs also have the online discourse characteristics of anonymity, autonomy, and tolerance, discussed by previous studies (Kushin & Kitchener, 2009; Meraz, 2009; Yun, 2014). Under the circumstances, bloggers' communication traits are often defined as personalization, honest opinion expressions, audience-oriented dialogue processes, and fragmented discourse (Wall, 2005). *Anonymity*. Bloggers are free from many constraints that are often imposed on in-person discussions, partially due to the anonymous weblog environment (Swigger, 2012). As a result, they tend to be unnecessarily honest and raw (Lasica, 2001), and are more likely to infuse views outside of traditional norms and ideas (Davis, 2011). Some argue that bloggers are more likely to be the anonymous public rather than named journalists and are more likely to be information transmitters rather than information sources (Davis, 2011). *Autonomy*. Blogosphere is where bloggers document and express personal beliefs, values, and opinions in public to share with other bloggers and readers (Davis, 2011; Leccese, 2009). In other words, online communication via weblogs is individualistic self-expression (Herring, Scheidt, Bonus, & Wright, 2004). Therefore, weblogs are often very individualistic and highly opinionated public spheres (Lasica, 2001). *Tolerance*. Under a strong individualistic, anonymous, and fragmented weblog culture, bloggers are highly tolerant of the different personal views expressed by other bloggers (Davis, 2011; Lasica, 2001). Bloggers generally pre-assume a higher-level of tolerance in their networking sites and are more willing to embrace opposing or deviating views (Lawrence, Sides, & Farrell, 2010).

Weblogs as general political venues. Unlike other social media, political weblogs cover a wide range of ideas and have various levels of participation. The scope drawn by political weblogs can cover a variety of topics ranging from general political issues and agendas to very specific policy

programs and politicians, in various degrees of depth and intensity (Chuenchom, 2019; Tremayne, 2007). Bloggers, often referred to as “new journalists” or “black market journalists” (Davis, 2011), provide alternative political information, having much more freedom and fewer obligations than traditional journalists (Skube, 2007). Therefore, political weblogs, where the external status quo pressures are lifted and are less bounded by societal norms and expectations, tend to be more independently, anonymously, and tolerantly operated than traditional media channels or non-political social weblogs where sociocultural norms and reciprocal expectations are still heavily laden. As a result, bloggers in such circumstances are even more expressive about their own values and beliefs (Papacharissi, 2004, 2010).

Political weblogs are more likely to drive partisan dialogue, and the full spectrum of polarized political views from the very far-left to the very far-right are presented freely and independently in the blogosphere. Partisan political bloggers engage more proactively in all levels of political participation, from political discussion, campaign activities, and voting to political demonstrations and violence (Adamic & Glance, 2005; Lawrence et al., 2010). Moreover, different political groups affiliated with a specific party and ideology tend to show different patterns in their political participation via weblogs. For example, political dialogue among liberals tends to be more diverse and open, engaging broader demographics and covering broader political issues, while conservative dialogue typically focuses on specific political issues discussed by more homogenous groups of people (Adamic & Glance, 2005; Best & Krueger, 2005; Laschever, 2017).

Weblogs as electoral campaign venues. The anonymous, independent, and tolerant weblog environments tend to be more encouraging for election-oriented weblogs where normative arguments are no longer valid, and preferences are independently accessed. Therefore, political participants via electoral weblogs are even more expressive of their own beliefs and ideas (Carlson, 2007; Huddy, Mason, & Aarøe, 2015).

The public dialogue space in election-specific weblogs can turn into even more partisan-driven communication venues since political discussion about electoral issues are mostly initiated from partisan standpoints (Huddy et al., 2015). Especially, during election years and campaign seasons, political weblogs operated by politically more motivated partisan groups and individuals are more likely to get heightened attention, and politically intentional individuals, like political candidates and their campaign staff, tend to dominate the virtual political weblog dialogues (Vatrapu, Robertson, Dissanayake, & Jeedigunta, 2008).

Moreover, as weblog discourse is intensified by partisanship, the anonymous, autonomous, and tolerant online sphere starts to expand in different directions and degrees. For instance, in liberal online spaces where broader issues are presented and more diverse individuals from broader ranges of demographics are interacting, the political bloggers participate more freely and vocally, (Laschever, 2017; Lawrence et al., 2010) cultivating more active crosscutting views than in other partisan weblogs (Papacharissi, 2004; Tremayne, 2007).

Weblogs as social venues. In contrast to political weblogs, social weblogs are more implicitly generated and more steadily evolved (Tremayne, 2007). Social bloggers who have been culturally bounded together for longer periods of time and with deeper relationships can be

relatively less anonymous, less autonomous, and less tolerant. On socially, culturally, and personally evolved issues, these bloggers are more likely to rely on each other, share more personal information, and mutually respect their shared values (Baker & Moore, 2008). Therefore, it can be implied that social bloggers are relatively more supportive of and agreeable to the presented issues and themes within their social blogospheres than political bloggers in political blogospheres.

Revisiting the Spiral of Silence in Blogosphere Dialogue

Traditional theoretical parameters of the Spiral of Silence. Since the theory of the Spiral of Silence was introduced by Noelle-Neumann (1974), a great number of studies have adopted the theory to explain the patterns of political expression in public political discourse. The theory argues that people are vulnerable to others' predominant views since humans' natural social sense prevents people from disagreeing with others and thus avoid being alone. This theoretical approach generously embraces the parameter of interdisciplinary understanding of public opinion at multiple levels, covering from the micro-level of socio-psychological mechanisms of "fear of isolation" and "social pressure," and intermediate-levels of "socio-political sense of majority public opinion," to the macro-level of "public expression." The theory provides a multi-angular lens that reflects humans' natural social psychology in daily political communication (Noelle-Neumann, 1993).

The classical theory, however, has faced critical difficulties in explaining political expression in evolving political dialogue in online environment because the fundamental assumptions and solid core argument of the theory are not easily adaptable to and utilized in the new technology communication era.

New communication parameters falsifying the Spiral of Silence. Online political communication has added a new circumstance that makes it hard for the mainstream communication theories and perspectives to explain the changes since those approaches were initially introduced to understand the old-fashioned, in-person and one-way communication. The most challenging elements of cyber political communication are the three components of anonymity, autonomy, and tolerance (Swigger, 2012; Yun, 2014). The three elements substantially weaken the core assumptions of the traditionally predominant theories like the Spiral of Silence that are grounded on socially and physically bounded communication.

The Spiral of Silence theory has been highly validated by the three levels of communication components: the socio-psychological elements of social pressure and fear of isolation; the intermediate social sense of dominant views; and the political consequence as public expression. These are the core assessments of the theoretical approach within socio-physically bounded interactive communications (Noelle-Neumann, 1974, 1993). However, in socially unrestrained and physically unbounded online zones, these fascinating theoretical components have lost their explanatory power and failed to provide valid instructions. The core theoretical components are more seriously falsified in the online atmosphere of weblogs, especially in political weblogs, where socio-psychological senses are significantly diminished due to the partisan-driven thin virtual walls that abate any normative or dominant argument in the loosely divided public sphere.

First, social pressure or fear of isolation is no longer a consistent or persistent condition for political expression because of the anonymous online atmosphere. Although the anonymity of online communication via weblogs is not fully guaranteed, it still creates the atmosphere that lowers the pressure of social expectation of self. As the level of the anonymity increases, social pressure decreases, and thus the sense of being isolated decreases (Yun, 2014).

In weblogs, especially political weblogs, bloggers can obtain anonymity if they choose to. Political participants in online forums in the blogosphere have a higher degree of anonymity than in traditional offline political meetings. Moreover, these political bloggers tend to be more anonymous compared to non-political social bloggers who are often more steadily and exclusively networked among interacting bloggers based on more extended and deeper relationships (Hsu & Lin, 2008). Politically liberal online spaces, where more diverse individuals with broader backgrounds and issues engage, tend to have much more anonymity, therefore have much less social pressure and consciousness than the conservative blogosphere where often more consistent and familiar partisan groups interact (Hargittai, Gallo, & Kane, 2008; Laschever, 2017).

Second, in online political dialogue, the sense of dominant views, the “quasi-statistical sense” according to Noelle-Neumann (1974), becomes ambiguous in that the autonomous component of online political communication feeds an individualistic political environment and triggers independent political individuals to speak, and thus confuses the separation between the majority views and the minority voices (Kushin & Kitchener, 2009; Yun, 2014). Therefore, a predominant opinion is less likely to be formed in an autonomous online environment, and political participants in a more autonomous environment are less likely to be exposed to, and constrained by, one dominant group or one majority view (Holt, 2004; Witschge, 2004). In addition, the patterns of political discourse depend on multiple mediating factors, such as group sizes, participants’ demographics, types of issues, and socio-political cultures. However, in online formats, all these mediating factors are unclear and are often not even relevant (Davis, 1999). As a result, the pseudo sense of whether the presented political views online are dominant public opinions is unclear due to a lack of cues for understanding the mediating factors. For instance, a seemingly dominant view in a small online group discussion could in reality be a minority view in disguise rather than a general public view.

The autonomous and independent online atmosphere is a relatively more common environment in political weblogs where there are multiple venues and types of political discussions, and it provides a more diverse but isolated place for independent individuals to express their own political views, and thus cultivates crosscutting views. These tendencies can be more ubiquitous in politically neutral weblogs where there is often no particularly predominant view presented from moderate individuals who do not have, or relate to, any specific political affiliation or issue (Koop & Jansen, 2009).

Third, political expression in online turns to more crosscutting dialogues due to a tolerant virtual atmosphere. Online environment lowers political and socioeconomic hurdles for political participants who are used being under-presented and isolated (Yun, 2014). Therefore, political mavericks and social minorities are more likely to participate and raise their voices in online political discussions under less pressure from predominating views and ideas (Brenner, 2012;

Witschge, 2004). As a result, in online political dialogue, people are often sharing less popular opinions and tolerating the different views of others (Davis, 1999; Kim, 2011; Wojcieszak & Mutz, 2009). As the level of tolerance increases, political voices against pre-perceived or predominant views are more likely to be expressed (Kushin & Kitchener, 2009).

In American politics, political tolerance tends to be higher from political liberals who tend to have broader political issues and views coming from diverse demographic groups rather than from conservatives who have more specific political issues and directional approaches and consist of politically and socioeconomically more cohesive groups (Carney, Jost, Gosling, & Potter, 2008). The pattern is directly reflected in weblog political discourse. Like real-world liberals, the politically liberal bloggers are often socio-economically and politically more diverse and are more tolerant to exchanging different and opposing views than their politically conservative counterparts who tend to be more cohesive in their interactions and discourses among their like-minded bloggers (Hargittai et al., 2008; Laschever, 2017; Nam, Jost, & Van Bavel, 2013; Rainie & Smith, 2012).

Alternative justification of the Spiral of Silence. The characteristics of online communication – anonymity, autonomy, and tolerance – significantly weaken the theoretical justification for the Spiral of Silence, particularly in its applications to weblogs. However, the accumulated theoretical supremacy of the theory cannot be ignored even in the new technology communication era. Therefore, rather than being stuck by the powerful but invalidated theoretical components of the Spiral of Silence in online venues, the current study proposes the reverse effect of the Spiral of Silence as an ad-hoc tool to examine blogosphere dialogues. In other words, as a pre-assumed theoretical perspective, the modified version of the Spiral of Silence can be used to understand the reverse phenomena of the Spiral of Silence in the initial process of opinion formation in the virtual sphere. The reverse Spiral of Silence can explain how different types of political weblog dialogues reduce the degree of social pressure and the sense of oppression by dominant views and encourage political expression as the levels of virtual anonymity, autonomy, and tolerance increase. As an ad-hoc approach in exploring online political communication, the modified model of the reverse Spiral of Silence can guide us in understanding the early stage of bloggers' socio-psychological mindsets when bloggers enter the blogosphere political discussion, and their dialogue begins to mature.

Revisiting the Bandwagon Effect in Blogosphere Dialogue

Traditional theoretical parameters of the Bandwagon effect. Since the very first practical success of a Bandwagon political campaign by Dan Rice in 1848 (Carlyon, 2001), the metaphor of bandwagon has been used extensively in professional politics and theoretical academia. While the Spiral of Silence is initiated from a socio-cognitive understanding in the beginning of opinion formation and process, the Bandwagon effect is more of a behavioral approach that occurs in the later stage of opinion formation. Joining the majority and getting on a more popular and bigger bandwagon are the main properties of the theory (Henshel & Johnston, 1987).

However, the Bandwagon effect is a theoretically ambiguous concept and a methodologically difficult measure (Klapper, 1964). Previous studies used the Bandwagon effect with different operational definitions and measures depending on the purposes of the studies. The amorphous

theoretical parameters of the Bandwagon effect can help the theory be more applicable to emerging communication research in the new technology era but can also weaken the theoretical power of predictability and generalizability.

New communication parameters falsifying the Bandwagon effect. As discussed in the Spiral of Silence's application in weblog research, the cyberspace components of anonymity, autonomy, and tolerance (Swigger, 2012; Yun, 2014) can also weaken the core theoretical mechanisms of the Bandwagon effect which are behavioral consequences of joining the majority.

First, the sense of conformity by joining the majority is no longer sufficient motivation in online due to the absence of a physical gathering space in an anonymous cyberspace (Wood & Smith, 2004). In the weblog sphere where anonymous individuals come across at random times (Davis, 2011; Wall, 2005), bloggers have less desire or need to be a part of the visible majority group. However, in a more specific, issue-focused weblog with more exclusive bloggers, a visible bandwagon tends to form, and the bloggers have stronger desires to share the established view and be a part of the dominant group. For instance, social weblogs, where bloggers have greater social bonds and networks based on self-interested themes, are more likely to show the pattern of the Bandwagon effect. Moreover, specific issue-oriented weblogs are more likely to show the pattern than broader and general weblogs (Baker & Moore, 2008; Tremayne, 2007).

Second, often there is no dominant view or apparent bandwagon to join in blogosphere since the autonomous online environment prevents a majority opinion from forming. Independent online visitors are less likely to stay as a group and are more likely to move freely around, depending on their interests and time constraints (Lasica, 2001; Wall, 2005). Therefore, unlike the Bandwagon effect in the real world, predominant or leading bandwagons are unlikely to form, and are not very visible, desirable, or appreciated in blogosphere.

In weblogs, individual bloggers have their own vehicles and venues to deliver their views to others. Political bloggers with different political ideologies independently interact in equally accessible cyberspace. However, the degree of autonomy varies across the different ideological spectrums. From the accumulated research on the patterns of different partisan groups, we can imply that political conservatives are more agreeable and supportive of people or views within their political boundaries since their political target topics tend to be specific and Republican party supporters are more loyal to their party and candidates than politically liberal or moderate people who have broader interests in random issues and are loosely affiliated to their party (Hargittai et al., 2007; Nam et al., 2013). Therefore, there tends to be more homogeneous consensus and agreement among the conservative Republican bloggers than the liberal Democrat counterparts (Laschever, 2017). Moreover, bloggers who interact with each other regarding non-political social topics, such as personal interests and hobbies, and virtually know each other are more agreeable to, and supportive of, suggested ideas and preferences within their social boundaries (Baker & Moore, 2008). Those socially networked bloggers, who are more tightly bounded and have less autonomy, may still form a more visible like-minded group and operate as a bandwagon in the blogosphere.

Third, tolerant, unlimited online spaces create multiple bandwagons, rather than one single dominant one. In a democratic and open society like the U.S., people respect the diversity and

differences of others across online and offline boundaries. The level of tolerance, however, is higher online where there are unlimited spaces that individuals can share without much conflict (Foust, 2017). As a result, online citizens are more willing to accept different views and groups, allowing for multiple bandwagons to coexist in unlimited spaces.

Therefore, there are multiple bandwagons co-occurring with few concerns of clashing interests in the highly tolerant blogosphere. Around each bandwagon, navigating within or across different weblogs, bloggers easily hop in and out of different bandwagons. The trends can be more true for political bloggers who gather for timely political issues on political weblogs where differences are openly tolerated, and less true for non-political social bloggers who mingle for more consistent social or personal interests where differences are often silently tolerated (Baker & Moore, 2008; Marlow, 2004). For the reasons of social forbearance and political freedom, people are more respectable and accepting of societal diversities but more expressive about their political views. In other words, political bloggers tend to be more expressive about different views and move around more easily across different bandwagons than social bloggers who are unlikely to attack or disagree with each other about social or cultural topics within their stable bandwagon group. The openly expressive atmosphere becomes even more apparent when it is about elections, or regarding political choices and preference rather than about general political norms, values, or traditions (Carlson, 2007; Huddy et al., 2015). Bloggers become more overt by moving from social blogs to political blogs, and by moving from general political blogs to more specific electoral blogs. It suggests that we are more likely to observe multiple loose bandwagons by crosscutting political bloggers and more tightly bonded bandwagons by covertly agreeing socially networked bloggers.

Alternative justification of the Bandwagon effect. Unlike the reverse effect of the Spiral of Silence, but with the same rationale of online anonymity, autonomy, and tolerance, weblogs provide good conditions to feed dynamic Bandwagon effects depending on the types of blogs in blogosphere. Each type of weblog has a unique circumstance since the blogosphere is an unbounded place for timely, like-minded people to selectively consume online information based on their own interests (Ancu & Cozma, 2009). Therefore, bloggers are more likely to search for, and observe like-minded views, and they are still more likely to agree with people within a click of a weblog's boundary across different topics, issues, and bloggers. These temporary and loose ties of cybernetic groups among bloggers make the gradual agreements bigger and stronger as multiple weblog dialogues evolve.

This study, therefore, values the Bandwagon effects as a more post-hoc tool to explain the later stage of weblog discourses after bloggers form visible opinions. The study also investigates how the formed bandwagons increase in size and become more cohesive as bloggers observe the degrees of agreement within the engaged weblogs. In blogosphere, the Bandwagon effect provides a more legitimate tool to examine the final stage of opinion formation rather than being a pre-assumed ad-hoc approach due to its behavior-oriented theoretical perspective. Therefore, the Bandwagon effect is a more compromising theoretical perspective as a post-hoc approach to explore the later stages of the public dialogue process in the new evolving political discourse environment in cyberspace.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The anonymous, autonomous, and tolerant atmosphere of online communication can lift socio-psychological pressure and help people feel less vulnerable to the majority opinion of others, and thus significantly handicap the theory of the Spiral of Silence (Yun, 2014). As an ad-hoc approach in blogosphere, the opposing effects of the Spiral of Silence can be posited. Bloggers in a less value-laden and more preference-oriented blogosphere, such as political blogs, especially electoral weblogs, tend to be freer from the socio-psychological pressure of the conscious agreement. For reasons involving ideological and partisan traits, liberal bloggers with broader demographic backgrounds and issues can be much less constrained by the dominant views than conservative bloggers who are relatively more consistent and cohesive in their issues and perspectives.

H1.1: Election-related weblog dialogues are more likely to suppress the effect of the Spiral of Silence than general political weblog dialogues.

H1.2: General political weblog dialogues are more likely to suppress the effect of the Spiral of Silence than non-political social weblog dialogues.

H1.3: Liberal political weblog dialogues are more likely to suppress the effect of the Spiral of Silence than conservative political weblog dialogues.

Previous studies have observed that there are less or more Bandwagon effects among bloggers depending on the sizes and types of online political groups (Tan, Goswami, Chan, & Zhong, 2005). Due to the variations in political and social traits among bloggers in the anonymous, autonomous, and tolerant weblog atmosphere, the Bandwagon effect, as a behavioral post-hoc approach, is restrained or present in varying degrees across different weblog dialogues. In the absence of a physical presence, the more behavior-oriented blogospheres, such as election-driven political weblogs, are more likely to repress the Bandwagon effect. In addition, due to the ideological patterns and traits exhibited in Republicans, who tend to be relatively more homogenous compared to loosely tied and diverse Democrats, the Bandwagon effect in the conservative weblog discourse can still appear and be stronger than in the liberal or neutral political blogosphere discourse.

H2.1: Election-related weblog dialogues are more likely to digress from the Bandwagon effect than general political weblog dialogues.

H2.2: General political weblog dialogues are more likely to digress from the Bandwagon effect than non-political social weblog dialogues.

H2.3: Liberal political weblog dialogues are more likely to digress from the Bandwagon effect than conservative political weblog dialogues.

METHODS

Sample Collection and Coding Process

This study explored textual-based interactive weblog dialogues including the subsequent comments resulting from those blog articles and posts across general political, election-related, and non-political social blogs in order to observe the patterns and processes of opinion formation and distribution in the blogosphere. The samples of weblog articles and comments were randomly collected over both election and non-election years, from February 15, 2015 to April 28, 2016, from the top 100 political and social blogs sorted by Feedspot, for a more comprehensive comparison among election-related posts, non-electoral general political posts, and non-political social posts, in order to have better control over mediating factors such as different political atmospheres and election effects.

In analyzing general political and election-specific weblogs, the researcher intended to observe political weblogs and the subsequent comments along the ideological spectrum from liberal, independent, and conservative blogs to find the patterns and trends of online public opinion formation and distribution among those ideologically varying political bloggers. For the purpose of the research and analysis, this study limited the sample weblog articles to those that had at least five subsequent comments reacting to the weblog articles, and selected only the first five comments across general political, electoral-specific, and non-political weblogs as well as through liberal, moderate, and conservative venues, in order to observe more consistent patterns and processes of opinion formation and distribution in the blogosphere and to minimize non-essential variations that can occur extensively across the different types of blog articles and comments.

Twelve college students went through a two-hour training session on sample selections, archiving methods, and coding processes, including a Q & A session. After, the training session, they randomly selected liberal, neutral, and conservative political and non-political weblog articles based on political content, bias, and tone across different types and partisanship of weblogs from the top 100 Feedspot political and social blogs, and then saved the first five comments from each of the selected sample articles during the collection period. The unit of analysis is a weblog article with the first five comments posted after the initial article. At the end of the sample collection period, the student coders coded ten example weblog articles and the resulting comments, and they achieved the Cronbach's Alpha intercoder reliability of .82.

Out of the 801 randomly selected weblog articles and the resulting comments, 124 were liberal electoral articles, 122 were neutral electoral articles, 131 were conservative electoral articles, 103 were liberal general political articles, 113 were neutral general political articles, 103 were conservative general political articles, and 105 were non-political articles.

Measures

Type of weblog. The initial analysis layer of weblogs was categorized into the following types: general political, election-specific, and non-political social weblogs based on the content of the blog articles. The second layer of the weblogs under general political and electoral weblogs was categorized as follows: liberal, neutral, and conservative weblogs based on partisan tone and bias.

Level of agreement. The level of agreement between each of the first five commenters to the initial weblog articles and each of the previous comments were measured on a scale of seven;

from 1 – “strongly disagree” to 7 – “strongly agree.” The averages of the total fair-wise agreements across the different types of weblogs were accessed. For the gradual changes in the level of agreement, both the average of agreement of each the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th commenters, and the accumulated agreements from the 1st commenters up to the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th commenters across the different types of weblogs were computed.

Disagreement and crosscutting. For additional measures of disagreement against dominant views, the total numbers of the first five commenters who made attacking or conflicting statements to previous bloggers and commenters were counted in a dichotomous manner where 0 was a “no” and 1 was a “yes.” The average and percentage of the attacking statements across the different types of weblogs were compared.

Commenting structure. Several other measures were assessed to understand the subsequent commenting patterns of bloggers in the different types of weblogs. At the sample collection stage, *the total number of the responding comments* were counted to see how the average number of comments varied across the different types of weblogs. *The average commenting timeline* for the first five comments was also retrieved to see how long it took for the first five active and intentional commenters to respond, depending on the types of weblogs they were responding on. In addition, *the average length of the comments in words* for those first five commenters were counted by the types of weblogs. The varying degrees in *tone for subsequent comments* to the different types of weblog articles/posts were measured on a scale of seven, where 1 was “very negative” and 7 was “very positive.” Lastly, any *personal cues* from bloggers that were observed and nuanced in the statements or in any other forms, such as pictures and nick names, were coded in a dichotomous manner where 0 was “no cue” and 1 was “specific personal cue,” for the list of socio-economic and political demographics; gender, political party, religion, education, occupation, age, ethnicity, and geographic location. The average number of personal cues for the first five commenters was used to see how those bloggers in the different types of weblogs were revealing and sharing their personal demographic information in their blogosphere dialogues.

RESULTS

Genetic Patterns of Weblog Dialogue

Utilizing the measures described above, this study found different patterns of dialogue across the different types of weblogs. Regarding the *average number of total subsequent comments*, election-specific (M=455.21, SE=78.32) and general political (M=419.76, SE=86.06) weblog articles seemed to generate greater amounts of dialogues than non-political blog posts (M=37.45, SE=147.85) among the subsequent commenters. More specifically, the moderate general political blogs (M=964.38, SE=215.83) were most likely to feed bloggers’ opinionated discussions and reactions to others’ views ($F[6, 767]=6.045, p \leq .001$) (See Table 1).

However, politically conservative bloggers posted their comments on engaged blogs faster than other partisan bloggers. The *average timeline* to get the first five subsequent comments were about 13.47 hours (SE=10.35) in the conservative general political blogs and 26.86 hours (SE=9.02) in the conservative electoral blogs. It took a much longer time for commenters to post on both electoral (M=46.65, SE=9.22) and general political blogs (M=49.46, SE=10.46) in a

neutral atmosphere, and the longest time on the general political blogs in a liberal atmosphere (M=73.86, SE=10.35) (F[6, 686]=3.749, $p \leq .001$) (See Table 1).

In terms of the *length of comments*, non-political bloggers who were often more likely to be interested in socioeconomic topics rather than political issues, tended to be lengthier in their replies to the views of previous commenters compared to political commenters. The average word count for the first five commenters on non-political weblogs was 189.34 (SE=57.09) while the average lengths were 63.74 (SE=2.95) words in general political blogs and 49.13 (SE=1.93) words in more specific electoral blogs (F[6, 772]=6.273, $p \leq .001$). In reviewing the *tone* of the weblog dialogue, non-political social blog discourses (M=4.70, SE=.17) were more supportive and positive than political weblog discourses (M=2.93, SE=.05 in electoral weblogs; M=2.66, SE=.07 in general political weblogs) (F[6, 756]=41.357, $p \leq .001$) (See Table 1).

Various *demographic cues* were either implicitly hinted at or explicitly presented in weblog dialogues. The demographics were observed in all types of weblogs, but there were different degrees of personal information shared across the different types of weblogs. The general demographics, such as bloggers' gender, political party, religious stand, level of education, and occupation were present more frequently but to varying degrees across different weblogs. However, the demographics that are more vulnerable at the personal level such as age, ethnic background, and physical location were less likely and less frequently presented across the different types of weblogs. Gender was the most frequently presented demographic cue in weblog dialogue; it was the most commonly shared information on election-focused weblogs, especially by politically liberal bloggers (M=2.56, SE=.19) (F[6, 788]=7.086, $p \leq .001$). Generally, conservative bloggers in general political weblogs were most likely to reveal their political party affiliations (M=2.25, SE=.20) (F[6, 788]=22.718, $p \leq .001$) and religious affiliations (M=0.47, SE=.11) (F[6, 788]=6.562, $p \leq .001$) than other partisan and non-political bloggers. In election-specific but ideologically neutral weblogs, bloggers were more likely to refer to their level of education (M=0.26, SE=.07) (F[6, 788]=3.760, $p \leq .001$). Unlike political bloggers who were interested in political exchanges of ideas and values, non-political social bloggers who intended to gain more socioeconomic benefits, such as networking and marketing, were more likely to share their occupations with others within engaged weblogs (M=0.24, SE=.06) (F[6, 788]=7.020, $p \leq .001$). However, bloggers were still uncomfortable disclosing their specific ages, ethnic backgrounds, and personal geographic locations, and these demographics were less likely to be shared in the blogosphere and were not distinctively different across the different types of weblogs (see Table 2).

Theoretical Patterns of Weblog Dialogue

As the effects of the Spiral of Silence and the Bandwagon unfolded, the current study found the digressing effects of the classical theories in political, and especially in electoral weblogs due to the higher degrees of tolerant, autonomous and anonymous dialogue environments. The tendency was more apparent among the liberal bloggers who often engaged in broader political issues than the conservative bloggers who often engaged in a more specific scope and set of issues.

The ad-hoc approach of the reverse Spiral of Silence seemed to work in the initial stage of online opinion formation in the blogosphere. The politically liberal, especially electoral atmosphere

sprouted different views of bloggers and weakened the effect of the Spiral of Silence. ANOVA and Scheffe Post-Hoc tests confirmed that bloggers and commenters in election-related weblogs ($M=3.98$, $SE=.05$) were less likely to be vulnerable to others' political views and thus more likely to be expressive about their disagreement to others and more openly share crosscutting viewpoints than bloggers and commenters in general political ($M=4.95$, $SE=.07$) and non-political ($M=5.19$, $SE=.13$) social blogospheres. In other words, contrasting to the argument of the Spiral of Silence, electoral weblog posts and comments were significantly more incongruent to dominant views, and the reverse effect of the theory was stronger in the electoral blogosphere discussions compared to non-electoral political ($p \leq .001$) or non-political social ($p \leq .001$) weblog dialogues ($F[2, 719]=78.056$, $p \leq .001$) (see Table 3).

When analyzing different partisan and ideological weblog dialogues, ANOVA and Scheffe Post-Hoc tests showed that the pattern was consistent. Liberal bloggers and commenters in electoral weblogs ($M=3.83$, $SE=.09$) were the least agreeable amongst themselves ($p \leq .001$), and conservative bloggers and commenters in general political blogs ($M=5.39$, $SE=.12$) were the most agreeable amongst themselves ($p \leq .001$) compared to bloggers and commenters in other types and partisanship of the weblogs ($M=4.54$, $SE=.05$) ($F[6, 715]=33.840$, $p \leq .001$) (see Table 3). The finding implies that political participation in political discussions via weblogs were less likely to be vulnerable to the political atmosphere and the views of the majority, and thus tended to be highly expressive, unlike what the Spiral of Silence theory argued in face-to-face real-world political discussions. As an ad-hoc approach, the suppressed Spiral of Silence effect seemed to be more apparent for political bloggers and commenters in the liberal electoral blogosphere.

Furthermore, the patterns of crosscutting opinion expressions across the different types of weblogs were reconfirmed when comparing the more explicit opposite statements/posts to dominant views related to the original weblog articles. The disagreeing minority views, negative comments, or attack statements against the majority voices were more frequently observed in electoral weblogs ($M=1.88$, $SE=.08$) than general political weblogs ($M=1.48$, $SE=.09$), and the contradicting crosscutting expressions were more prevalent in political weblogs than in the dialogue of non-political social weblogs ($M=1.02$, $SE=.14$) ($F[2, 785]=13.477$, $p \leq .001$). Among different ideological blogospheres, those opposite and negative voices against the dominant views were most likely to be observed in ideologically liberal electoral weblogs ($M=2.13$, $SE=.14$), while those negative disagreement and attack statements were least present in conservative political weblogs ($M=1.04$, $SE=.13$) ($F[6, 781]=7.563$, $p \leq .001$) (see Table 3).

Among the last commenters (5th) who perceived the views of the majority by observing previous commenters (up to 4th commenters) on the original articles, about 40% of the 5th commenters in election-specific blog discussions made negative attacks against the majority views of the original weblog article bloggers or previous commenters, while 28% of the commenters in non-electoral general political blogs, and 23% of the non-political social blog commenters did ($\chi^2=17.046$, $p \leq .001$). Politically liberal commenters in election-specific weblogs (48%), and neutral commenters on both electoral (38%) and general political (38%) weblogs, were most likely to oppose and attack the view of the majority openly and directly. The conservative commenters in general political blogs were least likely to express disagreeing views to the predominant opinions (16%) ($\chi^2=34.297$, $p \leq .001$) (see Table 3). The finding implies that

bloggers tend to disagree with each other, express views against others, and attack different views where either a liberal atmosphere or no dominant majority view by neutral bloggers is present. In other words, unlike in the Spiral of Silence that posits little opinion deviance in face-to-face political expressions, a considerable number of online political participants expressed incongruent political views against dominant views on weblogs in the early stage of opinion formation. The altering theoretical tendency was stronger for election-focused liberal weblogs than for general conservative political weblogs and was more apparent for political weblogs than non-political social weblogs.

When looking into the gradual process of joining online discourse and forming opinions as the weblog dialogues progressed, the study found gradually incrementing Bandwagon effects across the different types of weblogs. As bloggers perceived more agreement among comments and replies, they were more likely to agree with the overall view of the weblog dialogue. However, the degree of the Bandwagon effect, as a post-hoc approach, depended on the types of weblogs and their bloggers.

As shown in Table 4, the level of the correlation for each level of accumulated agreement by additional commenters had gradually increased. Following commenters perceived higher levels of accumulated agreements, and thus gradually agreed more with the overall views of the previous posts and comments, and finally were more confident in joining the dominant views ($p \leq .001$) (see Table 4). According to the ANOVA and Scheffé Post-Hoc tests, the Bandwagon effect varied and was more evident in non-political social blog discourse rather than in political blog discourse and was more evident in general political blog discourse than in election-related blog discourse ($p \leq .001$). The gradual agreements among the first five commenters on non-political blog posts had the highest standardized correlation value (r) of .81 and mean (M) of 5.19 ($SE=.15$), the level of the accumulated agreements among the general political blog commenters was relatively moderate ($M=4.95$, $SE=.08$, $r=.56$), and the value for the commenters to election-specific blog posts was the lowest ($M=3.98$, $SE=.06$, $r=.50$). Among political bloggers across different partisan lines, political commenters on liberal electoral blogs ($M=3.83$, $SE=.12$, $r=.34$) tended to have the lowest level of gradual agreement amongst themselves, and commenters on conservative political blogs were likely to have the highest level of gradual agreement amongst themselves ($M=5.39$, $SE=.15$, $r=.57$) ($F[6, 715]=33.839$, $p \leq .001$). In other words, the Bandwagon effect was more likely to digress in liberal dialogue within electoral weblogs than in other partisan discourses in other types of blogs (see Table 4). In conclusion, the reverse effects of the Spiral of Silence and the digressing Bandwagon effects occurred in the blogosphere, and the deviating theoretical trends by cyberspace crosscutting views were more likely to be present in liberal electoral weblogs than conservative general political or non-political social weblogs.

DISCUSSION

Political discourse via weblogs has been burgeoning and highly interactive with real-world politics. However, academic research on the effects and consequences of blogosphere politics is still far behind and has not kept pace with the practical side of real-world utilization. Therefore, early studies including the current study in the new era of political communication are struggling

to explore online political discourse without any established theoretical applications and reliable approaches.

The current study observed the varying effects of the different types of weblog dialogues and suggested modified theoretical approaches revisiting the classical theories and concepts that mainstream studies have repeatedly tested in the field of communication. As argued above, the study found evidence that the traditional theoretical approaches of the Spiral of Silence and Bandwagon effects are not able to fully explain the dynamics of political discourse in the anonymous, autonomous, and tolerant blogosphere, and needed to be altered in order to adapt to the changes in political dialogue and the rapid evolution of communication technology.

As predicted in the hypothesized patterns of blogosphere dialogue, applied by various pieces of previous bodies of work on online communication, the more preference-oriented and less norm-laden election-focused political weblogs, especially in a broader and more horizontally operating left-leaning atmosphere, provide more active crosscutting dialogue spaces compared to the more culturally-driven and value-laden social blogs or general political blogs, especially operated among more cohesively and hierarchically running conservative counterparts. In liberal electoral weblogs, the political netizens are less likely to be restrained by the predominant views and are more likely to be expressive of their own views and preferences under the lighter socio-psychological and physical pressures. Despite the different degrees of theoretical deviations depending on the types of weblogs, the evidence indicates digressing Bandwagon effects and suppressing Spiral of Silence effects in blogosphere politics.

By adopting modified classical theories and understanding different levels and patterns of online opinion exchanges, formations, and distributions, weblog feeders and consumers can utilize weblogs in a more efficient way and make weblogs a more positive, constructive, and egalitarian political dialogue sphere; something that real-world politics have not achieved, especially for the politically disadvantaged people in our society.

For effective and beneficial research, the socio-economic, political, and psychological meanings of weblogs need to be multidimensionally considered in combination with new technological capabilities, utilizing various methodological approaches with extensive data sources (Savant, Bhattacharyya, & Kim, 2016; Tan et al., 2005). This does not mean that academia needs completely new theories or approaches for online political communication. Rather, the future studies are encouraged to explore more possibilities for rigorous modifications of the verified classical theories that are still invaluable in their insights and applications, and continuously test them for more adaptive measurements in new communication and politics.

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Table 1. Genetic Patterns of Weblog Dialogue

Types of Weblogs***	# of Total Comments***	Commenting Timeline***	Length of Comments***	Tone of Comments***
Electoral Blogs	M=455.21 (SE=78.32)	M=33.63 (SE=5.37)	M=49.13 (SE=1.93)	M=2.93 (SE=.05)
Liberal	M=310.28 (SE=56.76)	M=27.53 (SE=9.34)	M=52.41 (SE=3.19)	M=2.99 (SE=.08)
Neutral	M=326.71 (SE=64.77)	M=46.65 (SE=9.22)	M=46.16 (SE=2.93)	M=3.03 (SE=.10)
Conservative	M=710.56 (SE=215.83)	M=26.86 (SE=9.02)	M=48.73 (SE=3.80)	M=2.78 (SE=.19)
General Political Blogs	M=419.76 (SE=86.06)	M=45.57 (SE=6.07)	M=63.74 (SE=2.95)	M=2.66 (SE=.07)
Liberal	M=158.63 (SE=30.85)	M=73.86 (SE=10.35)	M=45.95 (SE=2.71)	M=2.63 (SE=.12)
Neutral	M=964.38 (SE=215.83)	M=49.46 (SE=10.46)	M=80.21 (SE=6.55)	M=2.79 (SE=.09)
Conservative	M=61.26 (SE=12.62)	M=13.47 (SE=10.35)	M=62.57 (SE=4.05)	M=2.54 (SE=.13)
Non-Political Blogs	M=37.45 (SE=147.85)	M=36.12 (SE=12.09)	M=189.34 (SE=57.09)	M=4.70 (SE=.17)
	F[6, 767]=6.045, p ≤ .001	F[6, 686]=3.749, p ≤ .001	F[6, 772]=6.273, p ≤ .001	F[6, 756]=41.357, p ≤ .001

* p ≤ .05; ** p ≤ .01; *** p ≤ .001

+ M=Mean (SE=Standard Error)

+ Units: Commenting Timeline in Hour; Length of Comments in Word; Min.=1 & Max.=7 in Tone of Comments

Table 2. Demographic Cues in Weblog Dialogue

Types of Weblogs***	Gender***	Party***	Religion***	Education** *	Occupation ***	Age	Ethnicity	Geographic Location
Electoral Blogs	M=2.22 (SE=.11)	M=2.11 (SE=.09)	M=0.10 (SE=.02)	M=0.22 (SE=.04)	M=0.05 (SE=.01)	M=0.02 (SE=.01)	M=0.02 (SE=.01)	M=0.11 (SE=.03)
Liberal	M=2.56 (SE=.19)	M=2.07 (SE=.15)	M=0.10 (SE=.04)	M=0.20 (SE=.05)	M=0.05 (SE=.03)	M=0.02 (SE=.02)	M=0.02 (SE=.01)	M=0.15 (SE=.06)
Neutral	M=2.21 (SE=.19)	M=2.03 (SE=.17)	M=0.14 (SE=.04)	M=0.26 (SE=.07)	M=0.06 (SE=.03)	M=0.01 (SE=.01)	M=0.02 (SE=.01)	M=0.08 (SE=.04)
Conservative	M=1.90 (SE=.17)	M=2.22 (SE=.17)	M=0.07 (SE=.03)	M=0.19 (SE=.06)	M=0.05 (SE=.03)	M=0.03 (SE=.02)	M=0.02 (SE=.01)	M=0.09 (SE=.04)
General Political Blogs	M=1.40 (SE=.10)	M=1.75 (SE=.11)	M=0.24 (SE=.04)	M=0.08 (SE=.02)	M=0.01 (SE=.01)	M=0.01 (SE=.01)	M=0.01 (SE=.00)	M=0.04 (SE=.02)
Liberal	M=1.66 (SE=.18)	M=1.86 (SE=.18)	M=0.14 (SE=.06)	M=0.02 (SE=.01)	M=0.01 (SE=.01)	M=0.01 (SE=.01)	M=0.01 (SE=.01)	M=0.03 (SE=.02)
Neutral	M=1.41 (SE=.16)	M=1.20 (SE=.16)	M=0.13 (SE=.06)	M=0.15 (SE=.05)	M=0.01 (SE=.01)	M=0.00 (SE=.00)	M=0.00 (SE=.00)	M=0.06 (SE=.05)
Conservative	M=1.13 (SE=.16)	M=2.25 (SE=.20)	M=0.47 (SE=.11)	M=0.05 (SE=.02)	M=0.01 (SE=.01)	M=0.03 (SE=.03)	M=0.01 (SE=.01)	M=0.04 (SE=.03)
Non-Political Blogs	M=1.88 (SE=.21)	M=0.05 (SE=.03)	M=0.04 (SE=.03)	M=0.04 (SE=.02)	M=0.24 (SE=.06)	M=0.03 (SE=.02)	M=0.02 (SE=.01)	M=0.07 (SE=.03)
	F[6, 788]=7.086, p ≤ .001	F[6, 788]=22.718, p ≤ .001	F[6, 788]=6.562, p ≤ .001	F[6, 788]=3.760, p ≤ .001	F[6, 788]=7.020, p ≤ .001	F[6, 792]=0.616, p ≤ .718	F[6, 792]=0.583, p ≤ .744	F[6, 788]=0.997, p ≤ .426

* p ≤ .05; ** p ≤ .01; *** p ≤ .001

+ M=Mean (SE=Standard Error); Min.=0 & Max.=5

Table 3. Digressing Agreements in Weblog Dialogue

Types of Weblogs***	Level of Agreement***	Level of Opposing View***	% of Attack Statement***
Electoral Blogs	M=3.98 (SE=.05)	M=1.88 (SE=.08)	40.4%
General Political Blogs	M=4.95 (SE=.07)	M=1.48 (SE=.09)	28.3%
Non-Political Blogs	M=5.19 (SE=.13)	M=1.02 (SE=.14)	22.8%
	F[2, 719]=78.056, p ≤ .001	F[2, 785]=13.477, p ≤ .001	$\chi^2=17.046$, p ≤ .001
Electoral-Liberal	M=3.83 (SE=.09)	M=2.13 (SE=.14)	48.0%
Electoral-Neutral	M=3.92 (SE=.08)	M=1.77 (SE=.15)	38.0%
Electoral-Conservative	M=4.18 (SE=.09)	M=1.74 (SE=.14)	35.4%
General Political-Liberal	M=4.97 (SE=.12)	M=1.57 (SE=.18)	30.1%
General Political-Neutral	M=4.53 (SE=.10)	M=1.80 (SE=.15)	38.1%
General Political-Conservative	M=5.39 (SE=.12)	M=1.04 (SE=.13)	15.7%
Non-Political	M=5.19 (SE=.13)	M=1.02 (SE=.14)	22.8%
	F[6, 715]=33.840, p ≤ .001	F[6, 781]=7.563, p ≤ .001	$\chi^2=34.297$, p ≤ .001

* p ≤ .05; ** p ≤ .01; *** p ≤ .001

+ M=Mean (SE=Standard Error); Min.=1 & Max.=7 in Level of Agreement; Min.=0 & Max.=5 in Level of Opposing View

Table 4. Varying Accumulated Agreements in Weblog Dialogue

Types of Weblogs***	Up to the 2nd Commenters***	Up to the 3rd Commenters***	Up to the 4th Commenters***	Up to the 5th Commenters***
Electoral Blogs	M=4.02 (SE=.07), r=.29***	M=4.02 (SE=.07), r=.39***	M=3.99 (SE=.07), r=.42***	M=3.98 (SE=.06), r=.50***
Liberal	M=3.84 (SE=.12), r=.12	M=3.89 (SE=.12), r=.43***	M=3.87 (SE=.13), r=.45***	M=3.83 (SE=.12), r=.34***
Neutral	M=4.01 (SE=.13), r=.38***	M=3.96 (SE=.12), r=.48***	M=3.95 (SE=.11), r=.43***	M=3.92 (SE=.09), r=.56***
Conservative	M=4.19 (SE=.13), r=.39***	M=4.20 (SE=.13), r=.27***	M=4.15 (SE=.11), r=.38***	M=4.18 (SE=.12), r=.58***
General Political Blogs	M=4.95 (SE=.10), r=.47***	M=4.99 (SE=.09), r=.57***	M=4.92 (SE=.09), r=.55***	M=4.95 (SE=.08), r=.56***
Liberal	M=4.91 (SE=.18), r=.59***	M=5.07 (SE=.15), r=.61***	M=4.98 (SE=.16), r=.60***	M=4.97 (SE=.15), r=.52***
Neutral	M=4.62 (SE=.15), r=.42***	M=4.58 (SE=.15), r=.48***	M=4.49 (SE=.14), r=.50***	M=4.53 (SE=.12), r=.50***
Conservative	M=5.35 (SE=.20), r=.37***	M=5.34 (SE=.17), r=.57***	M=5.34 (SE=.16), r=.49***	M=5.39 (SE=.15), r=.57***
Non-Political Blogs	M=5.21 (SE=.17), r=.63***	M=5.20 (SE=.14), r=.71***	M=5.23 (SE=.15), r=.68***	M=5.19 (SE=.15), r=.81***
	F[6, 761]=16.912, p ≤ .001	F[6, 748]=23.844, p ≤ .001	F[6, 726]=28.673, p ≤ .001	F[6, 715]=33.839, p ≤ .001

* p ≤ .05; ** p ≤ .01; *** p ≤ .001

+ M=Mean (SE=Standard Error); Min.=1 & Max.=7

+ r= Accumulated correlations among commenters

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