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Dhavan V. Shah [a]; Jack M. McLeod [a]; Nam-jin Lee [a]
[a] School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Wisconsin-Madison,

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Communication Competence as a Foundation for Civic Competence: Processes of Socialization into Citizenship

DHAVAN V. SHAH, JACK M. MCLEOD, and NAM-JIN LEE

The study of political socialization must move beyond examinations of knowledge and norms to consider how young people acquire the basic motives and skills needed to participate meaningfully and effectively in public life. Such competencies transcend contexts and are powerful predictors of a range of behaviors. In this closing data essay, we contend that chief among the repertoire of civic competencies required for political socialization is *communication competence*. Building on recent conceptual efforts (McLeod, Shah, Hess, & Lee, 2009), we understand communication competence as encompassing *media use*, particularly public affairs news consumption via broadcast, print, and online sources, and *interpersonal communication*, in terms of discussion of public affairs and politics at home, in school, and among peers.

Communication competence, in this formulation, is a meta-concept (McLeod et al., 2005) represented by a range of discrete indicators of family communication patterns, deliberative activities in school, news media use, and interpersonal discussion (Chaffee, McLeod, & Wackman, 1973; Hess, 2002; McLeod, 2000). These different components of communication competence are understood as being interdependent and interconnected.

Dhavan V. Shah is Louis A. and Mary E. Maier-Bascom Professor, School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Wisconsin-Madison. Jack M. McLeod is Louis A. and Mary E. Maier-Bascom Professor Emeritus, School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Wisconsin-Madison. Nam-Jin Lee is a doctoral candidate, School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

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Address correspondence to Dhavan V. Shah, School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Wisconsin 5115 Vilas Communication Hall, 821 University Avenue, Madison, WI 53706. E-mail: dshah@wisc.edu

Communication norms established in the family likely shape whether young people choose to seek out classroom deliberation, consume news media, and talk about politics with peers. Likewise, deliberative activities in the classroom, which often include following the news and talking about controversial issues as curricular elements, should spur these same actions outside of school settings. The connection between news use and political talk, both offline and online, observed among adults likely develops in late adolescence and early adulthood (Shah, Cho, Eveland, & Kwak, 2005; Shah et al., 2007).

All of these indicators of communication competence represent elements of a larger process of *communicative socialization* into civic life. The flexibility of the motives and skills developed through family communication, classroom deliberation, information consumption, and political talk should spur varied forms of engagement: civic participation (community engagement), political participation (i.e., electoral engagement), and political consumerism (i.e., marketplace engagement) (Andolina, Jenkins, Keeter, & Zukin, 2002). It is these relationships that are the focus of this concluding essay. After briefly conceptualizing each of these elements of communication competence, we introduce a panel study of parents and adolescents collected around the 2008 election season to examine these relationships. We then reflect on these findings and the broader set of concerns that should animate the next wave of communication and political socialization research.

Communicative Socialization

The four key agents of socialization in public life—family, school, media, and peers—all convey communicative competencies. In these pages, we will focus on how these agents help to create communication competence and how this competence, collectively, socializes adolescents into public life. As a collection, the skills and abilities developed in family communication, during curricular and extracurricular activities, through media use, and via interpersonal talk equip young people with the means to navigate citizenship. We contend that they do so by providing the foundation on which young people can explore ideas, process information, and reflect about public affairs, and also by endowing them with the ability to form arguments, express opinions, manage disagreements, and form complex issue understandings. These skills are prerequisites to effective engagement in all aspects of civil society.

Such competencies begin to develop early, initially shaped by patterns of communication between parents and children. Family communication patterns are thought to vary on two discrete dimensions, socio-oriented and concept-oriented (Chaffee et al., 1973). Families high on the socio dimension emphasize harmony, conformity, and authority in parent-child relationships. Those high on the concept dimension emphasize free and open exchange of ideas and welcome conversational disagreement (Fitzpatrick & Richie, 1994). It is this concept orientation that is key to political socialization, for it opens young people to the exploration of opposing perspectives and rewards open discussion as a norm.

The effects of concept orientation on engagement, writ large, may be mediated through deliberative activities in the classroom, especially controversial issue discussion and civic life simulations (i.e., mock trials and elections). Both of these curricular activities have been linked to the development of communication skills and civic attitudes (Hess, 2002; Kahne & Westheimer, 2003). The capacity of schools to teach children to deliberate and role play around contemporary issues is rooted in "the fact that they contain more ideological diversity than one would expect to find in a family, church, synagogue, mosque, or club" (Hess, 2004, p. 257). This may also explain the power of involvement in student government and school media (Eccles & Barber, 1999). These sorts of curricular

and extracurricular activities often require young people to monitor current affairs at the local, national, and international levels, providing an informational base to the development of deliberative motivations and skills.

The incorporation of news use into classroom deliberation indicates the centrality of public affairs media for communication competence and, more generally, civic competence. It is well established that news media use has substantial direct and indirect effects on civic and political participation throughout the life course (McLeod, 2000). Many of these insights have resulted from looking beyond *how much* media are used to consider the *why* and *how* of attention to specific types of content (Shah, McLeod, & Yoon, 2001). These studies also point to the importance of understanding the difference between *dosage* and *potency* when examining the *role of media in youth socialization. For example,* broadcast news viewing is more widespread than newspaper reading among young adults, yet print news use has more influence on civic engagement than broadcast news use (McLeod et al., 2009). Likewise, the Internet, especially unconventional online news use (e.g., blogs and candidate Web sites), dwarfs the potency of traditional news use as a socialization agent despite the fact that levels of use for online news remain low (Castells, 2007; Friedland, 1996; Jennings & Zeitner, 2003; McLeod et al., 2009).

All of these communicative agents of socialization culminate in the day-to-day practice of political talk (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995). This interpersonal communication about public affairs with friends, coworkers, siblings, and the like has been found to be a powerful mediator of mass communication influence, which itself mediates the effects of demographic, ideological, and social structural factors (Shah et al., 2005, 2007). Interpersonal communication about public affairs via the Internet—a form of interaction favored by adolescents—is found to perform similarly. Both forms of talk facilitate information flow, increase cross-cutting exposure, improve opinion quality, encourage social tolerance, and foster participation (Kim & Kim, 2008). Yet there are important differences between conventional political conversation and interactive political messaging, with the latter permitting communication with a wider, geographically dispersed network on an asynchronous basis. Such effects are likely more powerful among the young, who are particularly adept at the use of digital technologies.

Taken together, these different components of communication competence are theorized as driving a range of participatory behaviors. Indeed, the flexibility of these skills may stretch beyond socialization into civic engagement, political participation, and political consumerism to include an enhanced social capital opportunity structure that will have implications for personal and community health, social connectivity, and community integration.

Data

The survey used to explore these theorized relationships was collected between May 20 and June 25, 2008, by Synovate, which employs a stratified quota sampling technique to recruit respondents. Initially, the survey firm acquires contact information for millions of Americans from commercial list brokers, who gather identifying information from drivers' license bureaus, telephone directories, and other centralized sources. Large subsets of these people are contacted via mail and asked to indicate whether they are willing to participate in periodic surveys. Small incentives are offered, such as prepaid phone cards, for participation.

Rates of agreement vary widely across demographic categories. For example, 5% to 10% of middle-class recruits typically consent, compared to less than 1% of urban minorities.

It is from this prerecruited group of roughly 500,000 people that demographically balanced samples are constructed. To achieve a representative pool of respondents, stratified quota sampling procedures are employed. That is, the sample is drawn to reflect the properties of the population within each of the nine census divisions in terms of household income, population density, age, and household size. This starting sample is then adjusted within a range of subcategories that include race, gender, and marital status in order to compensate for expected differences in return rates (see Shah et al., 2005, 2007, for details).

For this study, this technique was used to generate a sample of households with children aged 12–17. A parent in the selected households was contacted via mail, asked to complete an introduction portion of the survey, and then asked to pass the survey to the 12–17-year-old child in the household who had most recently celebrated a birthday. This child answered a majority of the survey content and then returned the survey to the parents to complete and return. This sampling method was used to generate the initial sample of 4,000 respondents for the 2002 Life Style Study. Of the 4,000 mail surveys distributed, 1,325 responses were received, representing a response rate of 33.1% against the mailout. A small number of these responses were omitted due to incomplete or inconsistent information, resulting in a slightly smaller final sample. These respondents were recontacted in November 2008 and will be surveyed again in April 2009, permitting panel analysis as these data become available.

To test these relationships, we first created single-item measures of demographics (age, sex, race, party ID, strength of partisanship), family background (household income, shared partisanship between parent and child, educational attainment of mother and father, marital status of parents, home media environment in terms of multichannel TV and high-speed Internet), and community integration (years of residence, church attendance, and size of friendship network). We also constructed measures of our communication competence constructs: concept-oriented and socio-oriented family communication patterns, classroom deliberation, academic performance, student government/media participation, television news viewing, newspaper reading, conventional and unconventional online news use, political talk, and political messaging. Finally, we created measures of civic participation, political participation, and political consumerism. Table 1 presents descriptive statistics on all of these variables, including estimates of internal consistency for the multi-item measures. (for full question wording and correlations among these variables, see http://www.journalism.wisc.edu/~dshah/resources.htm).

Results

To examine the contributions of communication competence to the development of active adolescent citizens, we ran a series of hierarchical multiple regression analyses separately predicting civic participation, political participation, and political consumerism. Through the grouping of conceptually and empirically related predictor variables into blocks and the specification of the order in which these blocks were entered into the models, these analyses provide a stringent test of the effects of communication competence on adolescent socialization after accounting for the contributions of theoretically preceding blocks of variables.

The sequence of entering the blocks of variables into the regression models was based on the mediating relationships we assumed to exist among the predictor variables. In particular, we specified communication among citizens, both face to face and online, as a set of processes that mediate the effects of the factors pertaining to other key socializing agents (i.e., family, schools, news media) on civic engagement. This is consistent with the

Table 1
Descriptive statistics for key variables

Variables	*M*	*SD*	Min	Max	Reliability
Outcome variables					
Civic participation	3.18	2.07	1.00	8.00	.85[a]
Political participation	1.32	0.93	1.00	8.00	.87[a]
Political consumerism	1.76	1.54	1.00	8.00	.65[b]
Predictor variables					
Age	14.51	1.62	12.00	17.00	
Sex (female)	0.48	0.50	0.00	1.00	
Race (White)	0.77	0.42	0.00	1.00	
Party identification	2.96	0.87	1.00	5.00	
Strength of partisanship	1.47	0.82	0.00	3.00	
Shared partisanship (parent-child)	0.62	0.49	0.00	1.00	
College graduate (mother)	0.33	0.47	0.00	1.00	
College graduate (father)	0.40	0.49	0.00	1.00	
Divorced or separated (parents)	0.14	0.35	0.00	1.00	
Household income	15.83	6.04	1.00	27.00	
Multichannel home	0.58	0.49	0.00	1.00	
High-speed Internet at home	0.70	0.46	0.00	1.00	
Years of residence	10.57	7.75	0.00	59.00	
Church attendance	4.75	2.92	1.00	8.00	
Size of friendship network	4.75	5.67	0.00	99.00	
Concept orientation	3.71	0.72	1.00	5.00	.68[a]
Socio orientation	3.02	0.84	1.00	5.00	.70[a]
Classroom deliberation	3.43	1.96	1.00	8.00	.78[a]
Academic performance	5.40	1.38	2.00	7.00	
Student government/media	0.12	0.32	0.00	1.00	
TV news	1.79	1.96	0.00	7.00	.68[b]
Newspaper	1.17	1.43	0.00	7.00	.30[b]
Conventional online news	0.51	0.96	0.00	7.00	.66[a]
Nonconventional online information	0.12	0.51	0.00	6.50	.83[a]
Talk about current events	3.70	1.89	1.00	8.00	.87[a]
Online civic messaging	1.41	1.04	1.00	8.00	.88[a]

[a]Cronbachs alpha.
[b]Interitem correlation.

communication mediation model (McLeod, Zubric, Keum, Deshpande, Cho, & Stein, 2001; Sotirovic & McLeod, 2001; Shah et al., 2005), which stresses the roles of news consumption and communication among citizens in mediating the effects of social structural factors on engagement. The results of these analyses are summarized in Tables 2–4.

Adolescents' demographics and political orientations (Block 1) accounted for only a modest amount of the variance in civic participation (2.5%), political participation (2.5%), and political consumerism (2.7%). Likewise, factors pertaining to the parents of the adolescent respondents and their household environments (Block 2) added relatively small amounts of additional variance: 2.8% for civic participation, 0.5% for political participation,

Table 2
Results of hierarchical regression models predicting civic participation

	Block 1	Block 2	Block 3	Block 4	Block 5	Block 6	Block 7
Block 1: demographics							
Age	.05#	.04	.06*	.06*	.03	.03	.01
Sex (female)	.12**	.13***	.10***	.10.***	.07*	.07*	.06*
Race (White)	.01	.00	.01	.01	.01	.02	.02
Party identification	.04	.02	–.01	–.01	–.01	.00	–.00
Strength of partisanship	.08**	.08*	.03	.01	–.03	–.04	–.06#
Block 2: family background							
Shared partisanship (parent-child)		–.03	–.02	–.01	.01	.02	.01
College graduate (mother)		.08*	.05	.04	.01	–.01	–.01
College graduate (father)		.04	.02	.03	.02	.02	.01
Divorced or separated (parents)		–.05	–.04	–.05#	–.06*	–.06*	–.06*
Household income		.07*	.06#	.06#	.05	.06*	.06#
Multichannel home		–.02	–.02	–.03	–.03	–.03	–.03
High-speed Internet at home		–.10**	–.08**	–.08**	–.09**	–.08**	–.09**
Block 3: social Integration							
Years of residence			.04	.05	.03	.02	.03
Church attendance			.25***	.24***	.17***	.17***	.17***
Size of friendship network			.10***	.09**	.07*	.06*	.05*
Block 4: family communication							
Concept orientation				.14***	.07*	.07*	.04
Socio orientation				.05#	.05#	.03	.04
Concept × Socio Orientation				–.01	.00	.00	–.01

(*Continued*)

Table 2
(*Continued*)

	Block 1	Block 2	Block 3	Block 4	Block 5	Block 6	Block 7
Block 5: school activities							
Classroom deliberation					.27***	.23***	.14***
Academic performance					.10***	.11***	.11***
Student government/media					.07*	.06*	.05*
Block 6: news consumption							
TV news						.06*	.01
Newspaper						.04	.02
Conventional Web news						.05	−.00
Nonconventional online info.						.09**	.05
Block 7: citizen communication							
Talk about current events							.22***
Online civic messaging							.13***
Incremental R^2 (%)		2.80***	7.20***	2.00***	8.50***	2.20***	4.80***
Total R^2 (%)	2.50***	5.30***	12.50***	14.40***	22.90***	25.20***	29.90***

Note. Entries are standardized OLS regression coefficients. N = 1,166.
$^{\#}p \le .10$; $^{*}p \le .05$; $^{**}p \le .01$; $^{***}p \le .001$.

Table 3
Results of hierarchical regression models predicting political participation

	Block 1	Block 2	Block 3	Block 4	Block 5	Block 6	Block 7
Block 1: demographics							
Age	.05#	.05	.05	.05#	.01	.01	−.01
Sex (female)	.03	.03	.02	.02	.02	.01	.02
Race (White)	−.09**	−.09**	−.09**	−.08**	−.08*	−.04	−.03
Party identification	.06*	−.06*	−.07*	−.07*	−.06*	−.04	−.05*
Strength of partisanship	.08**	.08*	.06#	.05	.03	.00	−.01
Block 2: family background							
Shared partisanship (parent-child)		−.02	−.01	−.01	.00	.02	.02
College graduate (mother)		.07*	.06#	.05	.06#	−.00	.01
College graduate (father)		.00	−.00	.01	.01	.02	.00
Divorced or separated (parents)		.01	.01	.01	.01	.00	.00
Household income		−.01	−.03	−.02	−.02	.01	.02
Multichannel home		−.01	−.02	−.01	−.02	−.01	−.02
High-speed Internet at home		−.04	−.03	−.03	−.03	−.01	−.02
Block 3: social integration							
Years of residence			.05#	.05	.04	.02	.03
Church attendance			.07*	.07*	.02	.03	.04
Size of friendship network			.10***	.10**	.08**	.05*	.06**
Block 4: family communication							
Concept orientation				.06#	.01	.03	.02
Socio orientation				.05#	.05#	.02	.02
Concept × Socio Orientation				.08**	.10**	.08**	.04#

(*Continued*)

Table 3
(*Continued*)

	Block 1	Block 2	Block 3	Block 4	Block 5	Block 6	Block 7
Block 5: school activities							
Classroom deliberation					.26***	.15***	.08**
Academic performance					−.07*	−.04	−.04
Student government/media					.02	.01	−.01
Block 6: news consumption							
TV news						.06*	.02
Newspaper						.05#	.03
Conventional Web news						.10**	.03
Nonconventional online info.						.38***	.23***
Block 7: citizen communication							
Talk about current events							.04
Online civic messaging							.43***
Incremental R^2 (%)		0.50	1.80***	1.40***	6.00***	19.60***	13.10***
Total R^2 (%)	2.50***	3.00***	4.80***	6.20***	12.10***	31.70***	44.80***

Note. Entries are standardized OLS regression coefficients. N = 1,166.
#$p \leq .10$; *$p \leq .05$; **$p \leq .01$; ***$p \leq .001$.

Table 4
Results of hierarchical regression models predicting political consumerism

	Block 1	Block 2	Block 3	Block 4	Block 5	Block 6	Block 7
Block 1: demographics							
Age	.08**	.07*	.08**	.08**	.04	.04	.01
Sex (female)	.07*	.08**	.06*	.07*	.06#	.06*	.06*
Race (White)	−.08**	−.088**	−.07*	−.08*	−.07*	−.06*	−.05#
Party identification	.01	.00	−.01	−.01	.00	.01	.00
Strength of partisanship	.09**	.10**	.08*	.07#	.04	.03	.01
Block 2: family background							
Shared partisanship (parent-child)		−.03	−.03	−.02	−.01	−.00	−.01
College graduate (mother)		.08*	.06#	.06#	.06#	.03	.03
College graduate (father)		−.01	−.02	−.02	−.02	−.01	−.03
Divorced or separated (parents)		.03	.03	.03	.03	.03	.02
Household income		.01	.01	.01	.01	.03	.03
Multichannel home		−.06#	−.06#	−.06*	−.07*	−.07*	−.07*
High-speed Internet at home		.02	.03	.02	.02	.02	.02
Block 3: social integration							
Years of residence			.01	.01	.01	.00	.01
Church attendance			.12***	.12***	.07*	.07*	.07*
Size of friendship network			.06*	.06#	.04	.03	.03
Block 4: family communication							
Concept orientation				.09	.04	.04	.03
Socio orientation				.02	.02	−.00	−.00
Concept × Socio Orientation				−.00	.01	.01	−.01

(*Continued*)

Table 4
(*Continued*)

	Block 1	Block 2	Block 3	Block 4	Block 5	Block 6	Block 7
Block 5: school activities							
Classroom deliberation					.26***	.20***	.12***
Academic performance					−.07*	−.06*	−.06*
Student government/media					.06#	.04	.03
Block 6: news consumption							
TV news						.07	.02
Newspaper						.00	−.02
Conventional Web news						.11	.06#
Nonconventional online info.						.10	.00
Block 7: citizen communication							.13***
Talk about current events							.28***
Online civic messaging							
Incremental R^2 (%)		1.00	1.80***	0.80*	6.50***	3.90***	7.40***
Total R^2 (%)	2.70***	3.70***	5.50***	6.20***	12.70***	16.60***	24.00***

Note. Entries are standardized OLS regression coefficients. $N = 1165$.
#$p \leq .10$; *$p \leq .05$; **$p \leq .01$; ***$p \leq .001$.

and 1.0% for political consumerism. Among the background variables included in the first two blocks, the strength of political party identification and mother's education were found to have consistently positive relationships with all three indicators of civic activism. However, neither of these variables survived to the final betas, suggesting that many of the positive effects of these variables were mediated by family communication, church attendance, classroom deliberation, and other communication activities. In addition, gender (being female) was positively associated with civic participation and political consumerism and, unlike other demographic variables, remained significant even after the entry of all of the subsequent blocks of variables.

The third block of variables examined the extent to which adolescents' integration into social groups and communities was related to these modes of participation. Length of residence in their current community, church attendance, and size of friendship networks were used as indicators of level of social integration. Consistent with previous research (e.g., Putnam, 2000; Shah et al., 2001), church attendance was a strong and consistent predictor of all three outcomes, especially for civic participation. The results also suggest that larger friendship networks tend to promote civic engagement.

Both dimensions of parent-child communication—concept orientation and socio orientation—were found to play a significant socializing role for adolescent citizens (Block 4). Concept-oriented family communication was related to a boost in two outcome variables, civic participation and political consumerism. In addition, we found a significant interaction effect between concept orientation and socio orientation in the model predicting political participation. The positive interaction effect indicates that adolescents from families high on concept orientation and socio orientation are most likely to take part in the political process. However, these positive effects of family communication were largely absorbed by the subsequent variables, most notable of which were classroom deliberation, political talk, and civic messaging. This pattern of results suggests that the effect of family communication is indirect, mediated mainly through its influence on the extent to which adolescents engage in various forms of expression and exchange outside the family, in classrooms and within social networks.

The entry of school-related variables (Block 5) accounted for sizeable amounts of the variances in the civic engagement outcomes (8.5% in civic participation, 6.0% in political participation, and 6.5% in political consumerism). This was mainly attributable to the highly significant relationships of classroom deliberation with all three facets of civic engagement. Classroom deliberation was by far the most robust and consistent school-related predictor ($\beta = .27$, $\beta = .26$, and $\beta = .26$, all $p < .001$, upon entry for civic participation, political participation, and political consumerism, respectively). The strength of these relationships remained significant but became substantially attenuated with the entry of the media consumption and citizen communication blocks (Block 6 and Block 7), suggesting that classroom deliberation boosts civic engagement both directly and indirectly by stimulating further communication activities. Participation in student government and media was found to be positively associated with the outcome variables but attained statistical significance only in the model predicting civic participation. Academic performance, which functioned as a control variable, contributed positively to civic participation but negatively to the other two participatory outcomes.

Consumption of political information (Block 6) was also found to be conducive to active citizenship among adolescents. The four news consumption variables, including both traditional news content (TV and print news) and online political information, contributed an additional 2.2% of variance in civic participation and 3.9% in political consumerism. This block of variables has much greater predictive power for political

participation, alone accounting for 19.6% of additional variance after controlling for all preceding blocks of variables. Whereas all four news consumption variables contributed positively to the model predicting political participation, use of nonconventional online political information (e.g., online-only news magazines, political blogs, and political candidates' Web sites) was by far the strongest predictor of political participation. To a lesser degree, this type of online information consumption also positively predicted both civic participation and political consumerism. The effects of these news consumption variables, however, were substantially diminished with the entry of the final "citizen communication" block, indicating that the effects of news consumption on civic engagement are strong but largely indirect via citizen communication.

The two forms of citizen communication—discussion of news and current events with others face to face and sharing of opinions and ideas through interactive online messaging—explained significant amounts of the variances of all three civic engagement outcomes (4.8% for civic participation, 13.1% for political participation, and 7.4% for political consumerism). Although both public affairs discussion and online civic messaging enhanced all three forms of citizen engagement, the former was a particularly strong predictor of civic participation ($\beta = .22$, $p < .001$), with the latter being the strongest predictor of political participation ($\beta = .43$, $p < .001$).

Our findings also highlight the critical role of the Internet in youth socialization. Among adolescents, consumption of online information tends to exert a stronger influence on civic engagement than does traditional news use. And although the use of the Internet for expressing and sharing opinions and concerns is not common ($M = 1.41$ on an 8-point scale), interactive political messaging is particularly consequential among young citizens, a clear example of low dosage but high potency within the realm of citizen expression. The same is true of classroom deliberation, which makes an impressive contribution despite the fact that most kids have not experienced it. These relationships inform our understanding of communication competence as well as efforts to close gaps in participation between more and less educated youth—that is, the democracy divide. This divide poses serious risks to the future of representative governance, engagement in community activities, and informed commercial consumption.

Discussion

To summarize, we observed that all major socializing agents (family, school, news media, and peers) play a substantial role in the cultivation of civic activism among adolescents. The relative potency of the four communication competence blocks (12 variables) relative to the first three demographic and social structural blocks (15 variables) is noteworthy. For civic engagement, the first three blocks explain 12.5% of variance, whereas the final four blocks account for 17.5% of additional variance. Likewise, for political participation and political consumerism, the first three blocks explain 4.8% and 5.5% of variance, respectively; in contrast, the final four blocks account for an additional 40% of variance in political participation and 18.5% of variance in political consumerism. When understood in terms of the total variance explained, communication competence incrementally accounted for an impressive 58.3% of explained variance in civic participation, 89.3% in political participation, and 77.1% in political consumerism. Given how little of the explanatory power of the first three blocks remains in the final model, we can conclude their impact is almost all indirect via communication.

Our findings also suggest the interdependencies among these agents, as evidenced by the complex mediating relationships among the components of communication competence.

Particularly notable, the capacity of family communication to boost civic engagement seems to depend on its impact on classroom deliberation and citizen communication. Likewise, the positive effects attributed to friendship networks and classroom deliberation on civic engagement are partially mediated through various communication activities including news consumption and public-spirited discussion, offline and online. This collection of relationships suggests that open and active parent-child communication and deliberative and civic school activities help to foster the motivations and skills necessary for engaging in effective political information acquisition, expression, and exchange—that is, communication competence.

This dynamic of mediated influence speaks to the centrality of *media use* and *interpersonal communication* across all of the key agents of socialization, as well as the mutually interdependent nature of the broader concept of communication competence. For example, the open discussion about controversial issues among family members that is foundational to a concept oriented family communication pattern is related to participation in deliberative discussion in the classroom and interpersonal political talk about politics and public affairs with family and friends. Likewise, news use that is part of deliberative activities in the classroom likely spurs attentive news consumption outside of the classroom. This is not tautological; rather, it speaks to the fact that interpersonal discussion and media use are implicated in all aspects of communication competence and shape a range of outcomes consequential for civic competence.

In addition to the relationship of communication competence with community engagement, electoral engagement, and marketplace engagement, future research should consider whether the motivations and skills examined above allow young people—both adolescents and young adults—to be more discerning information consumers. This will require scholars to go beyond knowledge as facts to consider variables such as cognitive complexity (i.e., the differentiation and integration of knowledge) and "dis-information" (e.g., lies like "Obama is a Muslim"). Youth who possess the motives and abilities associated with communication competence likely have a more complex understanding of social controversies and are more resistant to becoming misinformed, both increasingly important characteristics.

In this essay and the articles that precede it, we also see the need for careful examinations of various information-processing strategies beyond reflection/elaboration. These include (a) scanning and skimming skills, which inform judgments about what information is worth going over lightly and what needs to be consumed more thoughtfully, and (b) active processing skills, which allow news consumers to read through and learn from flawed or incomplete information. Such processing skills may have implications for communication mediation, providing additional pathways to participation for the citizen-consumer (Keum et al., 2004).

An emphasis on comparative research is essential for future inquiries concerning communication and political socialization. Comparisons of *space* in terms of nations, communities, neighborhoods, schools, and classrooms are critical for understanding how contextual and individual factors, especially communication competence, coincide to create effects. Inclusion of fine-grained contextual data in the panel study introduced here will allow for the application of multilevel modeling techniques. This will lead to the development of *auxiliary* theories that connect macro-structural concepts with the micro-individual concepts most common in communication and socialization research. Equally important, future research must make comparisons over *time*. Panel studies built around elections are one example of this type of research, though inquiries that cover longer periods are even more pressing. In particular, we need to understand the persistence and

development of communication competence from adolescence through the differential trajectories of college-bound and work-bound young adults.

Lastly, research on communication and political socialization needs to adopt the collaborative approaches increasingly common in other disciplines. This would allow sharing of insights across disciplinary boundaries and pooling of resources for more adequate research designs and measures. Future collaborative projects should consider diversity in their composition beyond experts in survey research and statistical methods. As the concept of communication competence demonstrates, insights from developmental psychology, education, sociology, political science, and communication must be brought together to chart new theoretical and methodological terrains. We are hopeful that this essay and the other entries in this special issue allow for that transdisciplinary conversation to begin.

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