

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

## A Communicative Approach to Social Capital

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*This article advances a communicative approach to social capital that views communication as the fundamental source of societal integration. We contend that integration occurring at the system level via news consumption and at the individual level via interpersonal discussion is amplified through ties at the community level. This cross-level interaction is theorized to encourage civic engagement, writ large, above and beyond the influences of news, talk, or social ties. This perspective distinguishes between the extent of news use and political talk and the orientation toward news consumption and political conversation. We offer evidence that communication variables, specifically news attention and exposure along with conversational frequency and orientation toward conversational understanding, interact with associational membership and network size to foster engagement.*

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Democratic societies must act collectively to address a range of social problems. In communities, as in interpersonal relationships and organizations, members are expected to give their attention to tasks requiring joint effort (e.g., Brewer & Kramer, 1986; Latane, 1986; Murnighan, Kim, & Metzger, 1994). If people did not act collectively, many challenges would go unaddressed, for they would be impossible to overcome without coordinated, collaborative strategies. Coleman (1990) advanced the concept of *social capital* to explain how connections among individuals can facilitate such collective action. Social capital underlies all forms of community engagement, particularly civic participation, for as other scholars have elaborated, people who participate in cooperative activities usually receive only a small part of the benefits of these activities (Olson, 1965). Instead, the gains are more diffuse, coming in the form of widespread social assistance and the redress of public ills.

As this suggests, connections among people and between people and institutions are central to community life, the democratic ideal of participation, and any definition of social capital. Yet such a perspective overlooks the importance of communication

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that flows through these social ties, the *communicative underpinnings of social capital*. This is particularly perplexing given Coleman's (1990) initial conceptualization of social capital as manifest in the "information that inheres in social relations" (p.310). This article seeks to fill this vacuum by providing a communicative perspective on social capital and offering empirical evidence of the synergic relationship of social ties and modes of communication, which we believe results from the information and shared meaning that flows through social ties and is constructed by them.

We view communication as the fundamental source of societal integration, contending that integration that occurs at the system level via news media consumption and at the individual level via interpersonal discussion is amplified through formal and informal ties at the community level. This interplay is theorized to encourage civic engagement, writ large, above and beyond the discrete influences of news use, political talk, and social ties (McLeod & McDonald, 1985; McLeod et al., 1996, 1999). The perspective we advance distinguishes between the extent of news use and political talk and the orientation toward the consumption and conversation. We then offer empirical evidence that communication variables, specifically news attention and exposure along with conversational frequency and orientation toward conversational understanding, interact with associational membership and network size to foster civic engagement. The implications for future research on social capital, civic participation, and communication effects are addressed.

This study examines these relationships in Colombia. For most of its modern history Colombia has been a country where violence has played a critical role as a conflict resolution mechanism. In the midst of this political turmoil, Bogotá has emerged as a political alternative to Colombia's violence cycles. Exploring the potential of communicative social capital for participatory engagement in Bogotá may offer important insights for governance in large, diverse, and conflict-prone areas, as well as for more stable societies.

## Social capital

Aspects of social capital and the relation of this concept to social structure can be traced back to the origins of sociology itself (Portes, 1998). However, contemporary accounts tend to conceptualize social capital primarily as a resource available to individuals or as a characteristic of certain communities. Researchers in various fields have related social capital to civic and political engagement (Putnam, 2000), governmental performance (Knack, 2002; Putnam, 1993), ethnic harmony (Varshney, 2002), rule enforcement (Zhou & Bankston, 1996), lower transactions costs (Fukuyama, 1995), and reduced crime rates (Kawachi, Kennedy, & Wilkinson, 1999).

Among sociologists the prevalent usage of social capital has been that of a resource to individuals, following Bourdieu (1985), Coleman (1990) and Burt (1992). Bourdieu defined social capital as the resources available from the existence of lasting networks of more or less formalized relationships. The emphasis was placed on the benefits that an individual can reap from "investing" in a group, the access that group membership

provides to the resources of other members of the group. Coleman referred to aspects of social structure that facilitate the action of certain actors within it, whereas Burt referred to social capital as “contacts through which someone receives opportunities to use your financial and human capital” (p.9), emphasizing weak ties and how they facilitate mobility of new knowledge and resources. Despite different emphases (e.g., Burt’s emphasis on structural holes and Coleman’s emphasis on dense networks), they all point toward social capital as “the ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other social structures” (Portes, 1998, p.6). Implicit to all of these conceptions is the notion that the networks creating connections among members are suffused with communication and the sharing of knowledge and understanding.

Following Putnam (1993), political scientists started to explore social capital as a feature of societies rather than a resource of its members. According to Putnam (2000) social capital refers to “connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them,” (p.19) that “allow people to resolve collective problems more easily, . . . grease the wheels that allow communities to advance smoothly, . . . and develops or maintains character traits that are good for the rest of society” (p.288). Portes (1998) has criticized the move of social capital from an individual resource to a social structural feature for failing to recognize that both are essential features of the construct. Along these same lines, Woolcock (1998), defining social capital as the “information, trust, and norms of reciprocity inhering in one’s social networks” (p.153), provides a compelling theoretical argument to examine social capital simultaneously at the micro- and macrolevel. Regardless of the level of analysis, the flow of information through a network of communicative connections retains a central place in all conceptions of social capital, consistent with our broader contention.

Building on Portes’ (1998) and Woolcock’s (1998) arguments, we assert that rather than selecting between an individual perspective or a societal perspective, social capital can be examined from an individual perspective as a linkage between actors and between individuals and institutions. These linkages provide pathways for information and ideas to flow among these actors. Such a communicative approach to social capital recognizes that it is not just social ties but social ties filled with communicative practices that encourage and foster civic participation. Yet at the same time, the patterns of linkage across larger groups that result from these individual linkages also tell us about collective potential for social integration and action.

In contrast to the communicative perspective we advance, much of the theorizing on social capital has emphasized civic virtues of trust and reciprocity that are thought to exist within these connections (Portes, 1998). These internalized norms and expectations of future claims are thought to imbue social relations and associational ties with an attitude of optimism toward the goodwill and competence of others (Jones, 1996). Yet empirical efforts to examine the role of trust in collective action

have had very limited success, with most studies finding a weak or nonexistent link of civic virtues with engagement (Shah, 1998; Uslaner, 1998).

A communicative perspective of social capital, on the other hand, shifts the focus from such social attitudes to the exchange of information and shared meaning that flows through social ties. This is consistent with Coleman's (1990) original formulation of information as inherent to social relations, and thereby to social capital. Bearing in mind that gathering information is costly, social and associational ties provide an efficient means to do so. Such ties may be maintained for other purposes but can also provide "information that facilitates action" (Coleman, 1990, p. 310). This approach values the information these ties can provide, rather than the credit for future obligations they may yield. A focus on this "informational" potential of social ties leads us to understand social capital as a communication structure grounded in formal and informal linkages. Two forms of social ties are central to theorizing communication as a critical aspect of social capital: interpersonal networks and associational memberships.

### **Social ties**

By beginning with a network conception of interpersonal relations (Fischer, 1982; Wellman, 1982; Wellman, Carrington, & Hall, 1988) and then understanding that personal networks provide the micro-macro bridge in which public discussion rests (Granovetter, 1973), previous research has provided evidence of how certain communication network characteristics influence civic engagement. Among these, network size has consistently been related to different forms of political and civic participation (see Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006; Leighley, 1990). This relationship has been explained with the notion that as the number of interpersonal contacts increases so does the potential for new information and opportunities.

Even though older research at the microlevel suggests that as group size increases, commitment to and participation in group activities decrease (for small groups, see Festinger, 1951; for voluntary associations, see Knoke, 1990), more recent scholarship at the meso-level consistently finds that commitment to the polity increases with social network size (Huckfeldt, Beck, Dalton, & Levine, 1995; McLeod *et al.*, 1996). One explanation for this is that larger networks contain greater information potential, and thus more mobilizing communicative message flow. The larger a network is, the more information flows through it. Thus, those who have large social networks and are rich in communicative practices should be more engaged as a byproduct of their connections. It is this intersection of social structure and information resources, writ large, that we refer to as communicative social capital.

However, egocentric networks are not the sole repository of social structural linkages. Personal networks (Wellman, 1999) fail to account for more organized, often institutional, structures of collective action that are critical to community life (Knoke, 1990). To do so, the notion of associational membership remains a critical component of any systematic understanding of individual connection to the

social structure. This is particularly important for our notion of communicative social capital, for ties to associational structures may be especially rich in mobilizing information. In this work, we consider social networks side-by-side with associational memberships, understanding that both informal and formal social ties must be assessed for an adequate picture of an individual's community connections. These two types of social ties—personal networks and associational ties—are the structural component of social capital, with the extent of news use and political conversation and orientations toward these communications providing the informational resources.

### Communication resources

Communication scholars were brought to the social capital debate primarily by Putnam's (1995) contention that television was the main "culprit" of the disappearance of social capital in the United States during the 20th century. This claim was soon contested and largely discredited by communication researchers. They provided evidence that rather than a medium-specific relation, effects of mass media are content specific; informational uses of media appear to be positively related to the production of social capital and recreational uses are not (see, e.g., Shah, 1998; Shah, McLeod, & Yoon, 2001; Sotirovic & McLeod, 2001).

Yet prior to this work, a long tradition of scholarship has focused on the participatory value of political discussion (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955), recently reconceptualized in network form (Wellman, 1999). From everyday interpersonal interactions to more ritualized deliberation exercises, findings consistently show that political conversation tends to increase issue reflection (McLeod *et al.*, 1999), cognitive complexity (McLeod *et al.*, 2001), political knowledge, argument quality/repertoire (Cappella, Price, & Nir, 2002; Kim, Wyatt, & Katz, 1999), schema integration (Gastil and Dillard, 1999), reduction in attitude uncertainty (Fishkin, 1995), and ultimately affect civic participation (Shah, Cho, Eveland, & Kwak, 2005; Wuthnow, 1994; Wyatt, Katz, & Kim, 2000), community belonging (Ball-Rokeach, Kim, & Matei, 2001), as well as more equitable and fair distributions and processes (Sulkin & Simon, 2001). Thus, political conversation is credited with making citizens more informed, engaged, and active, enhancing consensus and peaceful conflict resolution, and encouraging social tolerance (Delli-Carpini, 1997; Delli-Carpini, Cook, & Jacobs, 2004; Mendelberg, 2002; Mendelberg & Oleske, 2000; Rojas *et al.*, 2005).

In addition to direct conversations, in complex societies an important part of community conversation—that is, the local storytelling network—is carried out through mediated forms. Studies have provided evidence that (a) newspaper reading is a positive predictor of participation in local civic and political activities (Ball-Rokeach *et al.*, 2001; McLeod *et al.*, 1996; Stamm, Emig, & Hesse, 1997); (b) news and public affairs television viewing is related to increased political knowledge and participation (Eveland, 2001; Norris, 1996); (c) television use does not make us less trusting of others or cynical about politics (Bennett, Rhine, Flickinger, & Bennet, 1999; Shah, 1998; Uslaner, 1998); (d) information communication technologies, both news and talk,

enhance individual- and community-level social capital and political participation (Dutta-Bergman, 2005; Katz, Rice, & Aspden, 2001). Involvement in the local communication infrastructure through news use has been found to increase community integration and participation (Matei & Ball-Rokeach, 2003; Matei, Ball-Rokeach, & Qiu, 2001). These relationships are not particular to the United States; similar patterns have been documented in Britain, Continental Europe, Latin America, and Korea (Kim & Han, 2005; McLeod, Rush, & Friederich, 1968; Newton, 1999).

Friedland (2001; also Friedland & McLeod, 1999; Friedland & Shah, 2005) has sought to integrate these empirical findings in a theory of communicatively integrated community in which “communities in which there are rich, cross-cutting networks of association and public discussion are more likely to formulate real problems, find solutions, apply and test those solutions, learn from them, and correct them if they are flawed: in short, to rule themselves, or work democratically” (p.359). This notion of communicatively integrated community serves as the basis for some of our theorizing on communicative social capital, although we refine and expand upon this concept by specifying the manner in which social structures and communication resources intersect to foster greater integration into public life.

### **Communicatively integrated community**

Specifically, we extend insights provided by work on mass media and community integration (Friedland, 2001; Friedland & McLeod, 1999) and the communication infrastructure perspective (Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006) to reformulate our communicative conception of social capital. The importance of this communicative approach to social capital goes beyond diffusion of information and points toward the construction of shared meaning, in line with pragmatist accounts of social interaction (Dewey, 1922/1988; Mead, 1934/1967) or Habermasian accounts of communicative action (Habermas, 1984, 1989). As Kim and Ball-Rokeach (2006, pp. 173–174) say, “communication processes, such as mass communication, are common features of other perspectives, [yet] there is much to be gained by positioning communication structures and processes at the center of the inquiry into civic engagement.”

From this perspective, the conceptualization of social capital is extended beyond the narrow view of it as a source of social control, social support, or societal benefits (see Portes, 1998; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000) to a source of societal integration—integration that occurs at the system level via news media, at the community level via formal and informal social ties, and at the individual level via interpersonal discussion. In our theorizing on communicative social capital, understanding structure is important (Paek, Yoon, & Shah, 2005), and we can use knowledge derived from network analysis to further develop this understanding. However, the resources that flow in these networks are also important. Thus, to examine our claims about communicative social capital we rely on a strict, empirical approach that evaluates the interactive relationship of associational ties and social

networks with the extent of and orientation toward news use and conversation to explain civic engagement.

This shares some commonality with the idea of the neighborhood storytelling network, which considers the interplay of mass media and interpersonal discussion factors in community belonging (Ball-Rokeach *et al.*, 2001). This storytelling network is thought to intersect with a broader communications infrastructure of associational and institutional ties in what amounts to a network of networks (Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006). Yet in much of the work in this tradition, the components that comprise the storytelling network—mass media use and interpersonal discussion—are not considered as discrete influences. Instead, both are included in a single measure of the storytelling network. Thus, the component parts and their potentially multiplicative effects are not entered separately in models predicting civic engagement. We theorize that communicative social capital is created in the interplay of institutional affiliations, personal networks, mass media use, and political talk above and beyond the effects of these factors individually. That is, social capital is constructed when structural connections intersect with political information and civic orientations.

That is, we believe the interactive effects of associational ties and social networks with news and talk exist in addition to their unique individual contributions. Furthermore, when conceptualizing the role of news and talk, this perspective distinguishes between the extent of news use and political talk and the orientation toward the consumption and conversation, considering the extent of exposure to news and frequency of political discussion on the one hand and the degree of attention to news and orientation toward understanding on the other (Habermas, 2006; McLeod & McDonald, 1985; Rojas, 2008). Communicative social capital, then, is conceptualized as both a structural feature embedded in social ties and a resource of the individual comprised of information flows, with the interactions among these elements producing a range of pathways to participation and the reconstruction of social capital.

## Hypotheses

The construct of communicative social capital being advocated here posits that as social ties grow, both in terms of personal network and associational membership, so will civic participation, particularly as the information flowing within these ties increases due to greater surveillance media use, increased news attention, more frequent political conversation, and an orientation toward rationality in such conversations. The research we reference above has demonstrated that social ties and communication variables are important predictors of civic participation, individually and collectively. We contend that it is critical to reconceptualize social capital as a communicative phenomenon because it is precisely through communication within networks that social ties are sustained and gain their mobilizing potential.

To provide empirical evidence of this notion of communicative social capital, we expect that above and beyond the direct effects of social ties—associational membership and personal network size—and communication practices—both the extent of and orientation toward news use and political talk—the interplay of social ties and communication will result in increased participation. This is because the information and meaning flowing through mass media/political discussion systems penetrates social ties, and it is within both these relationships that meaning is ultimately constructed. We expect that the effects personal network size and associational membership tally on civic engagement will be amplified among those who also partake in surveillance media use, both in terms of exposure and attention. Accordingly, we predict:

**H1a:** The effects of associational membership on civic engagement will be amplified among those who experience higher levels of news exposure, above and beyond the discrete effects of social ties and communication practices.

**H1b:** The effects of associational membership on civic engagement will be amplified among those who are more attentive during their news exposure, above and beyond the discrete effects of social ties and communication practices.

**H2a:** The effects of personal network size on civic engagement will be amplified among those who experience higher levels of news exposure, above and beyond the discrete effects of social ties and communication practices.

**H2b:** The effects of personal network size on civic engagement will be amplified among those who are more attentive during their news exposure, above and beyond the discrete effects of social ties and communication practices.

In addition to mediated communications, we expect that the frequency of interpersonal political conversations will also enhance the effect of social ties (both formal and informal) on civic engagement. Kwak, Williams, Wang, and Lee (2005) provide initial evidence of the interactive effects of certain characteristics of discussion networks with the frequency of political talk. In this work, we extend their argument from interpersonal networks to associational membership while retaining a focus on network size. We further advance this perspective by predicting that like exposure and attention to news, it is not merely the frequency of political talk but the orientation that the individual brings to their discussions that creates communicative social capital. Drawing upon insights from Habermas regarding rationality of communication, we contend that an orientation toward reaching understanding will also interact with social ties to shape levels of participation. People who seek understanding in their political conversations should become increasingly engaged with their communities as their social ties increase. Therefore, we also offer the following hypotheses.

**H3a:** The effects of associational membership on civic engagement will be amplified among those who have frequent political conversations, above and beyond the discrete effects of social ties and communication practices.



**H3b:** The effects of associational membership on civic engagement will be amplified among those who approach political conversation with an orientation toward understanding, above and beyond the discrete effects of social ties and communication practices.

**H4a:** The effects of personal network size on civic engagement will be amplified among those who have frequent political conversations, above and beyond the discrete effects of social ties and communication practices.

**H4b:** The effects of personal network size on civic engagement will be amplified among those who approach political conversation with an orientation toward understanding, above and beyond the discrete effects of social ties and communication practices

These hypotheses reflect the manifestation of communicative social capital in specific contexts. Examining these hypotheses within a society in conflict in which violence has historically played a critical role in conflict resolution provides a particularly tough test of this theory of communicative social capital.

## Methods

The data reported in this article were collected in Colombia, a society in political strife. Internal wars between liberals and conservatives that characterized the 19th and roughly the first half of the 20th century evolved into a confrontation with communist guerrillas in the context of the Cold War. This unresolved conflict was fueled in the late 20th century with money from illegal drugs. Traditional landowners found allies in drug barons against communist guerrillas, leading to the creation of private armies, known as paramilitary groups. They were supposed to fight the communist guerrillas but have ultimately evolved into a new actor in conflict.

However, urban elites, facing international pressure as well as the challenge of drug lords trying to assert national political power, initiated a large-scale offensive against drug cartels. A failed peace process with FARC, Colombia's oldest and most important guerrilla group, at the turn of the century, led to the election in 2002 of Alvaro Uribe as president, under the promise that guerrillas would be defeated through the use of force. As president, Uribe started a full-scale offensive against the leftist rebels and negotiated a peace process with paramilitary groups.

In the midst of this political turmoil, Bogotá, Colombia's capital, emerged as a political alternative to Colombia's violence cycles. A series of local governments since 1992 have emphasized political accountability, cultural innovations on citizenship, and the physical transformation of the city, changing the political landscape and the local civic culture (Muñoz, Arturo, Bromberg, & Moncada, 2003).

With decreasing violence and the increasing importance of public opinion, Bogotá can be understood as a hopeful indicator of a future Colombia that finds ways to resolve political conflicts through democratic and deliberative process. Understanding the potential of communicative social capital to foster engagement and participation in the context of Colombia, a country classified as one with medium

human development, high income inequality and over a million internally displaced people (UNDP, 2010) offers a conservative test of our theory.

### Survey data

This study relied on face-to-face survey data collected in the city of Bogotá in December 2003 and 2004, from a single panel of respondents. The December 2003 data were collected by a professional polling firm—Deproyectos Limitada—on behalf of city government, as an assessment of civic culture. The Civic Culture Study used random sampling techniques to identify an initial random sample of households. Using the city's digital map, 600 city blocks were randomly selected. Within these 600 blocks, city government generated a census that listed all citizens and their basic demographic characteristics. From this list and relying on stratified quotas, a sample of respondents representing the city's population on the basis of gender, age, economic strata, and neighborhood was selected. Wave 1 generated 1,433 completed responses.

Bogotá's Observatory of Urban Culture granted us access to the 2003 data. For the December 2004 wave of the study a custom questionnaire was developed that complemented the civic engagement question posed by the Civic Culture Study with an array of questions on communication practices; then Deproyectos Limitada were engaged to recontact the individuals who completed the 2003 survey. For this recontact, the attrition rate for this survey against the previous wave was 50.1%, with 715 respondents completing the second questionnaire. Only 40 subjects (2.8% of original sample) refused to participate in the second wave. However, noncontacts resulting from residential instability were largely responsible for this attrition rate.

To examine the possibility of systematic attrition between the first and the second waves in the panel, a comparison of basic demographic characteristics, between those who participated only in the first wave and those who participated in both waves, was undertaken. The second wave sample is slightly older (mean wave 1 = 39.5; mean wave 2 = 42.1) and female (55% in wave 1; 60% in wave 2). However, in terms of political interest, knowledge, efficacy, associational membership, and civic participation, there were no significant differences between those who did not participate in wave two and those who did. For this article, we use the second wave responses ( $n = 715$ ) where the communication questions of interest are available.

### Measurement

#### *Criterion variable*

This study examined a series of behavioral outcomes that represent different forms of civic engagement and democratic participation. Civic engagement was measured with an additive index of 11 behavioral items that asked whether the respondent had carried out a series of behaviors in the past 12 months which included classical political participation (e.g., working for or donating money to a political party) to other broader forms of civic participation (e.g., attending a local civic forum or doing

voluntary work). All items indicating participation in local politics or community life were measured dichotomously (i.e., yes or no) ( $M = 0.9$ ,  $SD = 1.8$ ; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .83$ ). Given the skew present in the dependant variable (2.5), a square root transformation was used ( $M = 0.5$ ,  $SD = 0.8$ , skewness 1.3).

#### *Control variables*

Five established demographic control variables were included in our model: gender (60.6% female); age ( $M = 43.6$ ,  $SD = 16.6$ ); level of formal education measured on a 7-point scale ranging from none to completed college degree with a midpoint of incomplete high school ( $M = 4.5$ ,  $SD = 1.7$ ); house stratum, measured on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 to 6 that is based on the incremental quality of the household as assigned by local government for tax purposes, is employed as a proxy measure of household income ( $M = 2.7$ ,  $SD = 1.1$ ); and length of residence in years ( $M = 16.9$ ,  $SD = 12.6$ ).

Two predispositions that have been related in the past to levels of participation were considered in this study: social trust (Putnam, 2000) and postmaterialist values (McLeod, Sotirovic, & Holbert, 1998). Social trust was measured with a single indicator asking people to agree or disagree with the statement "most people are honest" on a 6-point scale ( $M = 3.0$ ,  $SD = 1.4$ ). Postmaterialist values were measured with three items asking people to rate on a 6-point scale, ranging from *not important* to *very important* the import of individual freedoms, expressive rights, and democracy as social goals ( $M = 4.6$ ,  $SD = 0.6$ ; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .78$ ).

In addition, a set of political orientations (interest in politics, political knowledge, and political efficacy) that have been consistently related to level of participation were also included for control purposes. Political interest was measured using a single item that asked respondents to gauge their political interest on an index ranging from 1 to 3 where 1 is *not interested* and 3 is *very interested* ( $M = 1.6$ ,  $SD = 0.6$ ). Political knowledge was measured with nine items taking into account "rules of the game, the substance of politics, and people and parties" (Delli-Carpini & Keeter, 1996, p. 65). An additive index for political knowledge was constructed ( $M = 5.1$ ,  $SD = 2.4$ ; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .77$ ). Political efficacy was measured with three questions concerning respondents' assessments of their actual ability to influence government and solve community problems, as well as their perception of government's responsiveness to people's initiatives. These measures of political efficacy were rated on a 6-point scale ranging from *total disagreement* to *total agreement* and then combined into an index constructed by averaging across a respondent's answers ( $M = 2.8$ ,  $SD = 1.3$ ; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .69$ ).

#### *Social ties*

In this study, social ties are considered both in terms of the structured ties that result from associational membership and the interpersonal social networks in which individuals are immersed in. Previous literature has used associational membership as a measure of social capital. In our study, associational membership is a critical

element of communicative social capital, but communicative social capital cannot be reduced to the formal or informal networks in which meaning flows. Accordingly, we measure both.

Associational membership was measured by an additive index of 15 items, which asked whether the respondent belonged to a range of organizations including: recreational, cultural, educational, environmental, professional, charities, cooperative, security, gender, ethnic, and labor unions ( $M = 2.4$ ,  $SD = 3.2$ ; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .75$ ). All items composing the associational ties index were measured on a 3-point scale ranging from *nonmember* to *active member*. Notably, if a person belongs to more than one association of the same type, he/she would not get a high score; a high score implies belonging to different types of organizations.

With regard to interpersonal networks, this study used conventional measures of network size and network heterogeneity, and a more novel measure of network density (Rojas, 2008). The size of a respondent's personal network was measured by averaging four items that asked respondents with how many family members, coworkers, neighbors, and friends they discussed politics and current events ( $M = 1.8$ ,  $SD = 2.2$ ; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .80$ ). The heterogeneity of a respondent's personal network was measured by averaging five items asking respondents how different the people they spoke to about politics were from them in terms of age, education, social class, political affiliation, and general views. These items were measured on a scale ranging from 0 to 5 in which 0 meant *very similar* and 5 meant *very different* ( $M = 2.6$ ,  $SD = 1.3$ ; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .80$ ). The density of respondents' personal networks was gauged averaging three items that inquired whether the respondent's discussion partners knew each other, where friends with one another, and discussed politics among themselves. These items were measured on a 6-point scale ( $M = 2.8$ ,  $SD = 1.7$ ; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .89$ ).

#### *Communication variables*

In this study, both mass-mediated and interpersonal forms of communication are considered. There were two measures of mediated forms of communication: one tapping a person's exposure to news and another tapping the orientation toward that exposure, namely whether it was attentive (McLeod & McDonald, 1985). Similarly, interpersonal communication is operationalized both in terms of the frequency of political conversation and an orientation toward reaching understanding while engaged in conversation.

The measurement of the respondent's level of exposure to news consisted of nine items that asked the respondent about exposure to national newspapers, magazines, local newspapers, national and local television news, radio news, and television and radio political commentary, which shows on a 6-point scale ranging from *never* to *frequently* ( $M = 1.9$ ,  $SD = 1.0$ ; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .77$ ). Attention to news was measured using six items that inquired the amount of attention given to international, national, political, economic, and local news, on a 6-point scale ranging from *no attention* to *a lot of attention* ( $M = 3.1$ ,  $SD = 1.2$ ; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .87$ ).

With regard to political conversation, this study used an established measure of discussion frequency, as well as an innovative measure for orientation toward seeking understanding of political conversation. The frequency of political discussion was measured with a four-item index that asked respondents how often they discussed politics with family members, coworkers, neighbors, and friends on a 6-point scale ranging from *never* to *frequently* ( $M = 1.6$ ,  $SD = 1.2$ ; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .74$ ). An orientation toward reaching understanding of conversation was measured with a battery of eight questions that inquired about certain communicative practices that privilege understanding the position of others in an effort to seek common understanding or communicative rationality, rather than to strategically persuade others of a position. An index was created by averaging the scores from eight items asking subjects their use of political conversation as a mechanism to promote solidarity, agreement, connection between people, the common good, understanding, and protection for the rights of others. Subjects rated their agreement with the statements using a 6-point scale, ranging from *completely disagree* to *completely agree* ( $M = 3.5$ ,  $SD = 1.0$ ; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .85$ ).

To test our hypotheses, eight different two-way multiplicative interaction terms were created from one of the two measures of social ties—associational membership or interpersonal network size—and one of the four measures of communication—news exposure, news attention, talk frequency, or talk orientation. All variables used to construct the interaction terms were standardized before the interaction terms were created (Eveland, 1997). These eight interaction terms are (a) associational membership and news exposure; (b) associational membership and news attention; (c) network size and news exposure; (d) network size and news attention; (e) associational membership and frequency of political talk; (f) associational membership and an orientation toward reaching understanding; (g) network size and frequency of political talk; and (h) network size and an orientation toward reaching understanding.

## Results

To examine the notion of communicative social capital posited in this article, we expected that beyond the contribution of social ties and communication variables to engagement, measures of social ties would positively interact with communication variables and result in further civic engagement. Overall, our findings support these expectations across the different models tested.

To examine these relationships, we performed a series of Ordinary Least Square regressions to predict civic engagement. In these analyses, we included demographics, predispositions, and political involvement as control variables, and then included social ties and communications, followed by a block of two-way interaction terms between social ties and communication practices.

The high correlations between some of the interaction terms led us to run four separate models, in which the final interaction block changes across the models.

The basic model including controls, social ties, and communication variable explains 37.2% of the variance in civic engagement. Final models, depending on the interaction terms included, explain 37.7–38.8% of variance, contributing a significant amount of incremental variance in three of the four tests. This provides some preliminary support for our general theoretical proposition.

For these analyses, we included demographic variables (gender, age, education, income, and length of residence), predispositions (trust and postmaterialist values), and political involvement (political interest, knowledge, and efficacy) as control variables. These variables taken together explained 18.9% of variance in civic engagement (Table 1).

Social ties, including associational membership and personal networks, accounted for 17.1% of additional variance in engagement, with associational membership, network heterogeneity, and density as the three significant predictors. That is, people with higher levels of association, denser, and less heterogeneous networks tend to participate more in civic life.

Communication variables explain 1.3% of incremental variance, with news exposure and an orientation toward reaching understanding of conversation as consistent predictors of civic engagement. Notably, the amount of incremental variance explained by the variables in this block would be 6.4% if entered before the social ties block.

In our final models, the interaction block explains 0.5–1.6% of incremental variance depending on the terms used. In the following section we will decompose the nature of these interactive effects and plot the significant two-way interactions for each model. Since the main effects are revealed in the coefficients and self-evident in the figures, we will focus our analyses in examining the nature of these interactive effects.

In the first model the interaction block explains 1.3% of incremental variance (Table 1, Model 1). The two-way interaction between associational membership and exposure to news ( $\beta = .11, p < .01$ ), is a significant predictor of civic engagement, while the interaction between network size and exposure to news is not ( $\beta = .05, p = .16$ ), although its pre-entry beta is significant (see the parenthetical values immediately following each beta coefficients). That is, in addition to people becoming more participatory as a function of their social ties or news exposure, there is also an interactive effect of these factors that contributes to engagement (Figure 1). While having broad associational memberships and being exposed to news are important factors in civic life, having both results in additional participatory activity. This pattern of results provides support for hypothesis 1a and some support for hypothesis 2a, with the pre-entry beta being significant for the interaction between network size and news exposure.

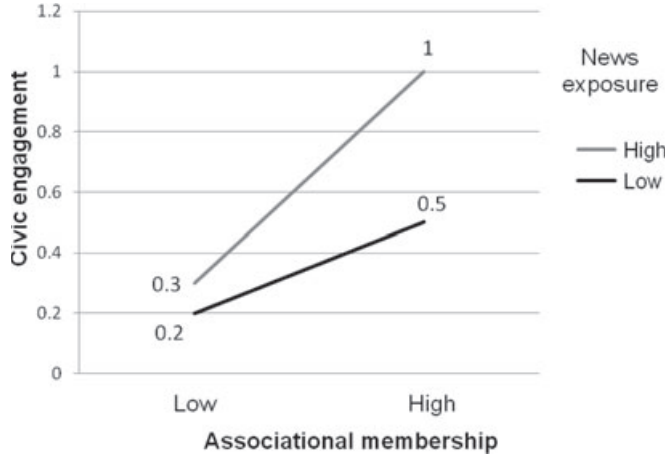
In the second model the interaction block explains 1.6% of incremental variance (Table 1, Model 2). The two-way interactions between associational membership and attention to news ( $\beta = .09, p < .01$ ) and the one between network size and attention to news ( $\beta = .09, p < .01$ ) are significant predictors of civic

**Table 1** OLS Models Predicting Civic Engagement

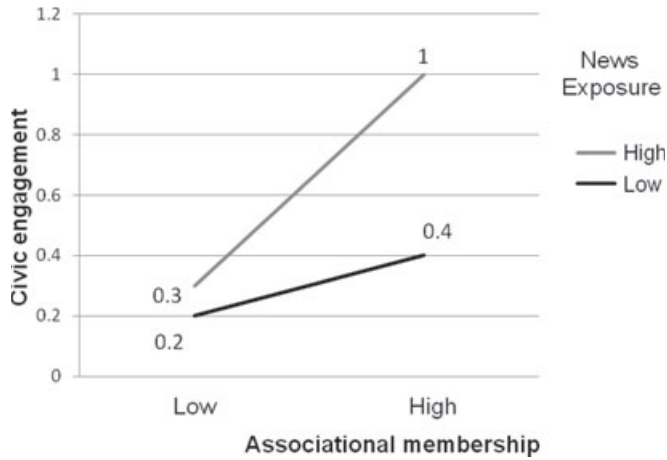
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Control variables</i>				
Gender (male = 0)	.02	.02	.02	.02
Age	.01	.01	.01	.01
Education	.09*	.09*	.09*	.08 <sup>#</sup>
Income	-.03	-.02	-.02	-.02
Residence (years)	.06	.06	.05	.05
Social trust	-.04	-.05	-.05	-.05
Postmaterialist values	.03	.04	.04	.04
Political interest	.21***	.21***	.21***	.21***
Political knowledge	-.05	-.06	-.06	-.05
Political efficacy	.02	.02	.02	.02
Incremental $R^2$	18.9%***			
<i>Social ties</i>				
Associational membership	.30***	.31***	.31***	.35***
Network size	.00	.01	.01	.01
Network heterogeneity	-.07*	-.06 <sup>#</sup>	-.07*	-.06 <sup>#</sup>
Network density	.15***	.15***	.15***	.15***
Incremental $R^2$	17.1%***			
<i>Communications</i>				
News exposure	.09*	.08*	.10*	.10*
News attention	.09*	.05	.09*	.08*
Talk frequency	.06	.04	.06	.05
Orientation to understanding	.09**	.10*	.09**	.12**
Incremental $R^2$	1.3%**			
<i>Ties*Communication</i>				
Membership*Exposure	.11** (.13***)			
Network size*Exposure	.05 (.08*)			
Membership*Attention		.09* (.11**)		
Network size*Attention		.09* (.10**)		
Membership*Talk			.08 <sup>#</sup> (.09*)	
Network size*Talk			.03 (.05)	
Membership*Understanding				.10** (.11**)
Network size*Understanding				.02 (.06 <sup>#</sup> )
Incremental $R^2$	1.3%***	1.6%**	0.5%	1.0%***
Total $R^2$	38.5%	38.8%	37.7%	38.2%

Note: Entries are standardized regression coefficients (in parenthesis pre-entry betas).  $N = 715$ . Significance at: <sup>#</sup> $p < .10$ . \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

engagement. That is, people with formal and informal social ties who are attentive to news, participate above and beyond what is explained by the main effects of these two factors (Figures 2 and 3), provide support for hypotheses 1b and 2b.



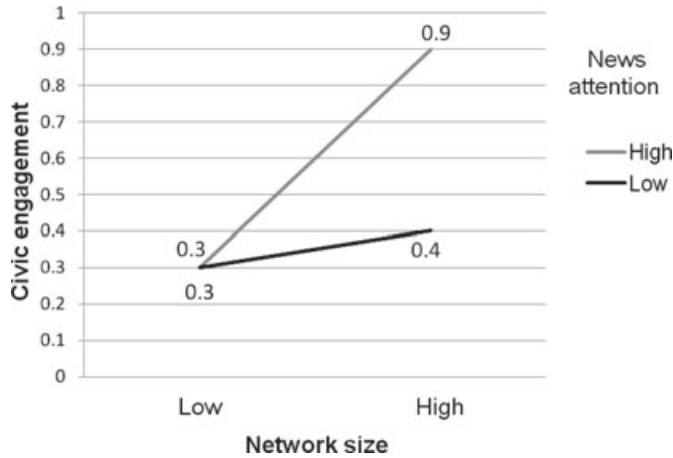
**Figure 1** Two-way interaction: Estimated marginal means of associational membership and news exposure on civic engagement.



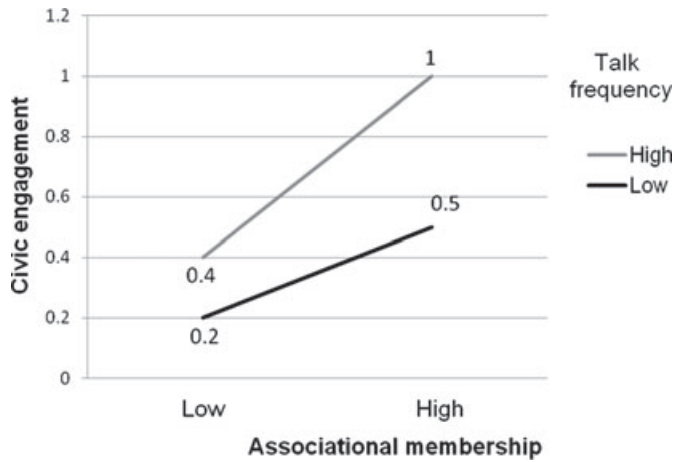
**Figure 2** Two-way interaction: Estimated marginal means of associational membership and news attention on civic engagement.

In the third model the interaction block explains 0.5% of incremental variance, the only case in which the *F*-change value is not significant (Table 1, Model 3). The two-way interaction between associational membership and frequency of talk ( $\beta = .08, p = .08$ ) is a marginally significant predictor of civic engagement (pre-entry beta is significant). That is, people with more formal associational ties who talk politics frequently participate at higher levels than those who have less associational ties and talk politics infrequently, even when controlling for the contribution of their social ties and communication patterns (Figure 4). These results provide some support for hypothesis 3a and no support for hypothesis 3b.



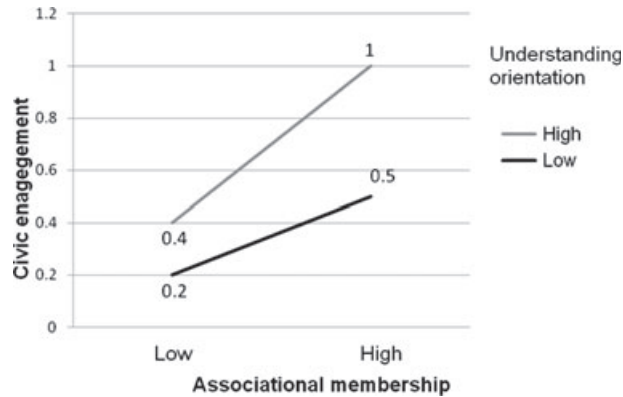


**Figure 3** Two-way interaction: Estimated marginal means of network size and news attention on civic engagement.



**Figure 4** Two-way interaction: Estimated marginal means of associational membership and talk frequency on civic engagement.

In the fourth model the interaction block explains 1% of incremental variance. The two-way interaction between associational membership and an orientation toward reaching understanding ( $\beta = .10, p < .01$ ) is a significant predictor of civic engagement (Table 1, Model 4). The interaction between network size and an orientation toward understanding of conversation is not and upon entry is only marginally significant. That is, there is support for the view that people with increased formal social ties who bring an orientation toward reaching understanding of their political conversations participate above and beyond the sum of what is contributed by individual predictors (Figure 5). The significant coefficient for the interaction



**Figure 5** Two-way interaction: Estimated marginal means of associational membership and understanding on civic engagement.

between associational membership and an orientation toward understanding of conversation provides support for hypothesis 4a. The marginal coefficient in the pre-entry beta for network size, which drops to nonsignificance, does not provide support for hypothesis 4b.

## Discussion

Overall, these results provide support for our theory of communicative social capital and the hypotheses derived from this approach. The effects of the extent of and orientation toward news use and political conversation on civic engagement are conditioned by the degree to which individuals are embedded in social connections, both formal and informal. In particular, formal social ties in the form of associational membership appear to gain power when infused with communicative potential in the form of news use or political talk.

These results support our expectations that communication variables, specifically news exposure and attention along with conversational frequency and orientation toward understanding, interact with associational membership and personal network size to increase civic engagement. Despite the modest amount of incremental variance explained, these findings provide strong support for the notion of communicative social capital advanced here. In fact, if entered prior to their component parts, these interaction terms would explain between 2.2 and 8.1% of incremental variance above and beyond the effects of the controls.

Is this a peculiarity of the Bogotá case? We are convinced that it is not. If anything, one might expect that in communities such as the one we have chosen to study, social ties would operate because of the existence of the tie itself and the sense of social control or social expectation embedded in that tie. Instead, we see that the effects of social ties are amplified when combined with information sources and intentionality of communication practices. That we observe these relationships in a

setting that likely constrains rather than enhances our case suggests that in settings where communication plays a more important or historically long-standing role as a source of community integration, the relationships that we observe here should be even stronger. Future research should certainly explore this possibility.

Coleman (1990) has emphasized the intangibility of social capital, suggesting that social capital is “embodied” in social relations. Yet following Coleman, not all social relationships constitute social capital; social capital can only be predicated by those social relations that facilitate action. Our work provides evidence of how both formal associations and informal network ties facilitate action in the form of civic engagement and they do so particularly when certain communication practices (news exposure, political discussion, and orientations toward attentiveness and understanding) exist within those ties.

One way of interpreting our results would be to assert that we have provided evidence of the information potential of social ties (i.e., Coleman’s notion of communication as a form of social capital). However, we argue that these results go beyond this and instead point toward a communicative understanding of social capital. From such a view, rather than focusing on the “chips” one holds against others, what becomes critical is how information flows, and if common understanding is reached in a system. To be clear, in a communicative approach to social capital, the metaphor of nodes representing persons and lines representing relations can still be used. However, the existence of a line does not represent an expected future obligation, but rather the existence of a communication relation between two nodes. On the other hand, nodes not only refer to people but also to social organizations with which one establishes communication. From this perspective, mass media outlets are important nodes in contemporary communications, especially for integration at the system level.

From our research one can assert that nodes that have more connections—to other people, to institutions, and to mass media—tend to be more active in the civic realm and that this increased activity comes not only from the connection themselves. Connections may not only favor a flow of information (with the more connected receiving more information, and this information leading to action), they may also work with the orientations individuals bring to their communication practices. The fact that news attention and orientation toward reaching understanding interact with social ties, especially associational membership, to increase engagement suggests that beyond simple information, the interaction of connections and communication supports a deeper and more harmonious conception of social capital.

In Bogotá, this notion of communicative social capital seems particularly fruitful. We contend that a pocket of communicative social capital has emerged in Bogotá that has dramatically altered action coordination mechanisms in the city, moving them from power and force toward the coconstruction and negotiation of common goals. It has to be seen whether this pocket of increased communicative social capital in one city can be expanded to other areas of Colombia. Regional comparisons of communicative social capital within Colombia as well as in other societies seem as the natural next steps in this line of inquiry.

Our empirical findings and our theoretical claims pose multiple challenges to political communication scholars. In the first place, it challenges scholars to theoretically ground communicative social capital. For this task, insights gained from network analysis (Knoke, 1990) and from the theory of communicative action (Habermas, 1984, 1989) seem particularly fruitful. Second, scholars must provide additional evidence of the interactions between social ties and the extent of and orientation toward communication across different contexts, and most importantly, start mapping out at the community and societal level what structures of communicative social capital are more conducive for collective action.

The empirical task is further burdened by the need to take into account both social relations and communicative content, in a context of decreasing spatial dependency for social relations (Friedland, Hove, & Rojas, 2006; Rojas & Puig-i-Abril, 2009) and increasing multiplicity of communication venues (Gil de Zuñiga, Puig-i-Abril, & Rojas, 2009). Further research in this area will benefit from multiple methodological approaches and different theoretical emphases that flesh out the implications of these findings, their potential use for democratization, as well as the conditions under which communicative social capital ceases to be a form of capital. That is, under what conditions communicative relationships become an obstacle rather than a tool for coordinated action, as may be the case for gossip or innuendo.

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