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Issue Publics and Cross-Cutting Political Views:

Assessing the Mediating Effects of Motivations for Discussion on Exposure to Political

Difference and the Contribution to Discussion Elaboration

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Abstract

The present research examines how issue public members contribute to citizen competence by understanding their exposure to cross-cutting political views through their political discussion. Built upon previous research on issue public members' issue-relevant information seeking behaviors, this study finds that issue public members are more likely than nonmembers to expose themselves to cross-cutting political views both in an online and an offline context. The research further explores the motivations for discussion that affect issue public members' exposure to cross-cutting political views. Results from structural equation modeling suggest that civic motivation for discussion triggers issue public members' exposure to both online and offline cross-cutting political views, whereas social motivation does not. The analysis also reveals that civic motivation and the cross-cutting exposure in the offline context lead to discussion elaboration; however, social motivation and the online cross-cutting exposure do not exert the same effect on discussion elaboration. Limitations of this study and implications of the functioning of deliberative democracy are discussed.

Keywords: issue publics, motivations for discussion, cross-cutting political views, discussion elaboration, survey

Issue Publics and Cross-Cutting Political Views:

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The concept of issue publics refers to individuals who stay committed to learning about a specific topic of great importance, while paying little attention to other issues being discussed in the public arena. (Converse, 1964). It was offered as an alternative perspective to explain why citizens may not have mastery over a wide range of political issues but rather may be concerned with particular issues on the basis of their values, identities, and interests. Therefore, they are well informed about issues of their interest, but do not necessarily care about subjects beyond the ones they are concerned about (Converse, 1964). Previous research also identified issue public members' issue-relevant information seeking behavior and found that they tend to rely on the Internet as this medium provides diversified contents and allows a high level of selective exposure to obtain information related to those issues they are invested on. Their information seeking behavior also result in their high domain-specific knowledge (Kim, 2009). However, the questions left unanswered concern whether issue public members' exposure to issue-relevant information relates to exposure to counterattitudinal or dissimilar political views.

Although the exposure to cross-cutting political views among issue public members has not been examined, research on personal issue importance hypothesis sheds light on the issue-relevance exposure (Iyengar, Hahn, Krosnick, & Walker, 2008). Selective exposure research based on the cognitive dissonance theory emphasizes individuals' active avoidance strategy to minimize their dissonance (Festinger, 1957), while issue-relevance exposure emphasizes other factors other than reduce dissonance that can intrigue selective exposure. For example, it is plausible that people selectively seek information for a communicatory or information utilitarian

purpose. By attaching attitude importance to an issue, individuals become the members of that specific issue public. Issue public members are therefore concerned about and involved in the issues (Krosnick, 1990). From this perspective, they are more likely to acquire comprehensive information about the issues in which they have their membership, and at the same time have a greater opportunity to expose themselves to cross-cutting viewpoints.

Addressing the role of exposure to cross-cutting political views in issue public members' political discussion is essential to explore how they contribute to the functioning of deliberative democracy. We, therefore, first examines if issue public members tend to expose themselves to cross-cutting political views in face-to-face and online forms of political discussion. Based on the research on the effects of motivations on face-to-face and online political discussion, we further investigates to what extent civic and social motivations for discussion affect exposure to offline and online cross-cutting political views. Also, we proposes motivations as mediators in influencing the relationship between issue public membership and exposure to cross-cutting political perspectives.

Lastly, we seeks to further the literature by understanding not only the cross-cutting exposure itself, but also how the exposure will lead to discussion elaboration, which is a core consequence of deliberative public opinion from political discussion and exposure to cross-cutting political perspectives (e.g., Mutz & Mondak, 2006; Price, Cappella, & Nir, 2002). What has been missing in this area of inquiry is how motivations for discussion and exposure to cross-cutting political perspectives influence discussion elaboration, especially when a specific type of citizens—issue public members—is taken into consideration. Thus, we examine the relationship to understand the influence in political deliberation.

Literature Review

Issue Publics and Exposure to Cross-Cutting Political Views

The role of informed citizens in politics is considered an important factor to keep democracy sound and healthy. Some scholars express concern about citizens' decreasing level of political knowledge and their increasing level of political apathy, which is harmful to the development of democratic society (e.g., Converse, 1964, 1970; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Downs, 1957). Other scholars disagree with the argument, saying that citizenry does not have knowledge on a wide range of issues, but they focus on specific issues based on their interests, values, and identities (Almond, 1950; Converse, 1964; Iyengar, 1990; Kim, 2009; Krosnick & Telhami, 1995). Therefore, they argue that publics develop among multiple groups of people focusing on diverse issues. This organizational occurrence is known as issue publics and these pluralistic issue publics in aggregation can contribute to the democratic society as much as what the attentive public (i.e., the sophisticated elites, the high socio-economic groups, the well-educated citizens).

The underlying assumption for the issue publics comes from the premise that people have few resources and little time to gather information on every political issue. Therefore, they only pay attention to a handful of issue and are highly informed and knowledgeable about their interest area (Kim, 2009). In addition, people do not need to be well educated to form attitudes towards issues (Krosnick, 1990). Instead, the personal importance on the particular issues functions as a strong incentive to be the issue publics (Krosnick, 1990; Krosnick & Telhami, 1995).

In light of this, it is assumed that the issue publics have distinctive characteristics in forming attitude and seeking information. Issue public members develop their domain-specific knowledge on the issue and attitude towards to the issue by selectively exposing themselves to the issues they are involved in. As a result, their issue-relevance exposure may be different from the traditional concept of selective exposure that assumes people crave for likeminded opinion or consonant information, and actively avoid counter-attitudinal information (Festinger, 1957).

Kruglanski's (1990) classification of different motivated selective exposure from his lay epistemics theory can shed light on issue public members' issue-relevance exposure. The first type of motivated selective exposure is the need for closure (i.e., preservation goal), which deviates from the accuracy goals with a tendency of avoid dissonance information. Individuals with need for closure desire for a preferred answer. Once they find information supporting their beliefs, they will avoid non-likeminded and non-supportive information, and freeze in information seeking in the early stage. This type of motivated selective exposure therefore resonates to cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957). Individuals stay in their comfort zone by keeping their psychological equilibrium balances in a way they prefer consistent messages with their views. Previous research has adopted this type of selective exposure to understand politically motivated reinforcement seeking, such as partisan media use (e.g., Garrett, 2009; Stroud, 2008, 2010). They found that people exercise their partisan-based selective exposure by exhibiting a preference for consonant political information or attitude consistent messages that reinforce their pre-existing opinions (e.g., Garrett, 2009; Stroud, 2008, 2010).

However, not all information seeking behaviors is trying to avoid dissonance. The second type of motivated selective exposure is a need to avoid closure (i.e., accuracy goal), which indicates that people are afraid of invalidity information and worried about incorrect answers.

Individuals with need to avoid closure have the goal to search for more information that can help them obtain accurate answers, which in turn will increase the exposure to different and cross-cutting views. Kim (2007) found that individuals with the need to avoid closure are more likely to expose themselves to compensatory information and they showed greater degree of unbiased information gathering than those with the need for closure. The characteristics of individuals with need to avoid closure are similar to the issue public members' characteristics because they are motivated to obtain diverse information about the issue they concern as they develop interest and attitudes of personal importance to the issues. In line of the reasoning, this type of motivated selective exposure lends itself to explain issue-relevance selective exposure.

Knoblock-Westerwick and Meng (2009) found that selection of counterattitudinal information existed among individuals with higher attitude importance. The finding suggests that issue public members who consider an issue personally important may tend to select opposing information when they exercise their issue-relevant exposure. Furthermore, issue public members' extremity in attitudes towards the issues can work as a leverage to expose themselves to the opposing views because they have strong self-conviction that they do not tend to be swayed by counter-attitudinal message (Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009). In this case, they are more likely to feel free to cross to opposing views without a fear of changing attitudes.

It is worth noting that Kim (2009) found that issue public members are more likely than nonmembers to use the Internet because the high level of selectivity on the Internet allows issue public members to select issue-relevance information. We, therefore, examine not only the exposure of cross-cutting political views in the face-to-face political discussion, but also the

online form of exposure to cross-cutting political views. Taking all into consideration, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1a: Issue public members are more likely than nonmembers to expose themselves to offline cross-cutting political views

H1b: Issue public members are more likely than nonmembers to expose themselves to online cross-cutting political views

Motivations for Discussion and Exposure to Cross-Cutting Political Views

Communication researchers have identified two distinct goals that explain why individuals engage in face-to-face and mediated forms of the interaction with others regarding public affairs: Instrumental and relational goals (Knapp & Daly, 2002).

The instrumental goal suggests that individuals participate in the political discussions in order to acquire information, shape and articulate opinions, or even further convince others (Conover, Searing, & Crewe, 2002; Eveland, Morey, & Hively, 2011; Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1987; Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1991). These purposive intentions for the participation in the discussion play influential roles in contributing to the deliberative discussion on public affairs because a wide range of opinions presented by engaging citizens (e.g., Fishkin, 1992, 1995; Gastil, 2008; Habermas, 1996). Put simply, the instrumental goal is highly civic-motivated as individuals are exposed to diverse opinions to stay informed about public affairs and express their opinions (Valenzuela, Jeong, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2011).

On the other hand, the relational goal can be categorized as social motivation for "everyday talk" (Valenzuela, et al., 2011). Instead of expecting concrete benefits of dialogue

with others, individuals initiate casual talk on politics in a way of striking up conversation with an acquaintance for social reasons (Eveland, et al., 2011; Guerrero, Andersen, & Afifi, 2010). Casual talk with the acquaintance has certain characteristics which are not mindful, contemplative, or well thought out (Mansbridge, 1999). Therefore, people may treat politics and public affairs as another form of sports or entertainment for casual relaxation or pleasure (Rubin, Perse, & Barbato, 1988; Schutz, 1966).

The casual talk on the current affairs may lead citizens to accumulate a certain level of information on developing their political views (Walsh, 2004, 2007). However, the relational goals play a limited role in encouraging individuals to engage in civic activities on the public sphere. Even though they do not have direct influence on civic engagement, an indirect relationship can be found through face to face and computer mediated communication (Valenzuela, et al., 2011). While these two motivations are considered equally important for citizens to engage in political discussion, they may exert influence on the exposure to cross-cutting political views in the political discussion. Since we know little about motivations for discussion and exposure to cross-cutting political views, the following research questions are proposed:

RQ1a: What is the relationship between motivations for discussion and exposure to offline cross-cutting political views?

RQ1b: What is the relationship between motivations for discussion and exposure to online cross-cutting political views?

Mediation Effects of Motivations for Discussion

Drawing on the aforementioned relationship between issue public members and their exposure to cross-cutting political views, and the factors of civic and social motivation for discussion in influencing the exposure to cross-cutting political views, this study proposes that motivations for discussion may have unique effects that mediate the relationship between issue public membership and exposure to cross-cutting political views. Since little is known about issue public members' civic and social motivations for discussion and the cross-cutting exposure, we therefore posit the following research questions. Through these research questions, we can also understand if civic and social motivations exert their mediating effect differently on cross-cutting exposure when it comes to issue public members.

> **RQ2a:** Does motivations for discussion mediate the relationship between issue public membership and exposure to offline cross-cutting political views?
>
> **RQ2b:** Does motivations for discussion mediate the relationship between issue public membership and exposure to online cross-cutting political views?

The Contribution to Discussion Elaboration

This study not only explores the factor—motivations for discussion—that influence issue public members' exposure to cross-cutting political views, but it also aims to understand the consequence of the relationship. In other words, to what extent issue public members may contribute to citizen competence—discussion elaboration through their motivations for discussion and exposure to cross-cutting views.

Elaboration (Eveland, 2001) was defined as "the process of connecting new information to other information stored in memory, including prior knowledge, personal experiences, or the connection of two new bits of information together in new ways" (p.573). It plays an important role in facilitating information learning (e.g., Eveland, 2001; Eveland & Dunwoody, 2002), and it also serves as a critical mediator that affects the relationship between news media use and political attitudes or behaviors (Cho et al., 2009; Eveland, 2001, 2004; Eveland & Thomson, 2006; Shah et al., 2007).

Motivation was identified as one of the factors that can affect how individuals cognitively process information (Eveland, 2001, 2002). First, when individuals expect themselves to participate in political discussion about certain topic in the future, which is called the communicatory utility motivation, they will devote more effort to process the news about that topic when they were first exposed to the information (Eveland, 2004; Scheufele, 2002). In other words, the communicatory utility motivations will produce greater cognitive elaboration on the news content.

In addition, surveillance gratifications seeking, a common motivation for news media use can encourage elaboration (e.g., Becker, 1979; Blumler, 1979; McLeod & Becker, 1981). When individuals are motivated to obtain information about their society and environment, they will engage in greater information process—elaboration—so that they can successfully learn from the news content (Eveland, 2001).

The motivations of communicatory utility and surveillance for news media use can shed light on civic motivation for discussion. As aforementioned, civic motivation for discussion indicates that individuals participate in political discussion is because they want to obtain

information and develop their opinions or persuade others. In light of the reasoning, individuals with civic motivations would be more likely than others to anticipate their future discussion on a topic, and they would also be engaged in the political information related to their environment and their daily lives in order to be a good neighbor and citizen. Accordingly, civic motivation for discussion should have effect on discussion elaboration. However, this relationship may or may not extend to social motivation for discussion because of its relational goals and the nature of casual conversation in daily lives. As previous research has not explored the relationship between motivations for discussion and discussion elaboration, we cannot anticipate the nature of the relationship between these types of motivations on discussion elaboration. We therefore posit the following research question:

> **RQ3:** What is the relationship between motivations for discussion and discussion elaboration?

The engagement in political discussion also facilitates the information processing—elaboration (Eveland, 2001; McLeod et al., 1999). When individuals participate in discussion, they need to make effort to understand the topics of the discussion, and articulately express themselves after a thorough organizing of their thought (Benhabib, 1996). In addition, exposure to diverse perspectives can allow them to evaluate the pros and cons (Benhabib, 1996). Cappella, Price, and Nir (2002) also found that individuals' engagement in interpersonal discussion is positively related to the adoption of complex concept and the reasoning of one's own and others' opinions. Thus, when individuals participate in interpersonal discussion, they are likely to elaborate their discussion.

More importantly, when the discussion involves diversity and disagreement, it creates larger pool of information and increases individuals' knowledge of rationales for other political perspective (Hively & Eveland, 2009; Mutz & Mondak, 2006). While individuals try to respond to challenges from others, they produce more reasons for their own arguments (Cappella, et al., 2002), thereby leading to a more comprehensive evaluation and balanced judgments (Meffert, Guge, & Lodge, 2004; Mutz, 2002; Sniderman, 1981). In this sense, exposure to cross-cutting political views in the discussion can facilitate individuals' discussion elaboration.

The relationship, however, should be cautiously examined whether or not the cross-cutting exposure occurs in an online or an offline setting. While political discussion has been carried from the face-to-face condition to the online environment, scholars have argued whether the online deliberation can generate positive effects on citizen competence and democratic society. Some scholars suggest that online political messaging can result in elaboration that is comparable to face-to face discussion because it has the deliberative nature of political discussion (Cho, et al., 2009; Shah, Cho, Eveland, & Kwak, 2005; Shah, et al., 2007). If individuals participate in opinion exchange with actively express and defend themselves, elaboration can occur without face-to-face contact (Delli Carpini, 2004; Lindeman, 2002).

However, other scholars are skeptical of the beneficial role of online deliberation. Online deliberation may be less effective because it lacks social context cues and cannot exchange emotionally complex messages (Daft & Lengel, 1984; Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976). Moreover, the online setting is easier than the offline environment to generate irrational message and polarized attitude due to anonymity or in-group out-group discrimination (e.g., Lea & Spears, 1991; Postmes, Spears, & Lea, 1998; Spears & Lea, 1992; Sunstein, 2001). Thus, online discussion may not have a positive relationship with discussion elaboration.

Previous research has not yet reached a conclusion on the relationship between exposure to cross-cutting political discussion in two different settings —offline and online — and discussion elaboration. We also know little about the consequences of issue public members' exposure to cross-cutting political perspectives; as a result, this study addresses an important research questions:

RQ4: What is the relationship between exposure to cross-cutting political views and discussion elaboration?

Method

Data

The data set used in this study is based on a two-wave national panel administered by the XX Research Unit at the [author's university]. The analyses reported here were confined to respondents interviewed for the second wave, which assessed their personal issue importance to the immigration issue, motivations for discussion, exposure to cross-cutting political perspectives, and discussion elaboration. Both waves of study were administered online using an online surveyor. The first wave of the survey was conducted to U.S. adults from across the country between late December 2008 and early January 2009. For a more accurate representation of the U.S. population, the XX Research Unit based this national sample on the gender and age quota reported in U.S. Census. Of the 8,568 participants, 1,159 completed the survey. The response rate (AAPOR PR3) for the first wave panel was 23%, which is an acceptable rate for panel web-based surveys (Goritz, Reinhold, & Batinic, 2002). In the second wave of the survey, conducted in July 2010, 312 of the original interviewees completed the questionnaire, for a retention rate of 27% (for more detail, see Appendix). Considering the second wave of

respondents was better educated, the data was weighted by education so that the different education levels were exact to the proportion provided by the US census.

Focus Issue

Immigration was chosen for this study because this issue has been a controversial public topic throughout the U.S. history (Tichenor, 2002). In the last decades, particularly, the Mexican immigration has raised intense public debates regarding policy making and social consequences. For example, Arizona Immigration Law, which aims to against undocumented immigrants, was passed in 2010. It received great attention from the media and the public and intrigued demonstrations among protestors. Facebook groups were formed for people to share their opinions and to oppose or support the Arizona Immigration Law as well. According to Pew Research Center, 10% of the Americans named Mexican immigration the most important problem facing the country, which reach the highest level in 20 years (Brader, Valentino, & Suhay, 2008). In addition, it was a major issue that influenced citizens' attitudes and voting choices in the 2008 presidential election (Brader, et al., 2008). While people's attitude toward immigration was found highly associated with prejudice and group identity (Kinder, 2003), the topic elicits strong views in different groups of people. Some emphasize the concerns about economic and cultural treat brought by immigrants, and some support legalization for illegal immigrants through policies and against racial profiling. Also it is relevant to note recent studies that highlight the importance that selective media exposure and political discussion may have in influencing people's attitudes towards Mexican Immigration (Gil de Zúñiga, Correa, & Valenzuela, in press). Immigration, therefore, serves as an idea issue topic example in this present study to examine to what extent people are involved in this issue, and how it relates to their opinion expression, and political behaviors.

Measurement

Issue publics (personal issue importance). Respondents were asked to rate to what extent the issue of immigration from Mexico is personally important to them. The answer ranged from 1 = "*not at all important*" to 10 = "*extremely important*" (*M* = 6.66, *SD* = 2.85). Following conventional measures adopted by previous research to identify issue public members (e.g., Kim, 2009), if an individual who rates an issue as more important than the mean score, then he or she belongs to that issue public. [1] Therefore, members of the immigration issue public in this study are defined as those who rate the immigration issue higher than the mean score on the personal issue importance scale.

Civic motivation for discussion. The measurement that tapped into respondents' civic motivation for discussion is related to being informed of public affairs, opinion formation or expression, and persuasion, while social motivation for discussion is about socializing, entertaining, and maintaining relationship. These items were adopted from the measurement in previous literature on motivations for political discussion (Conover, Searing, & Crewe, 2002; Eveland, Morey, & Hively, 2009), media use (Rubin & Perse, 1987), and political participation (Miller & Snyder, 2009). In addition, civic motivation and social motivations for discussion as two distinct types of motivations for discussion was identified in previous literature (Valenzuela, et al., 2011).

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[1] Personal issue importance has been used as one of the most common and appropriate indicators of issue public membership (e.g., Kim, 2009; Krosnick, 1990; Krosnick & Telhami, 1995). Members of an issue public are defined as those who think the issue is more personally important to them than other people and attach their attitude importance to that issue as well (e.g., Kim, 2009; Krosnick, 1990). Personal issue importance serves as a better indicator than demographic or personal opinion because it can capture individuals' concerns and interest concerning a specific issue, and it also links to individuals' basic value, needs and beliefs which reveals individuals' cognitive and behavioral involvement in a specific issue (Boninger, Krosnick, Berent, & Fabrigar, 1995; Krosnick, 1990).

With regard to civic motivation for discussion, respondents were asked to how often the following reasons described their motivations for talking about public affairs: "To form your opinion about something," "To stay informed about politics and public affairs," "To express your ideas and opinions," "To persuade others about something." A 10-point scale was used for each item, ranging from 1 = "*never*" to 10= "*all the time*." These four items were averaged to create an index of civic motivation for discussion (α = .92, M = 5.62, SD = 2.62). In terms of social motivations for discussion, respondents were asked to answer another three reasons that motivate them to talk about public affairs: "To pass the time with others," "To entertain yourself with others," and "To get to know others better." The answers range from 1 = "*never*" to 10= "*all the time*." These three items were averaged to form an index of social motivation for discussion (α = .90, M = 4.27, SD = 2.56).

Exposure to cross-cutting political views. Exposure to cross-cutting political views included offline exposure and online exposure. Each of them were measured by two items asking how often respondents talk about politics and public affairs with "people whose political views are different from yours" and " people who disagree with you." The answers were from 1 = "*never*" to 10 = "*all the time*." The two items measuring respondents' offline discussion were combined to form an index for exposure to offline cross-cutting political views (α = .92, M = 4.25, SD = 2.45), and another two items measuring respondents' online discussion were combined to form an index for exposure to online cross-cutting political views (α = .96, M = 3.06, SD = 2.53).

Discussion elaboration. Respondents' discussion elaboration was measured by asking whether respondents agree or disagree with the following statements about their behaviors regarding politics and public affairs: "I often think about how my conversions with other people

about politics and public affairs relates to other things I know," "I often find myself thinking about my conversations with other people about politics and public affairs after the discussion has ended," and " I often try to relate my talks with other people about politics and public affairs to my own personal experiences." The answers ranged from 1 = "*strongly disagree*" to 10 = "*strongly agree.*" The measurement was adopted from previous research examining elaboration on news content or political discussion(Eveland, 2004; Hively & Eveland, 2009). The index of discussion elaboration was formed by averaging scores across the three items ($\alpha = .91$, $M = 5.39$, $SD = 2.65$).

Control variables

Network size. Both offline and online network size were included as control variables. They were separately measured in an open-ended fashion by asking respondents to think about the people they have talked to regarding politics or public affairs, and then provide an estimate of the number of people they have talked to face-to-face and via the Internet, including e-mail, chat rooms, social network sites, and micro-blogging sites about politics or public affairs during the past month. Since the measures were highly skewed (Offline: $M = 8.73$, $Mdn = 5.00$, $SD = 13.52$, skewness = 4.04; Online: $M = 15.95$, $Mdn = 2.00$, $SD = 83.02$, skewness = 14.07, as could be expected, the number of people was transformed using the natural logarithm (Offline: $M = .73$, $Mdn = .78$, $SD = .47$, skewness = .08; Online: $M = .58$, $Mdn = .48$, $SD = .64$, skewness: .89).

Political efficacy. Respondents' political efficacy was measured with four questions by asking respondents whether they agree or disagree with the following statements: "People like me can influence government," "I consider myself well qualified to participate in politics," "I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country," and "No

matter whom I vote for, it won't make a difference" The answers range from 1 = "*strongly*

disagree" to 10 = "*strongly agree.*" The last item was reverse coded and then combined with the

other three items to form an index for political efficacy (α = .78, *M* = 5.51, *SD* = 2.30).

Political ideology. Respondents were asked to rate their political ideology using a 7-point

scale ranging from "*very liberal*" (6.5% of respondents) to "*very conservative*" (12.8% of

respondents). The midpoint represented 21.1% of respondents (*M* = 4.17, *SD* = 1.76).

News media use. News media use was obtained by measures of television news viewing,

newspaper reading, and online news reading. Television news viewing had three items, including

local television news exposure, national network news exposure (such as ABC, CBS, NBC and

PBS), and cable news exposure (such as CNN, Fox News, and MSNBC). Newspaper reading

included two items that ask about reading national newspapers in print and local newspapers in

print. Online news reading also included two items about reading national newspapers online and

local newspapers online. The answers were never (1), less often (2) once every few weeks (3), 1

to 2 days per week (4), 3 to 4 days per week (5), 5 to 6 days per week (6), and every day (7).

Total news media use was created by adding these seven measures (α = .71, *M* = 3.66, *SD* =

1.19).

Demographics. A variety of demographic variables were included for control purposes.

The respondents' age (*M* = 50.49, *SD* = 10.79), and gender (Male = 28%, Female = 72%), and

race (White = 88%) were asked in the survey. Survey respondents were also asked about their

highest level of formal education attained, which ranged from 1, indicating "less than high

school", to 8, indicating "doctoral degree" (*M* = 3.15, *SD* = 1.54, *Mdn* = college degree). Income

was measured with 9 categories, with 1 indicating under $10,000 and 15 indicating over

$100,000) ($M = 5.17$, $SD = 2.58$, $Mdn =$$40,000 to under $50,000).

Statistical Analysis

To test the proposed hypotheses and research questions, first, hierarchical regression

analyses were used to test the effects of key independent variables (i.e., issue public

memberships and motivations for discussion) on cross-cutting exposure. We employed structural

equation modeling (SEM) to examine the mediating role of the motivations for discussion in the

relationship between issue public membership and exposure to cross-cutting political views

offline and online. The SEM also provided us the overall relationship when the influence of

motivations of discussion and cross-cutting exposure on discussion elaboration was considered.

In the SEM test, all the control variables previously used were first residualized for each variable

(i.e., issue public membership, motivations for discussion, exposure to cross-cutting political

views, and discussion elaboration) so that potential confounding result from the influence of

control variables can be avoided. The hierarchical regression analyses were conducted in SPSS

18.0, and the SEM was analyzed by using Mplus 6.0 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2010).

Results

Issue publics, Motivations for discussion, and Exposure to Cross-Cutting Political Views

To test the first hypotheses, which predict positive relationships between issue public

membership and exposure to cross-cutting political views offline (H1a) and online (H1b),

hierarchical regression analyses were conducted (see Table 1). Control variables, including

demographics, political ideology, political efficacy, news media use, offline network size, and

online network size, were entered in the first block in both models. They significantly accounted

for 38.7% of variance in exposure to offline cross-cutting political views in the first model (ΔR^2 = .387, p < .001), and 36.9% of variance in exposure of online cross-cutting political views in the second mode (ΔR^2 = .369, p < .001). After the control, issue public membership was entered as the second block, and significantly accounted for .9% of variance in exposure to offline cross-cutting political views in the first model (ΔR^2 = .009, p < .01), and also in exposure to online cross-cutting political views in the second model (ΔR^2 = .009, p < .01). As showed in Table 1, after all the controls, the results indicate a significant and positive relationship between issue public membership and exposure to offline cross-cutting political views (β = .106, p < .01), and between issue public membership and exposure to online cross-cutting political views (β = .108, p < .01). H1a and H1b were supported. People who are issue public members are more likely than non-members to expose themselves to both offline and online cross-cutting political views.

<INSERT TABLE 1>

To understand the extent to which motivations for discussion contribute to exposure to cross-cutting political views offline (RQ1a) and online (RQ1b), hierarchical regression analyses were conducted. As shown in Table 2, the same control variables were entered in the first block, followed by the civic motivation for discussion, and social motivation for discussion in the second block in predicting the exposure to offline cross-cutting political views and exposure to online cross-cutting political views. The total variance of exposure to offline cross-cutting political views explained by all variables was 51.9% (R^2 = .519, p < .001). Civic motivation (β = .371, p < .001), and social motivation (β = .147, p < .001) emerged as the predictors of exposure to offline cross-cutting political views. In other words, people with greater civic motivation for discussion, or greater social motivation for discussion were more likely to expose

themselves to cross-cutting political views when they have offline political discussion. In addition, with regard to how motivations for discussion contribute to exposure to cross-cutting political views in the online environment, as showed in Table 2, the model accounts for 46.6% of the variance of online cross-cutting political views (R^2 = .466, p < .001). Both civic motivation (β = .273, p < .001) and social motivation for discussion (β = .149, p < .001) were significantly and positively related to exposure to online cross-cutting political views. These findings suggest that people who have higher civic motivation or social motivation for discussion tend to have cross-cutting political views when they are online.

<INSERT TABLE 2>

Mediation Effects of Motivations for Discussion and the Contribution to Discussion Elaboration

To examine the mediation relationship (RQ2a and RQ2b), and the contributions of motivations for discussion (RQ3) and cross-cutting exposure (RQ4) to discussion elaboration the theorized structural model illustrated in Figure 1 was proposed.

<INSERT FIGURE 1>

The Mplus estimates of the structural relationships among issue public membership, motivations for discussion, exposure to offline and online cross-cutting political views and discussion elaboration with all the effects of control variables residualized (i.e., demographics, news media use, political efficacy, political ideology, offline network size, and online network size) are shown in Figure 2. Overall, the SEM model had a good fit to the data (X^2 = 4.015 with *p* =. 26 and *df* = 3, RMSEA =. 040, CFI = .997, TLI = .984, SRMR = .025). The variables included

in this model accounted for 2% of the variance in civic motivation, 2% in social motivation, 26% in exposure to offline cross-cutting political views, 15% exposure to online cross-cutting political views, and 43% in discussion elaboration.

<INSERT FIGURE 2>

To understand the mediating role of motivations for discussion, the influence of issue public membership on exposure to political difference was decomposed by estimating direct and indirect paths from issue public membership to offline and online exposure to cross-cutting political views. Notably, no significant direct effect of issue public membership on exposure to offline and online cross-cutting political views was found when the factors of motivations for discussion were taken into account. Instead, issue public memberships had a significant indirect relationship with both exposure to offline and online cross-cutting political views through civic motivation for discussion. As shown in Table 3, issue public membership exerts influence on exposure to offline and online cross-cutting political views through civic motivation for discussion instead of social motivation for discussion ($\beta = .07$ $p < .05$ for offline exposure; $\beta = .06$ $p < .05$ for online exposure). Simply put, civic motivation fully mediates the relationship between issue public membership and exposure to online and offline political difference, while social motivation does not serve as a significant mediator in the relationship.

<INSERT TABLE 3>

With regard to the contribution of motivations for discussion and exposure to cross-cutting political views to discussion elaboration, the results from SEM analysis show that civic motivation for discussion was positively associated with discussion elaboration ($\beta = .52$ $p <$

.001), while social motivation for discussion did not have a significant relationship with discussion elaboration ($\beta = .09$ $p = .125$) (See Figure 2). Furthermore, the SEM test indicates that exposure to offline cross-cutting political views had a significant positive association with discussion elaboration ($\beta = .17$ $p < .01$); however, when it comes to the online environment, exposure to cross-cutting political views did not show a significant relationship with discussion elaboration ($\beta = .07$ $p = .275$).

Discussion

Deliberative theorists have long argued that having conversation with dissimilar or disagreeing people can contribute to the development of democratic society. This study emphasizes the role of exposure to cross-cutting political views, especially among those who consider an issue personally important—the issue public members. It first examined the relationship between issue public membership and exposure to offline and online cross-cutting political views. It also seeks to understand the motivational factor that leads to issue public members' cross-cutting exposure by investigating the mediating effects of two types of motivations for discussion—civic and social motivations on the relationship between issue public membership and exposure to cross-cutting political views in the offline and online context. Results indicate that issue public members are more likely than nonmembers to expose themselves to cross-cutting political views both in an offline and an online context in their daily political discussion. This study advances our understanding of cross-cutting exposure from a pluralistic perspective by examining issue publics rather than the general public. A score of studies found the tendency of selective exposure to likeminded opinions and avoidance from counter-attitudinal information among general public or attentive public. This study, however,

suggests that when an individual concerns about an issue, he or she will demonstrate a greater chance to expose themselves to cross-cutting political views.

What factors may lead to issue public members' cross-cutting exposure? Since previous research has examined the relationship between motivations and political discussion, we further explored how motivations for discussion can contribute to cross-cutting exposure in the discussion. With the emphasis of civic and social motivation, findings suggest that both types of motivation directly affect cross-cutting exposure offline and online. Moreover, civic motivation, such as staying informed about public affairs and express opinions, mediates the relationship between issue public membership and cross-cutting exposure, while social motivation for discussion, such as spend time with others and to get to know other people, does not serve as a mediator in this relationship. In a word, issue public members are more likely than nonmembers to have greater civic motivation for discussion, which in turn will lead to exposure to offline or online cross-cutting political perspectives.

Finally, building on previous literature that has contended that political discussion and exposure to cross-cutting political perspectives are essential components of deliberative public opinion and beneficial to the development of democracy, we also investigated how the relationship will contribute to citizen competence—discussion elaboration. Structural equation modeling reveals that civic motivation and exposure to cross-cutting political views in an offline context leads to discussion elaboration, while social motivation and the online form of cross-cutting exposure are not beneficial to discussion elaboration. As a result, the finding highlights the important role of individuals' motivational factor and the environmental factor for political discussion in affecting the development of deliberative democracy, and the precondition is that citizens have to consider an issue personally important and be involved in that issue.

To conclude, the study demonstrates an alternative way of the functioning of the deliberative democracy and suggests a substantial role of issue publics in politics. Individuals who concern an issue personally important (e.g., the members of immigration issue public) will tend to have a greater civic motivation for political discussion, which in turn will lead to their exposure to offline and online cross-cutting political views. Their civic motivation and their cross-cutting exposure—if it happens in an offline setting, will further strengthen their discussion elaboration. While scholars have been worried that citizens' political knowledge is decreasing and they do not participate in political or civic activities, individuals' care to a specific issue, their development of attitude importance and involvement in the issue can serve as the impetus to enhance citizen competence and facilitate deliberative democracy. In other words, the results ease the concern about decreasing citizen competence because if citizens attend to personally important issues, the attentiveness to political affairs can be elevated in an aggregate level by diverse groups of citizens passionate about specific issues. Democratic accountability can therefore be held.

Despite the new insights revealed in the findings, this study has several limitations. It adopted only the second wave of the data which is not well-suited to examine the causal relationship. We addressed this possibility of reversed-causal direction by employing a set of control variables and structural equation modeling. Also the second wave of the data may not represent the nation's population and have limitation in generalizability.

The second limitation lies with the issue we used in this study. Although immigration issue provides a good opportunity to examine the concept of issue publics, it may have limitations in generalizability to other issue publics, such as abortion, gun control, and same-sex marriage. A suggestion for future research is to examine if the relationship will sustain when it

comes to different issue publics. That is to say, if an individual's personal issue importance can function as the same way across different types of issues.

Another limitation is that this study relied on self-reported cross-cutting exposure. It brings about the questions if people can accurately remember their behavior, especially scholars have debated about whether dissonant or consonant information is easier to be ignored or unrecognized during the information process (e.g., Garrett, 2009; Huckfeldt, Beck, Dalton, Jeffrey, & Levine, 1995). An experimental setting can offer clear evidence if there is a higher tendency of cross-cutting exposure among issue public members compared to nonmembers. In addition, self-reported motivations for discussion may yield inaccurate measures. For example, respondents' social desirability bias may inflate their answers on civic motivation for discussion.

Despite these limitations, this study provides substantial insight into the significant role of issue publics. It finds issue public members' exposure to cross-cutting political views, suggests the motivations that leads to cross-cutting political views, and demonstrates how the elements altogether contribute to discussion elaboration. To conclude, it offers a positive view of how deliberative democracy sustains and functions from the pluralistic perspective.

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Appendix

Demographic Profile of Study Survey and Other Comparable Surveys

	Study Survey Wave 1 (Jan. 2009)	Study Survey Wave 2 (Jul. 2010)	Pew Internet & American Life Project Post-Election Survey (Dec. 2008)	U.S. Census Community Population Survey (Nov. 2008)
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Age:				
18-24	3.5	1.1	6.0	12.5
25-34	18.9	12.5	9.9	17.8
35-44	21.6	22.9	13.5	18.4
45-64	50.5	53.5	40.5	34.6
65 or more	5.5	10	30.2	16.6
Gender:				
Male	33.0	35.4	47.2	48.3
Female	67.0	64.6	52.8	51.7
Race / Ethnicity:				
White	84.4	88	79.8	68.5
Hispanic	4.5	4.7	6.1	13.7
African American	5.0	3.6	9.2	11.8
Asian	3.0	2.6	1.3	4.6
Education:				
High school or less	15.4	10.6	38.4	44.6
Some college	28.1	29.6	27.7	28.3
College degree	37.2	24.8	19.8	18.1
Graduate degree	19.2	35.1	14.1	9.0
Household Income:				
Less than $49,999	41.1	37.5	51.2	42.0
$50,000 to $99,999	37.9	34.3	31.8	35.3
$100,000 or more	21.0	28.3	17.1	22.7

Table 1. Hierarchical regression analysis investigating whether issue public membership influences exposure to cross-cutting political views offline and online

	Exposure to offline cross-cutting political views	Exposure to online cross-cutting political views
Block 1: Control variables		
Age	-.137***	-.120***
Gender	-.040	-.011
Income	.033	.012
Race	-.040	.024
Education	-.141***	-.152***
Political efficacy	.144***	.106**
Political ideology	.055	-.012
News media use	.152***	.068
Offline network size (logged)	.368***	.119**
Online network size (logged)	.176***	.475***
ΔR^2 (%)	38.7***	36.9***
Block 2		
Issue public membership	.106**	.108**
ΔR^2 (%)	.9**	.9**
Total R^2 (%)	39.6***	37.8***

Note: Sample size = 216. Cell entries are final-entry OLS standardized Beta (β) coefficients.
* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p<.001.

Table 2. Hierarchical regression analysis investigating whether motivations for discussion influences exposure to cross-cutting political views offline and online

	Exposure to offline cross-cutting political views	Exposure to online cross-cutting political views
Block 1: Control variables		
Age	-.102**	-.090**
Gender	-.015	.007
Income	.026	.001
Race	-.033	.030
Education	-.115***	-.133***
Political efficacy	.009	.000
Political ideology	.110***	.041
News media use	.134***	.056
Offline network size (logged)	.206***	-.009
Online network size (logged)	.082*	.398***
ΔR^2 (%)	38.7***	37.9***
Block 2		
Civic motivation for discussion	.371***	.273***
Social motivation for discussion	.147***	.149***
ΔR^2 (%)	13.2***	8.7***
Total R^2 (%)	51.9***	46.6***

*Note*: Sample size = 216. Cell entries are final-entry OLS standardized Beta (β) coefficients.
* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p<.001.

**Table 3.** Indirect Effects of Issue Public Membership on Exposure to Cross-Cutting Political Views

					β
Issue Public Membership	→	Civic Motivation	→	Exposure to Offline Cross-Cutting Political Views	.059*
Issue Public Membership	→	Social Motivation	→	Exposure to Offline Cross-Cutting Political Views	.021 ($p = 0.141$)
Issue Public Membership	→	Civic Motivation	→	Exposure to Online Cross-Cutting Political Views	.041*
Issue Public Membership	→	Social Motivation	→	Exposure to Online Cross-Cutting Political Views	.019 ($p = 0.157$)

Notes: Standardized regression coefficients reported. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed)

Figure 1. Theorized Model of Issue Public Membership, Motivations for Discussion, Cross-Cutting Political Views, and Discussion Elaboration
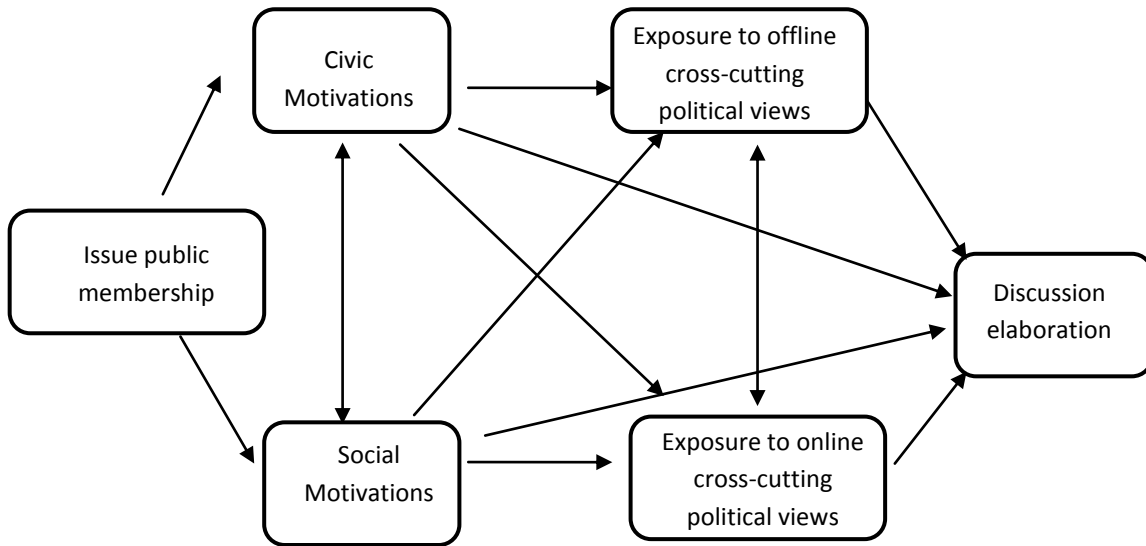
Figure 2. Results of SEM Model of Issue Public Membership, Motivations for Discussion, Cross-Cutting Political Views, and Discussion Elaboration
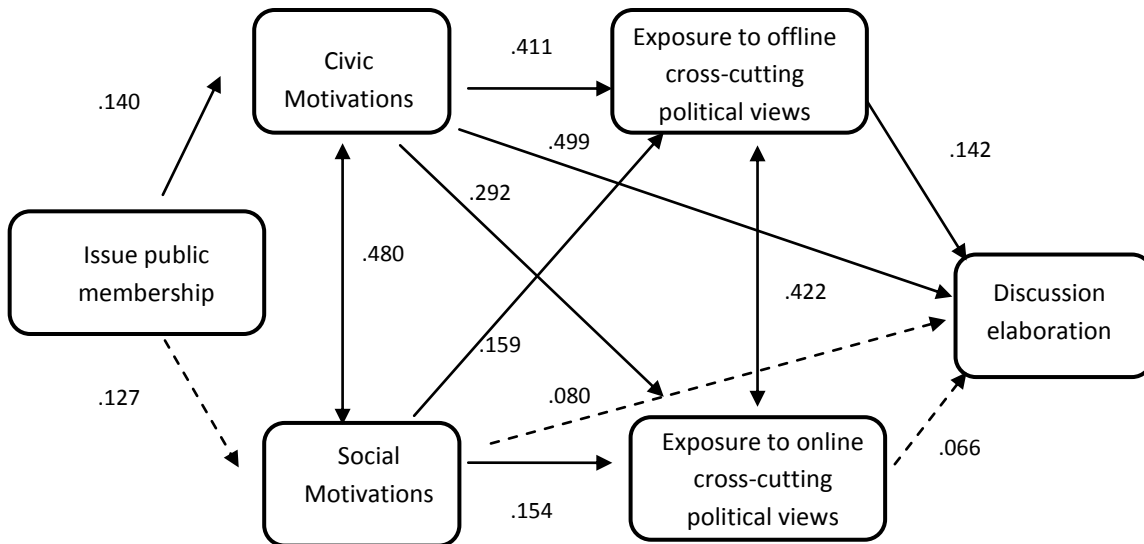
Note: Sample size = 216. Path entries are standardized beta coefficients at $p < .05$ or better. The effects of demographic variables (age, gender, education, race, and income), news media use, political efficacy, political ideology and network size (online and offline) on endogenous and exogenous variables have been residualized. Goodness of fit: Chi-square = 4.015, $df = 3$, $p = .26$; RMSEA = .040; CFI = .997; TLI = .984; SRMR = .025.

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