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ABSTRACT
The decision to engage in informal political talk within one's interpersonal network is not easily undertaken, particularly when that communication takes place through social networking sites (SNSs). This study explored motivations for engaging in informal political talk on the SNS, Facebook. Results suggest that those who are motivated by interpersonally focused goals online (i.e., relationship resource, affect management, and identity goals) are less likely to engage in political talk on Facebook, while those who are more politically motivated (i.e., cognitive engagement, influence, and personal resource goals) are more likely to engage in political talk on Facebook. Implications for encouraging informal political talk online are discussed.

In today's political climate there is little Democrats and Republicans agree on. A recent Pew Research study found that 78% of Americans say divisions between the two parties are increasing (“Partisan antipathy,” 2019). In such politically contentious times, polarization and a breakdown in communication within communities can increase, subsequently decreasing political engagement as individuals sacrifice the political for the social (Wells et al., 2017). In fact, Pew found that over half of Americans say it is “stressful and frustrating” to discuss politics with people they disagree with (“More now say,” 2018), and 48% say they would not be comfortable talking politics with someone they did not know well (“Public highly critical,” 2019). Research has also found that when political disagreement does occur within interpersonal relationships, that it can make voters more indecisive and decrease their likelihood to vote (Hopmann, 2012). To make matters worse, sharing one’s political opinions and thoughts online has been viewed as contentious for many social networking site (SNS) users (Fox & Moreland, 2015; Hampton et al., 2017). Indeed, multiple studies have pointed to how political talk on SNSs can spark disagreement and lead to the ending of interpersonal relationships, suggesting that the space for political talk within interpersonal relationships is lacking (Bode, 2016; Pennington, 2020). Together, this research demonstrates the push-pull of political talk within interpersonal contexts. Given the prevalence of SNSs in individuals everyday interactions, it is important to further explore the decision to engage in political talk online, balancing one’s own interest in politics with their desire to maintain various interpersonal relationships.
Eveland et al. (2011) suggest that, in studying political conversation, it is important to understand how political talk arises within everyday interactions, and what motivates that communication to occur. This study addresses this question, by exploring the motivations that give rise to political talk through Facebook, something that Eveland et al. (2011) note is of particular importance. Building on past research that explores motivations for engaging in informal political talk in-person and online (Bode, 2017; Kearney, 2017; Morey & Yamamoto, 2020), this study provides evidence on the motivations Facebook users have for discussing politics online from an interpersonal perspective, while also accounting for political interest and willingness to communicate about politics broadly (Banwart, 2007). What follows is a discussion of the role of informal political talk within interpersonal relationships, followed by a look at the potential of engaging through SNSs with one’s network about politics, concluding with a description of political interest and interpersonal goals research as it relates to political talk on Facebook.

**Informal Political Talk and Interpersonal Relationships**

The research on political discussion falls into two general categories—deliberative democratic discussion and informal political talk (Delli Carpini et al., 2004; Eveland et al., 2011; Wyatt et al., 2000). The former is a democratic ideal where people with opposing views have structured, in-depth conversations about politics. This type of discussion is relatively uncommon in the real world. Eveland et al. (2011) define informal political talk as, “interpersonal and small-group interactions about the broad topic of politics that take place outside of formal deliberation settings” (p. 1083). These are conversations that happen organically within one’s social network. Conversations may be a few minutes or hours and may blend in with other topics. They are not bound by a prescribed set of rules and happen with regular interaction partners: spouses, family, friends, coworkers, neighbors and so forth. This sort of informal everyday political conversation is important and is correlated with greater political participation and higher quality opinions on political issues (Wyatt et al., 2000).

The bulk of research indicates that people are most likely to discuss politics with stronger, or closer, ties who share their partisan and political opinions. For example, Morey et al. (2012) found that political discussion partners are most often spouses, relatives, and friends as opposed to weaker ties such as coworkers. Levinsen and Yndigøn’s (2015) study of Danish youth emphasized the importance of family in political conversation; family was seen as a natural place for political discussion among politically engaged youth, although those who were less engaged were more likely to come from families where politics was not as frequently discussed. Importantly, the family as discussion partner only held when they felt like there was general agreement. Indeed, Chen and Rhola (2018) presented evidence that following the 2016 election, families who consisted of mixed-political affiliations had shorter Thanksgiving dinners than families who held similar political views, suggesting that discussion was avoided when political views differed.

The downside of political talk with close contacts is a lack of disagreement or exposure to opposing viewpoints. Close ties, such as family and friends, are likely to have similar partisan opinions (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995), and primary discussion partners tend to be the most similar (D. Mutz & Martin, 2001). The composition of one’s network, its size, heterogeneity, and political knowledge in particular, can have important effects on political
talk and participation. For example, individuals whose networks have greater political knowledge are more likely to participate in politics (McClurg, 2006), larger networks are associated with a better ability to integrate information and see connections (Eveland & Hively, 2009), and a more diverse network can counteract effects of partisan media (Song & Boomgaarden, 2017). This would make the opportunity for discussion online through SNSs ideal as they are often both large and diverse networks, represented through core strong tie connections and the various weak tie relationships one has (Parks, 2010). Research on political conversations at work can shed some light on the potential for talk with weak ties. Coworkers are not self-selected, but one may frequently interact with coworkers, exposing them to diverse viewpoints, and, as D. C. Mutz and Mondak (2006) found, workplace discussion was associated with greater understanding of opposing positions and greater political tolerance. This suggests that there is potential for similar benefits from online political discussions, which can mimic the network diversity of the workplace.

The potential for disagreement and uncomfortable conversations begs the question- why do people engage in political conversations in the first place? Eveland et al. (2011) found the most common motivations for participating in political discussions were to pass the time and to start an interesting debate. Occasionally individuals were motivated by the desire to learn more or teach their conversation partner, and respondents were rarely motivated by a desire to persuade another. Lyons and Sokhey (2014) identified emotion as the driving motivation for participation in disagreeable discussions. Specifically, fear and enthusiasm about political candidates were found to drive discussion. Similarly, Wells et al. (2017) found that individuals were more likely to participate in disagreeable discussions when the issues had a direct effect on them but were also likely to end the conversation when it became unfriendly. Recent research from Morey and Yamamoto (2020) outlined six goals one may have for engaging in political talk, including the potential to build relationships. They found that building relationships was positively associated with frequency of political discussion agreement as well as discussions with weak tie connections. Given that the majority of one’s digital network are weak tie relationships (Pennington, 2020) this begs the question of how these motivations translate to a mediated context.

**Motivations for Discussing Politics on Facebook**

The introduction of SNSs as an outlet for political communication has been well-documented (Boulianne, 2015). Although early research focused heavily on how candidates themselves used SNSs to connect with potential voters, research has since suggested that engaging with candidates through these sites has minimal or no effect on political engagement (Boulianne, 2015; Pennington et al., 2015). More recent work has focused on what is the more pressing potential (and drawback) of SNSs within a political framework – the use of SNSs within interpersonal relationships to discuss politics (e.g., Hampton et al., 2017; Jang et al., 2014; Kearney, 2017; Velasquez & Rojas, 2017; Vraga et al., 2015). A primary takeaway from many of the studies centers around the push – pull of relational goals and outcomes versus political goals and outcomes.

In their research looking at how people discuss politics on Facebook, Wells et al. (2017) highlighted how individuals, as a way of maintaining a relationship, would forgo continued political discussion online. This is echoed in research that has found that as one’s network grew, the potential to talk about politics on one’s own profile page
decreased (Jang et al., 2014). There was also strong support for a spiral of silence on SNSs (Hampton et al., 2017). Individuals often avoid political talk on their SNS account out of a fear of social isolation (Chen, 2018). Further research has found that self-identified conservatives were likely to avoid SNS-based political discussion about topics that were viewed as liberal (Jang et al., 2014). This is similar to Chen’s (2018) finding that when individuals viewed their opinion as one of disagreement, they would refrain from sharing online, which was the major premise of spiral of silence as a theory. This fear of disagreement or push back from one’s social circle further highlights the dichotomy of the interpersonal and political.

Research by Mascheroni and Murru (2017) also sheds light on this issue, wherein interviews with teens in several European countries found that individuals largely believed that SNSs, and in particular, Facebook, were not an appropriate outlet for discussing politics given the public nature of the site. In this way, the continued uncertainty about who may or may not engage and/or perceive information shared led participants to refrain from posting or discussing politics online. Under what circumstances, then, might someone conclude in favor of discussing politics through SNSs?

Individual differences can help explain why someone may opt to post (or not) to Facebook about political issues. Vraga et al. (2015) suggest that how individual’s cope with disagreement and their own political interest can play a large role in their willingness to discuss politics online. They found that those who were highly conflict avoidant were less likely to post political content on Facebook, while those who had a high level of political interest were more likely to engage in political discussion. This is similar to Hayes et al.’s (2015) finding that participants who were higher in political interest were more likely to disclose about political topics on Facebook by engaging with members of their social network. Additional work found that when someone felt they had a stake in the discussion, and the political topic was salient to them (e.g., women’s rights), they were more likely to view it as part of their identity and engage in political talk through SNSs and in-person (Mascheroni & Murru, 2017; Wells et al., 2017).

Banwart (2007) offers one way to conceptualize political talk within interpersonal communication offline with a more nuanced measure of political interest; her measure of cognitive engagement. This measure examines interest as well as perceived understanding, and willingness to discuss politics. Rather than behavioral engagement or a simple measure of interest, Banwart’s (2007) scale development sought to ascertain how one’s perceived competence to discuss politics related to other measures of political engagement. Importantly, those who have high cognitive engagement are also more likely to engage in political discussions; Banwart notes that it: “reflects a willingness to initiate – certainly a higher level of risk is involved at this point – discussion with another whose opinions are most certainly not well known” (Banwart, 2007, p. 23). Furthermore, cognitive engagement was positively associated with political information efficacy and negatively associated with political cynicism. Given that one’s online audience is not always known (Bernstein et al., 2013), users’ level of cognitive engagement could help explain what motivates one to engage in political talk through SNSs. Research from Moffett and Rice (2017) support this, wherein they found participants who had a greater political interest were more likely to post on SNSs about politics. In addition to political interest, another way to conceptualize the decision to engage in political talk within interpersonal relationships online is through the literature on interpersonal goals (Dillard et al., 1989; Kearney, 2017).
**Interpersonal Goals and Political Talk on Facebook**

Dillard et al. (1989) builds on existing literature surrounding what motivates someone to attempt to influence another person by identifying six goal types that would affect the strength of the attempt to influence within an interpersonal interaction. Those goals are influence goals, identity goals, interaction goals, personal resource goals, relational resource goals, and affect management goals. Influence goals speak to one’s desire to change someone’s mind and engage in persuasion; in regard to posting about politics on Facebook, it is likely that those who have high influence goals are more likely to post than those who do not. Identity goals can be understood as internal standards of behavior and beliefs about who someone is and what they ought to do; in the case of political talk an example might be if they believe politics should even be talked about within interpersonal relationships and/or on Facebook. Interaction goals take into account one’s ability to manage impressions; individuals with high interaction goals seek to ensure pleasant and low-face threatening communication, and as a result may also avoid discussion about politics online. Personal resource goals seek to ensure one’s general self is not threatened by an interaction; if someone is comfortable with their network they may feel ok with posting about politics online, but if they are concerned that there could be backlash, they may refrain from engaging in political talk. Relational resource goals speak directly to the relationship; if someone is worried that sharing their political thoughts could end a relationship, they may be less likely to talk about politics on Facebook. Finally, affect management goals relate to feeling nervous or apprehensive about the topic at hand; in this case someone may be worried about their own political knowledge compared to their network and not post online.

Research from Kearney (2017) explored interpersonal goals and engagement in political talk on Facebook, finding that those with high influence and interaction goals were more likely to post about politics, while those with high affect management and identity goals avoided posting about politics on the SNS. Kearney also found that the decision to like posts about political issues were more likely for Facebook users with higher interaction goals and less likely for those with identity goals. Importantly, the study did not assess personal resource goals, and opted to exclude relational resource goals from analysis due to apathetic responses (Kearney, 2017). This study also notes that a focus on a college student population may restrict the generalizability of the sample to the greater population, as older adult users of Facebook and/or non-college students may have different interpersonal goals (Kearney, 2017).

In a similar vein of research, Lane et al. (2017) also explored how motivations may contribute to political talk. Their research found that those who were motivated by social issues were more likely to share politically online, but also that those who had a desire to maintain relationships were also engaging in political talk. Given these findings are the opposite of what theory would suggest, further work is needed to ascertain the role of, in particular, relationship-driven motives for engaging in political talk on Facebook. Macafee’s (2013) research explored the relationship between motivations and Facebook political talk as well, finding that social motivations and informational motivations were the most likely cause of engaging with others about politics on Facebook.

Although not about political talk on Facebook, as noted previously, Morey and Yamamoto (2020) did consider the different motivations individuals have for engaging in informal
political talk, offering additional support for exploring both public-politically oriented and privacy-relational driven reasons for engaging (or not) in political talk. Several of the motivations they outlined can be mapped onto those from Kearney (2017): expressing one’s opinion (identity goal), influencing others (influence goal), socializing (interaction goal), and building relationships (relationship resource goal). Morey and Yamamoto (2020) found that when one is motivated by expressing opinions and influencing others, that they were more likely to engage in political talk. They also argue that when it came to weak tie relationships (the majority of one’s Facebook network), that discussion in political talk was motivated by a desire to build that relationship. Taking into account the existing literature on political talk online, the following hypotheses and research questions are posed:

**H1:** Engaging with political content on Facebook will be positively associated with (a) political cognitive engagement, (b) influence goals, and (c) interaction goals.

**H2:** Engaging with political content on Facebook will be negatively associated with (a) identity goals and (b) affect management goals.

**RQ1:** Is there a relationship between (a) personal resource goals and (b) relationship resource goals and the decision to engage with political content on Facebook?

**Method**

**Participants**

Participants were recruited through the use of Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk) workforce. MTurk is a service available from Amazon that connects researchers (“Requesters”) with workers (“Turkers”) based on pre-set criteria (e.g., United States citizen, Facebook user). Participants \( N = 309 \) were paid 2.00 USD upon completion of the survey. The sample had slightly more females \( n = 159, 51.5\% \) than males \( n = 148, 47.9\% \) with a small portion identifying as transgender male \( n = 2.6\% \). Participants ranged in age from 20–70 \( M = 37.26, SD = 11.28 \). The majority of the sample identified as Caucasian \( n = 249, 80.6\% \), followed by African-American/Black \( n = 21, 6.8\% \), Asian \( n = 20, 6.5\% \), Hispanic/Latino(a) \( n = 11, 3.6\% \), Bi-racial \( n = 7, 2.3\% \), and Native American/Indian \( n = 1, .3\% \).

Participants reported on their political affiliation, with just over half identifying as Democrats \( n = 165, 53.4\% \), followed by Republican \( n = 85, 27.5\% \), Other \( n = 39, 12.6\% \), and Libertarian \( n = 18, 5.5\% \). For those who selected “Other” the most common answers were Independent \( n = 31 \) and no political affiliation \( n = 6 \). In terms of Facebook use, participants reported having as few as twelve friends on the site, and as many as 2,400 friends \( M = 315.70, SD = 357.77 \). The majority of participants also reported they spent 61–75 minutes on the site each day in the last week \( n = 175, 56.6\% \) followed by 90 + minutes \( n = 43, 13.9\% \), with the remainder split between 16–30 minutes \( n = 40, 12.9\% \), 31–45 minutes \( n = 38, 12.3\% \), and fifteen minutes or less \( n = 13, 4.2\% \).
Procedures

Following IRB approval, the study was shared for a period of one week in April 2017 on MTurk for potential participants to sign up and submit proof of completion of the survey. Linked from MTurk, the first page of the survey provided an informed consent form. The survey began with a definition of the word politics, which came from Moy and Gastil (2006):

This includes topics like: neighborhood and community affairs (e.g., decisions about a neighborhood watch crime prevention program), local and state concerns (e.g., school board disputes and/or sales taxes), national issues (e.g., health care, welfare policy, and/or foreign affairs), and broad cultural and social issues (e.g., civil rights, moral values, and/or the environment). (p. 448)

Eveland et al. (2011) highlight the importance of defining the term, as there can be misinterpretation as to what all would be included. By framing politics for participants, the survey ensured appropriate examples and responses were provided. This was followed by a series of general questions and scales about their use of Facebook, conflict style, tolerance for disagreement, interpersonal goals, and their political interpersonal communication index (Banwart, 2007). As this was part of a larger scale project on political-interpersonal communication and Facebook use, only scales relevant to this specific study are discussed below.

Measures

Included for analysis in this study were measure of Facebook political engagement, interpersonal goals, and political cognitive engagement (see Table 1 for reliability, means and standard deviations for each scale used in the study).

Facebook Political Engagement

Facebook political engagement was measured through a series of six items that had participants identify the likelihood they would engage in a particular political activity on the site (1 = extremely unlikely, 5 = extremely likely). Items were adapted from existing literature on Facebook political engagement to form the scale (Kearney, 2017; Macafee, 2013; Velasquez & Rojas, 2017). The six items were: I would share links to articles about political issue(s) I care about on Facebook, I would avoid discussing political issue(s) on Facebook, I would share who I voted for in an election, I use hashtags about politics, I post images relating to political issue(s) I care about, and I share my political affiliation on my personal profile. The scale was highly reliable (see Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>α</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FB Engagement</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence Goals</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity Goals</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction Goals</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Resource</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Resource Goals</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affect Management Goals</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Engagement</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: 309 total participants.
**Interpersonal Goals**

Previously modified by Kearney (2017), this study assessed all six interpersonal goals identified in the literature. All scales consisted of three items wherein participants were asked to identify how much they agreed with each statement (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Each subscale was found to be reliable (see Table 1), examples of items from each goal include; *It is very important for me to convince Facebook friends to consider my political views (influence), Facebook is not an appropriate place for me to persuade people about politics (identity), I am concerned with putting myself in a "bad light" when I think about posting on Facebook about politics (interaction), Getting Facebook friends to consider my political views is more important to me than preserving relationships (relational resource), I am worried about getting my feelings hurt if I express my political views on Facebook (personal resource), and I am worried that posting my political views on Facebook would make me uncomfortable or nervous (affect management).*

**Political Cognitive Engagement**

To measure one’s political interest, Banwart’s (2007) cognitive engagement subscale from the political interpersonal communication index was used. This scale consists of eight items, with participants identifying how strongly they agreed with each statement (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The scale measured political interest (e.g., *I stay up to date on current political issues and topics*), perceived understanding (e.g., *I have a good understanding about politics and political issues*), and willingness to discuss politics (e.g., *I enjoy talking about political issues and topics with others who don’t think like me*). The scale was highly reliable (see Table 1).

**Results**

To answer the research question and hypotheses posed, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted (see Table 2). There was no indication of multicollinearity among the independent variables; the variance inflation factors (VIF) were all below 3 and there were no significant differences in eigenvalues (Thompson et al., 2017). The first block of predictors consisted of the control variables: gender, political affiliation, age, and number of Facebook friends. Together, these four variables significantly predicted political talk on

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. Multiple regression predicting talking about politics on Facebook.</th>
<th>Block 1</th>
<th>Block 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (female)</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Affiliation (democrat)</td>
<td>−.17</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Facebook Friends</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Cognitive Engagement</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence Goals</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction Goals</td>
<td>−.04</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational Resource Goals</td>
<td>−.11</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Resource Goals</td>
<td>−.25</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R² changes</td>
<td>.04*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001.*
Facebook; however only number of Facebook friends contributed significantly ($\beta = .15$, $p < .01$) toward the model. The full model (Block 2) added in the political cognitive engagement and six interpersonal goals for analysis. The results were significant, with Table 2 showing that several variables predicted political talk on Facebook: gender, cognitive engagement, and all interpersonal goals except for interaction goals contributed to the final model. This suggests that females ($\beta = .08$, $p < .05$) were more likely to discuss politics on Facebook, as were those who had high cognitive engagement ($\beta = .20$, $p < .001$) and influence goals ($\beta = .19$, $p < .001$) offering partial support for H1. Those who had high identity ($\beta = -.30$, $p < .001$) and affect management goals ($\beta = -.29$, $p < .001$) were significantly less likely to discuss politics on Facebook, offering full support for H2. Answering RQ1, results indicated that those high in personal resource goals ($\beta = .09$, $p < .05$) were more likely to discuss politics on Facebook, while those high in relationship resource goals ($\beta = -.10$, $p < .05$) were less likely to discuss politics on Facebook.

**Discussion**

The results of this study build on prior work regarding motivations for engaging in political talk by assessing how interpersonal goals and political cognitive engagement relate to one’s decision to engage in political talk on Facebook. By using a non-college student sample, including all six interpersonal goals originally conceptualized by Dillard et al. (1989), and an analysis of political cognitive engagement (Banwart, 2007), this study offers a more complete picture of online political engagement through Facebook. What follows is a discussion of the results in relation to the existing literature.

As predicted, influence goals positively contributed to one’s decision to engage in political talk on Facebook, similar to past research findings (Kearney, 2017; Lane et al., 2017), but distinct from Eveland et al.’s (2011) research on face-to-face (FtF) political talk, which found persuading others was rarely a driving motivation. The masspersonal nature of SNSs may help to explain these findings, wherein broadcasting through a status update is viewed as a less direct form of communication than a one-on-one conversation (Hayes et al., 2015; O’Sullivan & Carr, 2018). The ability to post a status update about a political issue without directing it toward any one member of someone’s network could explain the higher likelihood of persuasion motivating online political talk versus FtF. On the other hand, as Eveland et al. (2011) argue, everyday (FtF) political talk happens organically and may weave in with other topics as part of the natural ebb and flow of conversation. Users may view posting on SNSs as an impersonal and public form of communication, while FtF encounters may be seen as more private and interpersonal (O’Sullivan & Carr, 2018). Furthermore, there is less need to persuade one’s FtF discussion partners because they are likely to have similar political opinions (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995; D. Mutz & Martin, 2001) whereas one’s online networks tend to be more diverse (Parks, 2010; Pennington, 2020). Recent work from Morey and Yamamoto (2020) may also shed light on this, wherein they concluded that influence goals led to political discussion with close relational partners within a FtF context, suggesting that influence and persuasion may be more common today than before.

This study also provided further support for Kearney’s (2017) finding that those with high identity and affect management goals were less likely to engage in political talk on Facebook. Recall that identity goals were framed around one’s internal standards about what they ought
to do; these findings are similar to work from Mascheroni and Murru (2017) who found that participants in their study did not believe Facebook was the appropriate outlet for political talk. This study’s findings related to affect management (i.e., feeling nervous or apprehensive about posting) can be tied back to the positive association found for cognitive engagement (Banwart, 2007). In other words, the more comfortable someone feels talking about politics, the more likely they are to post; but less comfort, which can lead to apprehension, results in less political talk. This supports previous research finding regarding a spiral of silence online due to a fear of social isolation (Chen, 2018; Hampton et al., 2017; Jang et al., 2014), and indicates there are some people who are unlikely to participate in online political discussion regardless of who initiates the conversation.

Importantly, this study also found that high relationship resource goals negatively predicted engagement in political talk on Facebook. In other words, the findings suggest individuals may avoid political discussion in an effort to protect relationships. This is somewhat counter to past work that found individuals who were motivated by relationships may actually be more likely to engage in political talk (Lane et al., 2017; Morey & Yamamoto, 2020). One explanation for these seemingly contradictory findings are the measures used. Lane et al. (2017) looked at motivations driving SNS use and their relationships to political talk while our study looked specifically at motivations for political talk online. Similarly, Morey and Yamamoto (2020) conceptualized their motivation for building relationships FtF. This distinction is important because the findings from this study suggest that some individuals are consciously prioritizing personal relationships over politics, but, as Lane et al.’s (2017) and Morey and Yamamoto (2020) study found, users may also engage in political talk as a way to connect with others. Based on the research of offline political discussion, it is likely that those using political talk to connect with others are doing so with people who largely agree with them politically; Morey and Yamamoto (2020) specifically highlight that those motivated by building relationships engaged in political agreement, but the study found no relationship for disagreement. Further work that ascertains the role of motivations as they relate to agreement versus disagreement online would be needed to build on these findings. Eveland et al. (2011) notes that non-civic motivations (e.g., relationship building) may actually play a larger role in spurring political discussion than civic motives. However, this study suggests that when individuals with high relationship goals see a potential conflict between relationships and political beliefs, they were likely to prioritize the relationship. This likely says more about the role of political talk between people who disagree politically and is supported by Wells et al. (2017) who found individuals would abstain from political talk for the sake of the relationship.

Finally, contrary to the findings in Kearney’s (2017) study, interaction goals did not predict engagement in political talk through Facebook. This may be due in part to the lower reliability of the scale or could point to differences that may arise between younger and older Facebook users (Pennington, 2016). This does align with Lane et al.’s (2017) finding that self-promotion as a motive was unrelated to Facebook engagement, but is in contrast to Macafee’s (2013) research that found self-presentation was a motivation for sharing about politics on Facebook. Further work is needed to ascertain the role (if any) of interaction goals in determining online political talk.
Conclusion

Song and Eveland (2015) have highlighted the importance of discussing politics within one’s social network, wherein conversation can spur increased political engagement. Future work should continue to explore the relationship between the interpersonal and political. Although this study highlights the motivations to engage in political talk on Facebook, it does not allow for an understanding of the effects of communication within social networks once that talk occurs. Which is to say; if someone was motivated to post about a political topic to their SNS, what spurs engagement (or avoidance) with that post? Past research suggests that if the topic is salient to one’s identity, they may be more likely to engage in political talk (Wells et al., 2017), highlighting the potential for SNSs to bring about political discussions within interpersonal networks that might not otherwise have occurred. That said, emotions can run high when identity is involved, which aligns with past work that has broadly pointed to political talk leading to the end of digital friendships (Bode, 2016; Pennington, 2020). Future work would benefit from exploring how one chooses to respond when someone else posts about politics first, and to understand how individuals deal with disagreements within their network online and the potential spillover it has to offline social and political decision making. In that same vein, the specific types of political talk online (e.g., sharing news articles, posting personal opinions) as well as topics of political discussion (e.g., issue, party, candidate) may result in different outcomes (Hopmann et al., 2020).

This study would also benefit from having a more representative sample of the general population. The sample skewed both in terms of race (Caucasian) and political party affiliation (Democrat). Drawing from a non-college student sample however, by using MTurk, allowed for a greater degree of representation of Facebook users, as increasingly the site is used by those who are 30+ (Perrin & Anderson, 2019). That said, future work that is more generalizable to the public would help to better assess key differences and/or similarities related to motivations for discussing politics through SNSs, particularly in the context of party affiliation (Levinsen & Yndigeun, 2015).

The results of this study also found, contrary to past work on SNS engagement (Koc-Michalska et al., 2019), that females were more likely than males to engage in political talk online. One possible reason for this may be the framing of ‘political’ broadly; while Van Duyn et al. (2019) found that men engaged with more national or international political topics, they suggested that women were more likely to engage and post about local issues. Heger and Hoffmann’s (2019) research on feminism and online political participation may also shed some light on the results, wherein they suggest that women who self-identified as second-wave feminists were more likely to engage in online political talk. Additionally, this study was conducted at a time when women’s political engagement was heightened; Trump’s election and Clinton’s defeat, the Women’s March, and the #MeToo movement made politics particularly salient and personal for many women, likely explaining why women were more engaged than men at the time. Further work that teases out the connection between online engagement and gender is needed to understand the intricacies of political talk online.

Finally, research would benefit from exploring potential engagement across various SNSs. This study focused solely on Facebook, which has decreased in popularity with younger SNS users in recent years, falling behind Instagram and Snapchat with users 18–24 years old, while maintaining steady overall in its popularity across all age groups.
compared to other sites (Perrin & Anderson, 2019). By more broadly identifying affordances and features of different SNSs, research can move beyond single sites to contribute to the literature base on political engagement online.

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**Data Availability Statement**

A variance-covariance matrix and variable level descriptive statistics are available via email from the corresponding author, Dr. Natalie Pennington: natalierose.pennington@unlv.edu

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