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Community Attachment, Communication Mediation, and Nonprofit Participation: An Integrated Community Communication Approach

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Abstract Nonprofit participation in the form of giving and volunteering has long been viewed as the building blocks of participatory democracy. Yet, prior research has rarely treated nonprofit participation as a distinctive form from the general construct of civic participation. Extending Communication Mediation Model, we examine nonprofit participation behaviors within community-based communication possesses. We use structural equation modeling to investigate the paths of influence among community attachment variables, nonprofit-specific media use and discussion, and individuals' volunteering and giving behaviors. Results highlight the importance of nonprofit-specific discussion in (1) directly promoting giving and volunteering behaviors (2) mediating the influence of nonprofit-specific traditional media use, and (3) translating community attachment into greater giving and volunteering activities. Different community and communication mechanisms are identified to predict nonprofit giving versus volunteering.

Keywords Nonprofit giving · Volunteering · Community attachment · Communication mediation model · Nonprofit-specific media use · Nonprofit-specific discussion

Introduction

As part of a society's civic infrastructure, nonprofit and voluntary organizations play a vital role in sustaining social capital and solving problems beyond the scope of public and private sectors (Putnam 1995). However, recent years have witnessed a decline of nonprofit participation in the United States. As an important pillar of civic participation, nonprofit participation refers to citizens' pro-social behaviors in the forms of volunteering and giving (Cnaan and Park 2016). A recent survey from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016) shows that the average volunteering rates for almost all age groups declined between 2011 and 2015 (Patterson 2018), a finding consistent with the claim made by Robert Putnam (1995) more than a decade ago. Thus, promoting nonprofit participation is more important than ever. The level of nonprofit participation is not only a benchmark of a society's civic vitality but matters substantially when it comes to nonprofit performance and organizational survival (Van Slyke and Brooks 2005).

While existing research has examined individual-level factors associated with nonprofit participation, such as socio-demographic background or psychological traits (e.g., Bekkers and Wiepking 2011a, b; Smith et al. 2016; Wiepking and Bekkers 2012), there lacks a theoretical approach that situates everyday nonprofit participation within the context of local community and its communication environment. Local community in the current study refers to "a group of people with diverse characteristics who are linked by social ties, share common perspectives, and engage in joint action in geographic locations or settings" (MacQueen et al. 2001, p. 1929). For many individuals, neighborhood community is the most immediate environment where everyday philanthropic activities and volunteering take place (Ryan et al. 2005). Nonprofit

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participation is particularly "community bound" in a sense that a large part of giving or volunteering decisions are heavily influenced by individuals' local community ties, as well as the extent to which individuals feel attached to the physical place (Manzo and Perkins 2006).

Moreover, the current nonprofit literature has yet to fully theorize how communication processes may influence individuals' giving and volunteering behaviors (Smith, Stebbins, and Grotz 2016; Wiepking and Bekkers 2012). Communication Mediation Model posits that communication processes, such as interpersonal discussion and news media use, can directly and indirectly influence individuals' civic participation (CMM thereafter, e.g., McLeod et al. 1996; Shah et al. 2007). While this research tradition establishes the empirical link between communication and civic participation, treating nonprofit participation as a default, constituting component of general civic participation, it is still important to further assess the impact of communication processes not just on the general domains of civic participation, but specific nonprofit behaviors.

Bringing a communication perspective to the nonprofit literature, the current study adapts the Communication Mediation Model to examine how local media and interpersonal communication processes are associated with citizens' giving and volunteering activities. We argue that, as a large part of citizens' nonprofit involvement is embedded in local communities, community attachment variables like individuals' sense of community and community belonging are likely to influence how communication processes mediate nonprofit participation. By doing so, we propose an integrated community communication framework that takes into account individuals' demographic and resource-level differences, community attachment factors, and nonprofit-specific communication behaviors in predicting volunteering and giving activities, respectively.

In the following, we first review the literature on nonprofit participation and the application of CMM in various civic participation contexts. We then test the hypothesized model using data from a national online panel consisting of 1046 individuals in the United States. Implications to CMM and nonprofit participation are discussed in the end.

Literature Review

Nonprofit Participation: Concept Explication

As an important sub-dimension of civic engagement, the umbrella term that captures individuals' political, social, and moral engagement (Berger 2011), nonprofit participation refers to specific citizen-initiated voluntary activities in the nonprofit sector by making financial or physical contributions for the betterment of public goods (Brown and Ferris 2007; Jones 2006). The research literature has distinguished two dimensions that undergird the specific act of nonprofit participation, giving and volunteering (Jones 2006). Giving, commonly referred as charitable giving or donations, includes behaviors of contributing financial or other material resources to nonprofit organizations (Radley and Kennedy 1995). Bekkers and Wiepking (2011a) more specifically define citizens' charitable giving as donations made to an organization that could "benefit others beyond one's own family" (p. 925). In the United States, more than two-thirds of households report making nonprofit donations (Giving USA 2018). From the standpoint of nonprofit sector, although the specific amount and rate of donations fluctuate year by year, private charitable giving consistently makes up the majority of contributions received by nonprofit organizations (Charity Navigator Giving Statistics 2017), only second to membership fees and government funding, such as grants and contracts from local or federal government agencies (Kerlin and Pollak 2011; Salamon 2012). In 2017, it is estimated that individual giving accounted for 72 percent of all the contributions received by the nonprofits in the United States (Giving USA 2018).

The other dimension of nonprofit participation is volunteering, which encompasses a broad range of public activities organized by voluntary associations, ranging from churches, hometown associations, to civic and political organizations. Penner (2002) defines volunteerism the "long-term, planned, prosocial behaviors that benefit strangers and occur within an organizational setting" (p. 448). The very fact that volunteering is often led by and mobilized around nonprofit organizations makes it an important component of nonprofit participation. For nonprofit organizations, the capacity to recruit and retain volunteers significantly influences their daily operation and the ability to achieve organizational goals (Bortree and Waters 2008). From a social capital point of view, civic volunteerism has long been viewed as the building block of trust and generalized reciprocity, which breeds civic participation and facilitates collective problem-solving (Jones 2006; Putnam 1995; Verba et al. 1995).

Various determinants and preceding conditions of civic participation are examined from disciplines including political science, communication, and sociology (e.g., Berger 2011, Kim and Ball-Rokeach 2006; Lee et al. 2013), where scholars still debate about the conceptual boundaries between terms such as civic versus political participation, or the distinction between citizens' cognitive versus behavioral engagement (e.g., Berger 2011). Nonprofit participation has long been nested under the concept of civic participation, which consists of a broad range of dimensions from association participation, political

behaviors, to other pro-social activities such as helping others or even environment-friendly behaviors (Cnaan and Park 2016). Indeed, the general civic and nonprofit participation behaviors are often intertwined, as empirical studies showed that youth voluntary associations participation was significantly associated with greater civic participation in adulthood (McFarland and Thomas 2006). Moreover, the general versus nonprofit-specific participation can be influenced by similar individual characteristics and communication processes, such as socioeconomic status (Verba et al. 1995), news media use (Xenos and Moy 2007), interpersonal discussion (Kwak et al. 2005), and organizational mobilization (Schofer and Fourcade-Gourinchas 2001), among other factors.

While acknowledging the interconnection between general civic participation and nonprofit participation, we focus specifically on the latter, the central construct in the nonprofit research. In the current study, nonprofit participation is conceptualized as consisting of two types of behaviors, giving and volunteering, which, respectively, taps into the financial, material versus human capital resources that individuals voluntarily contribute to the nonprofit sector. The distinction between the two dimensions has been well noted in existing work. For example, Jones (2006) argues that volunteering is more deeply embedded in residential communities, which "reflects an active community-based civil society" (p. 250). Meanwhile, contingent on personal resources, giving "corresponded to a more organizationally centered civil society, encouraged by shared cultural values of helping" (Jones 2006, p. 250).

The nonprofit literature identifies various factors and mechanisms explaining individuals' giving and volunteering behaviors. For example, Bekkers and Wiepking (2011a, b) reviewed over 500 publications and systematically presented key predictors of charitable giving ranging from individual predispositions (e.g., age, gender, socioeconomic status, religion) to eight social, psychological mechanisms like awareness of needs, cost and benefits, solicitation, and efficacy. Smith (1994) summarized five categories of variables associated with individuals' volunteering behaviors, arguing that these five categories often worked in concert with one another. These five categories include (1) contextual variables that characterize the environment where an individual is in, (2) social background variables like income or education, (3) personality variables like psychological traits, (4) attitudinal variables, and (5) situational variables, such as personal contacts and influence.

Expanding on the contextual and situational determinants of nonprofit participation, the current study focuses on the community and communication mechanisms that have not received much attention in the nonprofit participation literature.

Community Attachment as Correlating Factors

Whereas individual characteristics, such as socioeconomic status (e.g., income, education) and predispositions (e.g., altruistic orientation), are identified as important determinants of giving and volunteering (Bekkers and Wiepking 2011a, b; Smith et al. 2016; Wiepking and Bekkers 2012), the role of community attachment has been particularly noted from the community integration framework (Friedland 2001; McLeod et al. 1996). The community integration framework emphasizes the importance of physical place and the degree to which individuals become integrated into the local community in promoting pro-civic behaviors. Local community is a complex system comprised of individuals and various associational ties developed within the community (Friedland and McLeod 1998). When strong bonds forge between individuals and the community, residents are more likely to develop place-based identity, nurture positive feelings toward other community members (Liu et al. 2018b), and become invested in local public goods, thus more actively engaged in nonprofit-related activities (Ryan et al. 2005).

Central to the community integration framework are two closely related concepts, community belonging and the sense of community. Often interchangeably referred as "neighborhood belonging" (Ball-Rokeach et al. 2001, p. 392), community belonging includes an *attitudinal* dimension which taps into individuals' subjective evaluation, feeling or "sentiment" toward the neighborhood, and a *behavioral* dimension usually manifested through neighborly activities such as favor exchange or communicative interaction with neighbors (Ball-Rokeach et al. 2001; Manzo and Perkins 2006).

Meanwhile, the sense of community has been widely explored in the community psychology and sociology literature (e.g., Anderson 2009; Chavis and Pretty 1999), and it is often considered as an indicator of community attachment. Menzo and Perkins (2006) identified the specific components rooted in the sense of community, "feelings of mutual trust, social connections, shared concerns, and community values" (p. 339), and emotional connection is at the core in forming one's sense of community. As individuals stay longer and develop stronger social ties within the community, there may arise a perception of togetherness as well as affective feelings about others in the community (Manzo and Perkins 2006; Ryan et al. 2005).

Empirical research has shown that both community belonging and the sense of community can become catalyst of civic participation (Chavis and Pretty 1999; Kim and

Ball-Rokeach 2006). For example, Brown et al. (2003) found that residents' sense of community significantly motivated them to engage with local organizations in a neighborhood revitalization initiative. Chavis and Pretty (1999) similarly attributed the success of several community-building initiatives to "the value, relations, and other assets that keep people together as a community" (p. 640). Given the positive influence of community attachment on various civic outcomes, we hypothesize the following:

H_1 Individuals' level of community belonging is positively associated with nonprofit (a) volunteering and (b) giving.

H_2 Individuals' sense of community is positively associated with nonprofit (a) volunteering and (b) giving.

In addition, a higher level of community attachment is likely to stimulate more frequent communication about local nonprofit organizations. For example, the more individuals feel invested in the well-being of local public goods, the more likely he or she would actively seek for news information and engage in interpersonal discussion about local organizations (Liu et al. 2018a). In this regard, community attachment helps foster the surveillance motivation (Eveland et al. 2003), that is, the incentive for individuals to stay on top of nonprofit-related updates in order to safeguard a community's well-being. To test the relationships between community attachment variables and nonprofit-specific communication behaviors, we propose:

H_3 Individuals' level of community belonging is positively associated with (a) nonprofit-specific media use and (b) nonprofit-specific discussion.

H_4 Individuals' sense of community is positively associated with (a) nonprofit-specific media use and (b) nonprofit-specific discussion.

A Communication Mediation Approach to Nonprofit Participation

In addition to community attachment, communication has long been identified as an important situational factor to involve residents in local civic life. Although nonprofit participation literature has examined anecdotal factors such as interpersonal contact or peer-to-peer solicitation (e.g., Castillo et al. 2014), there lacks a more systematic approach to explain how communication processes may help generate greater nonprofit participation. We draw from the Communication Mediation Model (CMM) to bridge this gap.

Building on the O-S–O-R model (Markus and Zajonc, 1985), Communication Mediation Model (CMM) hypothesizes the mediation effect of communication processes, both directly and indirectly, on civic participation (Lee et al. 2013; McLeod et al. 1996; Shah et al. 2017). CMM posits that news media use and interpersonal communication not only independently, but also work in tandem to influence civic outcomes such as political learning, socialization, and participation. In simple terms, O stands for orientations variables, including "structural, cultural, cognitive, and motivational characteristics that audience bring to the reception situation that affect the impact of the message" (McLeod et al. 1994, p. 146). The orientation variables commonly include individuals' socio-demographic status and community-level features such as residential tenure. The second component, S, stands for stimuli. The model conceptualizes news media use and interpersonal communication as stimuli that can bring about attitudinal and behavioral changes. The second O refers to cognitive processing-related orientations, such as individuals' political knowledge or efficacy. Finally, R stands for responses, which include various civic outcomes such as voting, petition signing, or activism engagement.

Early application of CMM was made in the context of civic participation and focused primarily on traditional media and offline interpersonal discussion. For example, McLeod et al. (1999) examined the role of local media use, interpersonal discussion, and reflection of information on individuals' deliberation participation in public forums. New development of the model broadens the scope to contexts such as youth political socialization (Lee et al. 2013) and campaign advertising effects (Cho et al. 2009; Shah et al. 2007). Recent work also considers a diverse array of media forms, such as late-night TV comedy (Lee 2012) and social media (Yamamoto et al. 2017). The focus on interpersonal discussion similarly evolves from face-to-face discussion alone to a hybrid of offline and online messaging (Shah 2016; Shah et al. 2005), where more sophisticated discussion attributes, such as the size and heterogeneity of discussion networks, are examined (e.g., Yamamoto and Nah 2018).

The Role of Nonprofit-Specific News Media

The first communication component of CMM is news media. Traditional news media, including newspapers, radios, and televisions, are positive and significant predictors of citizens' participatory behaviors (McLeod et al. 1999; Shah et al. 2001). In particular, scholars recognize the importance of the informational use of mass media and public affairs-oriented media content. For example, Shah et al. (2001) examined the influence of print and broadcast media on interpersonal trust and civic participation. The informational use of media was found to significantly promote trust and civic participation, whereas social and recreational media use was negatively related to various

civic outcomes (Shah et al. 2001). However, recent research focused on "infotainment", an emerging media genre characterized by a hybrid of entertainment and information-oriented content, offers a more nuanced view of media types (Lee 2012; Moy et al. 2005). Lee (2012) examined the role of late-night comedy viewing on individuals' political participation, and the findings suggested that the consumption of entertaining political satire actually enhanced, rather than decreased, individuals' political participation. As numerous empirical studies consistently show, media exposure and media attention can significantly increase individuals' political knowledge (Eveland and Scheufele 2000), interest in political affairs (Strömbäck and Shehata 2010), and civic participation behaviors (Pasek et al. 2006).

While earlier research focused on traditional media, more recent scholarship broadens the scope to include digital media platforms such as networked social media. Polls in 2018 showed that one in five U.S.A adults got news via social media, which outpaced print newspapers as the major news source for the first time (Pew Research Center 2018). Recent studies also examined the impact of community-oriented social media use concerning local community issues or politics on individuals' civic participation in the United States (Nah et al., in press). The results corroborated the finding that Internet-based media use, especially those for information acquisition purposes, led to higher levels of civic participation, both online and offline. Beyond the United States, Ekström and Östman (2015) investigated the role of digital media on civic outcomes among Swedish adolescents. The authors identified the direct effect of creative forms of Internet use on youth political participation, and the indirect effect of informational media use through face-to-face and online political discussion.

While the role of general news media—including both traditional and new media formats—is well established in empirical literature, it is less clear whether nonprofit-specific media use may stimulate the same, or even greater levels of charitable giving and volunteering. The pro-civic media effects argument is informed by a motivational and an informational perspective of media use. The former posits that citizens would actively connect to media information in order to gain gratifications and achieve everyday goals such as surveillance and orientation (Blumler and Katz 1974), whereas the latter emphasizes the enhanced learning outcomes facilitated by news information, which fuels participation through exposing citizens to participation opportunities and relevant information resources (Shah et al. 2005).

In the context of nonprofit participation, nonprofit-specific storytelling and news information may significantly magnify the effect of news media through the following mechanisms. First, the informational and motivational mechanism is still at play. The niche stories focused on local nonprofit organizations may help raise awareness among residents, which might be particularly effective in setting public agenda and helping identify pressing issues (Nah 2010). Meanwhile, nonprofit-specific media use can serve as an important means of education and socialization, through which residents learn about participation opportunities as well as norms of giving and volunteering.

Second, other than presenting information, nonprofit-specific media may contain direct solicitation, which serves as an important mobilization mechanism to encourage individuals' volunteering and giving behaviors. Nonprofit research has consistently documented the importance of solicitation. Solicitation can increase the likelihood of contributing one's time and monetary resources to the advocated causes (Putnam 2000; Sokolowski 1996). Bekkers and Wiepking's (2011a) literature review based on both cross-sectional and experimental studies further suggested that active solicitation, rather than the passive presentation of contribution opportunities, best enhanced the likelihood of donations. Along this line, it is worth noting that new media, particularly participatory media platforms, are increasingly adopted by nonprofit organizations in community outreach and issue advocacy (Ciszek 2013). Ciszek (2013) examined the use of participatory news media like YouTube for diversity-focused NGOs to amplify voices from the otherwise excluded publics, the LGBTQ community.

Finally, it is important to note that individuals' nonprofit-specific media use may be driven by one's intrinsic interest or prior involvement with nonprofit organizations. In other words, individuals who are already engaged in nonprofit activities may be more likely to seek for nonprofit-related news information, and this may create a virtuous cycle and feed back into one's nonprofit participation. Taken together, we hypothesize:

H_5 Nonprofit-specific traditional media use is positively associated with nonprofit (a) volunteering and (b) giving.

H_6 Nonprofit-specific new media use is positively associated with nonprofit (a) volunteering and (b) giving.

The Direct and Indirect Influence of Interpersonal Discussion

Interpersonal discussion is the other communication mechanism that can bring about greater civic participation. According to CMM, there are two established pathways channeling such influences. First, as interpersonal network is a prominent source for political information and socialization (Liu and Gastil 2014; Mutz 2002), interpersonal

discussion can facilitate the exchange of political information just like media sources do. In addition, research has noted about the importance of interpersonal discussion networks, especially civically active ones, in political mobilization and civic action (McLeod et al. 1999). When interpersonal discussion is situated within the neighborhood community, it stimulates local civic participation and nurtures a sense of belonging among its residents (Kim and Ball-Rokeach 2006).

The second pathway proposed by CMM is the indirect effect of interpersonal discussion on civic behaviors (Shah et al. 2005). As Shah et al. (2017) note, the communication mediation approach "…sees mass and interpersonal communication as highly interdependent and complementary" (p. 2). Empirical work consistently shows such an indirect effect in various settings. For example, Lee et al. (2013) found that peer interpersonal communication, specifically adolescents' participation in deliberative classroom activities, can indirectly contribute to civic activism through their informational media use, including both online and offline media. Cho et al. (2009) confirmed the mediating role of interpersonal discussion in the realm of political campaigns, and identified three specific types of discussion that can mediate between campaign ads and citizens' campaign participation: face-to-face political conversation, online political messaging, and individuals' cognitive reflection.

Following the propositions of CMM, we hypothesize that nonprofit-specific discussion is likely to have similar direct and indirect effects. First, nonprofit-specific discussion is likely to encourage citizens' nonprofit participation through transmitting nonprofit-related information and knowledge, enhancing issue awareness, and serving as an informal recruiting and solicitation mechanism—that is, interpersonal discussion, along with the interpersonal network sustaining the discussion, is often relied upon for nonprofit to recruit members and volunteers (Lim 2008). We thus expect to observe a similar direct association:

H_7 Nonprofit-specific discussion is positively associated with nonprofit (a) volunteering and (b) giving.

Second, we hypothesize that nonprofit-specific discussion would positively mediate the relationship between nonprofit-specific media use and participation. In a way, nonprofit-related discussion could amplify the effect of media use, as it provides an avenue for individuals to elaborate on the information obtained from the media, as well as building a mobilization network around the shared issues and concerns among peer residents. Therefore, we hypothesize:

H_8 Nonprofit-specific discussion positively mediates the relationship between nonprofit-specific traditional media use and nonprofit (a) volunteering and (b) giving.

H_9 Nonprofit-specific discussion positively mediates the relationship between nonprofit-specific new media use and nonprofit (a) volunteering and (b) giving.

Figure 1 presents an integrated community communication model hypothesizing the influences of community attachment and communication mediation variables on nonprofit participation.

Methods

Data

Data for this study were collected through a Web-based survey on Qualtrics. The sample was derived from an online panel registered with the Nielsen Company. To represent the U.S. population to the best of the researchers' ability, the sample framing was constructed with the demographic distribution of gender, age, education, income, and race/ethnicity in mind. The web survey was administered between late April and mid-May, 2016. Out of 9, 215 invitations, 1046 respondents completed they survey yielding a response rate of 11.4% (see Kwon et al. 2020).

The final sample consisted of 43% females and 57% males between 18 and 92 years old (M = 57.87, SD = 14.22). U.S. Census Bureau (2016) data suggested that female made up 51.6% of the total population. In terms of racial and ethnic composition, the sample consisted of 83.9% Whites, 5.5% Blacks, 5% Hispanics and 2.6% Asians. Meanwhile, U.S. Census Bureau (2016) data indicated that the overall population consisted of 61.3% White, 17.8% Hispanic, 13.3% Black, and 5.7% Asian. The median of educational level was "associated degree," with over 97% having at least high school degrees. In comparison, the census data indicated that for individuals 25 years and older, only 87% were high school graduates and beyond (U.S. Census Bureau 2016). The median income of the sample was "$50,000–$74,999," comparing to the national median income at $57,617 (U.S. Census Bureau 2016). Residential tenure ranged between 0 to 80 years (M = 19.31, SD = 15.87), and the home ownership rate was at 81.7%.

Overall, the current sample included more male, White, wealthier, and better educated individuals than the population as estimated in 2016.

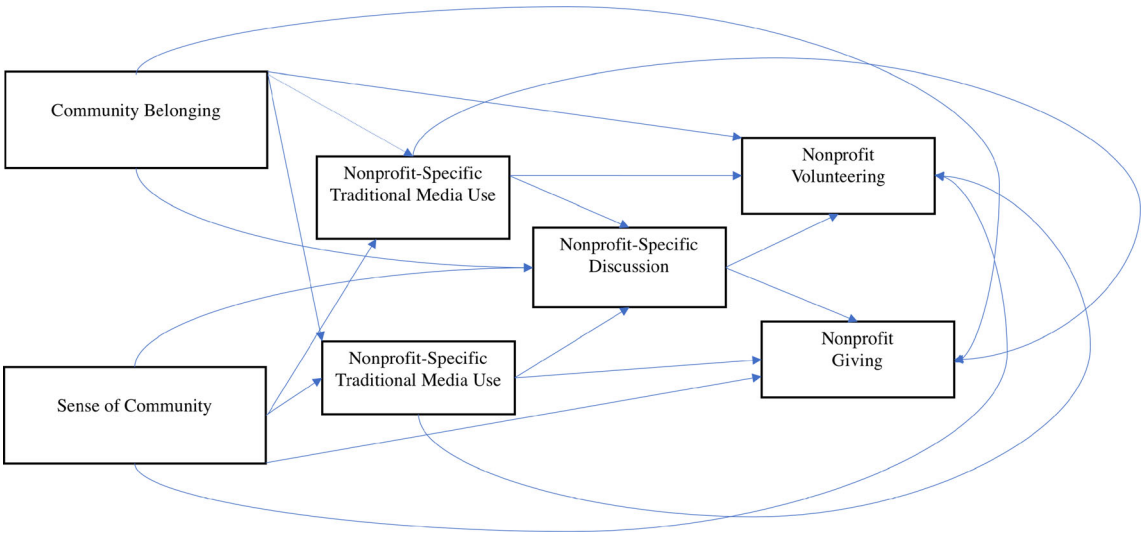

Fig. 1 Hypothesized model of community integration and communication mediation in predicting nonprofit participation. Control variables were not presented in the figure but were included in the analysis

Measurements

Nonprofit Volunteering

Respondents were asked if they engaged with local nonprofit or voluntary organizations of their community to work as a volunteer. Any indication of "yes" was coded as "1" (63.51%) and "no" coded as "0" (26.49%).

Nonprofit Giving

Respondents were asked if they (1) donated money or (2) donate items (e.g., food, clothing, blood) to local nonprofit or voluntary organizations of their community. Any indication of "yes" was coded as "1" and "no" coded as "0". The giving variable was computed by summing up the score of the two items on a scale of 0 to 2 (M = 1.42, SD = .75, Spearman's p[1] = . 433).

Nonprofit-Specific Traditional Media Use

Nonprofit-specific traditional media use was measured by asking respondents how often they used (*1 = never; 7 = frequently*) and how much attention they paid to (*1 = never; 7 = close attention*) three forms of nonprofit-specific traditional media, (1) nonprofit television news, (2) nonprofit newspaper news, and (3) nonprofit radio news stories. Responses to the six items were averaged to form a seven-point scale indicating the degree to which individual used nonprofit-specific traditional local media (M = 3.00, SD = 1.51, Cronbach's α = .916).

Nonprofit-Specific New Media Use

Respondents were further asked to report the frequency and the amount of attention paid to Internet news specifically about nonprofit organizations. A seven-point scale based on averaging the scores of the two items was constructed (M = 3.09, SD = 1.78, Spearman's p = .851).

Nonprofit-Specific Discussion

Respondents were asked to indicate how often they talked about local nonprofit or voluntary organizations with four types of interpersonal connections on a seven-point scale (*1 = never; 7 = frequently)*, including (1) family members; (2) neighbors; (3) co-workers; and (4) other friends and acquaintances. The scores of the four items were averaged to form a seven-point composite (M = 2.71, SD = 1.56, Cronbach's α = .871).

Community Belonging

Based on existing measures of community attachment and involvement, an eight-item belonging index was used to measure respondents' subjective feelings toward their neighborhood and objective neighborly behaviors (see Ball-Rokeach et al. 2001 for details regarding the development of the scale). Specifically, respondents were asked to indicate on a seven-point Likert scale how much they agreed with statements such as "I am interested in knowing what my neighbors in my community are like"

[1] According to Eisinga et al. (2013), a more appropriate reliability coefficient for two-item scale is the Spearman-Brown statistics rho, as opposed to the Cronbach's alpha for multiple-item measures.

(*1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree*). For the four objective items, they were asked to provide a number for four questions such as "How many neighbors you know well enough to ask them to keep watch on your house or apartment." The numerical responses were subsequently recoded into five categories (1 = *no neighbors*, 2 = *one neighbor*, 3 = *two neighbors*, 4 = *three neighbors*, 5 = *four or more neighbors*). The final composite was calculated by averaging each respondent's score on the eight items (M = 4.10, SD = 1.32, Cronbach's α = .91).

Sense of Community

Sense of community was measured by a single question "do you feel a sense of community with others in your community" on a seven-point scale (*1 = not at all, 7 = "a great deal"*, M = 4.08, SD = 1.61).

Control Variables

General traditional media use

Traditional media use was measured by asking respondents how often they used (*1 = never; 7 = frequently*) and how much attention they paid to (*1 = never; 7 = close attention*) three forms of local traditional media sources, including television news stories, newspaper news stories, and radio news stories. Responses to the six items were averaged to form a seven-point scale indicating the degree to which individual used traditional local media (M = 4.12, SD = 1.59, Cronbach's α = .861).

General new media use

New media use was measured by asking respondents how often they used (*1 = never; 7 = frequently*) and how much attention they paid to (*1 = never; 7 = close attention*) Internet-based news stories. Responses to the two items were averaged to form a seven-point scale (M = 4.14, SD = 1.91, Spearman's p = .788).

General Interpersonal Discussion

The level of interpersonal discussion was measured by a single question that asked respondents how often they had discussions with other people about things in their neighborhood. The seven-point scale ranged from 1 = *never* to 7 = *all the time* (M = 3.83, SD = 1.81).

Sociodemographic and Residential Variables

The following sociodemographic and residential variables were entered in the model as statistical control, including gender, age, ethnicity, educational level, income, residential tenure, and homeownership. Table 1 provides a summary of means and standard deviations of key variables in the study.

Analysis

Structural equation modeling (SEM) using the *Lavaan* package through the platform of R was employed to estimate the direct and indirect effects of nonprofit-specific communication processes and community attachment on individuals' nonprofit participation behaviors, with control variables, including general communication variables, demographic background, socioeconomic status, homeownership and residential tenure, being part of the model (Fig. 1). The significance level for all parameter estimates was set at $p < .05$, and Maximum Likelihood was used to produce those estimates. The model's goodness-of-fit, that is, the extent to which the hypothesized model fits the observed data, was assessed by the Chi square (χ^2) to degrees-of-freedom ratio (*df*), Bentler-Bonett normed fit index (NFI), the comparative fit index (CFI), and the root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA). Specifically, a satisfactory model fit would require the χ^2 to *df* ratio (calculated by χ^2 divided by the degree of freedom) lower than 5. The NFI and CFI indices compare the hypothesized model with null model specifying no association between any of the variables, should both reach .90 for an acceptable level (Marsh et al. 1988). Finally, RMSEA is a parsimony-adjusted index that addresses the amounts of observed variances and covariances as different from the hypothesized models. RMSEA $\leq$ .05 would indicate an excellent fit, RMSEA $\leq$ .08 a satisfactory fit, RMSEA between .08 and .10 a fair fit, and RMSEA $\geq$ .10 a poor fit (Jöreskog and Sörbom 1993).

Results

In order to obtain an over-identified model, bivariate correlations among the exogenous variables were first assessed, and covariances among exogenous variables found not to be significantly correlated were subsequently restricted to zero in the hypothesized model. This model was then estimated, and the Chi square to degrees-of-freedom ratio (= 2.45) NFI (= .93), CFI (= .94) and RMSEA (= .07) all suggested a good model fit to the data. The model's unstandardized parameter estimates and standard errors are reported in Table 2. Figure 2 presents the estimated model with all significant paths displayed.

The first two hypotheses posited that community attachment variables, including community belonging (H_1) and sense of community (H_2), were positively related to

Table 1 Means and standard deviations of endogenous, exogenous and control variables (N = 1046)

	Descriptive statistics		
	M	SD	Reliability
Socio-demographics			
Gender	Female = 43%		
Age	57.87	14.22	–
Ethnicity	White = 83.9%		
Education	5.04	1.47	
Income	6.60	2.38	
Residential tenure	19.31	15.87	–
Home ownership	Owner = 81.7%		–
Community attachment			
Community belonging	4.10	1.32	$\alpha = .910$
Sense of community	4.08	1.61	–
General communication processes			
Traditional media use	4.12	1.59	$\alpha = .861$
New media use	4.14	1.91	$\rho = .788$
Interpersonal discussion	3.83	1.81	–
Nonprofit-specific communication			
Traditional nonprofit media use	3.00	1.51	$\alpha = .916$
New nonprofit media use	3.09	1.78	$\rho = .851$
Nonprofit discussion	2.71	1.56	$\alpha = .871$
Exogenous variables			
Nonprofit giving	1.42	.75	$\rho = .433$
Nonprofit volunteering	Yes = 63.51%	–	–

individuals' volunteering and giving activities. H_1 was not supported, as community belonging was not significantly related to either volunteering or giving. Meanwhile, H_2 was only partially supported. Specifically, sense of community was a positive and significant predictor of individuals' volunteering behavior ($b = .03$, $p < .01$), whereas it was not significantly related to giving behaviors such as making financial or other forms of material donations.

The model produced mixed results regarding how community attachment variables were related to nonprofit-specific communication behaviors (H_3 and H_4). When it came to nonprofit-specific traditional media use, only community belonging was a positive and significant predictor ($b = .08$, $p < .01$). Meanwhile, the sense of community was significantly related to only nonprofit-specific new media use ($b = .09$, $p < .05$). Finally, both community belonging ($b = .17$, $p < .001$) and sense of community ($b = .08$, $p < .05$) significantly contributed to the level of nonprofit-specific discussion.

H_5 through H_7 tested the degree to which nonprofit-specific communication directly impacted individuals' nonprofit participation behaviors. Regarding the role of nonprofit-specific traditional media use (H_{5a} & H_{5b}), the results only partially supported the hypotheses, showing that nonprofit-specific traditional media use was significantly related to giving (H_{5a}, $b = .05$, $p < .05$), but not volunteering activities (H_{5b}). Meanwhile, nonprofit-specific new media use was not significantly associated with either volunteering (H_{6a}) or giving activities (H_{6b}). Finally, H_7 was supported as nonprofit-specific interpersonal discussion stood out as a consistent predictor of both volunteering ($b = .07$, $p < .001$) and giving behaviors ($b = .07$, $p < .001$).

Although nonprofit-specific media use was not directly related to one's nonprofit participation, the results supported the indirect association between media use and nonprofit participation, which was mediated through nonprofit-specific discussion (H_9). Specifically, the path analysis confirmed that the level of nonprofit-specific discussion was significantly related to both nonprofit-specific traditional ($b = .17$, $p < .001$) and new media use ($b = .21$, $p < .001$), but the direct link between media use and nonprofit participation was not consistently present.

Discussion

Combining community integration framework and communication mediation model (CMM), the current study tests the integrated community communication model with

Table 2 Path coefficient estimates, standard errors, and significance levels of the hypothesized community communication model (N = 1046)

	Nonprofit traditional media use Estimate *b* (SE)	Nonprofit new media use Estimate *b* (SE)	Nonprofit discussion Estimate *b* (SE)	Nonprofit giving Estimate *b* (SE)	Nonprofit volunteering Estimate *b* (SE)
Socio-demographics					
Gender	–	–	–	.100(.043)*	.022(.028)
Age	–	–	–	.009(.002)***	.004(.001)**
Ethnicity	–	–	–	− .006(.019)	− .008(.012)
Education	–	–	–	.040(.015)*	.022(.010)*
Income	–	–	–	.047(.015)***	.028(.006)***
Residential Tenure	–	–	–	-.001(.001)	-.001(.001)
Home Ownership	–	–	–	.018(.030)	.003(.019)
Community attachment					
Community Belonging	.076(.037)*	.053(.044)	.172(.041)***	.035(.023)	.016(.015)
Sense of Community	.069(.030)	.086(.036)*	.082(.034)*	.029(.019)	.033(.012)**
General communication processes					
Traditional Media Use	.449(.029)***	− .068(.034)*	− .062(.035)	− .010(.020)	− .004(.013)
New Media Use	.020(.021)	.498(.026)***	− .013(.028)	.018(.015)	.003(.010)
Interpersonal Discussion	.155(.024)***	.205(.029)***	.215(.028)***	.035(.016)*	.010(.010)
Nonprofit-specific communication					
Nonprofit Traditional Media Use			.165(.034)***	.045(.019)*	.021(.012)
Nonprofit New Media Use			.210(.029)***	.005(.016)	.005(.010)
Nonprofit Discussion				.070(.017)***	.065(.011)***

*$p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, ***$p < .001$

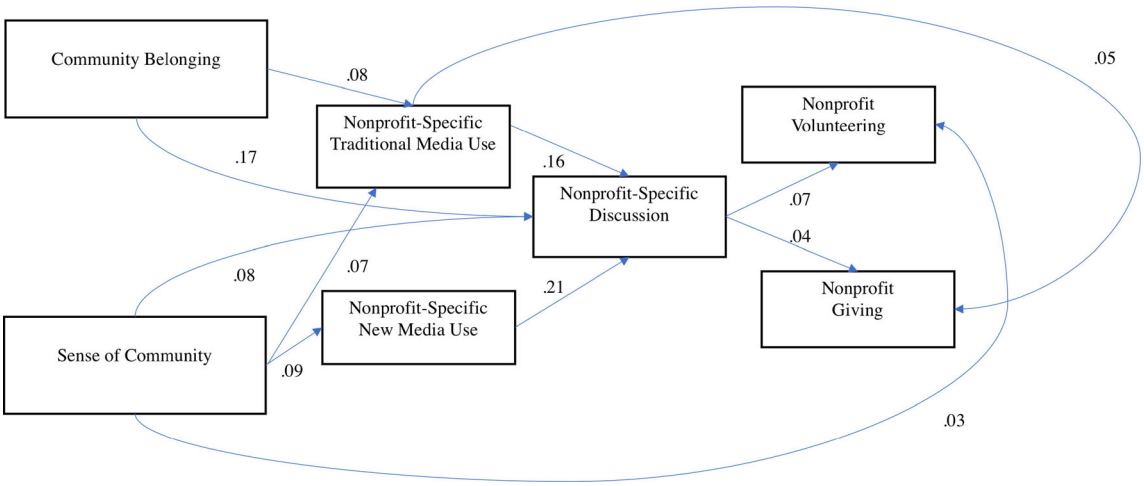

Fig. 2 Significant paths from the hypothesized model predicting nonprofit participation. Control variables were not presented in the figure but were included in the analysis

the roles of community attachment and nonprofit-specific communication mechanisms in explaining citizens' nonprofit participation behaviors. The path analysis identifies three important findings. First, an individual's integration into local community indeed influences one's involvement with local nonprofit organizations, but such a relationship is more nuanced than initially hypothesized. Specifically, while sense of community can directly and significantly promote volunteering behaviors, the same direct influence is not observed on giving behaviors.

Second, by extending CMM to the nonprofit participation context, the current findings both support and challenge the main propositions of the model. On the one hand, findings confirm that nonprofit-specific discussion directly promotes both volunteering and giving behaviors, and further mediates the effect of nonprofit-specific news media use. On the other hand, the direct pro-civic effect of nonprofit-specific media on nonprofit participation, either in traditional or new media forms, is largely not supported. Except for the marginally significant relationship between nonprofit-specific traditional media use and giving, media use does not directly impact individuals' volunteering decisions.

Third, interpersonal discussion is the most robust pathway across the models through which community integration variables can promote nonprofit involvement. As the current findings suggest, the more individuals feel connected to the community, the more they would engage in nonprofit-specific discussion, which further feeds into greater nonprofit participation. In terms of promoting nonprofit-specific media use, however, the influence from community integration variables to traditional and new media use is less consistent and weaker compared to that of interpersonal discussion. Below, we further unpack these findings.

Different Mechanisms Predicting Volunteering and Giving

Findings from the current study echo Jones' (2006) argument in that the same mechanisms may differently impact volunteering versus giving behaviors. For example, the sense of community is significantly and positively related to only volunteering behaviors, which is consistent with the nonprofit participation literature that volunteers are often best recruited and retained through community-based social networks (Ryan et al. 2005). The use of nonprofit-specific traditional media, on the other hand, was found to only significantly predict giving but not volunteering behaviors.[2]

[2] To assess how the current measures (two separate constructs of giving and volunteering) compared to a single composite of nonprofit participation empirically, a post hoc analysis was conducted by fitting the same path model using the composite measure as the only exogenous variable. Compared to the findings as discussed above, sense of community remained a significant and positive predictor of nonprofit participation, but the significant association between nonprofit-specific media use and nonprofit participation dissolved completely. Such divergence, to some extent, suggests that using a single dimensional measure of nonprofit participation may mask the weak, yet still significant association between media use and giving behaviors.

What is worthy of discussion is the unique role of traditional media in promoting giving behaviors. One possible explanation might be traditional media are still perceived as more credible sources for communicating charitable causes (Kenix 2008). Although Internet-based donation platforms like GoFundMe have surged in recent years, credibility remains a critical issue when it comes to individual donation decisions (Walker and Kent 2013). Meanwhile, to situate the media use patterns in the U.S. context, research has suggested that the primary users of traditional versus new media represent two different demographics. The RAND report on the profiles of different platform users indicated that people whose primary news sources were social media and in-person contacts tended to be female, younger, having less education and lower household incomes, whereas people whose primary news sources were print publications and broadcast television were significantly older and wealthier (Pollard and Kavanagh 2019). These socio-demographic characteristics may predispose individuals' choice of traditional versus new media platforms. Therefore, the significant relationship between traditional media use and giving behaviors may be partially attributed to the long-established demographic factors such as age and socioeconomic status (Bekkers and Wiepking 2011a).

To summarize, the above findings identify the differential capacity of traditional versus new media platforms in propagating philanthropic values, a factor significantly tied to cause-related marketing and charitable giving (Webb et al. 2000). The current results thus indicate that traditional media may still be the preferred source to promote citizen giving in the nonprofit and voluntary sector.

The fact that different mechanisms can uniquely predict volunteering versus giving behaviors is also consistent with the long-established finding in nonprofit participation literature, which suggests that giving and volunteering are two conceptually distinct constructs (e.g., Jones 2006). From a practical standpoint, nonprofit organizations are better advised to establish priorities, so that the strategies employed could better target the goal of fundraising or volunteer recruitment. For example, strategies involving social media may be effective in recruiting volunteers by leveraging the interpersonal networks afforded by the platform, but they alone may not be adequate to mobilize financial resources or attract individual donations.

The Role of Communication Processes in Nonprofit Participation

Assuming that communication processes are an essential catalyst of civic participation, the current study extends CMM to build an integrated community communication

model in the realm of nonprofit participation. We posit that the more residents are attached to the community, the more likely they would actively seek for nonprofit-specific participation opportunities through news media and engage in nonprofit-related discussion with other community members. The results have supported these hypotheses, with the level of community belonging and sense of community positively associated with nonprofit-specific communication behaviors. The virtuous circle between community integration and pro-civic communication processes has been theorized by other models such as communication infrastructure theory (CIT) (Kim and Ball-Rokeach 2006). CIT posits that local communication processes—including discussion among residents, local media, and community-based organizations—constitute key communication infrastructure that brings together the community and fosters engagement between residents and local nonprofits (Kim and Ball-Rokeach 2006).

In addition, the results confirm the mediating role of interpersonal discussion, a major proposition of CMM and something that has not been fully examined in the nonprofit participation literature. In contexts of voting and youth political socialization, interpersonal discussion has consistently been found to mediate the influence of news media on various civic outcomes (Lee et al. 2013; Shah et al. 2005). In the current study, the findings reaffirm that nonprofit-specific discussion not only directly encourages giving and volunteering, but also serves as the mediating pathways through which media could indirectly facilitate nonprofit participation.

The direct effect of media use on nonprofit participation, however, is minimal in the current study. Different from other forms of civic participation like voting or signing petitions, volunteering and giving are particularly embedded in local community and individuals' social networks. Therefore, everyday social interaction and interpersonal discussion might be communication channels more readily available for residents to access nonprofit-related information. Moreover, as powerful sources of solicitation and personal influence, interpersonal networks are already widely leveraged by nonprofits to recruit volunteers and collect donations (Teorell 2003). Meanwhile, the lack of inter-organizational connections, such as collaboration or information exchange between nonprofits and local media, could be liable for the nonsignificant relationship here. In many urban communities today, the meso-level linkages between local media and community-based organizations are found to be weak, if not completely absent (Matsaganis 2008). The lack of local media-nonprofit collaboration may lead to less media coverage about local nonprofits, thus hindering the potential of news media to inform and involve residents in nonprofit-related causes (Nah 2010). Community scholars and practitioners have begun to propose interventions aiming at strengthening the collaborative relationships between local media and community organizations (e.g., Liu et al. 2018b, Villanueva et al. 2017). By doing so, it helps achieve a better "communicatively integrated community" (Friedland 2001, p. 358) where local news media and nonprofit organizations can better work in concert to promote resident engagement.

The current finding sheds light on the pivotal role of interpersonal discussion, a communication mechanism that has long been overlooked in the nonprofit participation literature. CMM emphasizes the critical role of interpersonal discussion, and it unfolds one of the underlying mechanisms explaining how residents' attachment to community may breed greater nonprofit participation. Prior literature on nonprofit participation has observed that community attachment can translate individuals' affective feelings toward the community into pro-community actions (e.g., Brown et al. 2003; Manzo and Perkins 2006). However, those studies do not explicate how and through what theoretical mechanisms this can take place. The current study fills in the gap by providing a communication-centric explanation of why community attachment is capable of promoting nonprofit participation.

In addition, the strong and consistent influence of interpersonal discussion can be well explained by the solicitation mechanism, the active invitation initiated or made on behalf of nonprofit organizations (Meer 2011). Peer-to-peer solicitation has been identified to significantly contribute to charitable donations (e.g., Bekkers and Wiepking 2011a), and its effectiveness can be attributed to psychological mechanisms such as peer pressure (Meer 2011) as well as social mechanisms such as interpersonal trust (Herzog and Yang 2018). From a practical standpoint, this finding thus means that interpersonal discussion can be and should be better leveraged by nonprofits to engage their members, volunteers and supporters alike.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Despite the merits and implications of the results, there are several limitations in the current study and suggestions for future scholarship. The first deals with the online sample and the relatively low response rate compared to traditional modes of survey. Online survey is known to be subject to a greater level of nonresponse rate and self-selection bias (Sax et al. 2003). Participants in the current study appeared to disproportionally over-represent older and male populations, who also come from higher socioeconomic strata than national average. This may limit generalizability of the findings. Therefore, results in the current study should not be over-generalized to represent the entire populations in the United States, or populations in other countries. In

terms of participants' racial and ethnic background, the current sample also overrepresented White individuals. Given the great civic disparity along the racial, ethnic lines (Verba et al. 1995), the current study does not examine any possible divergence of nonprofit participation across different ethnic communities. Along this line, future research is encouraged to replicate the theoretical model to more representative populations, and it would be worthwhile to compare the extent to which the model fares across different ethnic communities. It is also worth noting that the cross-sectional nature of the study may limit its ability to make causal claims about how communication processes influence nonprofit participation. Future scholarship in response to this issue should consider conducting a longitudinal panel survey with representative samples.

Although the research sample is only based in the United States, the current theoretical model may be applicable to communities around the world, where regional or national culture may interact with local communication processes. Geographic communities are coming back as important contexts to examine everyday communication and civic action (Sampson et al. 2005). Future research is encouraged to explore how localized nonprofit behaviors may interact with macro-level factors such as diverging philanthropic cultures or societal values.

Second, although the current study situates nonprofit participation within the context of community by measuring individuals' integration into the community, it does not collect community-level (i.e., meso) data such as demographic composition, local media environment, or the density of nonprofit organizations in the area. The community integration framework conceives community as constituted by multilevel linkages among individuals, local media, and local organizations (Friedland and McLeod 1998; Friedland 2001). Therefore, not only micro or individual level data but also meso-, or even macro-level data, such as the level of connection between media and local organizations, can significantly strengthen the current study. In addition, CMM considers how different individual orientations and external community characteristics may render communication stimuli to work differently in predicting civic behaviors. In this direction, future research can identify key contextual features of community that might encourage or constrain citizens' nonprofit involvement. It is likely that communities already served by a vibrant nonprofit community are better able to engage their residents.

In addition, future research on nonprofit participation can benefit from more systematic measures, including dimensions such as frequency or specific domains of nonprofit participation. Individuals who habitually volunteer are arguably more active than those who only volunteer when triggered by external events, such as natural disasters affecting the community. Similarly, giving behaviors can be measured in more nuanced ways that reflect the varied levels of generosity and altruistic motivation of different individuals. Future work can develop a more elaborated measure that maps nonprofit activity on a continuum, similar to the established scale of general civic participation (e.g., Shah 1998; Verba et al. 1995).

Last but not the least, Internet and communication technologies have afforded new modes of nonprofit engagement. For example, volunteering and giving behaviors mediated by mobile devices and online social networks are growing (e.g., Saxton and Wang 2014), and these behaviors merit future research as they extend nonprofit participation from the offline to online realm. One direction of future work is to systematically compare and contrast online versus offline forms of nonprofit participation and assess the convergence or divergence in terms of the conduits or pathways leading to the growth of each. Another direction is to expand on the current study to investigate online communication processes, particularly online discussion, in shaping volunteering and giving behaviors in different settings. As technologies are transforming almost every aspect of human communication, the intersection between technology use and nonprofit participation opens up new avenues for future inquires.

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Conflict of interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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