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Hostile media perceptions are prominent today but little research has examined how social media use contributes to these beliefs. This study examines whether following politicians' social media feeds is indirectly linked to hostile media perceptions by evoking emotional responses in the audience. We test this possibility by analyzing two-wave panel survey data collected in the United States during the 2016 presidential election. Following politicians on social media is associated with anger at the presidential candidate individuals oppose and enthusiasm for their supported candidate, both of which are subsequently related to hostile media perceptions.

Media coverage of the 2016 presidential election in the United States was more unfavorable than of nearly every other campaign in modern U.S. history, as news about the two candidates, Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton, was epitomized by overwhelming negativity (Patterson, 2016). This negative coverage may have contributed to both candidates speaking out publicly to address what they perceived to be biased news coverage against their campaigns (Easley, 2016), including Trump's

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frequent use of social media to express his view that the media were biased against him (Enli, 2017). Amid candidates' claims of media bias, polls conducted during the election showed that supporters also believed the media were biased against their preferred candidate, including 90% of individuals who were favorable toward Trump (Gallup, 2016). This scenario represents an example of hostile media perceptions, which arise when partisans on both sides of a political issue or campaign perceive unfair media bias against their side or point of view (Perloff, 2015; Vallone, Ross, & Lepper, 1985).

This study seeks to better understand how hostile media perceptions develop in the contemporary political media environment. Politicians often make accusations of media bias that can contribute to public perceptions of hostility (Watts, Domke, Shah, & Fan, 1999). However, social media provide political elites the communication tools to stoke beliefs among their followers that news media are biased. Social media feeds provide political elites the opportunity to bypass traditional media outlets and instead speak directly to followers in a more personalized way (McLaughlin & Macafee, 2019; Metz, Kruikemeier, & Lecheler, 2019). Following politicians' updates on social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter has become an increasingly prominent way for people to receive political information; 24% of adults in the US followed social media activity by Trump or Clinton during the 2016 election, up from 6% who followed a politician in 2010 and 16% in 2014 (Pew, 2016).

This study examines the theoretical question of whether following politicians on social media contributed to citizens' hostile media perceptions during the 2016 election. If hostile media perceptions do arise from following politicians' feeds, the next question is, how? We build on work demonstrating the emotional underpinnings of the hostile media effect (Arpan & Nabi, 2011; Matthes, 2013) that suggests that emotional experiences may promote biased perceptions. We argue that politicians' social media activity evokes unique emotional responses toward the presidential candidates individuals support or oppose, which may subsequently promote perceptions of media hostility.

Our novel findings advance the literature on hostile media perceptions in two important ways. First, the study responds to calls to understand how social media use is associated with perceptions of media bias (Perloff, 2015), a question that has received surprisingly little attention in the literature (cf. Lee, Kim, & Coe, 2018; Rojas, Barnidge, & Abril, 2016). The results demonstrate that politicians can use social media to indirectly encourage hostile media perceptions among their followers. Second, the study highlights one mechanism through which hostile media perceptions emerge, showing that discrete emotions like anger and enthusiasm are key links between following politicians on social media and perceptions of media bias. Taken together, this study provides a theoretical account for how hostile media perceptions develop in the social media environment.

Politicians' Social Media Feeds and Hostile Media Perceptions

The hostile media perception is defined as partisans' tendencies to "perceive hostile bias … in news coverage that most nonpartisans find even-handed and objective" (Vallone et al., 1985, p. 578). Supporters and opponents of a political issue or politician may hold contradictory views of media content, such that both sides believe the media are biased against their position and favor the opponent (Gunther & Schmitt, 2004). Despite claims of media bias, meta-analyses and large-scale studies of media content do not find strong evidence that news favors one side over the other (D'Alessio & Allen, 2000). This raises an important question: If news media show no systematic bias in content, why do partisans continue to perceive such bias?

One potential source of hostile media perceptions may be politicians themselves. Recent surveys suggest that politicians believe the media are biased against them and often express those beliefs publicly. For example, politicians who perceive the media to be hostile are less willing to directly engage journalists, are more likely to believe the media fail to inform the public, and are more inclined to emphasize conflicts (as opposed to substantive arguments) to garner public attention and news coverage (Matthes, Maurer, & Arendt, 2019). Politicians also frequently accuse the media of bias, particularly bias favoring liberal perspectives (Watts et al., 1999), although the 2016 U.S. election saw both Republican and Democratic candidates express such concerns (Easley, 2016; Enli, 2017).

In prior eras in which broadcast television and newspapers were the dominant sources of political information, politicians making accusations of media bias were mostly dependent on the media to report those claims to reach voters. In many cases, the news media offered extensive coverage of these claims, which subsequently promoted public perceptions of media bias (Watts et al., 1999). Thus, news media were the key venue through which politicians leveled charges of media hostility.

Although politicians continue to rely on news coverage to reach voters, social media have changed how political elites communicate with the public. Social media are utilized to bypass traditional news gatekeepers, allowing politicians to communicate directly with constituents. While each social media platform offers a unique set of affordances and may reach different audiences, politicians generally use social media as a central part of their campaign strategies (Kreiss, Lawrence, & McGregor, 2018). Audiences have responded as well; nearly one-third of American adults follow politicians' social media feeds (Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, Levy, & Nielsen, 2017) to monitor and engage with political leaders. On Election Day 2016, Trump had 12.3 million followers on Facebook and 12.9 million on Twitter, while Clinton had 8.3 million Facebook and 10.2 million Twitter followers (Stromer-Galley et al., 2016).

Social media may provide an environment ripe for politicians to encourage perceptions of media bias among their supporters. Social media users are up to

five times more likely to follow a supported politician's social media feed compared to an opposed politician's account (Newman et al., 2017; Pew Research Center, 2016), and politicians use these platforms to try to influence and persuade their supporters (Borah, 2016; Kreiss et al., 2018). By following a politician on social media, individuals may be exposed to implicit cues suggesting the media are biased (Watts et al., 1999) or even explicit claims of media bias from politicians (Enli, 2017). Followers are also exposed to politicians' posts that promote in-group identification (McLaughlin & Macafee, 2019), which can strengthen hostile media perceptions. Heightened group identification—such as political partisanship or ideology—can lead to both in-group favoritism and out-group derogation and is often used as a cue to evaluate media content. When group identity is made salient, partisans tend to perceive neutral media to be biased against their side (Reid, 2012). We therefore expect that following a politician on social media will encourage perceptions of media bias against a supported political candidate.

> **H1**: Following a politician on social media (W1) is positively related to hostile media perceptions (W2).

Following Politicians on Social Media and Emotions toward Candidates

While we expect following a politician on social media to be directly related to hostile media perceptions, this behavior may also be associated with people's emotions toward politicians. Emotions are valenced and evaluative reactions to events, objects, or individuals in the environment (Nabi, 2010). Although these responses can be studied along continuous dimensions of affect like valence and arousal, researchers have recommended that a discrete approach to emotion—one that focuses on unique emotional states—is better suited to understanding the relationships between communicative behavior and affect (Nabi, 2010). Given that different emotions are associated with different thought patterns (appraisals) that lead to unique behaviors, motivations, perceptions, and cognitions (Nabi, 2010), different discrete emotions—including those that share a valence—may influence hostile media perceptions in dissimilar ways. A number of studies show that discrete emotions like anger, anxiety, and enthusiasm have unique effects on individuals' political beliefs and perceptions (MacKuen, Wolak, Keele, & Marcus, 2010; Weeks, 2015). This study assesses whether discrete emotional responses toward the 2016 U.S. presidential candidates mediate the link between following politicians on social media and hostile media perceptions.

There are several reasons to expect following politicians on social media to be associated with negative emotions toward an opposed candidate and positive emotions toward the supported candidate. Modern political campaigns must strike a balance between attacking other candidates and building support for themselves. Yet political campaigns are particularly negative, as candidates frequently criticize opponents in an effort to win over voters (Iyengar, 2011). This negative

campaigning is effective in triggering both positive and negative emotional responses from the audience (Brader, 2005). Presidential campaigns often use social media to make direct emotional appeals to their followers, including enthusiasm, anger, and fear appeals (Borah, 2016), which can drive engagement with content on politicians' social media pages (Hasell & Weeks, 2016; Heiss, Schmuck, & Matthes, 2018).

Emotional responses may also be intensified by the personalization of political communication on social media. Personalization can strengthen the connection between constituents and politicians, particularly when that personalization is emotional (McLaughlin & Macafee, 2019; Metz et al., 2019). This more personal connection may affect feelings about both supported and opposed candidates. Because candidates use emotional appeals on social media to promote themselves and attack their opponents (Borah, 2016), we expect following politicians on social media to be associated with more negative emotions toward the presidential candidate an individual opposes. At the same time, because politicians are often successful in using emotional appeals to build enthusiasm for their own campaigns (Brader, 2005), we also expect individuals who follow politicians on social media to exhibit greater enthusiasm for their supported candidate.

> **H2**: Following a politician on social media (W1) is positively related to negative emotions (anger, anxiety) toward the opposed presidential candidate (W2).

> **H3**: Following a politician on social media (W1) is positively related to enthusiasm toward the supported presidential candidate (W2).

Emotions and Hostile Media Perceptions

The connection between emotions and hostile media perceptions has been mostly overlooked in prior scholarship, though recent work has begun to address the potential link (Arpan & Nabi, 2011; Matthes, 2013; Matthes & Beyer, 2017). Yet existing research on the relationship between emotion and hostile media perceptions has, for the most part, not examined the unique influence of different discrete emotions—namely, feelings of enthusiasm, anger, and anxiety. For example, Matthes and colleagues' work on affective involvement and hostile media perceptions (Matthes, 2013; Matthes & Beyer, 2017) measured discrete emotions but combined these items into valence-based scales (positive/negative) in their primary analyses. Generally speaking, these studies find that negative affective involvement with a political issue is associated with greater hostile media perceptions, while positive affective involvement is linked to lower perceived media hostility.

Despite some evidence that positive affect may dampen hostile media perceptions (Matthes & Beyer, 2017), other work suggests that the discrete emotion enthusiasm might in fact promote these perceptions in some situations. In a political context, enthusiasm is a positive emotion that signals things are going

well, which serves to reinforce people's motivation to support their party (Brader, 2005). People who express enthusiasm toward a supported politician tend to act in a more partisan fashion and make political decisions primarily based on prior political beliefs and preferences (Brader, 2005). In other words, enthusiasm drives people to further rally around political elites they support. If politicians make accusations of media bias, an enthused supporter may believe this claim because they are motivated to uncritically accept what the politician says or to process this statement through a partisan lens (MacKuen et al., 2010). Furthermore, those more connected to a candidate (as an enthused supporter is likely to be) are more likely to report bias in media coverage (Vallone et al., 1985). This suggests that individuals who are more enthusiastic about their preferred candidate will be more prone to perceive media bias against that candidate.

> **H4**: Enthusiasm about the candidate individuals support (W2) is positively related to hostile media perceptions (W2).

Anger should also promote hostile media perceptions. Anger is a discrete negative emotion that occurs when individuals' goals or interests are disrupted or when someone is hurt or perceives a slight from others (Nabi, 2010). In political settings, angry people become defensive about their existing beliefs and are more partisan when considering new information or reporting their opinions. Angry individuals are more likely to become politically close-minded and less willing to compromise, search for information, or consider alternative perspectives (MacKuen et al., 2010; Weeks, 2015). Simply put, angry people see the political world in a more biased and partisan manner. In the context of an election, voters who are angry at the opposed political candidate may fall victim to perceptual biases and be more likely to think the media are biased against their side. For instance, anger triggered by news stories is associated with higher levels of hostile media perceptions (Arpan & Nabi, 2011) and anger about political issues can also promote perceptions of media bias (Matthes, 2013, footnote 3). Thus, anger directed toward the candidate individuals oppose should drive perceptions of media bias.

> **H5**: Anger toward the candidate individuals oppose (W2) is positively related to hostile media perceptions (W2).

Although angry and anxious feelings both involve negative emotional arousal, these two emotions may work differently to predict hostile media perceptions. While angry individuals are likely to become more partisan, anxious people tend to be more open-minded and attentive to new perspectives and information. Anxious individuals more carefully consider available information and are less likely to automatically process information in a way that is consistent with prior political attitudes (MacKuen et al., 2010). Accordingly, anxious people should weigh the evidence of the existence of hostile media but, ultimately, be less likely

to perceive media bias against their candidate. We therefore do not expect anxiety to have a strong relationship with hostile media perceptions that is either positive or negative. Rather, we advance the following research question, noting the need to test whether anxiety is relevant in predicting hostile media perceptions (Matthes, 2013).

RQ1: Is anxiety toward the candidate individuals oppose (W2) related to hostile media perceptions (W2)?

We are ultimately interested in the underlying theoretical processes through which following politicians on social media may contribute to hostile media perceptions. Given the expectations regarding the antecedents and consequences of anger and enthusiasm outlined above, we expect the following indirect relationships to emerge:

H6: Following a politician on social media (W1) will have a positive indirect relationship with hostile media perceptions (W2) through enthusiasm toward the supported presidential candidate (W2).

H7: Following a politician on social media (W1) will have a positive indirect relationship with hostile media perceptions (W2) through anger toward the opposed presidential candidate (W2).

We are less certain about the nature of the relationship between anxiety and hostile media perceptions. As a result, we pose the following research question regarding the indirect relationship through anxiety:

RQ2: Is following a politician on social media (W1) indirectly related to hostile media perceptions (W2) through anxiety toward the opposed presidential candidate (W2)?

Do Platform Differences Matter?

Our theoretical model argues that following politicians on social media should be associated with emotional responses that subsequently relate to hostile media perceptions. However, there are reasons to question whether these proposed relationships are consistent across the two social media platforms we examine, Facebook and Twitter. Although there is some evidence that campaigns tend to post much of the same content to Facebook and Twitter (Bossetta, 2018), important differences in the architecture, functions, and audiences of these platforms may lead to different political outcomes. First, Twitter users tend to be younger, Democrat, more highly educated, and have higher incomes than the US population (Pew, 2019). Second, campaigns at times use these platforms differently. Facebook is by

far the largest social media platform and because of its broad audience, campaigns use it to speak to the general public and to target particular groups of interest through algorithmic filtering (Bossetta, 2018; Kreiss et al., 2018). Campaigns also tend to use Facebook to mobilize voters and promote daily activities (Stier, Bleier, Lietz, & Strohmaier, 2018). In contrast, campaigns often use Twitter to reach journalists and other elites, which allow them to better control the news cycle and drive conversations around high-profile events (Kreiss et al., 2018). Campaigns also prefer Twitter as a platform for politicians to comment on developing political events (Stier et al., 2018). Given the potential for differences to emerge, we ask the following research question:

> **RQ3**: Do the proposed relationships between following politicians on social media, emotional responses, and hostile media perceptions differ depending on platform?

Method

Sample

Data were collected in 2016 via a two-wave national online survey conducted in the US. The survey research company YouGov was contracted to conduct data collection. Our sample was drawn from YouGov's panel of adult respondents in the US using a matching technique to ensure the sample resembled the American population in terms of key demographics like age, gender, race, income, and education. Wave 1 was fielded in late September during the general campaign period of the presidential election. 6,213 individuals were invited to participate in W1; 1,800 provided valid responses (29% participation rate). Wave 2 was fielded in early November 2016 during the final six days before the election. Of the 1,800 participants in W1, 1,293 also completed W2 (71.83% retention rate). To assure respondents were paying attention and providing valid data, the questionnaire in W1 included an attention check. 366 participants failed the attention check in W1 and were subsequently disqualified from analyses in either wave. This resulted in a sample of 1,434 respondents in W1 and 1,056 in W2.

Although not representative, the resulting sample resembles the demographic characteristics of the adult American population based on a comparison to the US Census Bureau's 2015 American Community Survey (ACS). The median age in the sample was 51 (ACS median = 45 to 54 years old), the median household income was $50,000 to $59,000 (ACS median = $53,889), and the median level of education for those 25 and older was "some college" (ACS median = "some college"). The sample did differ slightly in terms of gender, as 56.82% of our respondents were women, compared to 51.4% in the ACS.

The primary criterion variable for this study is individuals' perceptions that the media are hostile toward their preferred presidential candidate. It was therefore

necessary to limit the analyses to respondents who, in the second wave, expressed a preference (measured by vote intention) for one of the two major party presidential candidates, Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. Of those respondents who passed the attention filter, 460 reported support for Clinton and 394 supported Trump, resulting in a final sample of 854. Descriptive statistics for the variables and all analyses are derived from this final sample.

Measures

Following Politicians on Social Media. Facebook and Twitter allow people to receive updates from politicians and their campaigns by following their official page or feed. The independent variable was measured using two items asking respondents how often they receive updates from a politician or political advocate they follow on (a) Facebook and (b) Twitter (6-point scale, 1 = "never", 2 = "once in the past 14 days", 3 = "2–3 days per week", 4 = "2–3 days per week in the past 14 days", 5 = "4–6 days per week in the past 14 days", 6 = "every day in the past 14 days"). Respondents who did not use social media were coded as having "never" followed a politician on social media. Respondents who used social media but did not use Facebook or Twitter in particular were also coded as "never" for the corresponding platform. Responses were combined into an averaged-item scale (W^1 M = 1.66, SD = 1.10, r = .39).

To address RQ3, we also separated the analyses by platform. Of the respondents in our final sample, 77.6% used Facebook, while 24.7% used Twitter. Mean levels of following a politician on each platform were as follows: Facebook (W^1 M = 1.83, SD = 1.56) and Twitter (W^1 M = 1.48, SD = 1.30).

Emotional Responses toward Presidential Candidates. Emotional responses to the candidates were measured with a series of questions that asked about Clinton and Trump separately. On a five-point scale (1 = "not at all" to 5 = "extremely") respondents reported their agreement with the statement(s), "Please tell us the extent to which you feel the following about [candidate]:" followed by seven discrete emotions presented in random order: hopeful, enthusiastic, proud, angry, mad, anxious, and afraid. Responses to the hopeful, enthusiastic, and proud items were combined into indices that represent enthusiasm for Clinton (W^2 M = 2.24, SD = 1.44, α = .97) and Trump (W^2 M = 2.22, SD = 1.51, α = .96). The angry and mad items were combined to create a scale tapping anger about Clinton (W^2 M = 2.75, SD = 1.69, r = .94) and Trump (W^2 M = 2.91, SD = 1.67, r = .93). Finally, the anxious and afraid items assessed anxiety about Clinton (W^2 M = 2.77, SD = 1.56, r = .77) and Trump (W^2 M = 3.04, SD = 1.56, α = .78). Feelings toward the supported and opposed candidates were assessed based on the intended vote choice question in W2 noted above. Items were then computed to reflect *enthusiasm for supported candidate* (W^2 M = 3.35, SD = 1.28), *anger about*

opposing candidate (W^2 *M* = 4.20, *SD* = 1.14), and *anxiety about opposing candidate* (W^2 *M* = 4.13, *SD* = 1.11).

Hostile Media Perceptions.   There is little consistency in the literature on how to operationalize hostile media perceptions, as studies often use different items to measure the concept. However, there is widespread agreement that at its core, the concept involves individuals' perceptions that media content is not neutral, balanced, or fair (Perloff, 2015). Our novel measure was therefore designed to capture beliefs about a lack of media neutrality and fairness toward the candidates. Given that both candidates claimed that mainstream, legacy media outlets were unfair toward their campaigns (Easley, 2016), we created an original measure to assess respondents' perceptions of unfair treat of candidates by the media. In W2, respondents were asked on a five-point scale (1 = "not at all" to 5 = "extremely") the extent to which they believed "the mainstream media try to unfairly influence the election against [candidate]." Participants were asked to report perceived media bias against both Clinton (*M* = 1.77, *SD* = 1.16) and Trump (*M* = 2.84, *SD* = 1.74). Next, the variable *hostile media perception* was created by determining which candidate the respondent supported based on their response to the candidate support question from W2 (W^2 *M* = 3.26, *SD* = 1.60). For respondents who reported electoral support for Clinton, their score for hostile media perceptions about Clinton was used for this variable. For respondents who reported electoral support for Trump, their score for hostile media perceptions about Trump was used.

Control Variables. The analyses include potentially confounding control variables. In addition to demographics, perceptions of the media are influenced in part by individuals' political characteristics and exposure to news content (Perloff, 2015). The models include a measure of *news media use*, measured as the average frequency of news consumption in the last seven days for national and local TV news, daily newspapers, cable news (CNN, FOX, or MSNBC), and online news (W^1 *M* = 2.71, *SD* = .98, α = .60; five-point scale, 1 = "never", 5 = "very often"). Political characteristics include *interest in politics* (single item "I am interested in politics", seven–point scale, strongly disagree to strongly agree, W^1 *M* = 5.26, *SD* = 1.68), *political affiliation* (W^1 *M* = 2.81, *SD* = .1.30; five-point scale, strong Democrat to strong Republican), and *political knowledge* (8-item averaged scale testing knowledge of candidates' stances on issues, W^1 *M* = 4.04, *SD* = 1.94). Models also included controls for *distrust in government* (two items, seven-point scale, strongly disagree to strongly agree, "People in the government waste a lot of the money we pay in taxes" and "Most politicians can be trusted" (reverse coded, W^1 *M* = 5.49, *SD* = 1.23, *r* = .27) and *political cynicism* ("Corruption is always present in American politics" and "No matter which party is in power, it seems like our government is run by a few big interest groups," seven-point scale, strongly disagree to strongly agree,

W^1 M = 5.68, SD = 1.08, r = .43). Finally, polls in 2016 indicated that Trump supporters were more likely to perceive media bias against their candidate than were Clinton supporters (Gallup, 2016). We therefore included a dichotomous variable for candidate support, wherein respondents who indicated support for Trump were coded high and Clinton supporters coded low.

Results

The main analyses used PROCESS (Hayes, 2013) and focused on a single mediation model that first examines whether following a politician on social media (W^1) related to enthusiasm about an individual's supported candidate, as well as their anger and anxiety toward the opposed candidate (W^2). The second part of the model subsequently tests whether those candidate-directed emotions related to perceptions of media bias (W^2).

H1 predicted that following a politician on social media (W^1) would have a positive, direct relationship with perceptions of media bias against the supported candidate (W^2). This hypothesis was not supported, as there was no direct link between the two variables, b = − .00 (.03), p = .94 (See Table 1). This suggests that any link between following a politician on social media and hostile media perceptions must be indirect.

H2 predicted that following a politician on social media in the first wave would be associated with more negative emotions about the opposed presidential candidate in the second wave. The data offer some support for this prediction. Data indicate a positive and significant relationship between following a politician on social media and anger directed at the opposed candidate, b = .08 (.04), p = .03, (all p-values two-tailed). However, this behavior was not correlated with anxiety toward the opposed candidate, b = .03 (.03), p = .43.

We also expected that following a politician on social media would be positively associated with enthusiasm about the supported candidate (H3). Results indicate that greater exposure to politicians' social media activity was positively related to enthusiasm about the candidate individuals support, b = .13 (.04), p < .001. This lends support to H3 and suggests that using social media may be an effective way for politicians to increase enthusiasm among their supporters.[1]

We next turn to the predictors of hostile media perceptions. The model accounts for 58% of the variance in perceptions of hostile media. Some control variables help explain these perceptions. For instance, the variable for Trump supporters was a significant predictor, and its coefficient suggests that all else equal, Trump supporters were 2.06 units (on a five-point scale) higher in perceptions of media hostility against their candidate than were Clinton supporters. Governmental cynicism was also a significant predictor of hostile media perceptions.

Next, enthusiasm about a supported candidate was related to higher levels of hostile media perceptions, supporting H4, b = .26 (.03), p < .001. There is also

Table 1
Predicting Emotional Responses to Candidates (W^2) and Hostile Media Perception (W^2)

	Enthusiasm About Supported Candidate (W^2)	Anger About Opposed Candidate (W^2)	Anxiety About Opposed Candidate (W^2)	Hostile Media Perception (W^2)
Follow Politician on Social Media (W^1)	.13 (.04)***	.08 (.04)*	.03 (.03)	−.00 (.03)
Enthusiasm About Supported Candidate (W^2)	—	—	—	.26 (.03)***
Anger About Opposed Candidate (W^2)	—	—	—	.11 (.04)*
Anxiety About Opposed Candidate (W^2)	—	—	—	−.03 (.04)
Trump Supporter	.65 (.13)***	.08 (.19)	−.17 (.11)	2.06 (.11)***
Age (W^1)	.01 (.00) ***	.00 (.00)	.01 (.00)*	−.00 (.00)
Gender (Women Coded High) (W^1)	.23 (.09)*	.03 (.08)	.18 (.08)*	.00 (.08)
Education (W^1)	−.06 (.03)*	.00 (.03)	.08 (.03)**	−.04 (.03)
News Media Use (W^1)	.06 (.05)	−.05 (.05)	−.09 (.04)*	.04 (.04)
Distrust in Government (W^1)	−.08 (.04)#	.11 (.04) **	.07 (.04)#	.07 (.04)#
Cynicism (W^1)	−.06 (.05)	.04 (.04)	.02 (.04)	.11 (.04)**
Political Interest (W^1)	.08 (.03)**	.10 (.04)***	.11 (.03)***	.02 (.03)
Party Affiliation (Rep. Coded High) (W^1)	−.13 (.05)**	−.01 (.04)	.06 (.04)	.01 (.04)
Political Knowledge (W^1)	.09 (.03)**	.04 (.03)#	.07 (.03)**	.00 (.03)
Constant	2.38 (.38)***	2.47 (.35)***	2.09 (.34)**	−.00 (.02)
R^2 (F)	.14 (11.98)	.07 (5.15)	.08 (6.46)	.58 (81.31)
(df)	(11, 813)	(11, 813)	(11, 813)	(14, 810)

Note. N = 825. Unstandardized coefficients reported. Standard errors in parentheses.
***$p < .001$, **$p < .01$, *$p < .05$ #$p < .10$ (two-tailed).

support for the predicted association between anger and perceptions of hostile media, as anger toward the opposed presidential candidate was linked to these perceptions (H5), $b = .11$ (.04), $p = .01$. The initial research question asked whether anxiety toward the opposed presidential candidate (RQ1) was related to hostile media perceptions. It was not ($b = - .03$ (.04), $p = .47$).[2]

The next hypotheses and research question examined the indirect relationship between following a politician on social media and hostile media perceptions through the three emotion variables. The model included the emotions as parallel mediators, and bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals were generated using 10,000 bootstrapping samples. Following a politician on social media is indirectly associated with hostile media perceptions through both enthusiasm (H6) for a supported candidate (point estimate = .03 (.01), 95% CI = .02 to .06) and anger (H7) directed at the opposed candidate (point estimate = .01 (.00), 95% CI = .00 to .02). While both of these mediated links are relatively small, they nonetheless highlight that following politicians on social media is indirectly linked to perceptions of media hostility. There was no indirect relationship through anxiety (RQ2) (see Table S1).[3]

The final analyses examined possible differences in the proposed relationships on two different platforms, Facebook and Twitter. Looking first at Facebook, the same results emerge as in the combined analyses. Following a politician on Facebook is not directly related to hostile media perceptions but is associated with both enthusiasm about the supported candidate and anger toward the opposed candidate (see Table S2 for coefficients). Enthusiasm and anger are subsequently related to hostile media perceptions. There remains an indirect link between following a politician on Facebook and hostile media perceptions through both enthusiasm and anger. As in the primary analyses, following a politician on Facebook does not drive anxiety, nor is anxiety related to hostile media perceptions.

When isolating the analyses to Twitter, the same pattern of relationships for enthusiasm is apparent. Following a politician on Twitter is related to greater enthusiasm for the supported candidate, which is then positively related to hostile media perceptions (see Table S3 for coefficients). The indirect link between following a politician on Twitter and hostile media perceptions through enthusiasm also remained. We find a slightly different pattern with anger. In particular, the link between following a politician on Twitter and anger toward the opposed candidate becomes non-significant, though anger is still associated with hostile media perceptions. The indirect link between using Twitter to follow politicians and hostile media perceptions through anger is also no longer significant. As in the primary analyses, anxiety is not associated with either our independent or dependent variable.

Discussion

While past research documents how hostile media perceptions stem from traditional media like newspapers and television, changes in the way people receive political information require scholars to also examine whether social media use contributes to this perceived bias and, if so, how (Perloff, 2015). To our knowledge, this study is the first investigation into whether using social media to follow political elites promotes hostile media perceptions. We find that attention to politicians' social feeds during the 2016 U.S. presidential election is indirectly related to perceptions of media bias through anger at the opposed presidential candidate and enthusiasm for the supported one. These findings have a number of theoretical implications for our understanding of how social media as platforms for political communication relate to hostile media effects more broadly.

While other studies have failed to find a relationship between general social media use and hostile media perceptions (Rojas et al., 2016), we find that people who actively choose to follow politicians on social media have stronger politically relevant emotional responses that subsequently promote perceptions of media hostility. Although it is possible for people to be incidentally exposed to politicians' social media feeds through general media use or media coverage of the feed, the data suggest that hostile media perceptions were indirectly associated with purposefully following politicians on social media. Directly following a politician on social media increases the likelihood that one is exposed to their posts, and the various persuasion cues and rhetoric politicians employ on their social media pages to discuss the media may facilitate perceptions of media hostility, in much the same way as in offline contexts (Watts et al., 1999). Politicians are increasingly using social media as a primary way to reach voters (Kreiss et al., 2018), taking advantage of the ability to bypass the media and speak directly with their followers, thereby creating a prominent platform to criticize the media and their opponents and to promote themselves (Enli, 2017).

This study also demonstrates two emotional pathways through which following a politician on social media indirectly relates to hostile media perceptions. We find that politicians may be able to use social media to generate enthusiasm about their own campaign while also stirring anger about their opponent. Our findings are consistent with prior work demonstrating that social media are important platforms for politicians' emotional appeals to voters (Borah, 2016; Heiss et al., 2018; Metz et al., 2019). This is significant because the experience of these emotions in our study was subsequently related to hostile media perceptions. Yet our work also suggests that not all emotions promote hostile media perceptions. While anger was related to perceptions of media bias, anxiety was not. Anger is often associated with more partisan bias, and our findings support work indicating that this bias extends to perceptions of media hostility (Arpan & Nabi, 2011). The experience of political anxiety is often associated with open-mindedness and consideration of opposing political arguments (MacKuen et al., 2010), which may be why no relationship

between anxiety and hostile media perceptions emerged. This also suggests that prior relationships between negatively-valenced affect and hostile media perceptions may be driven primarily by anger rather than anxiety (Matthes, 2013). Combining the two negative emotions in analyses may mask the more powerful effect of anger. Experimental work that manipulates emotions is needed to better tease out not only the causal effects of emotions but also the unique effects of similarly-valenced yet discrete emotions.

The positive influence of enthusiasm on hostile media perceptions found here is in contrast to prior work finding that positive emotions lowered hostile media perceptions (Matthes & Beyer, 2017). The difference in these findings may lie in the target of the measured emotions. Matthes and Beyer (2017) asked about positive emotions toward news coverage of illegal immigration, whereas the measure here was enthusiasm about a supported political candidate. In line with affective intelligence theory (Brader, 2005; MacKuen et al., 2010), experiencing enthusiasm about a liked candidate should drive partisan evaluations of media content, as we find. In other words, if an individual is very enthusiastic about their favored politician, they are more likely to think the media are treating that politician unfairly. This politician-driven enthusiasm is not the same as positive emotions experienced about news coverage of a particular issue—if one feels hopeful about news coverage, it is less likely that they will also see bias in that coverage.

It is important to note some limitations in the interpretation of the findings. Although we look at these processes over time using data from different waves, we do not argue that these relationships are causal. We only measured our dependent variable—hostile media perceptions— in the second wave, which prevents us from analyzing whether following politicians on social media and emotional responses over time also predict changes in perceptions of bias. It may also be that the causal arrow works in the opposite direction. We demonstrate cross-sectionally that those with hostile media perceptions exhibit stronger emotional responses that are associated with following politicians on social media (see note 3). This raises the possibility of a process in which following politicians, emotional responses, and hostile media perceptions reinforce one another over time. Future work utilizing experimental designs that assign individuals to follow certain political accounts or that manipulate the degree to which politicians criticize the media would be helpful in identifying causal effects. We also did not ask respondents which politicians they followed on social media. Although prior research suggests that people are twice as likely to follow supported candidates than opposed ones (Pew Research Center, 2016), we are not able to identify which accounts they followed. There is likely variation in the extent to which candidates criticize the media or make accusations of bias, so future research should track which accounts are followed, what content politicians post, and the effects of posts. Neither can our study account for exposure to politicians' social media feeds that occurs through social sharing or media coverage of the posts. The single-item measure of hostile media perceptions of mainstream media is also a limitation. Although this item captures core components of hostile media perceptions—mainly a departure from

media neutrality and fairness—respondents may have had different beliefs about what constitutes "mainstream" media or media more generally, which may have influenced the findings (Perloff, 2015). This is especially true given that people perceive "the media" in general to be biased, even as self-selected partisan media are not perceived that way (Barnidge et al., 2017).

It is also important to recognize that social media are not monolithic—each platform has its own affordances, audiences, and norms that may lead to different effects (Kreiss et al., 2018). We chose to combine Facebook and Twitter in our primary analyses because we were interested in the consequences of following politicians on social media, which both of these platforms allow. However, our post-hoc analyses suggest the findings were driven primarily by Facebook. While we do find subtle differences in the hypothesized relationships on Twitter, we are unable to make strong claims about the reason behind these differences. It may be that politicians use Twitter differently or that Twitter users respond differently to following politicians' posts. It may also be that the differences emerged as a result of the relatively small number of Twitter users in our sample. Testing these platform-specific relationships will require studies that examine samples of users of specific platforms. Likewise, our data were collected during one of the most emotionally-charged U.S. elections, in which one candidate (Trump) was highly critical of the news media. It is important for future research to test these mechanisms in other contexts, including in future presidential elections, in other non-presidential races, and in other countries.

Despite these limitations, this study illustrates one important way in which social media use can promote hostile media perceptions. As politicians' social media accounts become more central to political campaigns and sources of political information for citizens, it is necessary to better understand the consequences of this relatively new form of political communication. This study suggests that political campaigns can use these platforms to stir politically-relevant emotions, ultimately contributing to perceptions of media bias. This is particularly consequential at a time in which political parties are polarized and trust in media is low; those who distrust the media to begin with may turn to politicians' social media feeds as sources of information, thus furthering their perceptions of media bias. In an increasingly partisan political environment, it is important to know how hostile media perceptions emerge. This work identifies that an increasing reliance on politicians' social media feeds as sources of campaign information may contribute to divergent realities among partisans, particularly when it comes to perceptions of media bias.

Notes

1. Treating W2 emotions as mediating variables suggests emotions should have a more immediate relationship with hostile media perceptions. However, we also tested a model with W1 emotions as mediators. Results are consistent, as following politicians on social media is related to enthusiasm about the supported candidate ($b = .13$ (.04), $p < .001$) and anger at the opposed candidate ($b = .11$ (.04), $p = .002$). Unlike the original model,

following a politician on social media is related to anxiety about the opposed candidate ($b = .09$ (.03), $p < .01$), though anxiety is not related to hostile media perceptions. Like the original model, W1 enthusiasm toward the supported candidate is related to hostile media perceptions ($b = .20$ (.03), $p < .001$), as is anger at the opposed candidate, though the latter variable falls short of conventional standards of statistical significance if a two-tailed test is used ($b = .07$ (.04), $p = .06$).

2. Measuring emotions in both waves allows for models that include a lagged measure of emotion to predict changes in this variable over time. Controlling for W1 emotions, following politicians on social media is not significantly associated with W2 emotions, as most of the variance is explained by emotions in the previous wave. Enthusiasm toward the supported candidate in W2 remains significantly related to hostile media perceptions ($b = .34$ (.06), $p < .001$). Anger at the opposed candidate is also related to hostile media perceptions, though the coefficient here does not fall below conventional standards of statistical significance if a two-tailed test is used ($b = .10$ (.06), $p = .065$). Although the data do not provide evidence that following politicians on social media changes emotional responses toward candidates over time, there remains strong and consistent evidence that following politicians on social media is associated with enthusiasm toward the supported candidate and anger at the opposed candidate over the course of the election cycle.

3. We also tested the possibility of reverse causal order. Because hostile media perceptions were only measured in W2, we cannot use W1 perceptions to predict W2 social media following behavior or emotions. We therefore examine how hostile media perceptions predict emotional responses and following politicians on social media in W2 only. Individuals who perceive the media as hostile toward their candidate are more angry ($b = .18$ (.04), $p < .001$) and anxious ($b = .08$ (.03), $p = .02$) at the opposed candidate, and more enthusiastic about the supported candidate ($b = .34$ (.04), $p < .001$). Anger directed at the opposed candidate ($b = .10$ (.04), $p = .03$) and enthusiasm toward the supported candidate ($b = .10$ (.04), $p = .004$) are associated with following politicians on social media cross-sectionally in W2.

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Supplementary material

Supplemental data for this article can be accessed here.

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