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POLITICAL CONTENT AND POLITICAL BEHAVIOR: USING FUNCTIONAL THEORY TO TEST THE ABILITY OF POLITICAL CONTENT TO STIMULATE POLITICAL INTEREST

by

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DISSERTATION

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Study of Participation

The study of participation is crucial for understanding American democracy, as participation is at the heart of all democracies (Verba & Nie, 1972). Disagreement over the health of the American democracy exists: Some scholars have contended that meaningful democratic participation is on the decline (Brown, 2002; Freelon, 2010), placing American democracy in critical condition. Other scholars believe the situation is not so dire and that new communication technologies have created new media for acquiring political information and increasing enthusiasm, engagement, and eventually political participation (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010; Towner & Dulio, 2011). These technologies, according to the optimists, will revive the state of American democracy (Delli Carpini, 2000).

Two narratives have dominated scholarly debate about the role of communication and political participation (Bennett, Wells, & Freelon, 2011). One narrative consists of the expectation that new communication technology will stimulate participation among those who do not vote and engage with politics (Delli Carpini, 2000). The other narrative flows from the argument that passive television culture and declining group memberships have created a ''generational displacement'' from politics and public life that is unlikely to be ameliorated by new forms of online civic action (Bennett et al., 2011). These pessimists have predicted that new communication technologies will occupy voters' limited time and harm participation rates (Putnam, 2000).

The use of a narrative with only dichotomous options has proven problematic. As Wright (2012) argued, the perceived binary relationship harms research and hurts political communication scholarship.

> The schism between the revolution and normalization "schools" has negatively influenced subsequent empirical analyses of political conversation online (and of e-

democracy studies more generally). It will argue, first, that many scholars have failed to consider the nature of revolutionary change in any detail, tending to frame and interpret their research findings with the very technologically determinist accounts of revolutionary change of which they are so critical: the either/or dichotomization of revolution/normalization is false. A more nuanced understanding of 'revolution' and "normalization" is required, one that places it in the context of a broader range of potential impacts, if we are to fairly assess how new media impact politics, and deliberation in particular. (p. 245)

In response to this perceived deficiency in scholarship, a third camp of scholars has emerged. This group has contended the relationship between new communication technologies and participation probability exists in the gray area between the optimists and pessimists (Wright, 2012). These scholars have begun to formulate support for the normalization narrative, in which new communication technologies become just another tool to reinforce the political interest of people who are already engaged (Bimber, 2001; Boulianne, 2009; Nisbet & Scheufele, 2004). Disagreement exists among political communication researchers over which of these narratives most aptly describes the relationship between technology and participation. Optimists have argued that the introduction of technology can alter the availability of democratic spaces, which could allow individuals to overcome traditional socioeconomic barriers to participation (Marien, Hooghe, & Quintelier, 2010). Pessimists will point to the new barriers, such as availability of Internet access, which limit political engagement in marginalized communities (Kenski & Stroud, 2006; Marien et al., 2010). Normalists will point to no significant change between content consumption and political behaviors (Rojas & Puig-i-Abril, 2009). Research therefore must move beyond simplified narratives to a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between individual facets of communication technology and civic engagement (Boulianne, 2009).

This project is intended to address those concerns by looking at political discourse in interactive new communication environments. Political communication scholars have traditionally examined presidential elections and big events, such as the Arab Spring. Enli and

Moe (2013) called for political communication research to move beyond headlines and to look at the local races that make up the bulk of the political process. This dissertation study was aimed at filling in the gaps in knowledge of nonpresidential-related political communication research, focusing on nonpresidential elections. The goal in this research was to move beyond the big events to examine political content on the nonpresidential statewide race level in order to differentiate between the narratives of the optimists, pessimists, and normalists.

Researchers who have investigated political content have developed many theories and employed different research methods. This study used political information efficacy (PIE) and functional theory of campaign discourse to guide the selection of stimuli and to conduct a laboratory experiment to test the effects of exposure to online political advertising on individuals' confidence in the political knowledge they possessed.

This project also focused on differentiating the effects of political advertising on those who were politically engaged and those who were unengaged. The results provide information on participants' new media use habits to gain further insight into how those user habits affect political engagement. Experimental methods have not been employed to test the effectiveness of different political advertisements coded to functional theory of campaign discourse (Boulianne, 2009). The study's specific focus is younger voters who use social media. Through this new combination of theory and method, this dissertation was intended to add clarity to understanding the relationship between new communication technologies and political engagement.

To understand the state of American democracy, a deeper look at the evidence of its health comprised a good starting point. Conflicting empirical evidence was found when investigating the state of American democracy. The percentage of eligible Americans who

vote has decreased since reaching a 20th-century high of 62.8% in 1960 (McDonald, 2013). While more Americans, in absolute numbers, voted in 2008, only 62.2% of eligible voters actually voted, which pales in comparison to the all-time high of 81.8% in 1876 (McDonald, 2013). The 2008 election might have been an aberration—the 2012 election produced a 58.7% voter turnout, continuing the recent downward trend in American engagement (McDonald, 2013). The turnout rate for v oters younger than 30 was similar to 2008, with 50% of 18- to 29-year-olds voting in 2012. Their percentage of overall turnout increase to comprise 19% of all voters (Pillsbury & Johannesen, 2012).

Election turnout declined between 2008 and 2012, but other options to engage in political action have emerged. People make more of an effort to contact politicians than at any time in the past (Dalton, 2006). Putnam (2000) replicated four questions from Verba and Nie (1972) and Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995), covering general political interest, attending a rally, working in the community, and protest participation. Putnam (2000) did not find any statistically significant differences between the 1972 and 2000 results. Despite this, Putnam (2000) contended that political engagement decreased due to television and other factors of modern life, such as the rise of women in the workplace, mobility to the suburbs, and decline of social organizations. This debate is difficult to resolve. Comprehensive high-quality longitudinal data on the voting patterns of Americans are available, whereas similar data on participation beyond voting are difficult to obtain (Dalton, 2008). The lack of causal research relating new communication technologies and political participation clouds the debate on the health of American democracy. Political communication scholars continue to disagree over the relationship between participation and the rise of new communication technologies (Boulianne, 2009).

Political participation and communication are closely related. Analyzing political communication and its effects on voters requires understanding the information in the messages that citizens use to make informed choices. One of the most important choices an individual can make is casting his or her vote for elected office. In preparing to make that choice, individuals often consume political advertisements. Increasingly, this consumption has moved to the online world of on-demand, "anytime anywhere" media. Individuals' changing habits regarding how they consume political content brings into prominence the theories of selective exposure and polarization and their role in American democracy. These theories are not new, harkening back to a time before the advent of the Internet.

The study of selective exposure theory extends back to the foundational studies of public opinion research (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009). The study of polarization is not quite as historic, but goes back about 25 years and encompasses the return of partisan news sources (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008). The theoretical study of polarization focuses on the intensification of partisan attitudes and partisan media (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009). These two theories have different origins, but both require consideration in the new media environment of 2014. Evidence continues to indicate consumers are selectively consuming polarized news content in greater numbers than ever before (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008). This dissertation will provide further analysis into these two theories in the context of interactive political content consumption.

Media and Democracy

Understanding the history of media effects is important for understanding the media's relationship with democracy. Prior to the inception of mass communication, discourse often took place in public spaces. The historical intent of these public spaces was to function as the town hall, a place where speech relevant to civic life could take place (Bowers, 2004). The next stage

in the evolution of public space was the rise of mass media as a factor in the decision-making process. In the 1940s and 1950s, the mass media began to play a role in the political communication process, but other factors, such as civic groups, remained significant in the decision-making process (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008). In the early mass communication era, influences from memberships in a group-based society— such as political parties, churches, unions, and service organizations— had a greater influence on the political decision-making process than did the mass media (Putnam, 2000). This concept developed into the theory of social capital.

Putnam, in *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community,* first popularized the definition of social capital (Lee & Lee, 2010). However, Putnam was not the first to introduce the concept. Coleman (1988) conceptualized the term, paralleling other concepts of capital, such as financial, physical, and human. Social capital, though, concerns societal relations among individuals. Putnam added further theoretical development to Coleman's initial construction. Putnam (2000) defined social capital as two different types: bonding and bridging. Bonding social capital is associated with homogenous groups, which include strong ties between members of ethnic, religious, or ideological groups (Putnam, 2000). The drawback is insularity and shunning of out-groups and their diverse opinions (Putnam, 2000).

People with bonding social capital have little diversity in their backgrounds, but have stronger personal connections. Deep family connections do not build trust with other community members. The groups of early political influence practiced bridging social capital, which was built across lines of difference, such as gender, race, and ethnicity. Social capital occurs in social organizations such as unions and community organizations, which bring people of different backgrounds together and influence political choice and participation (Putnam,

2000). High levels of social capital are associated with high levels of civic health (Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins, & Delli Carpini, 2006). In the era of powerful union influence, politicians interacted with community and party leaders in an effort to generate support (Tolbert & McNeal, 2003).

In the 1980s and 1990s, the media began to play a more significant role in influencing political attitudes than did memberships in group-based organizations (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008). This switch established mass media as the dominant political space for many individuals (Bowers, 2004). The rapid disassociation of individuals from group-based civil society and the rise in media saturation through the growth of new mass media channels could account for the increase in media influence in the 1980s and 1990s (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008). Researchers have revealed that the media told people what to think about (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) and how to think about it (Entman, 1991). Politicians looking to connect with voters embraced this rapid change in media effects and turned to mass media to exchange information. The mass media became the preferred medium for politicians to disseminate information and for individuals to consume information in the 1980s (Freelon, 2010). In this era, politicians turned away from leaders and used the mass media to communicate directly with individuals in their homes (Tolbert & McNeal, 2003).

The emergence of new communication technologies seems to have changed the world of media effects again. As voters exercise greater choice over both the content and source of their political information, effects become increasingly difficult to produce or measure in the aggregate, while creating new challenges for theory and research (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008). New communication technologies, such as social media, have customized, personalized, and mobilized media consumption for many individuals, especially among 18- to 34-year-olds, with

over 58% of that demographic carrying smart phones (Nielsen, 2011). In order for a commercial to reach 80% of the country in 2008, the commercial would have had to have aired on 100 networks, whereas 30 years ago, it would have had to have aired on only three networks (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008). The number of networks needed in 2014 is no doubt even greater. The fragmentation of media alters the study of communication, and these structural issues must be accounted for in the study of political communication in the social media era.

Empirical research on political participation and the entirety of the Internet has produced mixed results (Tolbert & McNeal, 2003). Pfau, Houston, and Semmler (2005) found increased use of the Internet did not correlate with increased levels of political participation. On the other hand, Tolbert and McNeal (2003) found that Internet news consumption had a positive influence on the likelihood of political participation. The Internet is at least as effective as face- to-face deliberation for motivating voting behavior (Hooghe, Vissers, Stolle, & Mahéo, 2010). Pasek, More, and Romer (2009) concluded that those who frequently use the Internet for information consumption are more likely to engage in civic activities than those who do not use it often. The varying results of the study of the Internet as a whole provide clues, but no clear models, to explore the relationship between online activity and offline political actions.

Research has indicated the potential of social media to change the way individuals communicate about politics (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010. Social and political modernization of the United States has substantially altered democratic citizenship norms and made online involvement a standard tool used for participation (Dalton, 2008). This study focused on new methods of participation in the hope of improving the understanding of the effects of new communication technologies on American democracy. The generation most affected by new communication technology is that of the millennials, those 15- to 34-year-old digital natives, who

grew up with the Internet and are comfortable with new communication technologies such as social media.

Younger Voters

While the effects of social media use offers potential to influence all voters, it holds the greatest potential when it comes to young voters (Tedesco, 2011). Researchers studying youth political activity have tried to find connections between participation and changing factors of society. Younger citizens are less likely to participate in formal institutionalized activities, such as voting, than are their older counterparts (Putnam, 2000). Television and Internet use have been blamed for the decreasing levels of engagement of younger voters (Putnam, 2000). Kaid, McKinney, and Tedesco (2007), noted a feature of the younger generation: "Low levels of electoral participation may be conjoined with another distressing characteristic of young citizens: their sometimes shockingly low levels of political knowledge and information" (p.1094). Putnam's (2000) forecast was gloomy: "Well-established life cycle patterns give little reason to expect that the youngest generation ever will come to match their grandparents' levels of civic engagement" (p. 254).

Other scholars have placed themselves in the optimistic camp, offering hope that new communication technologies can stimulate interest in politics and encourage political engagement. In a meta-analysis of Internet use and engagement, Boulianne (2009) found that the effects of Internet use on political engagement may be changing over time. Dalton (2009) argued that young voters participate in many more ways than Putnam (2000) acknowledged. Gil de Zúñiga, Veenstra, Vraga, and Shah (2010) , in disagreeing with Putnam (2000), stated, "The ease of use of the Internet, as well as its potential anonymity, may allow those disengaged from conventional politics to begin to close this gap and allow for a more democratically equal

society" (p. 46). Indeed, due to the changing education and social landscape, youth are empowered and engaged with each other more than ever before (Dalton, 2009).

Further youth-focused online studies would help scholars to understand how closely youth political communication resembles adult political communication (Freelon, 2010). There is little question that by conventional measures, young adults are more disengaged from politics than are their older counterparts (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010). Youth are less likely to participate in politics in conventional measures, such as voting, contributing money, volunteering time, or showing up to a protest rally, than are older Americans (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010). The media habits of youth are also different from those of older citizens, with a preference for digital content, as opposed to newspapers, radio, or television news (Bachmann, Kaufhold, Lewis, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2010). Due partially to the rapid evolution of the Internet, it has been difficult to assess the way in which youth use social networks to engage in politics (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010). This dissertation study focused on different facets of youth political communication to further the understanding of the relationship between new communication technologies and political participation.

Technology and Democracy Narratives

Scholars have worried about the negative effects produced by new communication technology. Social media is a highly individualistic medium, of which users can choose to consume only agreeable content (Garrett, 2009a). The very nature of the Internet and social media encourage the construction of narrowly focused communities of like-minded individuals (Bowers, 2004). These narrowly focused communities could result in homogeneous thought and stifle debate, thereby negatively affecting civic engagement (Baek, Wojcieszak, & Delli Carpini, 2012).

Pessimists of communication technology have expected these facts to have a harmful effect on political engagement.

Research has contradicted the skeptics, with communication technology having, at worst, a neutral relationship or, at best, a positive relationship with political engagement (Boulianne, 2011). Optimists believe communication technology will be part of the solution to reverse declining rates of democratic participation (Bowers, 2004). Optimists see hope in communication technologies, as these technologies facilitate the way voters gather information, discuss politics, and perform other foundational elements of citizenship (Dalton, 2009).

New media consumption is a different experience than traditional media consumption. Online consumption requires continued attention, clicking, scrolling, and searching (Boulianne, 2011). Consumption of digital media has been demonstrated to have a stimulatory effect on voting habits of younger individuals (Bachmann et al., 2010). The media landscape of the 21st century represents an important transformational era of political communication, where consumers have a broader range of information available (Dylko & McCluskey, 2012).The interactivity, mobility, and ability to create communities offered by current media technologies have been thought to hold the potential to stimulate participation (Bowers, 2004). Gatekeepers are not filtering out the opinions presented in user-generated content (Dylko & McCluskey, 2012). The optimists hope that, especially among traditionally underrepresented groups such as young and minority voters, new communication technologies can encourage participation (Dalton, 2006). The rise in user-generated content marks a historical shift in the role of individuals in societal political participation (Dylko & McCluskey, 2012).

On the other hand, some scholars believe the new communication technology will serve as just another medium for the politically interested to engage with each other. These scholars expect

the Internet to become normalized into society and that its use will be confined to those who are already engaged (Zukin et al., 2006). Researchers have found that White, educated, older males are the most frequent contributors to online political discourse, the same demographic that consistently votes (Baek et al., 2012).

This study had a specific focus on youth voters, or digital natives—those individuals who have grown up with the Internet as an integral aspect of their life. The rise of mobile communication technologies has enabled digital natives to stay connected no matter where they go. Many pessimists have argued the current generation of digital natives is distracted, and their low participation rate is harming the American democracy (Putnam, 2000). This study was designed to test the effects of new communication technology use on digital natives' levels of political confidence. This study used political information efficacy (PIE) as the theory to explain if digital natives vote. According to PIE theory, the higher level of confidence youth have in their political knowledge, the higher the likelihood they will vote (Kaid et al., 2007). Political confidence has been identified as the key component in whether individuals exercise their right to vote (Tedesco, 2011). By showing digital natives different types of political content using different levels of interactivity and gathering their confidence after each exposure, this research was designed to illuminate the relationship between digital natives' media exposure and political participation. In this study, I investigated the three narratives, which describe the relationship between new communication technologies and political participation. I research additional constructs, as part of an examination of the relationship between new communication technologies and political engagement.

Dissertation Outline

This dissertation is organized as follows: Chapter 1 introduces the study, addresses the current debate about political communication, and delineates the significance of the research. Chapter 2 focuses on the political side of political communication, including the literature surrounding the concepts of citizenship and participation. In this chapter, the narratives surrounding the collision between technology and political engagement are explored. The chapter concludes with an examination of the variables connecting political communication and political engagement.

Chapter 3 details the theoretical foundation of media effects and the communication side of the study of political communication. The theoretical foundation of social media study and the functional theory of campaign discourse are reviewed, as well as previous studies that centered on political communication in the examination of social media. Chapter 3 concludes with hypotheses and research questions derived from the literature. Chapter 4 outlines the methodology guiding the study, including the procedure, sample, unit of analysis, stimuli, statistical analyses, and reliability used in this study. Chapter 5 focuses on the characteristics of the participants, presents the results for the hypotheses and research question, and provides results of hypotheses and research questions developed post hoc. Chapter 6 presents a discussion of the results and their fit into the literature. The chapter also outlines the study's limitations and presents suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2: POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

Although many elements of political communication and political participation overlap, they are fundamentally different concepts. Informed participation is impossible without communication, but communication is possible without participation, according to some views (McKinney & Chattopadhyay, 2007). In this chapter, the literature covering those components of political communication studies, as well as the concepts that underlie political communication and democratic participation, is analyzed. Many political communication scholars have studied the effects of the Internet on civic engagement, political efficacy, and political campaigns (Kaid, McKinney, & Tedesco, 2009). In this chapter, those constructs are reviewed and political information efficacy, which has been developed as a theory to describe youth voting behavior (Tedesco, 2011) is considered. The literature review begins with the concept of political participation.

Political Participation

Political participation is broadly considered essential for a healthy democracy (Verba et al., 1995). The primary conduit for political information is media, both traditional and new (Taneja, Webster, Malthouse, & Ksiazek, 2012). Not surprisingly, political communication scholars have been analyzing the relationship between participation and media for over 50 years (Hoffman, 2011). In the history of the discipline, scholars have examined, identified, and defined media effects, as well as refined measurement and operationalized key constructs in the political communication field. The deficiency identified in much of this research on political communication and political participation was that researchers had not consistently defined these two activities, especially when it came to studies of new communication technologies (Hoffman, 2011). Most scholars have focused on discussing communication and participation and the media

effects on these concepts (Xenos & Moy, 2007), but have not precisely distinguished between the two activities in an era of new media (Hoffman, 2011).

This disagreement or failure to distinguish between the two concepts was revealed in the research concerning the effects of Internet use on political participation, which resulted in little consensus from the academic community (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010). Research has yielded positive and negative correlations between the two, and disagreement regarding the effects of the Internet on political engagement continues (Boulianne, 2009). One reason researchers have offered conflicting results is the variety of definitions used to describe political participation (Hoffman, 2011). The classic political communication researchers, such as Verba et al. (1995), helped establish the fact that attitudes toward political participation are related to actual behavior, and that scholars need to study political communication because of this potential influence on attitudes (Gastil & Xenos, 2010). Verba et al. (1995defined political participation as any "activity that is intended to or has the consequence of affecting, either directly or indirectly, government action" (p. 9). Conway (2000, p. 3) developed a similar definition: "those activities of citizens that attempt to influence the structure of government, the selection of government officials, or the policies of government." These definitions imply that participation is active and intended to influence.

The Verba et al. (1995) definition of political participation accounts only for explicitly information-rich statements or preferences sent directly to policymakers. The diffusion of communication channels in the current media era does not allow the easy application of this definition (Hoffman, 2011). On the other hand, Conway (2000) provided a definition for "passive" forms of political participation, such as consuming political media. According to the

Verba et al. (1995) definition, this may not be participation, but may be better defined as communication.

Political communication allows voters to communicate with each other and the government; constituents who partake in political participation have a clear intention to influence government action (Hoffman, 2011). Given that participation is, by definition, an active behavior with intent to influence government or public officials, how do new forms of online behaviors fit the traditional definition? One important aspect of participation outlined by Verba et al. (1995) is that participatory activities are inherently "information-rich acts." Verba et al. (1995, p. 221) defined information-rich acts as "those in which an explicit message can be sent to policymakers." However, messages not meant for policymakers can also constitute democratic participation. Denton Jr. and Kuypers (2007) further specified that political communication is a "public discussion" about revenues, sanctions, and social meaning that can occur in intrapersonal, interpersonal, small group, and mass communication processes. Political communication is not a new development; rather, such contact between a government and its citizens has existed for centuries. In other words, it has developed into a system involving multiple actors instead of just a direct link between citizens and their government (Hoffman, 2011).

Similar to the lack of differentiation between political communication and political participation is the lack of differentiation between the types of participation in which individuals are engaging. The literature regarding political communication has a rich history of empirical measures of engagement, but lacks depth. Political communication studies should account for the difference between two types of participation: institutionalized and noninstitutionalized. Institutionalized forms of participation include voting, joining a political party, participating in political action groups, and attending organized political rallies (Marien et al., 2010; Mwesige,

2009). Noninstitutionalized forms of political engagement consist of alternate ways of civic engagement, such as volunteering, engaging in deliberative discourse, and participating in other community activities (Marien et al., 2010; Mberia & Ndavula, 2012).

The study of institutional participation has a rich history, due to the vast amounts of empirical information available (Dalton, 2008). On the other hand, noninstitutionalized participation does not have a significant body of research in the social science tradition. Noninstitutionalized forms of engagement historically have not been analyzed due to the difficulty in quantifying variables such as participation (Dalton, 2008). Institutionalized forms of participation are deteriorating in America as voting rates, party membership, and other measures of participation are on the decline (McNair et al., 2002). However, Marien et al. (2010) contended that noninstitutionalized forms are on the rise in liberal democracies and need to be reviewed in any analysis of democratic participation.

Most empirical studies on political participation have tended to focus on institutionalized forms of participation (Mwesige, 2009). In spite of this, focusing on institutionalized participation alone does not provide a full picture of democratic participation. The potential for democracy does not end at the voting booth; opinions must be formed somewhere. Democratic participation is often overlooked in the workplace and everyday life (Brown, 2002). It is in the day-to-day world of work, entertainment, conversing with neighbors, and ordinary conversations that political attitudes and collective judgments are formed (Brown, 2002; Mwesige, 2009). Democracy is not simply about the freedom to vote; it is about making informed choices (Mwesige, 2009).

The evolution of new communication technologies has stretched the traditional boundaries between political communication and participation, as well as between noninstitutionalized and institutionalized participation. These new technologies have blurred the lines that historically

separated these conceptually different actions. The conceptualization of the dimensions of online political participation needs further exploration (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2010). To further advance the field, a definition that accounts for both types of participation must be established. Hoffman (2011) updated the definition of online participation first developed by Verba et al. (1995) to read, "an information-rich activity that utilizes new media technology and is intended to affect, either directly or indirectly, policy-makers, candidates, or public officials" (p. 220). Given the conflicting evidence of the collision of surrounding communication technology and political participation, this might suggest that, if scholars were to differentiate consistently between online participation and communication, less conflict might be seen among the various findings (Hoffman, 2011).

This study used active information-rich online political communication media to test the effect these have on individuals and their intent to engage with public officials and their community in both noninstitutionalized and institutionalized capacities. In this study, institutionalized participation in the form of voting and voting-related behaviors was examined. Noninstitutionalized effects were examined by investigating the individual's potential to discuss politics, interact with political content, take action within his or her community, and establish norms of 21st-century citizenship. Noninstitutionalized participation has changed in its norms over the years. Understanding this evolution of the concept of citizenship and how American citizens are expected to engage is a crucial step to understanding the relationship between new communication technologies and participation.

Citizenship

In this study, the narratives of the technology and American democracy were examined in the context of the changing norms of citizenship, with a focus on digital natives. While the term millennials is used to describe the generation that has grown up in the 21st century, digital natives

is a more appropriate term for this generation. Digital natives, born after 1980, have grown up with networked technology and have access and knowledge to use the technology (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008).

Among digital natives, the norms of citizenship have changed over the last 20 years (Dalton, 2009). The optimistic and pessimistic narratives have dominated the debate over the relationship between new communication technologies and political participation of digital natives (Bennett et al., 2011), most of the studies analyzing these narratives have failed to account for the changing norms of citizenship. Without accounting for these changes, many previous researchers have concluded that participation among youth is on the decline (Utz, 2009). This study accounted for these differences in citizenship norms, in that long-term conclusions about the status of American citizenship could be drawn (Dalton, 2009).

Another notable facet of digital natives' behavior is the blending of their offline and online lives. Most major activities in their lives, social interactions, friendships, and civic activities are mediated through communication technologies (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008). With a lifetime of using technology to conduct their lives, digital natives do not differentiate between online and offline interactions, which causes difficulties when applying traditional norms of citizenship (Bennett et al., 2011).

The difficulty of interpreting what it means to be a citizen and how one can engage politically may account for the current controversies over what counts as youth political engagement (Bennett et al., 2011). Political communication researchers have often failed to account for the difference between participation and communication, and the same is true of citizenship. Bennett et al. (2011) argued that the same refinement of citizenship is necessary to move the field forward, stating, "without a more systematic model of how different conceptions of

citizenship and engagement become coded into civic communication technologies, it will remain difficult to make rigorous comparisons and interpret differences across the spectrum of online communities" (p. 838). Dalton (2008) contended that there are two variations of citizenship: (a) duty-based citizenship, which focuses solely on voting; and (b) engaged citizenship, which focuses on other norms of participation in society, such as obeying laws, supporting fellow citizens, and forming independent opinions. The pessimists who feel new communication technologies are harming American democracy have pointed to the decreasing number of citizens who participate in their duty-based activities. Dalton (2006) concluded those pessimists were not accounting for the change in citizenship norms. Younger citizens are finding new ways to participate in political action. They are becoming engaged citizens, and empirical evidence is needed to understand how they are engaging in noninstitutionalized activities. The new repertoire of communication technology allows individuals to participate in activities that matter to them. Individuals can use communication tools to contact their representatives or to participate in protests and boycotts, either online or in person, as the option to participate in activities they find rewarding are available to all (Dalton, 2009).

Younger citizens have shown a preference for engaged citizenship, whereas older Americans prefer duty-based citizenship (Dalton, 2009; McLeod & Shah, 2009). In specifically focusing on younger voters, Lariscy, Tinkham, and Sweetser (2011) found that 18- to 38-year-olds view political participation differently than do previous generations; for this group, more solitary activities, such as searching for political information or reading blog content, constitute political participation. Bennett et al. (2011) also argued for a new type of citizenship among youth, which he called "actualizing" citizenship (p. 839). While the elements of this definition vary from the definition of engagement-based citizenship, the two definitions share

foundational principles. Both types of citizens prefer effective action in referendums and direct action to traditional measures of participation (Dalton, 2008).

Actualizing citizenship marks a generational shift from authority power structures, toward a personal decision-making influence by peer networks and the use of these networks to engage civically (Bennett et al., 2011). Dalton (2008) offered a similar view of the change in citizen norms, stating:

> Rising levels of education, changing generational experiences and other social forces are decreasing respect for authority and traditional forms of allegiance as represented in duty- based citizenship. Simultaneously, these same forces are increasing self-expressive values as well as the ability and desire to participate more directly in the decisions affecting one's life. (p. 81-82)

The shifts in the norms of young citizens should be reflected in measures of citizenship. The generational shifts of values are central constructs seldom found in the literature examining digital natives and political participation.

Simply analyzing voter turnout provides inconclusive evidence regarding the collision of technology and democracy. A lack of high-quality empirical evidence accounting for the transformation of citizenship norms prevents researchers from drawing conclusions about the relationship between communication technology and democratic participation (Dalton, 2008). With all the conflicting evidence and conflicting narratives, both forms of citizenship need empirical analysis. Thus, for this study, citizenship norms provided a framework for understanding how and why the patterns of political participation may be changing. The new type of citizenship places citizens in a position to exert greater influence over political activity. Understanding the citizenship norms of digital natives would offer a key understanding of their rates of political participation.

While the changing norms of citizenship may be changing to account for participation levels of youth, that alone does not explain the relationship between youth participation and

technology (Dalton, 2008). Kaid et al. (2007) developed a theory to explain this relationship by analyzing confidence as the key connection between youth and political participation.

Political Information Efficacy

Self-efficacy is a foundational concept that plays a large role in the link between behavior and attitude (Gastil & Xenos, 2010; Kenski & Stroud, 2006). Political participation depends on one's confidence in one's knowledge (Kenski & Stroud, 2006). In order to understand the behavior of participation, understanding young citizens' democratic attitudes is crucial (McKinney & Chattopadhyay, 2007). Gastil and Xenos (2010) stated:

> In addition to complementing political efficacy with civic attitudes, we look beyond voting and more traditional conceptions of political participation to consider a broader set of civic counterparts. As communication scholars, we have particular interest in looking at the wider range of ways in which we communicate in politics and community life. (p. 324)

The need for a theory modeling concepts beyond political participation that account for self-efficacy among digital natives was established.

The development of a theory resulted from focus group research consisting of young voters, who indicated two necessary elements in the decision to vote: information and confidence in one's knowledge (Tedesco, 2011). The concepts were developed into the construct of the theory of political information efficacy (PIE), which "focuses solely on the voter's confidence in his or her own political knowledge and its sufficiency to engage the political process (to vote)" (Kaid et al., 2007, p. 1096). PIE was developed with a goal to study perceptions of youth voters, who cite the lack of information about candidates and political issues as the single most important reason for not voting (Tedesco, 2007).

Whereas traditional political efficacy has been defined as an individual's feeling that he or she has the ability to influence the political process, the concept of PIE is an internally-based measure that starts with the political knowledge individuals possess (McKinney &

Chattopadhyay, 2007). The development of PIE stems from a decade of research on youth voting behavior (McKinney & Chattopadhyay, 2007). Focus groups that led to the development of PIE were conducted throughout the United States. The focus groups performed during the 1996, 2000, and 2004 presidential elections provided explanations about what facts lead digital natives to vote (McKinney & Chattopadhyay, 2007).

The development of the internal measure of confidence provided evidence of a significant construct explaining the participation of digital natives. The most prominent explanation by nonvoting young citizens was that they lacked the knowledge necessary in order to feel confident to exercise their right to vote (Tedesco, 2011). PIE, as defined by Tedesco (2011), has been operationalized through a four-question index. Participants were asked to state their level of agreement on a five-point Likert scale in response to the following questions: (a) "I consider myself well-qualified to participate in politics"; (b) "I think that I am better informed about politics and government than most people"; (c) "I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country"; and (d) "If a friend asked me about the presidential election, I feel I would have enough information to help my friend figure out who to vote for" (Tedesco, 2011).

Researchers who examined self-efficacy have often treated it as a fixed, given precondition and ignored the possibility it could be increased (Beaumont, 2011). Other researchers have treated it as a malleable feeling and analyzed the ability of information to increase levels of self-confidence. Chaffee (1978) found that consumption of presidential debates has a positive correlation with voter turnout. Pfau et al. (2005) found that viewings of election debate promoted positive outcomes and increased self-confidence. Other researchers have

found that self-confidence and PIE increased when young citizens were exposed to political information (McKinney & Chattopadhyay, 2007).

Kaid et al. (2007) found a correlation between the likelihood people would vote and their confidence in their political knowledge. Other scholars have also found that PIE was a significant predictor of institutionalized political participation (McKinney & Rill, 2009; Towner & Dulio, 2011). Kaid et al. (2007) found that younger voters were much less confident in their levels of political knowledge than were their older counterparts. If young voters do not have confidence in their political knowledge, they are less likely to vote. How a young voter processes information and perceives his or her PIE is an important variable in understanding the likelihood someone will vote (Kaid et al., 2007).

PIE has been used in the study of advertisements and new communication technologies (Tedesco, 2011). Many of these studies are limited to presidential elections. These studies resulted from a single presidential election, and even though these studies demonstrated a positive relationship from exposure to political information and an increase in confidence, further analysis is necessary to study PIE across a multitude of situations (Tedesco, 2011). The emergence of PIE provides another construct to explain the relationship between new media technology and political participation.

Narratives of Participation and Technology

The relationship between communication technology and participation has divided scholars. Some scholars have expressed optimism that the Internet could offer citizens new political uses and rewards, primarily because of the Internet's structural opportunities, such as inherent interactivity; generally low cost; freedom from boundaries; high speed; and lateral, horizontal, and nonhierarchical modes of communication that could enhance democracy

(Zukin et al., 2006). Other scholars have been skeptical of the Internet's ability to reinvigorate civic engagement, expressing the belief that the Internet would have little effect on politics or support (Kaid et al., 2009). The third narrative has coalesced around a normalization structure, which is based on an assumption that those who are already engaged in political expression use technology to expand the space available to them to express their political opinions (Bimber, 2001).

In an effort to resolve this debate, two approaches have been used to examine how citizens use media for political participation (Pfau et al., 2005). One approach is the macro- level approach, looking at media in their entirety. The macro approach to the study of communication and participation began with looking at television as a whole. Researchers have found that increased television consumption is associated with reduced levels of political participation (Putnam, 2000). However, television alone is not to blame for a reduction in political participation. The increase in two-career families and a transition to a suburban lifestyle have affected levels of citizen engagement (Putnam, 2000). The transition to two-career families has occurred over the last 30 years as millions of American women have moved out of the home into paid employment (Putnam, 1995). The effects of this shift in the American way of life have had a profound effect on social capital building organizations. Social capital building organizations bring people together across lines of differences and build social capital, which encourages political participation. Putnam (1995) offers one explanation of the societal change.

> The sharpest decline in women's civic participation seems to have come in the 1970s; membership in such "women's" organizations (PTA, the League of Women Voters, the Federation of Women's Clubs, and the Red Cross) as these has been virtually halved since the late 1960s. By contrast, most of the decline in participation in men's organizations occurred about ten years later; the total decline to date has been approximately 25 percent for the typical organization. On the other hand, the survey data imply that the aggregate declines for men are virtually as great as those for women. It is logically possible, of course, that the male declines might represent the knock-on effect

of women's liberation, as dishwashing crowded out the lodge, but time-budget studies suggest that most husbands of working wives have assumed only a minor part of the housework. In short, something besides the women's revolution seems to lie behind the erosion of social capital. (p. 8)

If the rise of two-career families is not to blame, other facets of American life must be examined. In the examination of other factors, some place the majority of the blame on television, as it has become the preferred leisure activity of the American public (Putnam, 2000). Analyzing participation through the civic volunteerism model, one realizes that time is required for political participation (Verba et al., 1995), and if Americans' limited leisure time is spent watching television, participation will likely suffer. Expanding on the notion of time as a limited resource, Putnam (2000) offered the time displacement hypothesis, which holds that every hour of television has a negative impact on political engagement. Researchers have examined specific parts of television in the second major phase of research into television and political participation. The number of studies examining microelements of the medium has been steadily increasing.

Researchers studying the micro level have examined individual parts of media content, such as television news (Pfau et al., 2005). Additional researchers have found that television news consumption has positively affected political participation (Boulianne, 2011; Nisbet & Scheufele, 2004). Other researchers have found support for the normalization narrative, identifying a neutral relationship between television news consumption and civic engagement (McLeod, Scheufele, & Moy, 1999). The study of television on both the macro and micro levels is an important aspect of political communication research. The dominance of television requires further analysis of its effect on political participation. This dissertation study, however, focused on new communication technology, specifically on the rise of mobile social media. The study of these new technologies began with the assessment of the tethered Internet on the macro level.

The history of empirical research on political participation and the Internet as a single entity have shown mixed results (Tolbert & McNeal, 2003). Pfau et al. (2005) found the use of the Internet did not correlate with increased levels of participation. Other researchers found a neutral relationship between participation and use of the Internet. Kenski and Stroud (2006) found the Internet had neither a negative effect nor a positive effect on efficacy, knowledge, or participation (Kenski & Stroud, 2006). Additional researchers found those who are already engaging in political behavior will use the Internet and these new tools to expand their political space (Bimber, 2001; Nisbet & Scheufele, 2004; Tolbert & McNeal, 2003). Some researchers have found the Internet to be at least as effective as face-to-face deliberation for motivating individuals to vote (Hooghe et al., 2010), while Kenski and Stroud (2006) found that Internet use was positively related to enhanced levels of political confidence. Boulianne (2011) also found support for Internet use having a positive impact on political participation. The history of macro-level studies of Internet has shown mixed results on political participation. On the other hand, researchers who focused on microelements of the Internet have found that Internet use had a positive effect on political participation rates.

In a micro-level study, Tolbert and McNeal (2003) found that Internet news consumption positively influenced the likelihood of political participation. Similarly, Pasek et al. (2009) concluded that those who consumed their news on the Internet were more likely to engage in civic activities than those who did not. Most of the research on this level has yielded small, yet positive and significant, associations, suggesting that the Internet is not going to be a revolutionary space for democracy (Kenski & Stroud, 2006). Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2010) found that reading blogs increased the likelihood of political participation. Other researchers studying individual media channels have found a different relationship. In a study on YouTube, the

consumption of videos did not increase the likelihood one would participate (Towner & Dulio, 2011).

Additional researchers who have conducted micro-level studies found support for the normalization narrative. Boulianne (2011) found that the consumption of television news was the medium of choice for those citizens who were already interested in politics. Xenos and Moy (2007) made political engagement the independent variable (IV) and found no significant effect on the dependent variable (DV) of Internet use. Internet use was found to increase levels of civic engagement (Hooghe et al., 2010). The authors of these models have not been able to establish any directional significance in the relationship between new communication technology use and political participation (Hooghe et al., 2010). The unclear relationship between use of new communication technologies and political participation requires additional research. Due to these conflicting results, causal models have yet to be developed to explain the relationship between technology and political participation (Boulianne, 2009).

The focus of this study is younger voters. This segment of the population is turning to alternate sources of information, such as *The Daily Show*, *The Colbert Report*, and *Last Week Tonight.* Increasingly this group is going online to get news and information from social network sites, such as Facebook and YouTube. More needs to be done to understand the motivations and political participation patterns of young citizens (Kaid et al., 2009). Research has demonstrated that young citizens seem less interested and involved in politics than are their older peers, and exhibit lower levels of PIE than do their older peers (Kaid et al., 2007). One possible explanation for their lower levels of PIE is their cynicism toward the political process.

Political Cynicism

Political cynicism has been identified as a primary attitude affecting citizens' democratic engagement (McKinney, Rill, & Thorson, 2014). Political cynicism is the dissatisfaction of citizens toward politicians and the government (Balmas, 2014). Political cynicism is also defined as the belief that elected officials are working in their self-interest and/or engaging in dishonest behavior (Dancey, 2012). Citizens may also feel that politicians make campaign promises with no intention of keeping them (Balmas, 2014). As a result, cynics tend to make negative evaluations of politicians' work habits, honesty, and integrity (Cappella & Jamieson, 1996).

Researchers who study political news have suggested that high exposure to strategic news during an election campaign leads to an increase in political cynicism (Cappella & Jamieson, 1996). Baumgartner and Morris (2006) found that viewers of *The Daily Show* displayed more cynicism of the electoral system and the news media than did nonviewers. The audience of *The Daily Show* largely overlaps with the demographics of digital natives.

Research has demonstrated that political cynicism decreases as younger voters grow older and begin to engage in politics (Dalton, 2006). Scholars believe that technology alone will not change historical rates of participation (Bimber, 2001). Access to this technology creates a barrier and possible narrows the politically active segment of the population (Gibson, Howard, & Ward, 2000). Concern initially centered on the skills needed to use the technology. Digital natives have the necessary skills: Thus, research on Internet use and political participation will likely find a positive or neutral relationship between the two (Gibson et al., 2000).

Many scholars view the Internet as the new home of civic engagement (Gibson et al., 2000). Optimists have argued the Internet will increase levels of voting, contacting, and

information gathering, as this media increases the rational and expressive benefits of participation. Information becomes more easily available, and new electronic tools for more direct debate at the mass level and between masses and elites are offered (Gibson et al., 2000). Political communication research has moved to differentiation between the stimulation. The next phase of research into the relationship between new communication technologies and political participation requires examination of the reinforcement narrative (Marien et al., 2010).

The overwhelming amount of literature offering support for the optimists and normalists guided this dissertation study. These two camps agree on many theories, including the fact that the Internet may reinvigorate civic life by increasing access to political information and providing alternative venues for political discourse (Marien et al., 2010). Future researchers will need to differentiate between these two positions and offer clues to what new communication technology may hold for political participation. Further, the most frequent users of this new communication technology space are digital natives. Future researchers will need to discuss the ways digital natives use new communication technologies (Kaid et al., 2009). In this study, the emphasis was on understanding the use of new communication technologies, with a primary focus on users who are digital natives. Additionally, this dissertation was intended to analyze the narratives surrounding the effects of new communication technology on political participation. The aim with this dissertation was to differentiate between stimulation and reinforcement models (see Figures 1 and 2) developed by Boulianne (2011) in order to gain insight into the relationship between the use of communication technology and measures of political interest, citizenship, and institutionalized political activities.
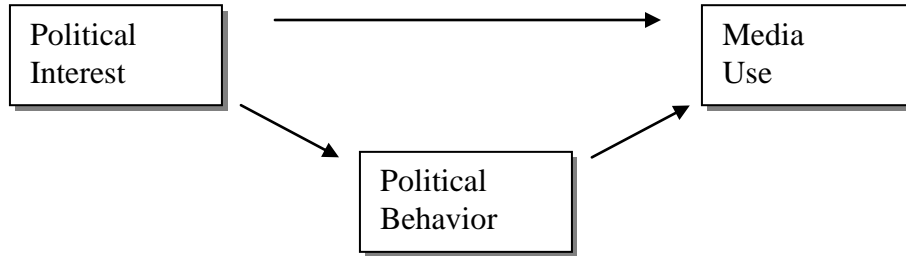
Figure 1. Media use Stimulates Political Interest (Stimulation).
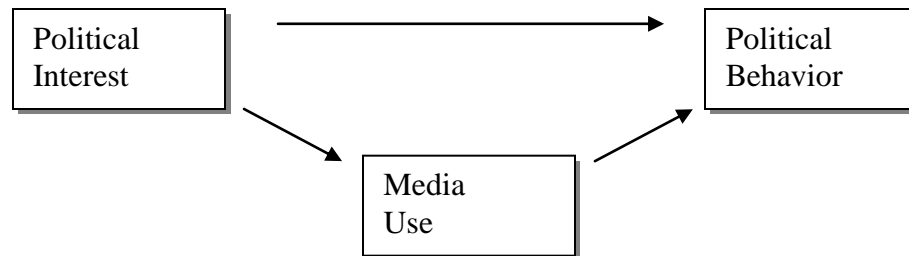
Figure 2. Political Interest Motivates Media Use (Reinforcement).

       The study of new communication technologies and political participation is still in the beginning stages. Similar to the study of television use and participation, the field began with researchers examining large conceptual entities, providing clues into the relationship between media use and political participation, but often failing to account for the differences between the individual components of the medium. This chapter outlined the literature concerning the political concepts of participation and citizenship, with particular attention paid to political engagement and PIE. The chapter covered the political side of political communication. The next chapter addresses the communication side of political communication, beginning with a history of media effects research.

CHAPTER 3: MEDIA EFFECTS

Media Research

Since the beginning of the electronic communication era, scholars have debated the effects of media consumption. This historical debate over media effects reached some consensus, but with the changing political, social, psychological, and economic transformation, debate continues over the effects of media (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008). Participants in the field are still trying to make sense, conceptually, of the relationship between old and new media (Jensen & Helles, 2011). The study of new media requires a brief history of the study of traditional media, as well as acknowledgement of some foundational issues that need consideration in light of changing media technology.

First, a definition must be established when discussing new communication technologies. The definition used in this dissertation overlaps three basic constructs: interactivity, content creation, and mobility. Social media networks such as YouTube and Facebook best represent the interactivity afforded by new communication technologies. *Social media* commonly refers to the conjunction of two concepts: Web 2.0 and user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Web 2.0 was first used in 2004 to describe the new approach used by developers that resulted in applications no longer being created solely by developers; once the foundations of the application are established, users drive continued development (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

User-generated content is also a key facet of how social media differ from traditional media. The primary content producers are the users of the medium, as opposed to professional content producers. Social media lets users connect with other users to share and consume content. While the naming conventions of these sites may vary, all social networks have the basic features of interactivity and content creation in common (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

The final aspect of the new communication technologies used for this dissertation was the mobility afforded by such technology. The ability to consume and create content in any location is a foundational change of new communication technology. The increasing amount of political media consumption taking place on these cellular phones requires future researchers to account for this aspect of technology (Hill, Tchernev, & Holbert, 2012). As with any complex constructions, the definition of social media has varied from study to study, but what all definitions of new communication technology should have in common is the user and his or her role in the center (Enli & Moe, 2013). With the user empowered at the center of new communication technologies, consumers' choice in their media consumption needs to be considered in the study of media effects.

Bennett and Iyengar (2008) contended that due to the audience segmentation and diversification of the 21st-century media environment, it is no longer relevant to think of mass media and mass audiences. If the media no longer have mass audiences, mass effects research requires further scrutiny. Bennett and Iyengar (2008) asserted that media effects are no longer mass effects, but more on the lines of minimal effects. Due to the changing media environment, not everyone agrees with this interpretation of media effects. The question of the definition of mass effects has moved to the forefront of research: Do mass effects have to be large effects, or can mass effects be a small effect on a large number of people? Holbert et al. (2010) asserted that small effects on a large number of people are still possible in the era of on-demand information:

> An environment where the central process of persuasion has a more pronounced seat at the media effects table—where we can begin to see the possibility of meaningful and sizeable persuasive media influence in politics, not an era of minimal effects as argued for by Bennett and Iyengar. (p.28)

The definition of effect comes into focus with this discussion of minimal effects. A large number of minimal effects could be interpreted as confirmation of existing attitudes rather than as evidence of opinion change (Bennett & Iyengar, 2010). In their minimal effects research, Holbert et al (2010) argued that reinforcement of political attitudes would be a minimal effect while change in political attitudes would be a mass effect (Vaccari, 2013). Some scholars have claimed the effects of political campaigns are minimal, because competing campaigns offset each other and produce a minimal effect on the audience (Benoit, Hansen, & Holbert, 2004).

While the disagreement over effects remains, both groups of scholars have acknowledged the changing era of media effects. Holbert et al. (2010) stated, "Although change is afoot, we anticipate that its magnitude will be modest. Modern communication systems, including the Internet, on which these changes are premised, are far from the first revolution in information accessibility to influence political information consumers" (p. 30).

The transition from the era of the three big networks to the on-demand, personalized nature of media today alters the effects of media. Media effects depend on how political media consumption is conceptualized (Holbert et al., 2010). One conceptualization of media use is reinforcement narratives. Some scholars believe media consumption is based upon pre-existing beliefs, and media effects are limited because media use simply offers confirmation—that is, reinforcement—of existing beliefs (Holbert et al., 2010). Other scholars believe that prior factors influence a citizen's political media consumption, such as seeking to satisfy entertainment, informational, or social needs (Holbert, Lambe, Dudo, & Carlton, 2007).

Some scholars believe media use has consequences; thus, the potential exists for stronger media effects, such as stimulation of political interest, for example (Holbert et al., 2010). The rebuttal to this argument is that users will not choose to consume media that does not

gratify their desires. Holbert et al. (2010) acknowledged the role of user choice in media consumption and effects by stating, "We are confident that Bennett and Iyengar (2008) do not intend to take a deterministic, technological dystopian view, yet broad generalizations about the inherent threats to society posed by a technology push the scholarly debate in that direction." In response to this critique, Bennett and Iyengar (2010) argued that Holbert et al. (2010) missed their main point that customized, on-demand content across a multitude of available platforms will only lead to further homogenization of opinions. The concept of uses and gratifications provides a lens to explain the role of audiences in the interactive media of the 21st century.

Uses and Gratifications

Uses and gratifications (U&G) marks a shift from the traditional viewpoint of "powerful-media-effects" theories, in which an audience is depicted as passive and easily manipulated by media influences (Mondi, Woods, & Rafi, 2008). Using U&G as an approach to media study is generally recognized to be a subtradition of media effects research; this approach accounts for audience needs and the types of content they select to satisfy their social and psychological needs (Ruggiero, 2000). Uses and gratifications theory is based on the notion that a medium cannot influence an individual unless that person has some use for that medium or its message (Rubin, 1983). The approach has undergone varying frequency of use, but currently has come into vogue again with the combination of methodological refine and interactive media (Ruggiero, 2000).

A key assumption of U&G is the presence of an active audience member who makes a motivated choice about media content (Ruggiero, 2000). That is, users choose the content they are motivated to seek out. U&G provides a lens to understand the role of active user choice in interactive media currently available. One significant advantage of U&G is recognition of the

media's ability to influence attitudes through motivating content consumption; however, the negative side of U&G is narrow-minded media consumption. The on-demand nature of online content lets people seek out media content that is consistent with their existing beliefs (Peer & Ksiazek, 2011), raising the issue of selective exposure in media consumers.

Selective Exposure

The study of selective exposure theory emerged from the foundational studies of public opinion research (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009). Initially, selective exposure was solely the domain of limited media effects research (Stroud, 2010). This selective exposure debate was dormant for many years, but with the changes in media at the beginning of the 21st century, it has reemerged as a point of disagreement in mass communication research (Garrett, 2009b). Bennett and Iyengar (2008) argued that the American media audience is extremely fragmented; today it would take 100 networks to reach 80% of the country, whereas 30 years ago, three networks could accomplish that feat. This fragmentation of television and the rise of new media provide a massive amount of "anytime options" for consumers, allowing consumers the freedom to choose the media that satisfies their desires.

Selective exposure theory is based on the position that individuals prefer to be exposed to arguments supporting their positions and will in fact consume media that support their positions (Stroud, 2010). Other scholars have argued that selective exposure theory is just a preference for agreeable information, as opposed to avoidance of disagreeable information (Garrett, 2009b). However, Garrett (2009a) found evidence that people prefer agreeable information, but also do not entirely avoid disagreeable information. Garrett (2009b) found that individuals consistently sought support for their positions and were more likely to look at information that confirmed their opinion and to spend more time reading that information.

Towner and Dulio (2011) performed an experiment with YouTube content that offered support for the selective exposure argument, in which users were much more likely to choose agreeable content over dissenting information.

Recent efforts to differentiate between these two interpretations of the theory have produced mixed results in the political communication field (Kahne, Middaugh, Lee, & Feezell, 2012). Some researchers have suggested that exposure to like-minded individuals correlates with higher levels of political participation (Mutz, 2002). Tolbert and McNeal (2003) found different results: The selection of only agreeable content on the Internet might actually be a problem, increasing bonding social capita or strong relationships, which do not cross socio-economic lines, leading to the further polarization of society. The selection of only agreeable content could lead to lower levels of political knowledge. Political knowledge gain has been tied to discourse involving opposition viewpoints; a discussion consisting of similar viewpoints, on the other hand, does not contribute to political knowledge gain (Eveland & Hively, 2009). Along similar lines, scholars worry that the ability to expose oneself to news content that coincides with one's views may lead to a polarized electorate (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008). With political knowledge firmly established as a requirement for political participation, the potential for a polarized electorate could harm participation levels.

The polarization of the electorate has occurred simultaneously with the rise of new media technologies (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009). Forty years ago, the majority of Americans consumed their daily news from one of the three network newscasts (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008). These three newscasts employed similar norms of journalism that meant no matter which network people watched, they consumed similarly balanced point-counterpoint content (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008). Partisanship and polarization are two concerns of scholars in the context of

media fragmentation. The growth in popular partisan cable news channels demonstrates a broader institutional and cultural transformation (Peer & Ksiazek, 2011). With minimal effort, people can access newspapers, radio, and television stations from around the world (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008). "Given this dramatic increase in the number of available news outlets, it is not surprising that media choices increasingly reflect partisan considerations," (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009, p. 20).

Using new media communication technologies may not be beneficial for democratic debate, as the Internet may increase connections, but only among like-minded individuals (Tolbert & McNeal, 2003). In a study of users' network connections, Gaines and Mondak (2009) found users of Facebook tend to be friends with members of similar ideologies, generating communication only among like-minded individuals. In another study of polarization, Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007) found that networks of similar members do not offer many benefits, as opposed to diverse networks, which foster debate and tolerance.

This consumption of desired, agreeable content removes the conversation element from democratic discourse (Bowers, 2004). The ability to choose news content that coincides with one's views could lead to a polarized electorate that does not feel the need to participate in institutionalized democratic norms (Peer & Ksiazek, 2011). With a fragmented media landscape, reconceptualization of media effects is required when examining the field in the 21st-century media environment. Interest in the question of how media content consumption influences attitude change is increasing in media effects research. An increasingly popular model to explain the ability of information to effect attitude change is the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Polk, Young, & Holbert, 2009).

Elaboration Likelihood Model

Different models have been established to explain the ability of media to effect attitude change. One such model is the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), which is based on the idea that attitude change is a result of information consumption (Polk et al., 2009). Attitude change is defined as a shift in a person's beliefs and behaviors (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). The ELM is the interaction between four elements; levels of elaboration and processing routes. Two levels of elaboration, high and low and two processing routes; central and peripheral are theorized in the ELM (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). For this dissertation, attitude change is represented by the confidence individuals have in their political knowledge.

The central processing route involves effortful or "deep" analysis of message arguments—in other words, critical reasoning—whereas the peripheral route involves much more automatic or "shallow" processing (Cacioppo, Petty, & Stoltenberg, 1985). If a message is processed in the central route, its ability to persuade is limited by the power of the argument and the individual's existing thoughts on the subject (Baumgartner & Morris, 2008). When elaboration is high, the salience of the issue will have a greater impact on the ability of the information to cause attitude change (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). The combination of central processing and high elaboration reduces the chance of the information to effect attitude change.

On the other hand, use of the peripheral route of message processing offers much more potential for attitude change (Polk et al., 2009). In a message being processed with low elaboration, it is more likely other variables than the message itself will influence the audience (Baumgartner & Morris, 2008). For example, the motivation of audience members will influence the way they process information.

In the ELM, content consumption with high personal relevance will be more likely to be processed along the central route, whereas content that lacks a connection to prior knowledge will most likely be processed along the peripheral processing route (Polk et al., 2009). As the ELM model implies, motivation also plays a role in which processing route is used (Wojcieszak & Price, 2012). Motivation in the model is a circular action, as motivation is enhanced by related factors, such as personal connections or issue salience (Wojcieszak & Price, 2012). Analyzing content selection through a uses and gratification (U&G) paradigm sheds light on the route through which messages will be processed. Individuals select media that satisfies particular needs. When individuals have higher levels of motivation, they are more likely to critically analyze the message (Polk et al., 2009). When messages are exposed to critical analysis, it is less likely the person will change his or her attitude. Thus, it follows that if someone is politically active, the person will critically analyze the message, making attitude change less likely, especially when a message contains information that is inconsistent with the person's initial attitude (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). For those who are not politically active, the message will be sent via the peripheral process route and may influence only short-term attitude change. This attitude change could be either an increase or decrease in political confidence.

Ultimately, the relationship between cognitive route and attitude change depends on the strength of the underlying message arguments (Polk et al., 2009). In the presence of strong arguments that resonate, central processing will likely increase persuasion; when arguments are weak, central processing will decrease persuasion, as the receiver will be resistant to the claims due to his or her active critical reasoning processes (Cacioppo et al., 1985).

Critical reasoning does not play the same role when messages are processed via the peripheral route. When individuals peripherally process a message, emotion plays a stronger role

(Polk et al., 2009). With emotion playing a larger role between content and attitude change, the direct effect of the message might take on a larger role. In a study of satiric political news, *The Colbert Report* was found to increase support for the conservative values that Stephen Colbert directly expressed in his humor (Baumgartner & Morris, 2008). The parody of conservatives found in the program did not have the same effect. Viewers' attitudes were not influenced to be critical of conservatives (Baumgartner & Morris, 2008).

It is clear that motivation, delivery, and content play a role in determining the route through which individuals process messages. The ELM establishes a connection between content and PIE. As Polk et al. (2009) stated, "It is also interesting to note that the ELM is driven by the constructs of motivation and ability. Internal political efficacy is a unique iteration of these, as efficacy could be conceptualized as perceived ability" (p. 216). Other scholars agree on the application of the ELM in the new communication environment. Holbert et al. (2010) argued that the basic tenets of the ELM have a substantive influence on the status of persuasive outcomes in the current media environment. To clarify the effects of new communication technologies and PIE, in this study, social media as a key area of a micro-level study of the Internet were examined.

One of the most popular forms of these new communication technologies is YouTube, which encourages the consumption, production, and distribution of videos. The sharing of these videos combined with the interactivity nature of the medium places YouTube in a unique position as a new communication medium.

YouTube

The 2008 U.S. presidential election established YouTube as a significant source for political communication (Mberia & Ndavula, 2012). In the 2008 election, seven presidential

candidates announced their campaigns with online videos, 110 candidates registered channels on YouTube, and over 220 million users viewed political content during the election (May, 2010). YouTube is rated as the second most popular Web site worldwide, with over 800 million unique visits per month (Paek, Hove, & Jeon, 2013). In addition, YouTube itself created a special election channel (Towner & Dulio, 2011), and YouTube cosponsored one of the debates with CNN (McKinney & Rill, 2009).

The format of YouTube allows candidates to reach voters with different types of information not available in traditional media formats (Towner & Dulio, 2011). The special election channel allowed users to upload their content to each campaign, as well as consume content created by the respective campaigns. The design of YouTube allows users to post comments, "like" videos, and access other interactive features. In addition to consumption, citizens can also use this medium to express themselves (Potter, 2005). In the migration of democratic space into an online environment, interactivity is a key component, and YouTube channels fill that space by providing a space for conversation and two-way dialogue.

Research has shown that digital natives who get political information from YouTube are more likely to participate in online political activities (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010). Greater participation in noninstitutionalized democratic activities, such as talking to others about preferred candidates, increases the reported likelihood of voting (McKinney & Rill, 2009). In a study of online videos, people who did not previously use YouTube, but were exposed to the medium during the experiment, were more likely to be influenced by YouTube content (Towner & Dulio, 2011). These results further support the stimulation narrative and offer hope for optimistic scholars. In spite of this, Towner and Dulio (2011) concluded that some Internet

usage may be beneficial for democracy, but YouTube in particular does not appear to be beneficial for democracy.

YouTube's architecture has some inherent functionality that changes media production and consumption; people turn to YouTube for its content. One facet of YouTube that requires further research is the difference between producers of online video content and consumers of the content.

Producers and Consumers

The rise of user-generated content on YouTube as well as other sites provides an illustration of the blurring of the distinction between media producers and consumers (Ornebring, 2008). New communication technologies have opened the possibilities of content creation and distribution to the individual. YouTube is the most common of the many Web sites that provide the capability of producing, distributing, and discussing videos (Paek et al., 2013). This foundational change in the capability of Internet users should be considered part of the construct measuring the relationship between technology and participation. In sum, user-generated content is an important theoretical phenomenon requiring further study in order to understand its relationship with political participation (Dylko & McCluskey, 2012).

Leung (2009) found that people who create content on the Internet were more likely to engage politically than were those who just consumed Internet content. This difference between producers and consumers of new media content is new in political communication research. Researchers studying digital production have had difficulty distinguishing among communication, participation, production, and consumption in the study of new communication technologies (Schradie, 2011). In this dissertation study, the expanding field of user-generated content

effects was examined by investigating this difference between producers and consumers of new media content.

Early researchers who examined producers and consumers and political engagement did not find a significant relationship between producers and levels of political engagement (Leung, 2009). The construct needs further explanation, as a weak positive correlation has been found between producers and political efficacy (Leung, 2009). In a preliminary survey of YouTube users, significant differences were found between producers of YouTube content and consumers of YouTube in their noninstitutional political activity (Stouffer, 2013). Further, in an analysis of national survey results, differences between producers and consumers of digital content were found. The differentiating factor was education: Those with higher education produced a greater amount of online content than did those with just a high school education (Schradie, 2011). Barriers to Internet access and to the production of online content require further analysis.

Digital Divide

The digital divide has been a popular area of study since Bill Clinton and Al Gore began to use the term in 1996 to describe the socioeconomic gap between people who had computer access and those who did not (Schradie, 2011). In the ensuing years, various aspects of access have been researched. In fact, the issue of access is at the forefront of the discussion of whether technology is to offer any solution to declining rates of democratic participation. In mediating a technology-based conversation, it is important that the technology not be a barrier for participation (Sorensen & Murchú, 2004). A number of factors restrict access to YouTube, but the most common is economic. Reliable, fast, low-cost Internet access is not available to millions of Americans, both urban and rural. Technology must target the low-end user to allow equal

participation (Sorensen & Murchú, 2004). Pessimists have cited the technological divide as a potential limitation of the ability of the Internet to stimulate participation (Russell, 2005).

Most researchers have suggested college-aged men and women are using new communication technology in equal numbers (Jones, Johnson-Yale, Millermaier, & Pérez, 2009). Internet use, however, is not equal among all age groups, with younger citizens using technology in far greater numbers compared to their older counterparts (Lariscy et al., 2011). Correlation studies of race and technology use are less conclusive; some studies have shown race to be a barrier, and others have indicated that it is not (Jones et al., 2009).

Traditional barriers to political participation need re-examination in the light of user-generated content. A survey showed that among online users, minority groups—African-Americans, Latinos, and Asians—tend to create online content more frequently than White students (Correa & Jeong, 2011). Optimists point to increased access as a reason new communication technologies will enable increased political engagement. Technology has brought many people out of isolation, and enabled their involvement with politics (Schradie, 2011).

Pessimists have pointed to existing differences of online content creation as evidence that technology is not expanding participation to those previously unengaged. Schradie (2011) claimed,

> As creative content applications and uses have grown, the poor and working class have not been able to use these production applications at the same rate as other uses or users, creating a growing production divide based on these elite creative functions. Regardless of the type of activity, a critical mechanism of this inequality is consistent and high quality online access at home, school or work and having a high-status information habitus and Internet-in-practice. These cultural and material factors are more significant for the production of online content than they are for consumption. (p. 165)

The ability to create online content offers potential to stimulate participation, but the traditional barriers to access still play a role in the relationship between new communication technologies and political participation.

Barriers like gender and age have often been noted with regard to political participation. For example, highly educated, older males are the most likely to take part in the American political process (Kaid, McKinney, & Tedesco, 2007). Education also plays a role in the relationship between online content creation and political engagement (Schradie, 2011). The student sample used in this dissertation study made the analysis of educational level as a moderating variable impossible; however, in this dissertation, other traditional socioeconomic barriers, such as gender and race, were examined as moderating variables in the relationship between new communication technologies and political participation. One of the key concepts involving how communication changes with online content creation is the flow of communication. No longer is communication a one-way flow from professional producers to consumers. The flow is now multidirectional, and the interactivity of this experience requires further research.

Interactivity

YouTube was the primary medium studied in this research. The concepts underlying YouTube are user choice and interactivity. Interactivity was one of the primary manipulations employed in this experiment to test the effect of interactivity on each participant's political confidence. Scholars need to conceptualize online political activity in two different ways, information seeking and opinion expression (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010). Wang (2007), in his factor analysis, found support for these conceptual distinctions of online political activity. Tedesco (2007) also classified interactivity in similar ways, with the interaction being either user-to-user or user-to-system. With the rise of new communication technologies, the concept of interactivity has been fundamental to political communication studies (Dimitrova, Shehata, Strömbäck, & Nord, 2014).

Previous researchers generally found support for the theory that more active forms of political Internet use affect citizens' political involvement more strongly than do more passive forms (Kruikemeier, van Noort, Vliegenthart, & de Vreese, 2013). In this study, interactivity was further investigated through manipulation as one of the IVs of this study. The interactivity used in this dissertation was based on a theoretical division used in past political communication research (Katz, Rice, & Aspden, 2001; Kruikemeier et al., 2013; Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010; Tedesco, 2007). Interactivity has been divided into the actions of passive information seeking and active information consumption (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010). This study was designed to test these different types of interactivity based on the conceptual distinctions. The first interactive condition mirrored traditional media and provided the participants no interactive options.

The second interactive condition was based on passive information seeking and provided the user with limited choice over the political content they consumed. This condition mirrored the Tedesco (2007) limited interactivity condition. This condition was based on passive information seeking (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010) with no discussion component.

The final interactive condition was highly interactive, involving participants' exchanges of opinions with the other participants, as well as their choices of content and their expressions of opinions about the content. Thus, this condition also mirrored the highly interactive condition used by Tedesco (2007). Katz et al. (2001) argued that information exchanges occurring in online discussions reflect active information consumption behavior and use different cognitive processes compared to information consumption processes that lack a discussion component, such as seen in the medium interactive condition. While mobility and interactivity play a central role in new communication technology, the content available through those technologies is

still the central reason that individuals visit social media Web sites (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010).

Content

When researching political content, scholars must examine political advertising, due to its uniqueness and to the central role it plays in the electoral process (Kaid, McKinney, & Tedesco, 2009). Exposure to these advertisements has been found to affect existing partisan beliefs, with a significant impact on voters (Kaid et al., 2009). Televised political advertising also has been shown to be particularly effective at persuading undecided voters (Bowen, 1994) and those who are not highly involved in politics (Rothschild & Ray, 1974). Benoit, Leshner, and Chattopadhyay (2007) in their meta-analyses found that political ads have significant effects on viewers. These advertisements are capable of influencing perceptions of the candidates' character, affecting attitudes toward candidates and stimulating interest in the campaign, among other effects (Benoit et al., 2007).

This study used functional theory of campaign discourse to guide content development. Specifically, social media content in the form of political advertisements was manipulated based on the four tenets of functional theory. In functional theory of campaign discourse, first, each citizen votes based on which candidate appears preferable or based on other particular issues that are most important to the voter (Benoit & Sheafer, 2006). Second, candidates must distinguish themselves from their opponents in order to be preferable (Padgett, 2009). Third, the goal of political campaign messages in those campaigns is to establish the differences between candidates (Benoit, Stein, & Hansen, 2005). The fourth proposition requires that political campaign messages can occur on only two potential topics: (a) the candidate's policy positions, past deeds, plans, and

goals with regard to governmental action and problems amenable to governmental action; and (b) the candidate's personal qualities, leadership ability, and ideals (Padgett, 2009).

According to functional theory, political advertisements can accomplish one of three functions: acclaim, attack, or defend. The first option for a candidate is to engage in self-praise, or acclaim (Benoit, Blaney, & Pier, 1998). Second, candidates can engage in an attack of their opponent (Benoit et al., 2005). The third option for a candidate who has been subjected to attack is to defend against those attacks (Benoit & Airne, 2009). In this dissertation study, the acclaim option of functional theory was used as a lens to focus the examination. The dissertation also included user-generated content. The user-generated content also used the acclaim function. In this experiment, user-generated content was built into the browsing experience, generating content from participants. The coding of this content followed the principles of grounded theory of constant comparison, which was particularly useful for the coding of user-generated comments (Paek et al., 2013).

Grounded Theory of Constant Comparison

Review of the political communication literature revealed little research on the use of theory to guide the creation of hypotheses predicting the content of the comments. In the absence of existing theory to inform the creation of content categories, the grounded theory approach of constant comparison was employed during content analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The grounded theory approach of constant comparison consists primarily of finding differences and creating categories directly from the data (Keyton, 2011). Grounded theory takes on the approach of de-emphasizing previous theory and hypotheses, generating theory instead by examination of the data (Glaser & Strauss, 2009). Grounded theory has central tenets for the coding of data that,

while not meant to be formulaic and overly rigid, do require adherence to use the approach successfully (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

A typical approach to grounded theory is to first review the data without any attempt to code them (Keyton, 2011). The second review of the data is called initial coding, which involves looking for relationships (Boeije, 2002). The next pass through the data is a coding process in which all categories are organized around a central theme (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The fourth pass through the data is to compare and contrast the categories that emerged (Keyton, 2011). Referencing the preceding literature review, four hypotheses and research questions were tested.

Hypotheses

The first hypothesis addressed the ability of interactivity to influence political information efficacy (PIE). Highly interactive media consumption is positively associated with political self-efficacy (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010). Social media use has been found to have a positive relationship with political participation (Bakker & de Vreese, 2011). Nisbet and Scheufele (2004) also found that online political information consumption, when combined with discussion, increased political efficacy. Experimental research from the 2004 campaign revealed that exposure to interactive Web content significantly increased both internal and external efficacy for young adult participants, whereas participants in the noninteractive exposure condition did not produce significant increases in efficacy (Williams & Tedesco, 2006). The following hypothesis guided this study:

H1: Consumption of political content in the interactive conditions will increase PIE more than will consumption of political content in the noninteractive condition.

The functional theory of campaign discourse established the use of policy advertisements as the most frequently used type of political advertising (Benoit & Sheafer,

2006). The most popular form of advertisements should also be the most effective in generating interest in campaigns. However, functional theory has not been used to guide experiments to test if these advertisements are the most effective. In order to test the effectiveness of the most frequently used types of advertisements, a second hypothesis was proposed:

H2: Consumption of political content covering the policies of candidates will increase PIE more than will consumption of character-based political content.

Selective exposure theory is based on the position that individuals prefer exposure to arguments supporting their positions and will consume media that support their position (Stroud, 2010). Selective exposure indicates that those who are not interested in politics will not consume political content. In the traditional media era, it was nearly impossible for citizens to avoid political content, and institutionalized participation occurred in greater frequency (Lariscy et al., 2011). With the changed norms of society, citizens can avoid political content, and their levels of political confidence remain low. If those participants are exposed to political content, that content has the possibility to stimulate interest in political activity (Boulianne, 2011).

H3: Consumption of political content will increase PIE more in low-engaged citizens than in high-engaged citizens.

H4: Exposure to political content will increase PIE.

Research Questions

With the changing norms of American citizenship argued by Dalton (2009), empirical research needs to continue to examine how these norms function within alternate mediums. The research into how users are using new media is in its early stages. Researchers have begun to examine the relationship between producers and consumers and political engagement (Leung,

2009). Thus, two research questions were proposed to investigate the relationship between uses and gratifications of people's media habits and political engagement.

RQ1: What is the relationship between the participants' political engagement, content creation and consumption habits, and change in PIE from exposure to the stimuli?

RQ2: What is the relationship between the different interaction conditions and levels of PIE?

In the next chapter, the methods by which the hypotheses and research questions were tested are explained.

CHAPTER 4: METHODS

This dissertation used two experimental designs. The first design used was the pre- and posttest design. This design is the most common type of experimental design (Colosi & Dunifon, 2006). Using a pre- and posttest design allowed the assessment of changes in participant knowledge and attitudes toward the political content the participants were exposed to during the study (Colosi & Dunifon, 2006). Many researchers prefer this type of experimental design as measurements at two intervals allows attitude changes to be detected after participation in the study (Colosi & Dunifon, 2006).

The second design was a repeated-measures posttest design to handle the presentation of political content. This design allowed control over the political content the participants viewed and allowed me to establish causal connections between media exposure and participants' reactions (Towner & Dulio, 2011). A posttest-only design is not ideal for all experimental conditions, but in a repeated-measures design, the use of a posttest-only design is viable (Campbell, Stanley, & Gage, 1963). A repeated measures design had several additional advantages, such as a more definitive evaluation of dependent variables facilitated by the collection of measurements across time and multiple conditions (Yi, Logan, Glueck, & Muller, 2013). The second advantage of this design was that the participants acted as their own control groups through multiple exposures to a stimulus (Sullivan, 2008). The combination of precise measures and multiple exposures resulted in an increase in statistical power, useful for detecting changes in study participants through the use of a repeated-measure design (Yi et al., 2013). The next step was to operationalize the variables used in the experiment.

Operationalization

Literature from previous studies guided the operationalization of the variables. The variable of political information efficacy (PIE) was operationalized with the same four questions used by Tedesco (2011). As detailed in the literature review, the process to theorize and test the variable has a rich history. The PIE variable was measured with four questions, which were used to ask participants about their confidence in their political information, measured on a five-point Likert scale. Tedesco (2011) performed research with multiple stimuli and measured PIE during the pretest and posttest. Between his recent research and his history with the concept, Tedesco's research offers strong support for his operationalization method. Tedesco (2011) produced strong reliability scores both times he measured PIE, with a Cronbach's alpha of .88 on the pretest and .90 on the posttest. See Appendix A for the questions.

The second variable to operationalize was citizenship, which was analyzed with two constructs of citizenship: duty-based and engaged. An examination of the two constructs allowed comparison of empirical voting behaviors with other studies, as well as comparison of the changing norms of American citizenship as noted by Dalton (2009). The variable was operationalized as defined by Dalton (2008), using nine questions, which focused on participants' perceptions of their obligations as citizens such as supporting the military and obeying laws, measured on a five-point Likert scale. See Appendix B for the questions.

The next variable measured prior political interest through participants' online political expression. This variable was measured with five questions on a five-point Likert scale. The questions focused on the frequency of participants' use of different new communication technologies, such as blogs, Facebook, and YouTube, to express their political beliefs. Zhou and

Pinkleton (2012) used the index and had a Cronbach's alpha of .78. See Appendix C for the questions.

New media use was measured with three questions to gauge the subjects' content creation frequency on the Internet. This variable allowed the division between Internet consumers and producers. The questions centered on the amount of time participants' spent creating content on blogs, Facebook, and YouTube. The index was developed by Leung (2009) and achieved a Cronbach's alpha of .85. See Appendix D for the questions.

The final variable that required operationalization was voting behavior. To correct for limited research into nonpresidential election year political behavior, a multi-item construct was created to measure voting behavior through engagement beyond presidential elections. The variable was an index created from four questions, with a binary question for voting in the 2012 presidential election combined with questions to measure participants' efforts to vote. The questions focused on their efforts to vote in local and nonpresidential elections. The questions were measured on a five-point Likert scale. See Appendix H for the questions.

Procedure

Participants for the study were recruited through a departmental research subject pool. The pool was drawn from an introduction to public speaking course that was a campus-wide required course. The even distribution of majors alleviate potential concerns over a research pool conducted within a department, where a high concentration of communication and political science majors could have influenced the effects of political communication research.

Student samples can offer valid results if used properly to analyze a relevant population. In this study, the population of interest was digital natives. If a study is well guided by theory, and if the sample has multiple similarities to the target population, the use of student

samples are appropriate (Bello, Leung, Radebaugh, Tung, & Van Witteloostuijn, 2009). This study focused specifically on youth voters and multivariate relationships. Multivariate relationships between media use and celebrity feelings were found to be significant when using both students and representative samples (Basil, Brown, & Bocarnea, 2002).

Further, student samples have been shown to be an appropriate sampling technique for certain studies (Peterson, 2001). Combining a theory aimed at explaining youth behavior with a sample of college-aged people made a strong case for using a student sample in this research. The methodological choice combined with the multivariate analysis indicated the choice of sample population should not jeopardize the validity of the research.

The research pool allowed participants to sign up at their convenience to participate in the study. The experiment took place in the department's research computer laboratory. Once participants entered the computer laboratory, they were welcomed, seated at a computer, and briefed on their rights as research participants. After informed consent was obtained, the researcher explained the procedure and directed the participants to the pretest questionnaire. The questionnaire contained questions about PIE, political behavior, citizenship values, online political behavior, and new media use.

Once the pretest questions were completed, participants viewed and navigated through all six stimuli. The stimuli were presented in a random order to each participant. After exposure to each stimulus, participants answered multiple-choice distraction questions about what they remembered from the content, followed by the four questions of the PIE variable. After the stimuli, participants were directed to the post-exposure questionnaire to answer questions about their citizenship, age, gender, race, voting behavior, and, finally, the four questions of the PIE variable again.

Stimuli

The content of the stimuli was of two different types, either policy- or character-based on the functional theory of political discourse. The stimuli were created using as much authentic political content as possible. The creation of the content began with searching for political content from current Michigan elections. To minimize name recognition, political advertisements from the 2014 gubernatorial election were not used. Instead, material from statewide elections for U.S. Senator and Secretary of State were used. In order to keep content as relevant to participants as possible, advertisements were selected from political races in the state of Michigan. Once Michigan content was exhausted, political content from races in Wisconsin, Indiana, Illinois, Ohio, and Massachusetts were used in the study.

In order to assure adherence to functional theory, a multistep coding and testing process was used. After preliminary coding by the researcher, a pretest was performed with other graduate students to evaluate their agreement with the function of the content. The content featured video political advertisements and print-style campaign news stories. See Appendix E for an example of the content.

The content was altered as needed to fit theme requirements. A professional editor performed any changes to the political advertisements; the resulting changes were unnoticeable to participants, as determined by a survey of other graduate students who viewed the altered videos. The researcher also altered the political news stories as needed. A professional journalist was asked to read the stories as a validity check. The journalist determined the stories were written inverted pyramid-style or feature-style and deemed them publishable.

The final content element of the high interactivity condition was the user-generated comments that accompanied each video. Comments found with the advertisements were used

whenever possible. The user names were changed to protect the identity of the commenter. To maintain ecological validity, native comments relating to the theme of the advertisement and comments that were slightly off topic were both used. All of the comments used were categorized, according to functional theory as acclaim function. Comments coded as attack or defensive were not used. In the appropriate condition, each political advertisement featured four comments. For political advertisements that did not have four acclaim comments on YouTube, the researcher created comments.

In addition to content, each stimulus varied on interactivity. Interactivity had three conditions: high, medium, or none. The first stimulus condition, high interactivity was based upon YouTube. The stimulus featured actions a user could take on social media. In this level of interactivity, the participants selected the order in which they viewed five political advertisements. Each political advertisement was accompanied by user-generated comments. The participants read these comments and were required to create and post their own. The participants then selected the next advertisements they wished to watch and repeated the process until all advertisements were viewed. Once they watched and posted comments on all five videos, the stimulus was completed, and they were directed to the post-stimulus questionnaire. The high level of interactivity tested the theoretical active information consumption behavior (Katz et al., 2001).

In contrast to the high interactivity condition, the medium type of interactivity resembled political news websites, such as Politico. In this stimulus, the participants selected a story from a list of headlines. They read a political news story about a candidate. After the completion of the story, they chose which story to read next. Once the participant read all three stories, they finished this stimulus and were directed to the post-stimulus questionnaire. The medium level of interactivity required that participants only consumed information, as opposed to the high

interactivity stimulus where they consumed and actively engaged with information. Information consumption is a different cognitive process from active information consumption with a discussion component (Katz et al., 2001).

The third interactive condition, none, lacked interactivity and was meant to mirror more traditional mass media consumption. The static stimulus only allowed users to view one political advertisement after another. Participants viewed four political advertisements. Passive information consumption was the theory driving this Web site experience (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010). Thus, each participant was exposed to six stimuli. Each stimulus combined policy or character content with a different level of interactivity. The 3 x 2 experimental design tests within-subjects variables with varied interactivity (high, medium, none) and content (character, policy). See Table 1.

Table 1

Experimental Design

		Content	
		Character	Policy
Interactivity	High		
	Medium		
	None		

Each stimulus required about five minutes to consume the presented information. Six stimuli were built for the experiment, with a simulated Web site designed for each interaction and content combination. The benefit of using a simulated websites as opposed to using YouTube or Politico was that it allowed control of the content the participants viewed (Towner & Dulio,

2011). The presentation of similar political content to what a digital native might encounter in the real world offered strong evidence regarding the effects consuming Internet political content has on young voters. This type of design increases the experimental realism of the results and boosts external validity, allowing the generalization of the results to other digital natives (Towner & Dulio, 2011). The next chapter presents the results of the experiment and the analysis of the data.

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

In this dissertation, four hypotheses and two research questions were proposed concerning the effects of political media consumption on internal political confidence. After initial review of the data, two additional hypotheses and two research questions were developed post-hoc. Post-hoc testing offers the potential for bias, but with exploration of new concepts where little theory exists can be used appropriately (Ruxton & Beauchamp, 2008). With little theory guiding user-generated comments and media producers and consumers post-hoc hypothesis were developed.

The results of the experiment follow, beginning with descriptive data of the participants.

A total of 152 participants completed the experiment at a large urban Midwest university. Three participants were removed from the final analysis due to technical issues with simulated Web sites not properly functioning, and two participants were removed for skipping of content. Four additional participants were removed due to repetition of responses. Thus, the final results comprised data from 143 participants, recruited from a research participant pool that gave extra credit for students in participating classes. Participants ranged in age from 17 to 53 years (M = 21.83, SD = 4.786), and 62.9% (90) were women. The racial makeup of the sample consisted of 46.9% (67) Caucasian; 25.9% (37) African American; 10.5% (15) Asian; and 9.1% (13) Middle Eastern/South Asian. The experiment was conducted between February 12 and April 21, 2014.

Political information efficacy (PIE) was measured with four Likert index questions ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) based on an index created by Tedesco (2011). PIE was collected eight different times during the experiment, both before and after all stimuli and after each Web site browsing experience. The Cronbach's alpha of the pre-exposure measure of PIE was .789 and .887 on the posttest. Cronbach's alpha of the social media interactivity condition was .878

for character-based content and .846 for policy-based content. Cronbach's alpha of the online news interactivity condition was .920 for character-based content and .890 for policy-based content. Cronbach's alpha of the static interactivity condition was .876 for character-based content and .895 for policy-based content. Reliability scores were calculated for citizenship norms. Nine questions regarding two different types of citizenship were asked. Results for the two constructs of citizenship were collected—duty-based and engaged—as defined by Dalton (2008). Duty-based citizenship achieved a Cronbach's alpha of .550 and engaged-based citizenship measures achieved a Cronbach's alpha of .386. The removal of politically related questions from both scales changed the reliability scores for the indexes. See Table 2 for the reliability scores, and see Appendix B for questions.

Table 2

Citizenship Norms Cronbach's Alpha

Engaged Citizenship	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Form Opinion	.209
Support People Worse Off	.248
Politically Active	.575
Volunteer	.273
Duty-Based Citizenship	
Report a Crime	.450
Obey Laws	.485
Support the Military	.452
Serve on Jury	.418
Vote	.659

Participants' political engagement was measured in two different ways. The first measure was the binary of voting in the 2012 Presidential election. Political engagement as determined by the measure indicated 77 (53.5%) participants were engaged and voted and 67 (46.5%) were not. The second measure was designed to advance understanding of nonpresidential election voting by creating a voting behavior index. The voting behavior index combined the binary of voting in the 2012 presidential election with three additional Likert-scale questions, which measured effort to vote in local and state elections. See Appendix F for the questions. Cronbach's alpha of the index was .860. The median of the index (M = 2.666) was used to divide high-engaged and low-engaged citizens. The resulting variable comprised 76 (53.1%) high-engaged and 67 (46.9%) low-engaged participants.

The next index test for reliability was the online political expression index. The index was a measure of the participants' frequency of discussing and engaging in political communication using new communication technologies. The index was on operationalization of the concept by Zhou and Pinkleton (2012). The index in their original operationalization achieved a Cronbach's alpha of .780. In this study, the measure had a Cronbach's alpha of .856.

The final index that needed reliability analysis was new media use. The index measured the use of different new communication technologies. Leung (2009) developed the index. In the initial operationalization, Leung (2009) achieved a Cronbach's alpha of .850. In this study, the index achieved a Cronbach's alpha of .455. This index, as well as the citizenship index that achieved unacceptable reliability scores, is analyzed further in the discussion section.

Despite the low reliability scores, the creation of the consumers and producers categories commenced. The measure took the median point of the amount of time participants spent creating new media content, 16–30 minutes (2.333, on the 1-to-5 Likert scale), and used it to categorize

the participants. The results were 109 (76.2%) consumers who spent 30 minutes or less creating new media content and 34 (23.8%) producers who spent 31 minutes or more creating content on an average day. See Appendix D for the questions.

The primary statistical test used in this dissertation study was a repeated-measures analysis of variance (ANOVA). One of the assumptions of this test is normality of the data. Of the eight measures of PIE gathered in this experiment, seven violated this assumption of normality. The pre-exposure measure of PIE was normally distributed, but the other seven measures were positively skewed. Two different data transformation techniques were employed in an effort to correct the normality issues. First, in accordance with Tabachnick and Fidell (2007), the square root was calculated to fix moderately positive skewed data. This data transformation did not fix the normality issues of the data. The next step was to transform the data using the technique for substantially positive skewed data. Tabachnick and Fidell (2007) suggested applying a logarithmic scale to the data. This data transformation did not solve the normality issues. After the unsuccessful testing of two data transformation techniques, further literature was consulted to determine the most appropriate solution to deal with the normality issues.

Schmider, Ziegler, Danay, Beyer, and Bühner (2010) suggested ANOVAs are strong enough to handle violations of normality. Tabachnick and Fidell (2007) also suggested that if all the normality issues are similar in nature, data transformation only offers negligible results and may be unneeded. Testing of skewed data revealed that using an ANOVA even with the assumption of normality yielded results with the same chance of Type 1 and Type 2 errors (Schmider et al., 2010). Other tests have found similar results. Schmider et al. (2010) also performed regression analysis that indicated normality violations were not a significant factor in

ANOVA results. With the support of the preceding literature, the analysis went forward, retaining the original positively skewed data in testing the hypotheses.

H1 predicted that consumption of political content in the interactive conditions would increase PIE more than consumption of political content in the noninteractive condition.

A repeated-measures ANOVA was conducted to determine whether there were statistically significant differences in pre-exposure PIE compared to PIE scores collected after each interactive political content consumption session. A visual inspection via a boxplot confirmed a lack of outliers in the data. The assumption of sphericity was violated, as assessed by Mauchly's test of sphericity, $\chi^2(5) = 162.765$, $p = .001$. A Greenhouse-Geisser correction was applied ($\varepsilon = 0.569$). PIE was statistically significantly different after participation in the experiment, $F(1.707, 242.432) = 15.304$, $p = .001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.097$.

Post-hoc analysis with a Bonferroni adjustment revealed that PIE did not vary significantly between each of the experiment's conditions. PIE did have a significant change from preintervention to each subsequent measure of PIE. PIE decreased from preintervention (M = 2.837, SD = 0.811) to high interactivity (M = 2.494, SD = 0.764), medium interactivity (M = 2.479, SD = 0.832), and no interactivity (M = 2.475, SD = 0.771). The conditions' differences were not significant when noninteractive compared to medium interactivity 95% CI [−0.118, 0.110], p = 0.999, compared with high interactivity, 95% CI [−0.113, 0.074], p = 0.999, and high interactivity compared to medium interactivity, 95% CI [−0.097, 0.127], p = 0.999.

This hypothesis was also tested for between-subject effects, using the demographic variables as moderating variables. There was no statistically significant interaction between the

type of interactivity and race, divided into White, Black, and other, $F(2, 140) = 0.28$, $p = .398$, partial $\eta2 = .013$. There was no statistically significant interaction between the type of interactivity change and gender, $F(1, 141) = 0.058$, $p = .811$, partial $\eta2 = .000$. There was also no statistically significant main interaction effect between gender, race, and interactivity, $F(2, 140) = 1.170$, $p = .314$, partial $\eta2 = .017$.

H1 was not supported. The hypothesis predicted an increase in PIE due to exposure with a greater increase in the interactive conditions. Instead, the experiment found a significant decrease due to exposure, with a similar decrease found for each interactivity condition. See Table 3 for the results.

Table 3

Interactivity & PIE

Interactivity Condition	PIE
Pre-Exposure	$M = 2.837$, $SD = 0.811$
No Interactivity	$M = 2.475*$, $SD = 0.771$
Medium Interactivity	$M = 2.479*$, $SD = 0.832$
High Interactivity	$M = 2.494*$, $SD = 0.764$

$*p < .05$ from pre-exposure measure

H2 predicted that consumption of political content covering the policies of candidates would increase PIE more than consumption of character based political content.

A repeated-measures ANOVA was conducted to determine whether there were statistically significant differences in PIE after the exposure to different types of political content. A visual inspection via a boxplot confirmed a lack of outliers in the data. Mauchly's test of sphericity indicated that the assumption of sphericity had been violated, $\chi2(2) = 111.539$, $p = .001$. A Greenhouse-Geisser correction was applied ($\varepsilon = 0.644$). PIE was statistically significantly

different from the pre-exposure measure compared to measures collected after different types of content consumption, $F(1.288, 182.847) = 18.334$, $p = .001$, partial η2 $= 0.114$, with PIE decreased from pre-exposure ($M = 2.837$, $SD = 0.811$) with exposure to character content ($M = 2.454$, $SD = 0.762$) and policy content ($M = 2.512$, $SD = 0.774$).

Post-hoc analysis with a Bonferroni adjustment revealed that PIE did not significantly differ in change to policy or character content. There was not a significant decrease as a result of character content compared to policy content, p =.271.

This hypothesis was also tested for between-subject effects, using the demographic variables as moderating variables. There was no statistically significant interaction between the type of content and race, divided into White, Black, and other, $F(2,137) = 1.024$, p = .362, partial η2 = .015. There was no statistically significant interaction between the type of content and gender, $F(2,137) = 0.281$, p = .597, partial η2 = .002. The main interaction between content, race, and gender was not significant, $F(2,137) = 1.202$, p = .304, partial η2 = .017.

H2 was not supported. The hypothesis predicted policy content would increase PIE. The experiment resulted in a significant decrease in PIE to both policy and character content. The decrease as a result of policy content was smaller, but not statistically different from character content. See Table 4 for the results.

Table 4

Content and PIE

Content Condition	PIE
Pre-Exposure	$M = 2.837$, $SD = 0.811$
Policy	$M = 2.512^*$, $SD = 0.774$
Character	$M = 2.454^*$, $SD = 0.762$

*$p < .05$ from pre-exposure measure

H3 predicted that consumption of political content would increase PIE more in low-engaged citizens than in high-engaged citizens.

Engagement was measured in two different ways for this hypothesis. Using the first measure of engagement, the binary of voting in the 2012 election results, two tests were employed. An independent samples t-test and Mann-Whitney U test revealed similar results. Seventy-seven participants voted in the 2012 presidential election, and 66 did not. High-engaged voters had lower levels of PIE change ($M = -0.016$, $SD = 0.787$) than did low-engaged voters ($M = -0.109$, $SD = 0.741$). There was homogeneity of variances as assessed by Levene' test for equality of variances ($p = .690$). There was not a statistically significant difference in PIE scores between types of voters, $t(141) = .728$, $p = .468$, $d = 0.122$.

Measuring engagement on the voting behavior index and using the median split to divide participants into groups of low-engaged and high-engaged and comparing with change in PIE resulted in non-normally distributed data, as assessed by Shapiro-Wilk's test ($p < .05$). A Mann-Whitney U test and independent samples t-test resulted in similar differences in PIE change scores between low-engaged and high-engaged participants. There were 76 high-engaged and 67 low-engaged participants. PIE scores increased after participation in the experiment for high-engaged participants ($M = 0.062$, $SD = 0.700$), whereas low-engaged participants ($M = -0.197$, $SD = 0.817$) had a decrease in their PIE after content consumption and this difference was statically significant $t(141) = -2.051$, $p = .042$, $d = 0.342$.

H3 was not supported. The hypothesis predicted a greater effect on low-engaged voters versus high-engaged voters. In both cases, the content from the experiment resulted in a decrease for low-engaged participants. The measure of engagement did change the interpretation of the hypothesis: A decrease in PIE for high-engaged participants was seen when engagement

was measured by voting, and an increase in PIE for high-engaged participants was seen when engagement was measured by the voting behavior index. See Table 5 for results.

Table 5

Engagement and PIE Change

Engagement	PIE Change
2012 Presidential Voting	
High-Engaged	$M = -0.016$, $SD = 0.787$
Low-Engaged	$M = -0.109$, $SD = 0.741$
Voting Behavior Index	
High-Engaged	$M = 0.062$, $SD = 0.700$
Low-Engaged	$M = -0.197$, $SD = 0.817$

H4 predicted that exposure to political advertisements would increase PIE.

In a visual inspection for outliers, one outlier was detected that was more than 2.5 box-lengths from the edge of the box in a boxplot. Inspection of their values did not reveal it to be extreme, and it was kept in the analysis. The pre-exposure PIE scores ($M = 2.837$, $SD = 0.811$) decreased to the postexposure scores ($M = 2.777$, $SD = 0.934$). The decrease was not significant as measured by a t-test, $t(142) = 0.928$, $p = .355$, $d = 0.077$. H4 was not supported due to the significant decrease found in PIE.

RQ1 focused on the relationship between the subjects' political engagement, content creation and consumption habits, and change in PIE from exposure to the stimuli.

The results of a two-way ANOVA revealed there was homogeneity of variances, as assessed by Levene's test of homogeneity of variance ($p = .303$). There was not a statistically significant interaction between new media producers and consumers and engagement as

measured by voting in the 2012 presidential election on change in PIE, $F(1,139) = .292, p = .590$, partial $\eta2 = .002$. There was not a significant interaction based on engagement, $F(1,139) = .577$, $p = .449$, partial $\eta2 = .004$ and type of new media user, $F(1,139) = 1.534, p = .218$, partial $\eta2 = .011$ on change in PIE.

There was not a statistically significant interaction between new media producers and consumers and engagement as measured on the voting behavior index on change in PIE, $F(1,139) = 1.120, p = .292$, partial $\eta2 = .008$. There was not a significant interaction based on engagement, $F(1,139) = 1.197, p = .276$, partial $\eta2 = .009$ and type of new media user, $F(1,139) = 2.283, p = .133$, partial $\eta2 = .016$ on change in PIE.

RQ2 involved the relationship between the different interaction conditions and levels of PIE.

A repeated-measures ANOVA was conducted to determine whether there were statistically significant differences in PIE between each type of interactivity. A visual inspection via a boxplot confirmed a lack of outliers in the data. Mauchly's test of sphericity indicated that the assumption of sphericity had been violated, $\chi2(2) = 8.220, p = .016$. A Greenhouse-Geisser correction was applied ($\varepsilon = 0.946$). PIE was not statistically significant between different types of interaction conditions, $F(1.893, 268.778) = .128, p = .870$, partial $\eta2 = .001$. PIE measured after high interactivity ($M = 2.494, SD = 0.764$) compared to PIE after medium interactivity ($M = 2.479, SD = 0.832$) and similarly after the none interactive condition ($M = 2.475, SD = 0.771$).

After analysis of the initial hypothesis and research questions, two additional post-hoc hypotheses were developed. Two research questions were also developed after completion. The combination of additional data availability and the complexity of the relationship between new

communication technology and political participation warranted further analysis. The post-hoc

hypothesis and research questions were generated around producers of new media content and

user-generated content. The combination of the exploration of these themes and their secondary

prominence in this dissertation makes post-hoc an appropriate approach of study. The results of

those hypothesis and research questions follow.

PHH1: Participants who voted in the 2012 presidential election will show higher

motivation to vote in local and nonpresidential elections.

A visual inspection via a boxplot confirmed a lack of outliers in the data. An independent

samples *t*-test and Mann-Whitney *U* test revealed similar results. Seventy-seven participants

voted in the 2012 presidential election; 66 did not. The motivation to vote was measured with

three questions regarding participants' voting habits in local and nonpresidential elections. See

Appendix F for the questions. Presidential voters had higher levels of voting behavior

($M = 3.437$, $SD = 1.129$) than did nonpresidential voters ($M = 2.131$, $SD = 1.025$), resulting

in a statistically significant difference, $t(141) = 7.189$, $p = 0.001$. There was homogeneity of

variances, for change in PIE scores for high-engaged and low-engaged voters, as assessed by

Levene's test for equality of variances ($p = .216$). The hypothesis was supported, indicating

those who voted in the 2012 presidential election had significantly higher motivation to vote in

local, state, and nonpresidential campaigns than did those who did not vote in 2012.

PHH2: High-engaged participants will participate in more political expression than will

low-engaged participants.

Online political expression measured the participants' use of blogs, Facebook, email, and

other new communication technologies to express political opinions. See Appendix C for the

questions. Online political expression was compared between the two measures of political engagement.

Comparing online political expression with the engagement of participants as measured by voting in the 2012 presidential election showed no outliers in the data, as assessed by a boxplot. An independent samples *t*-test and Mann-Whitney *U* Test revealed similar results. There were 77 high-engaged participants and 66 low-engaged participants. High-engaged voters had higher levels of online political expression ($M = 2.039$, $SD = 0.903$) than did low-engaged voters ($M = 1.748$, $SD = 0.760$). There was a statistically significant difference between online political expression and high-engaged and low-engaged participants, $t(140.963) = 2.087$, $p = 0.039$, $d = 0.351$. There was not homogeneity of variances, for online political expression for high-engaged and low-engaged voters, as assessed by Levene's test for equality of variances ($p = 0.048$).

Comparing online political expression with the engagement measured on the voting behavior index showed no outliers in the data, as assessed by a boxplot. An independent samples *t*-test and Mann-Whitney *U* Test revealed similar results. There were 76 high-engaged participants and 67 low-engaged participants on the voting behavior index. High-engaged voters had higher levels of online political expression ($M = 2.015$, $SD = 0.894$) than did low-engaged voters ($M = 1.779$, $SD = 1.025$). There was a marginally statistically significant difference between online political expression and those high-engaged and low-engaged participants, $t(141) = -1.672$, $p = .097$, $d = 0.281$. There was homogeneity of variances for online political expression for high-engaged and low-engaged voters, as assessed by Levene's test for equality of variances ($p = .117$). Levene's test for equality of variances tests two or more

groups from a population for the same variance, as one assumes two samples from the same population will have the same variance.

The hypothesis was marginally supported. Again, the results varied by the measure of engagement. Measuring engagement by 2012 presidential voting, those who voted had significantly more online political expression than did those who did not vote. Measuring engagement on the voting behavior index, the results were marginally significant, with high-engaged participants using new communication tools more frequently for political expression than did low-engaged voters.

PHRQ1: What is the relationship between consumers/producers and online political expression?

Comparing online political expression with the content creation and consumption habits resulted in no outliers in the data, as assessed by a boxplot. An independent samples t-test and Mann-Whitney U Test revealed similar results. There were 109 content consumers and 34 content producers. Producers had higher levels of online political expression ($M = 2.311$, $SD = 0.926$) than did consumers ($M = 1.778$, $SD = 0.787$), and this difference was statistically significant, $t(141) = -3.306$, $p = .001$, $d= 0.556$. There was homogeneity of variances for online political expression for producers and consumers, as assessed by Levene's test for equality of variances ($p = .064$).

PHRQ2: What is the relationship between new media use and online political expression?

A Pearson's product-moment correlation was run to assess the relationship between online political expression and new media use. Preliminary analyses showed the relationship to be linear without any outliers in the data. There was a moderate positive correlation between online political expression and new media use, $r(141) = .284$, $p =.001$. Time spent expressing

political views online accounted for 8% of the variation in new media use, meaning more online political expression equated with more new media use.

After the analysis of the original and post-hoc hypotheses and research questions was completed, the analysis focused on the features of new communication technologies. User-generated comments created as part of the high interactivity condition were recorded and were analyzed as part of this dissertation.

The experiment produced user-generated comments created during the high interactivity Web site experience. The participants' entered comments in response to the political advertisements and other user-generated comments they consumed. The interactivity of the condition was meant to simulate the use of social media. The focus of this experiment was on the cognitive processes behind the interaction rather than on the user-generated content.

In the exploration of user-generated content, grounded theory of constant comparison was employed to analyze the content created in this experiment. The grounded theory approach encompasses several steps. The creation of a codebook began with an initial review of the data. During the second review of the data, preliminary categories were developed. In the third review, refinement of the categories continued with the search for relationships between the different themes. The final step of the coding process was achieved with a review of the central theme of the user-generated comments. Four initial categories were developed. Another prominent feature of the grounded theory approach is the encouraged collaboration with other researchers (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). After the creation of the initial categories, another doctoral candidate was consulted. The ensuing discussion resulted in the creation and refinement of a codebook.

The creation of the codebook resulted in four categories. The first category was "asking a question," containing comments such as "What has he done other than help the vets?" The second category was "expressing support for the candidates," similar to "The candidate seems to have a clear goal and agenda." The third category was "expressing disagreement with the candidates," such as "I don't think 'road on Indiana' is a good ad because it did not show anything of him doing something," and "other." During postcoding consultation with the consulted doctoral candidate, the "other" category was refined even further with "replies" emerging as a new category out of the "other" coded user-generated comments. A number of the comments in the "other" category were replies to other comments in the experiment.

Intercoder reliability was not performed on the grounded theory categories. Glaser and Strauss (2009) stated the problem with intercoder reliability is the "verificationism effect" of testing data. Researchers often look to confirm their initial thoughts through their testing of data. As Ryan (2005) discussed, grounded theorists rarely conduct intercoder reliability tests due to their desire to discover new social phenomenon. The user-generated comments collected in this dissertation were intended to explore new research by describing the content with the emergent categories. Little empirical evidence exists as to which techniques of identifying themes work best (Ryan, 2005).

The user-generated comments were analyzed in different ways. A chi-square test was conducted between type of content and comment generated in response. All expected cell frequencies were greater than 5. There was a statistically significant difference between one category of comments and policy or character content, $\chi2(9) = 30.729$, $p > .001$. The difference centered on greater support for candidates being expressed after exposure to policy content. See Table 6 for the results.

Table 6

User Generated Comments by Content Type

Content Type	Comment Type	Frequency	Percentage
Character	Ask a Question	30	20.9%
	Express Support	64	44.7%
	Express Disagreement	37	25.8%
	Other	12	8.3%
			100%
Policy	Ask a Question	20	13.9%
	Express Support	91	63.6%
	Express Disagreement	17	11.8%
	Other	15	10.4
			100%

The next analysis compared the type of comment from both policy and character content and producers and consumers. There was not a statistically significant association between character content and media usage habits, $\chi 2(3) = 4.419, p = .246$. Policy content and user type did not have a statistically significant association either, $\chi 2(3) = 4.916, p = .178$. In a comparison of political engagement and comment type, no statistically significant relationships were found between content categories and either measure of engagement. Gender and race did not have statistically significant relationships with comment type as well.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

The macro area of study in this dissertation is the relationship between new communication technology and political participation. At the heart of this discussion is the disagreement over the current health of American democracy. The effect of technology on participation will play a key role in the future of American democracy. Three narratives have dominated scholarly debate about the effects of new communication technologies on political participation. (Bennett et al., 2011). One narrative emanated from those who expected new communication technology to stimulate participation among those previously unengaged (Delli Carpini, 2000). The pessimists, on the other hand, expected new communication technologies to occupy individuals' limited time and to harm participation rates (Putnam, 2000). Proponents of the normalization narrative expected new communication technologies to become just another tool to reinforce political interest of people who were already engaged (Bimber, 2001; Boulianne, 2009; Nisbet & Scheufele, 2004).

This study was intended to add clarity to the relationship between media and political participation. The study specifically focused on examining new communication technologies and their effects on political participation. The relationship between new communication technologies and political participation is influenced by many factors and variables. In this experiment, this research isolated a few key variables related to new communication technology and tested the effects of exposure to the media on political confidence.

A consensus has begun to emerge concerning the relationship between new communication technologies and political participation around the optimist and normalists narratives. Boulianne (2009) found in her meta-analysis of 38 studies and 166 effects between new communication technologies and political engagement,

> that there is little evidence to support the argument that Internet use is contributing to civic decline. The findings suggest that the effect of Internet use on engagement is

positive. However, the question remains: Are these effects substantial? The average positive effect is small in size. (p. 205)

Boulianne (2011) found support for the normalization narrative: the effects of new communication technologies seemed to reinforce existing attitudes. People who were engaged in politics used the new communication technology space to engage in political discussion; exposure to political content on unengaged citizens did not increase their political behaviors (Wright, 2012).

The results of this research indicate support for the pessimists and the belief that exposure to political content can harm voters' confidence and thus decrease the likelihood they will vote. The results contradict the prevailing literature on the relationship between new communication technology and political participation. The unexpected findings necessitate a further review of the literature surrounding the conflict. Boulianne's (2009) meta-analysis showed that a majority of studies (45%) found a statistically significant positive relation between new communication technology and political participation and that 4% found a statistically significant negative relationship. See Table 7 for the complete results. The negative results found in this experiment are not unprecedented, but they place this study in the minority of studies examining the relationship between new communication technology and political participation.

The meta-analysis demonstrated the variety of ways Internet use has been measured and data collected. Some studies compared Internet users and nonusers; other studies examined hours of Internet use, years of experience using the Internet, or types of Internet use; many studies used Internet surveys as the mode of data collection and as a result could not compare Internet users and nonusers (Boulianne, 2009). This made finding a harmful relationship by comparing the studies difficult. One Internet-based survey did return similar results to this study. In a national survey, Gibson et al. (2000) found that the effect of Internet use on political engagement was negative.

Table 7

Aggregate Findings on Internet Use and Engagement

	Significance	No. of effects	% of total effect
Positive Effects	Statistically significant*	74	45
	Not statistically significant	53	32
Negative Effects	Statistically significant*	6	4
	Not statistically significant	20	12
Direction not reported	Statistically significant*	0	0
	Not statistically significant	13	8
Total		166	100

*$p < .05$; Source: Adapted from "Does Internet Use Affect Engagement? A Meta-Analysis of Research", by S. Boulianne, *Political Communication*, 26, p. 198, 2009

In addition, Gibson et al. (2000) found a negative relationship between online socializing and political engagement. The online socializing index included such activities as online political discussion. Similarly, the results of this study found a negative relationship between Internet use and political engagement. The other studies finding a negative relationship possessed stark differences in methods that made comparison difficult. For example, the studies featured methods such as random sampling technique in large populations and in-person surveys (Boulianne, 2009). In this chapter, the focus is on individually examining the results of each hypothesis and research question, as well as the post-hoc hypotheses and questions.

The first hypothesis were designed to investigate the relationship between interactivity and PIE. The expected results, based on the literature, predicted a positive relationship between exposure and PIE, with the high interactivity online experience to have an even greater effect than the medium and static experiences. The results indicated a significant decrease between pre-exposure PIE and PIE after each different type of interactivity condition. The results did not

show a difference between the conditions and their effects on PIE. The decrease of political confidence could be due to the motivation of the participants to consume political content.

The ELM was used to explain the effects of information on consumers and their attitude change (Polk et al., 2009). As the ELM implies, motivation also plays a role in determining which cognitive processing route is used (Wojcieszak & Price, 2012). Therefore, motivation is a key element in the ELM. The results of this study indicate uncertainty regarding the motivation of participants to process the content from the experiment. The engagement levels of the participants were similar to national voting rates, with 53.7% of the sample having voted in the 2012 presidential election.

An additional factor contributing to motivation was the salience of the content. Comparing the local and salient political content to the rest of the political content in the experiment revealed significant differences. A *t*-test comparing the local to non-local content in the high and none interactive conditions revealed significantly higher levels of PIE for local content, See Table 8. The salience of the content to the participants is a potential reason for the decrease in PIE levels. The low salience of non-local content contributed to low motivation levels when the content was being cognitively processed.

Table 8

Differences between Content Proximity

Pair Comparison	Mean Difference	t	Sig.
Local – Non-Local Non Interactive	0.188	3.02	.003
Local – Non-Local High Interactive	0.169	-2.79	.005

With low motivation, the content was processed via the peripheral processing route. Content processed via the peripheral processing route has an easier time to effect attitude change than content processed via the central route. Content processed via the peripheral route may produce short-term attitude change, but does not have lasting effects.

The decrease in PIE as a result of this experiment could have been a short term effect of lowering participants confidence. One explanation is the political content was able to decrease political confidence via the peripheral processing route. Information processed via the peripheral route often leads to short-term attitude change (Baumgartner and Morris, 2008). Without longitudinal studies, determining the process route of the information from this experiment is impossible, but with motivation as one of the primary factors that determines which processing route information travels, the lack of motivating political content may explain the peripheral processing. Additionally attitude change after a short exposure to content indicates peripheral processing was used. If central processing were used attitude change would be less likely to occur after a short exposure to political content such as the experience in this experiment. A significant factor in determining which processing route is used is the salience of the content to the consumer and their motivation to analyze the material.

Motivation plays a significant role in the processing route content takes in the ELM. The lack of salient political content could have lowered the participants' motivation to analyze the information critically. Research has demonstrated that prior political motivation is a significant moderating variable between political advertisements and large effects (Shen, 2004). The combination of the low motivation levels could have affected the processing route of the content and thus the ability of the content to effect attitude change. The decrease in self-confidence from political content exposure has been found in other studies. For example, Yamamoto and Kushin

(2013) found exposure to political content via social media increased apathy and decreased self-confidence. Other studies with student samples found small effects on attitude change (Benoit, Leshner, & Chattopadhyay, 2007).

"Social media also may foster social fragmentation, prompting users to build walled gardens to retreat into websites where selectivity is the governing ethos of content exposure" (Yamamoto & Kushin, 2013, p. 11). Building "walled gardens" in social media is similar to the effects of selective exposure theory. Selective exposure studies have found social media reduces the likelihood of exposure to counter veiling political content (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010). This reduction of information diversity could lead to harmful effects for American democracy. The selective exposure of social media is similar to social capital studies.

Narrow networks of information and connections are related to lower levels of political participation. Bridging social capital crosses lines of division and exposures people to a diversity of viewpoints. Selective media exposure results in a spiral of silence and the narrowing of available information. Both theories have the same effect; harming American democracy.

Some scholars have viewed YouTube as a potential cure for such issues (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010). However, research from this dissertation and other studies reveal YouTube and other interactive websites may not be the cure to prevent the ability of users to build niches of information with new communication technologies, increasing selective exposure and harming online social capital.

Interactivity alone does not explain the relationship between users and political confidence. The results mirror previous studies on YouTube (e.g. Towner & Dulio, 2011) concluded that Internet usage may be beneficial for democracy, but YouTube in particular does not appear to be beneficial for democracy. The principles behind the YouTube maybe beneficial for democracy,

the interactivity and the content specifically examined in this dissertation and found on YouTube do not have seem to have a specific positive effect on democracy. The role of content found on YouTube needs to be examined further.

The first hypothesis also tested for traditional barriers of participation, such as race and gender. In general, confidence declined in this experiment; gender and race were not found to have a moderating effect between new communication use and political confidence. No main significant effects were found between race and PIE or between gender and PIE. Given the negative results of this study, it is no surprise that gender and race did not reveal significant differences. Findings in the literature have been mixed on the prevalence of traditional barriers to participation in Internet studies. New communication technology causing decreased levels of political confidence would support pessimist scholars who have argued traditional barriers to participation are still present (Kenski & Stroud, 2006; Marien et al., 2010).

While support for the pessimists was found in this research, traditional barriers to participation were not associated with statistically lower levels of confidence. The question remains, if exposure already has a negative effect on confidence, is it possible for it to have an even larger negative effect when accounting for gender and race? Research has demonstrated that noninstitutionalized participation has been less divided along gender lines than has institutionalized participation (Marien et al., 2010). In this light, the lack of gender differences was not surprising. Kenski and Stroud (2006) found race to be less of a factor for those Hispanics and African-Americans with Internet access than for those without. The participants in the experiment all have the option of regular Internet access with their enrollment in the university. Race might be less of a factor in a sample that has access to information via the Internet.

The second hypothesis tested the content of political advertising. The hypothesis predicted policy-based content would be more effective at increasing confidence. Policy-based content is more frequently used by politicians and would be expected to be more effective due to its frequent use (Benoit, et al., 2004). The results of the second hypothesis revealed a statistically significant decrease in confidence after exposure to both content types. The decrease was lower with exposure to policy content versus character content; however, there was no statistically significant difference between the two. Similar results have been found in the past, with exposure to both policy and character content having the same effect (Shen, Dardis, & Edwards, 2011). Exposure to political information on traditional, less interactive Web sites has been found to increase political disaffection (Yamamoto & Kushin, 2013). Exposure to policy content resulted in less of a decrease in confidence than did exposure to character content. The fact that policy content appeared to be more effective than character content, even if negative in this case, is a similar finding to results reported in functional theory literature in which policy content was employed more frequently than character content by politicians (Benoit et al., 2007).

The same arguments about ELM processing detailed in the first hypothesis apply here: The participants' peripheral processing may have produced apathy from exposure to the content and a subsequent decrease in confidence levels. The hypothesis also tested for gender and race differences and found neither to be a significant moderating factor.

The third hypothesis predicted that the exposure to political content would have a greater effect on low-engaged citizens versus high-engaged citizens. The results found exposure to have a negative impact on both groups: Their confidence levels decreased after exposure. More low-engaged voters' PIE scores decreased, compared to the number of decreases seen in the scores of high-engaged voters, but the difference was not significant.

This hypothesis tested engagement in two ways to correct for a history of overreliance on voting as a measure of engagement (Dalton, 2009). The first measure-categorized engagement based on 2012 presidential voting. The second measure of engagement was created through the voting behavior scale, with the median point dividing high-engaged and low-engaged participants. By this measure, high-engaged participants had a slight increase in PIE and low-engaged participants showed a decrease. The difference was statistically significant, but with the opposite effect the hypothesis predicted.

The third hypothesis focused on participants' selected exposure and content consumption. High-engaged participants consumed political content to reinforce their political interest and viewpoints; low-engaged participants avoided political content due to selective exposure and lacked confidence in their choices. According to the ELM, exposure to content with high personal relevance will be more likely to lead one to process content along the central route, whereas content that lacks a connection to prior knowledge will most likely be processed along the peripheral processing route (Polk et al., 2009). The lack of salience of the content was apparent for both high-engaged and low-engaged participants. The results of this hypothesis provided further evidence for the pessimist camp, who believe that new communication technologies have a negative effect on political engagement (Putnam, 2000).

The presence of a difference in the results of the hypothesis depended on the measure of engagement used. The difference provided insight into the problem concerning scholars about the narratives of technology and participation. Measuring engagement by tracking traditional presidential voting supports the position of the pessimist camp, while using a more inclusive engagement measure offers support for the normalists. The results conflict depending on the definition of engagement, thus exemplifying the difficulty in determining the relationship

between new communication technologies and political engagement. The conflicting results found in this hypothesis do not add clarity to the debate; if anything, these findings only add to the debate's complexity.

The fourth hypothesis predicted that exposure to political content would increase PIE. In fact, the results indicated the opposite, a decrease. The decrease was slight and not statistically significant. Research using PIE as the dominant theory supports a positive increase in PIE due to content exposure (Tedesco, 2011). However, a similar change in direction has been previously found. For example, Nisbet and Scheufele (2004) found that online political content consumption had a slight negative effect on participants' political efficacy. Bimber (2001) also found that exposure to political information alone did not increase participation. "Having access to the wealth of political information and communication available through the Internet is not by itself connected with participation," (Bimber, 2001, p. 61). The results offer support for the pessimists, who think new communication technologies will harm democracy. The results indicate exposure to content alone is not enough to change the confidence of individuals. Previous research has found that selected exposure to nonpolitical content is related to political cynicism (Lariscy et al., 2011). One possible explanation of the decrease in confidence is a potential increase in political cynicism.

Political cynicism has been studied primarily as an outcome of exposure to political advertising. Several studies have documented increased levels of cynicism among potential voters because of negative political ads (Lariscy et al., 2011). Cynicism may also be related to the framing of political content. Researchers have suggested when coverage focuses on issues besides substantive policy content, voters become more cynical, and their confidence decreases (Lariscy et al., 2011). The stimuli of this experiment contained both policy and character

content, so a possible effect of exposure to the content would be an increase in cynicism and a decrease in PIE.

The results of the experiment failed to support the positive hypothesis generated prior to the experiment. The significant results add support for the pessimists and normalists. The results further cloud the relationship between media and political engagement. The research questions, as well as post hoc work, were part of an attempt to clarify this relationship further.

The first research question focused on the relationship between political engagement, media consumption, and production. The results did not include any significant effects when comparing the change in confidence in the participants. The results did, however, demonstrate a difference between producers and consumers and their engagement levels. High-engaged producers of new media content had a positive change in PIE, whereas both groups of low-engaged and high-engaged consumers showed decreases in their confidence levels (see Figure 3). High-engaged participants increasing their confidence through the experiment provides further support for the normalization narrative. The difference between the producers and consumers needs further explanation. One difficulty in studying producers and consumers is the blurring of the lines between the two on social media Web sites. Social media Web sites encourage interaction centered on user-generated content; the user becomes both content producer and content consumer (Yamamoto & Kushin, 2013).

One possible explanation is achieved through a uses and gratifications lens. User-generated content on the Internet, civic engagement, and psychological empowerment have received significant interest in recent years, and some evidence has emerged that user-generated content on the Internet facilitates psychological empowerment (Leung, 2009). If producers of user-generated content are using central cognitive processing routes in the creation of online content, content

consumers might be more open to consuming online information through a similar processing route. With Internet users becoming more used to interacting with media rather than passively consuming it, producers believe that there are audiences for the content they produce, leading to the potential of activating cognitive process unseen in other Internet users (Leung, 2009). YouTube embodies the combination of this user influenced content production. YouTube and the empowerment of its users to create frequent and mobile content needs further study.
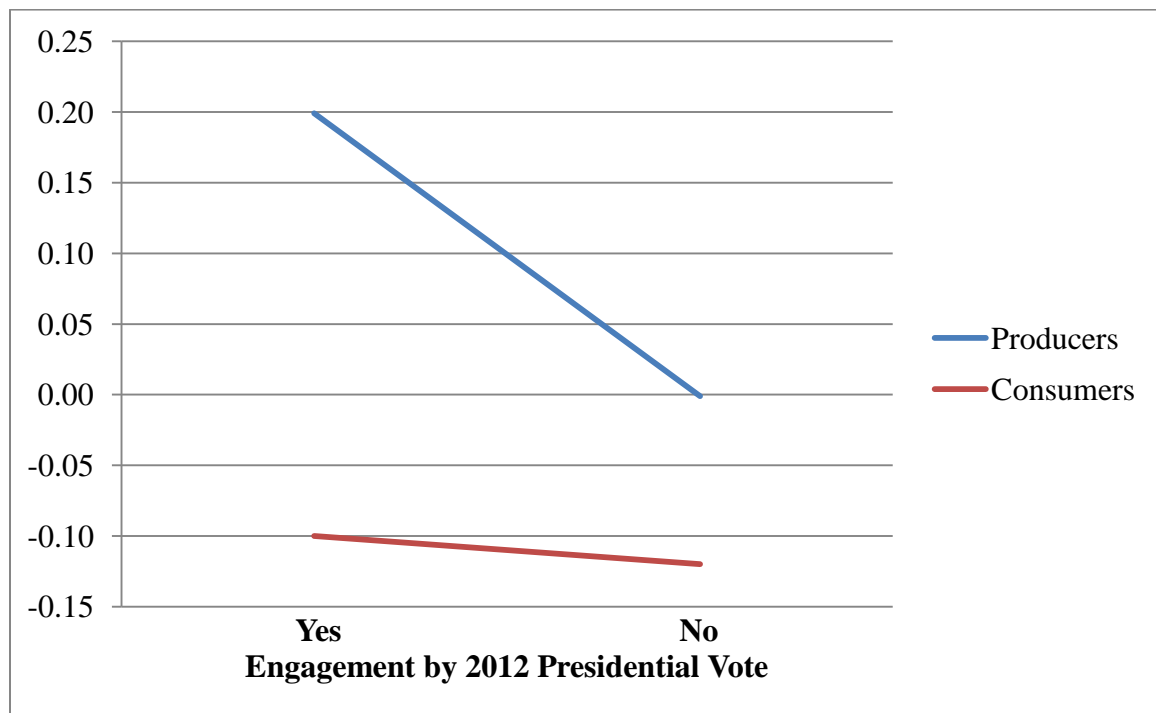
Figure 3. PIE Change by Media Consumption

The second research question expanded upon the first hypothesis and focused on the difference between each interactivity condition. The differences between the types of interactivity conditions were not significant. The PIE resulting after exposure to highly interactive content was the greatest, but not significantly different from the PIE resulting from medium or no interactivity. Both the medium and static interactive conditions had similar levels of PIE after

exposure. This experiment did not find any difference between the interactive conditions as previous studies have found (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010).

The result from the research question mirrors the results of Baumgartner and Morris (2010), who found support for the pessimist narrative that youth who use social media tend to have less political knowledge than their counterparts who rely on traditional media sources. The research question provides evidence that interactivity alone does not increase confidence. The interactivity of social media and other online news sources did not lead to an increase in political knowledge (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010). Ruling out the interactivity of social media as a positive effect leads to the examination of content or some other explanatory factor to describe the relationship digital natives have with politics.

The first post-hoc hypothesis predicted that participants who voted in the 2012 election would have higher levels of voting behavior. This hypothesis was created to evaluate the voting behavior index. The voting behavior index achieved a high level of reliability; further evaluation of the index through this hypothesis adds validity to the index. The difference between the groups, $M = 3.437$ vs. $M = 2.131$, respectively, revealed the constructs were similar and measured similar behavior. The different nature of the engagement measured by the voting behavior index allowed for deeper analysis of political participation, beyond just measuring presidential voting behavior alone. Presidential voting often serves as a measure of institutionalized engagement (Dalton, 2006); however, the measure raises the question, should casting one vote every four years count as being engaged? The voting behavior index was designed to correct this deficiency by measuring all voting behavior to determine the difference between high- and low-engaged participants. The significant differences produced using this measure, as seen from the results of the third hypothesis and confirmation of its validity, raised significant criticisms of previous literature. Has the majority

of political communication literature measured political engagement with a simplistic or inaccurate operationalization? Does a more complex and accurate measure of political engagement include local and statewide election behavior as well as presidential election behavior? The results of this research indicate that an alternative measure of engagement would alter the literature surrounding the collision of new communication technologies and political engagement.

The second post-hoc hypothesis predicted that high-engaged participants would have higher levels of online political expression than would low-engaged participants. The results were marginally statistically significant when using the voting behavior index ($p = .097$). The results were statistically significant when analyzing engagement with 2012 presidential voting ($p = .039$). The results support the normalists' narrative, showing those already interested in politics who engaged in institutionalized participation were the ones using new media technology to engage in noninstitutionalized participation in greater frequency than individuals who did not participate in politics. The main factor that drives optimists is the easy information availability new technology affords (Delli Carpini, 2000). In contrast, Bimber (2001) argued the cost of information was not a significant variable in political engagement, and the availability of information via the Internet would not increase participation. The results of this hypothesis support the normalists' position that those engaging in offline institutionalized activities are the ones using the new technologies to engage in online noninstitutionalized activities.

The first post-hoc research question involved the relationship between consumers and producers and online political expression. The results included a statistically significant difference between consumers ($M = 1.778$) and producers ($M = 2.311$) of new media content and their frequency of online political expression. The results revealed those who spend more time creating content online also spend more time creating political content online. These results might indicate

a relationship between spending time online and using some of that time to engage in politics. Uses and gratifications research offered some explanations here, indicating users seek out what they want on the Internet (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010). In the current media environment, digital natives are empowered to avoid content they deem undesirable and to seek out content they deem agreeable. A user of these social networking sites, where much of the online content is user-created, allows users to seek out agreeable information and limits participation to online activities, which does not translate to offline behavior such as voting in elections (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010).

The second post-hoc research question was intended to account for this relationship, building upon the first question, which involved the relationship between the amount of new media use and online political expression. The question encompassed both variables on a continuous level. The results showed a statistically significant relationship, with online political expression accounting for 8% of the variation in new media use. The results revealed a moderately positive correlation. Thus, the results indicate additional support for the normalists' narrative.

The experiment also collected comments in the highly interactive condition, during which participants entered responses to other comments and video. The comments were coded using the grounded theory of constant comparison. The majority of the comments expressed support for the candidates. The significant differences found between the supportive comments between policy content and character content support functional theory. Functional theorists have claimed that policy content is used more frequently and thus is more effective than character content (Benoit, Brazeal, & Airne, 2007). The experiment found 91 comments expressing support from exposure to a policy-content stimulus and 64 supportive comments from a character-content stimulus.

The hypothesis about interactivity did not generate any significant results. The significant differences between user-generated comments and content support the central tenet of the Web: Content is king. It is not the medium that makes the differences in political engagement, but the content created and consumed on that medium (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010).

In this dissertation project, the objective was to understand the relationship between American democracy and new communication technologies. Prior research has divided scholars into three schools of thought: optimists, pessimists, and normalists. The results of this dissertation study support both the pessimists and the normalists. One way to explain the mixed results is through a uses and gratification paradigm, which focuses on why participants use communication technologies. Coleman, Mendelson, Kurpius, and Lieber (2004) argued that content was the most important factor of new communication technology as it related to political attitude change. If content is the most important factor, participants in this experiment might have been alienated by the content of the experience, which resulted in a slight negative change in their confidence.

The motivation an individual brings to his or her use of media is an important factor in political confidence. If an individual is motivated to use the Internet for informational purposes, his or her political efficacy increases; however, if a person uses the Internet for entertainment purposes, Internet use harms political efficacy (Scheufele & Nisbet, 2002). The conclusion places uses and gratifications as the key theory explaining the effect of new communication technologies on political confidence. Politically interested individuals turn to the Internet to satisfy the motivation to expand and express their political knowledge. The participants of this experiment, which generated low levels of political engagement, were possibly alienated by the political content; their confidence decreased as a result.

Researchers involved in the debate over the effects of media continue to try to reach a consensus in terms of the power of new communication technologies to effect attitude change. Experts in the field are still struggling to come to an agreement regarding the relationship between new technology and traditional media (Jensen & Helles, 2011). The support for the normalists' narrative places this study squarely in the minimal media effects area. Vaccari (2013) looked at reinforcement of political attitudes and found minimal effects. The results of this dissertation project add further depth to the research concerning the intersection of new communication technology and political participation, but fail to provide clear answers that fit in with existing literature. The results of this study also raise new questions for future studies, and as with many studies, include limitations in drawing conclusions from these results.

Limitations

The first limitation to note of this research involved the sample. This dissertation overcame those limitations by focusing specifically on digital natives and multivariate relationships. First, using a nonrepresentative sample of students has been shown to be an appropriate sampling technique for studies of digital natives (Peterson, 2001). In the study, the goal was to examine multivariate relationships, which were found to be significant when using both representative and nonrepresentative samples (Basil et al., 2002). Even with the effort to overcome the limitations of a convenience sampling technique, it is important to note the sampling technique as one limitation of the research. This study can provide support for the broad arguments, as well as for the conclusions about the sample, but cannot support generalization of the findings to all American digital natives.

Another limitation was the relevancy of the content used in the experiment. The dissertation included local content relevant to Michigan voters whenever possible, but many of the political advertisements were from nearby states. The relevance of this content may have been

partially responsible for the directional change of PIE. Comments entered by participants reflect this as a possible limitation of this study, comments such as "I have no comment on what's happening in Indiana. I'm in Detroit… we're the ones who need the help lol" were found in response to many advertisements. User-generated comments such as this raise the possibility that the content increased political cynicism and decreased confidence. Data on political cynicism was not collected during the experiment; however, the results combined with further research on the concept point to this factor as a possible explanation for the results of the experiment.

A third limitation of this study was the reliability of the citizenship norms construct. The study was designed to account for the differences in 21st-century citizenship norms (Dalton, 2009) and therefore collected support for statements concerning engaged and duty-based citizenship norms. The low reliability scores of both measures prohibited any analysis using the constructs. Dalton (2009) contended the norms of citizenship are changing, and that partially explains the lower rates of participation. The constructs were intended to be used to help explain the relationship between digital natives and political participation. The reliability scores achieved for both the engaged and duty-based citizen norms prevented the use of the index to explain the relationship between the two phenomena.

With both citizenship constructs achieving unreliable results for their respective indexes, the argument Dalton (2008) made that norms of citizenship are changing failed to find support from this study. Both the traditional duty-based and the newer engaged citizenship failed to find reliable indexes. One possible explanation is that the questions regarding citizenship did not reflect the new norms of citizenship. While Dalton was correct that people are concerned about helping others, they may be helping according to a new cause-oriented micro-personal political agenda

(Bang, 2009). The decrease in confidence and the failure to support Dalton's argument provide further support for the pessimists. The changing norms of citizenship need further research.

The final limitation addressed is the fatigue effect created by repeatedly measuring PIE. A significant decrease was found between initial and final measure of PIE. There were not any significant differences found between the first and subsequent measures of PIE. A fatigue effect remains a possible explanation of the decrease found overall in the experiment, as participants may have tired of answering the same questions eight times during the experiment. Nevertheless, support for a fatigue effect is limited, as the eighth and final measure of PIE increased from the second through seventh measures. A fatigue effect would likely have resulted in a steady decrease in PIE. Ultimately, the dismissal of a fatigue effect is impossible and the effect of participant fatigue remains a limitation of this study.

Future Research

The research and results of this dissertation raised many concepts for further examination. The first area for future research was the difference between new communication content producers and consumers. This dissertation continued the early study of new media content and producers. While quantitative research was appropriate for many aspects of the relationship between new communication technology and participation, it might not be the most appropriate for examining a very new construct. Scholars are still in the beginning stages of examining the relationship between those who primarily produce content on new media and those who primarily consume content. This dissertation revealed differences in their levels of participation. Future researchers need to take a step backward and examine consumers and producers from a qualitative point of view first. In-depth interviews, focus groups, and participant observation of new media users would all help to develop a firmer understanding of the construct and the key variables

needed to measure the new media habits of users. After the establishment of valid and reliable measures, quantitative research would be more appropriate to establish a causal relationship between consumers and producers and their political engagement.

The second area of further research raised by this dissertation is the topic of functional theory. Future research could expand upon testing of the functional theory of campaign discourse. The theory has received little testing in laboratory experiments; further testing could use the entire theory, including the acclaim, attack, and defend advertisement categories to test each type of political advertising for effectiveness in motivating participation. Testing the ability of policy-based and character-based advertisements to increase confidence would be a significant area for future research. Policy- and character-based content revealed different levels of PIE after exposure; however, future research should explore these content types to confirm or refute the results of this study.

The third construct requiring further research was the construct of political engagement. The results of this study raised the issue of the measurement of political engagement. The significantly different results based upon the measure of political engagement support the call by many scholars to rethink the measure of political engagement. The history and wealth of empirical measures of presidential voting provided the historical rationale for its use; however, the minimal commitment a presidential vote requires, plus the results of this dissertation, raises questions about the measure. Future research should continue the examination and evaluation of political engagement measures to bring some clarity to the murky field of political communication.

Conclusion

Researchers in the field of political communication disagree over the effect of new communication technology on political participation. The focus of this dissertation study was to examine three facets of political communication. First, on a macro level, the study was intended to examine the relationship between new communication technologies and political participation. Second, on a micro level, the study was designed to investigate the relationship between interactivity and content of Web sites and their effects on political confidence. Finally, the study focused on digital natives—those who have grown up with the Internet as a primary communication tool and who will soon become the largest block of American voters.

The study used political information efficacy (PIE) as the primary theory to explain whether youth vote. Using PIE as the driving theory, the results of the dissertation study indicated a harmful relationship between political content consumption in a new media environment and levels of confidence and likelihood of participation. The study also found slight differences between different interactivity and content conditions and the reported levels of confidence after exposure. These differences were not significant; further research is needed to understand the difference between topic and interactivity of online political content consumption and its effect on participants' confidence in their political knowledge.

This study does not provide clear generalizable evidence of the relationship between these three factors and political participation. The search for a causal relationship between the interactivity of new communication technologies and the effect these technologies have on political participation habits of digital natives seems more convoluted after this research. If anything, this study contributed to the complexity of the field of political communication. On a macro level, the difficulties in understanding the effects new communication technology have on

political participation were highlighted further by the mixed results of this research. Some of the conflicts in this relationship between the two were underscored with this study. The search for substantial causal effects between 21st-century media consumption and political participation continues. The call for continued research in the political communication field is supported with the findings of this study. The questions remain: What type of political content influences political interest and engagement, and under what conditions? Further research into these areas could help assess whether online political content consumption has a substantial impact on engagement.

APPENDIX A: PIE

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the study. First, we will begin with some questions concerning your political beliefs and media use.

I consider myself well-qualified to participate in politics.

    Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree
         []   []   []   []   []

I think that I am better informed about politics and government than most people.

    Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree
         []   []   []   []   []

I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country.

    Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree
         []   []   []   []   []

If a friend asked me about the upcoming election, I feel I would have enough information to help my friend figure out who to vote for.

      Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree
           []   []   []   []   []

APPENDIX B: CITIZENSHIP NORMS

I feel it is important to take action to support people who are worse off than I am.

Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree
[]   []   []   []   []

I feel it is important to obey laws and regulations.

Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree
[]   []   []   []   []

I feel it is important to form my own opinion on matters.

Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree
[]   []   []   []   []

I feel it is important to be active in volunteer organizations.

Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree
[]   []   []   []   []

I feel it is important to be active in politics.

Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree
[]   []   []   []   []

I feel it is important to serve on a jury when called.

Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree
[]   []   []   []   []

I feel it is important to support the military in whatever way I can.

Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree
[]   []   []   []   []

I feel it is important to report a crime if I witness one.

Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree
[]   []   []   []   []

APPENDIX C: ONLINE POLITICAL EXPRESSION

I share political news, video clips, or others' blog posts online.

| Not at all | | | | Very Frequently |
| [] | [] | [] | [] | [] |

I exchange opinions about politics via e-mail, social media (YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.) or other sites on the Internet.

| Not at all | | | | Very Frequently |
| [] | [] | [] | [] | [] |

I write blog posts on political issues.

| Not at all | | | | Very Frequently |
| [] | [] | [] | [] | [] |

I participate in online political discussions.

| Not at all | | | | Very Frequently |
| [] | [] | [] | [] | [] |

I create and post online audio, video, animation, photos or computer artwork to express political views.

| Not at all | | | | Very Frequently |
| [] | [] | [] | [] | [] |

APPENDIX D: NEW MEDIA USE

Over the past six months, how much time on a typical day do you spend writing or creating content on the following activities on the internet:

Personal Webpage or Blogs:

15 minutes or	16–30	31–59	One to two	More than
fewer	minutes	minutes	hours.	two hours per day.
[]	[]	[]	[]	[]

Facebook or other social networks:

15 minutes or fewer	16–30 minutes	31–59 minutes	One to two hours.	More than two hours per day.
[]	[]	[]	[]	[]

YouTube:

15 minutes or fewer	16–30 minutes	31–59 minutes	One to two hours.	More than two hours per day.
[]	[]	[]	[]	[]

APPENDIX E:
CODING OF STIMULI ACCORDING TO
FUNCTIONAL THEORY OF CAMPAIGN DISCOURSE

Political Advertisements

Policy Function:

Acclaim: "Emmer voted for reduced government spending." - MN Forward

Character Function:

Acclaim: "I remember where I came from. I believe in opportunity, I believe in

hard work to build a good life. I believe we can fix our economy. I believe we

can get this right."- Kyrillos for US Senate

Political News Stories

Policy Function:

Terry Whitney announces campaign for U.S. Senate

In declaring his campaign for the U.S. Senate, Terry Whitney discussed policies that he promised would help change the direction of this country and the State of Michigan.

Whitney stated, "job creation and economic development are critical to the future of Michigan. I know success in our economy means tapping the innovation of our people to find new approaches to attract more jobs to the state. And those jobs need to pay a living wage — one large enough for working people to raise a family and pay the bills."

Whitney's campaign has focused on his record as a small business owner and county executive. "I have proven track record of professionalism and enterprise level experience creating jobs, cutting costs, and thinking outside the box to deliver real world solutions to the ever changing and complex business world," said Whitney.

In Marquette County, Whitney helped set up an economic development fund that encouraged businesses, small and large, to bring jobs back to Michigan.
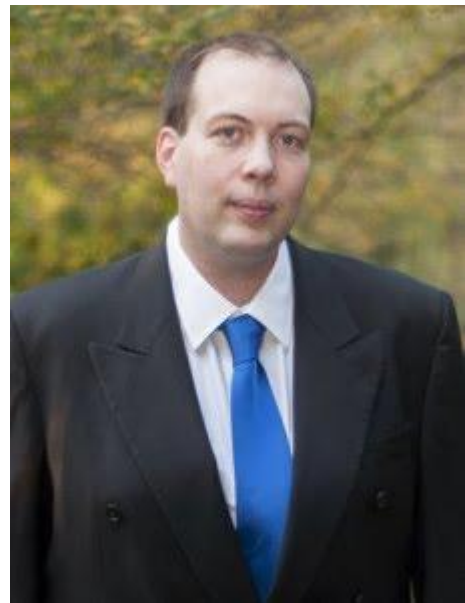
Whitney continued, "bringing new business into Michigan is important — but we also need to protect the jobs that are already here. Thanks to the President's auto rescue, Detroit manufacturing is back. We need to make sure that forward progress continues."

Whitney concluded his campaign announcement, with a focus on education. "Each step on the educational ladder brings with it economic progress. Bringing new and innovative jobs to Michigan will only be effective if we have the educated workforce to fill them."

As Marquette County Executive, Whitney has made investments in our children. The county implemented a universal preschool program to make sure children get the head start they need. "The investment in our schools and teachers will pay off in the long term, this is just an example of the priorities I'll bring to Washington," stated Whitney.

Character Function:

John Gregg campaigns for Governor

John Gregg visited Franklin County Saturday night when he made a campaign stop at The Hearthstone Restaurant just outside Metamora. He sat down for an interview before the event.

Gregg, who is from Southwestern Indiana, served three terms as Speaker of the Indiana House of Representatives, and he spoke to an enthusiastic and packed room.

When asked about the economic challenges facing Indiana, Gregg was quick to reply.

"We've got some issues. 60 percent of our bridges in Indiana are going to need to be replaced in the next 20 years. We have some natural things that we can take advantage of such as energy.

Clean coal, methane, natural gas, wind farms, we need to be manufacturing the poles and the blades for those wind farms. When I was a kid, people were moving over to Connersville, Marion, Anderson, New Castle, because of the good paying auto industry jobs. We have to get back to that with value added and advanced manufacturing. We need to do everything we can to make sure if something is going to be built, it is going to be built in Indiana," Gregg said.

Next, he was asked about what he would do differently in his administration?

"We can do things, we can accomplish things. We build the rails trains run on, we build the engines at Cummings that they use, we build the boxcars in Muncie, yet we have no rail policy? We can have common sense things but we have to stop fussing and fighting. We need the proper leadership to fix these issues. We lack commonsense because we lack the right leaders to take charge and cross party lines. When I was Speaker, the Republicans controlled the Senate and we passed balanced budgets, we collaborated, we cooperated, and we worked together because the

next generation was more important than the next election, and we need to get back to that, and I will do that as Governor," Gregg said.

Times seem to be tough and politics seem to be nothing but polarizing, why is that?

"There have been three major attacks from Indianapolis and from Washington D.C.; An attack on working men and women in labor and the middle class, an attack on education, and an attack on women through healthcare. I am pro-life, I am a minority in our party, but I am also a cancer survivor and I know the importance of early screening. You can't do abortions with federal funds, and that is fine, but to want to shut down Planned Parenthood's health care services,

breast exams, cervical exams, preventive screening, contraception, denying healthcare services to women is wrong. We need a leader who will stand up for what he or she believes in a fight for the people of this state," Gregg said.

The appearance by the candidate in Franklin County was the final stop after a full day of visits and speeches across the southern part of the state and Gregg expects to keep at the same pace throughout the election cycle.

APPENDIX F: PIE

I consider myself well-qualified to participate in politics involving these candidates.

        Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree
              []   []   []   []   []

I think that I am better informed about politics involving these candidates than most people are.

        Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree
              []   []   []   []   []

I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing these candidates.

        Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree
              []   []   []   []   []

If a friend asked me about the upcoming election involving these candidates, I feel I would have enough information to help my friend figure out who to vote for.

        Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree
              []   []   []   []   []

APPENDIX G: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

You are almost finished. We have just a few more questions. We'd now like to gather some personal information about you. Please remember all your answer are confidential.

Are you a U.S. Citizen?

Yes	No
[]	[]

Are you male or female?

Male	Female
[]	[]

Which of the following best describes your race?

White, non-Hispanic	Black/ African American	Hispanic	Asian or Pacific Islander	American Indian or Alaskan Native	South Asian/Middle Eastern	Other
[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]

How old were you on your last birthday'? fill in the blank)

APPENDIX H: VOTING BEHAVIOR

I always make an effort to vote.

Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree
[]   []   []   []   []

I have voted in all local elections which have occurred, since I have been eligible to vote.

Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree
[]   []   []   []   []

I have voted in all state elections, which have occurred, since I have been eligible to vote.

Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree
[]   []   []   []   []

Did you vote in the 2012 Presidential election?

Yes   No
[]   []

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ABSTRACT

POLITICAL CONTENT AND POLITICAL BEHAVIOR: USING FUNCTIONAL THEORY TO TEST THE ABILITY OF POLITICAL CONTENT TO STIMULATE POLITICAL INTEREST

by

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Major: Communication

Degree: Doctor of Philosophy

The health of the American democracy is up for debate. Digital natives will decide the future of this democracy. Fewer digital natives—those who have grown up with Internet access—are engaging in formal political participation, compared to their parents. Digital natives lack the information needed to participate. This study examined the effects of interactive political content on digital natives' political information efficacy (PIE) through an experiment. The results revealed a decrease in the participants' political confidence and a decrease in the likelihood they would vote. Exposure to political information harmed most digital natives' PIE and reinforced political attitudes in some. The results are troubling for the future health of the American democracy. The results call attention to the need for further research on the relationship between digital natives' use of new communication technologies and its effect on political participation.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Ryan Stouffer was born in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan in 1981. He graduated from L'Anse High School in 2000 and from Miami University in 2004 with a Bachelor of Arts in Mass Communication. He received a Masters of Arts from San Francisco State in 2006. He worked for three years in Silicon Valley, designing and optimizing small business Web sites. He spent five years working as a media educator, producing 27 foreign student documentaries. He is currently a Doctoral Candidate at Wayne State University and a tenure-track Instructor at Longwood University, Farmville, VA.

His research interests include social media, political participation, framing, critical pedagogy, and digital storytelling.