THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION IN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: EXPLORING THE

SOCIAL NORMATIVE AND COGNITIVE PROCESSES RELATED TO POLITICAL

BEHAVIORS

BY

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ABSTRACT

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This study develops a social normative and cognitive mediation model of political

participation to simultaneously examine the roles of political news media, online citizen media,

online political interaction, and offline political discussions in shaping political participation.

One Web survey was conducted in one large northwestern university community with a

probability-based sample including undergraduate, graduate students, and university employees

(N=1,292). Structural equation models reveal that political interest is the strongest predictor of

political participation, but its effect is completely mediated by communication activities and

social normative and cognitive processes. News media have no significant effect on political

participation. The positive influence of online citizen media on political participation is

completely mediated by political interpersonal communication and social normative and

cognitive processes. Both online political interaction and offline political discussion exert strong

direct and indirect influences on political participation. As social psychological mediating factors,

subjective norms of political participation, perception of peers' political participation, political information efficacy, and political external efficacy are positively associated with political participation. In addition, different communication activities have their unique contributions to these social psychological factors. The present suggests that driven by individuals' political predispositions and motivations, different communication activities exert their special influences in shaping political participation via unique social normative and cognitive processes. Further, these findings empirically and theoretically support the original "orientation-communication-social and cognitive influence-responses" model advanced in this study as a new communication mediation model to better understand the social psychological processes related to political communication in the new information era.

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INTRODUCTION

Political participation – public involvement in efforts to address collective problems – has long been an essential characteristic of American democracy. Yet many democratic citizens fail to engage in the most basic mode of participation – voting (Lijphart, 1997); let alone more demanding forms of political engagement and collective action (Putnam, 2000; Shah & Scheufele, 2006; McCluskey, Deshpande, Shah, & McLeod, 2004). Accordingly, scholarly interest in the factors that contribute to political participation remains high, and personal demographic characteristics, social structure, media use, and communication patterns have been well studied. However, due to the increasingly rapid development of communication technologies, trying to assess the impact of media and communication on the American politics is somewhat akin to shooting a moving target.

In the mid-20th century, scholars began to assess how individuals were socialized into political contexts (for reviews, see Kelly & Donohew, 1999; McDevitt & Kiousis, 2007), and the famous era of minimal media effects emerged from studies done in the 1940s and early 1950s (Klapper, 1960; Bennett & Iyengar, 2008). Scholars concluded that media messages were filtered and interpreted through social reference processes (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Bennett & Manheim, 2006). With the dramatic change of the socio-technological context since 1980s, people have become increasingly detached from social institutions and had more opportunities to obtain proliferated and individualized information sources (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008). Since then, the research approach to political communication has gradually been switched to information-processing and cognitive perspectives (McGuire, 1993). Attitude change theories (Festinger, 1957; Zajonc, 2001) and information processing and learning theories (Zaller, 1992; Graber,

1988) encourage communication researchers to focus on how people respond to messages and how media exposure shapes individuals' decision-making process and behaviors.

Since 1990s, the popularity of the Internet has dramatically changed the landscape of political communication via greatly expanding citizens' access to information and their opportunities to voice their own opinions. Given the interactivity of the Internet, audiences consist not only the traditional and passive readers, listeners, and viewers, but also the active participants in networked online public spheres where they are constantly expressing their opinions and also are constantly exposed to the distribution of others' choices and opinions (for review, see Benkler, 2006, Bennett & Iyengar, 2008). Information channels are fragmented and audiences also less connected with traditional social institutions, yet, ordinary citizens' opinions are instead more easily voiced, crystallized and synthesized via the free distribution of information and personal interaction in cyberspace, such as citizen blogs, cell phones, online forums, and social media (Benkler, 2006). For instance, in the 2008 election cycle, 40% of all Americans received information about the campaign via the Internet, 10% used social networking sites to engage in political activity, and 39% went online to read or watch "unfiltered" campaign materials via candidates' Web sites and citizens' blogs (Rainie, 2008). How do the distribution of ordinary citizens' opinions and the personally mediated interaction influence individuals' political behaviors? The transition to the personally mediated society requires researchers to spot where the old and new formations come into play in different political communication processes. This study attempts to understand how new interactive communication impacts citizens' political participation based on social influence and information processing theories.

Scholars have long argued that political behaviors develop through a dynamic process between cognitive and social influence components (e.g. Price & Roberts, 1987; McLeod, Kosicki, & McLeod, 1994; Hoffman, et al., 2007; Neuwirth & Frederick, 2004). Although communication is imbedded in this dynamic process and exerts influence across multiple levels, researchers often focus only on one or two levels of process to examine how communication impacts political behaviors (e.g. Price, 1989; Shah & Scheufele, 2006; McLeod, Kosicki, and McLeod, 1994). The purpose of this study is to simultaneously examine multiple factors associated with the process of political participation in order to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of the overall political participation process. The conceptual model of the political participation process in this study is based on the theoretical contributions of McLeod, Kosicki, and McLeod (1994), Hoffman et al., (2007), and Neuwirth and Frederick (2004).

<div align="center">LITERATURE REVIEW</div>

Developing a Theoretical Framework

Three models that acknowledge the overlapping and interactive effects of different predictive factors guide the present study. Derived from advances in psychology, McLeod, Kosicki, and McLeod's (1994) cognitive mediation model moves beyond the simple stimulus-response (S-R) perspective of direct effects to an O-S-O-R perspective (Markus & Zajonc, 1985) to examine cognitive activity that takes places before, during and after media use. The first "O" in the model focuses on individual-level motivation of media use based on uses and gratifications theory (e.g. Rubin, 1984; Becker, 1979). In terms of political communication, media use depends on citizens' motivational state reflecting a person's interest in public affairs (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944; Pinkleton & Austin, 1998). The second "O" represents "what is likely to happen between reception of the message and the response of the audience member" (McLeod

et al., 1994, pp. 146-147) based on social learning and information processing theories, such as citizens' attitudes, belief, and self-efficacy changes (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995; Pinkleton & Austin, 1998). Generally, the cognitive mediation model connects between gratifications sought, audience activity, and media effects as a sequential process at a individual level and suggests that information processing behaviors are the central determinants of cognitive media effects (Eveland, Shah, & Kwak, 2003; Eveland, 2002).

However, the O-S-O-R model does not fully capture the interrelated mediating processes because of ignoring the roles of interpersonal communication and social influence in shaping political behaviors (Shah, Cho, Nah, et al., 2007). Shah et al., (2007) added the *reasoning* (R) into the center of the O-S-O-R framework as a core mediator of the effects of stimuli on outcome orientations and subsequent responses. The *reasoning* means both mental elaboration (intrapersonal ways of thinking) and collective consideration (interpersonal ways of thinking). Some empirical studies have supported the important roles of elaboration and political discussions in the modified O-S-R-O-R model in promoting political participation (Eveland, 2007; Shah et al., 2007).

Compared with information processing theories, social control theories offer different perspectives on the roles of communication integrating information and crystallizing actions (Hoffman et al., 2006; Noelle-Neumann, 1973; Price & Roberts, 1987). Hoffman et al., (2006) incorporated the essential components of media use and interpersonal communication and conceptualized three filters –intrapersonal, media, and social filters- in the process of public opinion formation. Hoffman et al.'s (2006) model suggests that personal predispositions and issue interests, media use, and interpersonal interaction altogether account for the overall variance in individuals' opinion and behavior formation. In other words, the areas of potential

overlap between O-S-R-O-R (Shah et al., 2007) and communication filters model (Hoffman et al., 2006) appear to include (a) issue interest, predisposition, and motivation of media use and (b) personally mediated communication.

However, neither Hoffman et al.'s (2006) model nor O-S-O-R models has examined the mediating process between communication and behavior formation. Based on the theories of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1988, 1991) and the spiral of silence (Noelle-Neumann, 1984) Neuwirth and Frederick's (2004) model offers the present study the theoretical framework on *how* social interaction and media use impact individuals' behaviors. Ajzen's (1988, 1991) theory of planned behavior suggests that behavioral intention is affected by attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavior control. Attitude toward the behavior is the person's global evaluation of performing the specific behavior and the subjective norm is the person's perception of whether relevant others believe he or she should perform the behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Neuwirth and Frederick (2004) conceptualized the perceived behavioral control as one's ability to perform an action, that is, self-efficacy (also see Bandura, 1986). Neuwirth and Fredrick (2004) also combined Noelle-Neuman's (1974) spiral of silence theory to examine the role of perception of estimate of social climate in individuals' behaviors. Although theory of planned behavior and spiral of silence emphasize different behavioral outcomes and are based on different social-psychological mechanism, they suggest that both of normative beliefs and perception of majority opinions or behaviors exert their influence on individuals' behaviors (Neuwirth & Fredrick, 2004). In terms of political communication, political scientists and public opinion researchers have connected the segmented associations between communication (including media use and interpersonal communication) and normative beliefs, evaluations, self-efficacy, and the perception of social climates (e.g.

Noelle-Neuman, 1974; Glynn & Huge, 2007; Chaffee, 1977; Pinkleton & Austin, 1998; Neuwirth & Fredrick, 2004; Glynn & McLeod, 1984; Atkin, Hocking, & Block, 1984).

Building upon these theoretical models, this study focuses on three components in the affecting process of communication on political behaviors: (1) the entry roles of personal demographics and political interests; (2) the relationship between information consumption and personally mediated interaction; (3) the social normative and cognitive processes (i.e. normative belief, self-efficacy, and perception of social climate) that mediate the vital function of communication in influencing political behaviors. For most issues, there are almost infinite number of factors that may shape individual political behaviors, yet this study attempts to examine a limited number of important processes or paths to understand how communication ultimately and effectively affects individuals' behaviors. From McLeod, Kosicki, and McLeod's (1994) and Hoffman et al.,'s (2007) models, this study identifies the information and cognitive process from motivation and interest to information use and personally mediated interaction to individuals' behaviors. Neuwirth and Fredrick's (2004) application of two social normative and cognitive influence theories provides this study with a framework from which to analyze the social influencing processes of communication on individuals' behaviors. In other words, this study not only attempts to demonstrate the intertwining influence of information consumption from various media and personally-mediated interaction on political behaviors, but also attempts to understand the intricate mediating mechanism related to the communication influence.

Figure 1 presents the conceptualization of the affecting process of communication in the formation of political behaviors. This model demonstrates that, personal demographics and political interests activate communication behaviors, including information consumption and interpersonal interaction. As information is obtained and processed, not only personally mediated

communication will increase, that is, the collective elaboration process, but also simultaneously people's normative belief, perception of social climate, and self-efficacy will be shaped. Each of these components has the potential to shape individuals' political behaviors, operationalized as political participation in this study.

Information Consumption, Personally Mediated Interaction, and Political Participation

This study conceptualizes the communication behaviors as four components: political news media use (including traditional news media and online news media), online citizen media use, online political interaction, and offline political discussion. Traditional news media have both direct impacts and indirect influence as mediated by political efficacy and political knowledge on political participation. Multiple studies indicate that traditional news increases political knowledge and promotes feelings of efficacy, making an individual more likely to participate in campaigns and/or politics (e.g. Pinkleton & Austin, 2001; Eveland & Scheufele, 2000; Scheufele et al., 2004). In terms of the Internet information consumption, Shah, Cho, Eveland, and Kwak (2005) argued that the Internet may promote political participation partly because of its flexibility, which would make citizens more able to achieve their information needs and increase opportunities to participate in political activates (also see Weber, Loumakis, & Bergman, 2003; Horrigan, Garrett, & Resnick, 2004; Kenski & Stroud, 2006).

Since the late 1990s, the popularity of social media has expanded the online information sources to online citizen media (i.e. personal blogs, bulletin boards, and social networking sites). Online citizen media differs from established traditional news outlets for the absence of formal editorial review (Kaye, 2005). Citizens' opinions that are expressed through social media have become both a supplement and a challenge to traditional journalism (Kennedy, 2008; Kaye,

2005). For instance, bloggers and blog readers muse about social and political issues, especially those that the traditional media gloss over or omit (Palser, 2002; Seipp, 2002). Although academic research linking social media use and political participation has not been found, researchers have provided some empirical evidences on the connections between blog consumptions and political trust and efficacy. Amis (2002) argued that Weblog readers have little faith, a growing distrust, and considerable contempt in established journalism. With a blogger's support, blog readers are ready to fact-check the media and often force newspapers to issue retractions and corrections (Rosenberg, 2002). As recipients and providers of news and commentary, user of online social media have a high interest in political and general news and a heightened sense of self-efficacy to bring about political and social change (Kaye, 2005). Zhou (2008) found that citizen media consumption is unique from hard news consumption in terms of factor analysis and their influences on political participation and interpersonal interaction. This study attempts to examine the unique role of online citizen media use in the process of political participation.

Online and offline interpersonal political communication results in political participation and public opinion development (Hoffman et al., 2007; McLeod et al., 2001; Sotirovic & McLeod, 2001; Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995; Shah et al., 2005). Political discussion is characterized by all kinds of political talk, as long as the conversation is voluntarily carried out without any specific agenda via various communication channels (Kim, Wyatt, & Katz, 1999). Research suggests that frequency of political talk has been highlighted as a key variable in a chain of communication effects on political engagement and contributes to a number of politically desirable outcomes, such as greater political knowledge, higher self-efficacy, better social tolerance (Mutz, 2002; Hoffman et al., 2007; Shah et al., 2005). Eliasoph (1998) argued

that talking through vague political ideas, playing with their ideas in the light of day helps citizens to understand political processes, reconcile potentially inconsistent points of view, and make informed decisions. Robinson and Levy (1986) even argued that political discussion seems to be at least twice as powerful a predictor of political mobilization as political news media.

The communicative potential of the Internet permits the sharing of political perspectives and concerns with others through interactive messaging technologies (Price & Cappella, 2002). Online communication about politics may not only permit citizens to gain knowledge but also allow them to address joint concerns and coordinate collective actions (Bimber, 1998; Davis, 1999; Norris, 1998). Online discussion leads the participants to feelings of emancipation by exposing them to lively conflicts and disagreements (Papacharissi, 2004). Besides, the Internet offers opportunities for citizens to exercise political activities via cyber protesting, online polling, cyber petitions and discussion which may help citizens to cultivate their capacity to act on political realities (Kim & Rhee, 2006). Therefore, this study expects four types of communication activities to positively influence citizens' political participation.

H1a: Political news media use will positively predict political participation.

H1b: Online citizen media use will positively predict political participation.

H1c: Offline political discussion will positively predict political participation.

H1d: Online political interaction will positively predict political participation.

Political Interests as an Entry Point

The present theoretical model predicts political interests and demographics play entry roles in the whole model. The political interest was advanced by Atkin (1972) and was considered as an important element in political decision-making process (Campbell et al., 1960; Pinkleton & Austin, 2001; McLeod & McDonald, 1985). Political interests motivated people to

practice activities, such as information seeking and interpersonal discussion to find specific satisfaction [for review Bandura (1997); Salmon, 1986]. An individual expecting to discuss public affairs or display his/her political knowledge is likely to devote more effort to seek information about public affairs or elections. New information technologies (i.e. the Internet and cell phone) have greatly facilitated the collection of public affairs information for active information seekers with higher involvement level (Reagan, Pinkleton, Aaronson, & Ramo, 1995).

H2: Political interests will positively predict political communication activities (i.e. political news media use, online citizen media use, online political interaction, and offline political discussion).

Demographic variables such as age, household income, and political ideology could also help explain the impacts of communication on political behaviors. The present model operationalizes demographic influence primarily as a means of statistical control.

Social Normative and Cognitive Mediating Processes

Based on previous studies and research models (e.g. Neuwirth & Frederick, 2004; Pinkleton & Austin, 1997; Noelle-Neumann, 1974; Glynn & Park, 1997), the present model emphasizes three variables –political efficacy, perception of peers' political participation, and subjective norms – to examine the cognitive and social normative mediating processes of communication effects on political participation.

As one set of factors in the framework of cognitive and information processing theory that may influence intention of behavior, self-efficacy is considered as one important and frequently cited factor influencing political decision-making and various political behaviors (Pinkleton & Austin, 1998; Campbell, Gurin, & Miller, 1954; Niemi, Craig, & Mattei, 1991).

Self-efficacy is related to the extent to which a citizen feels that he/she is confident in his/her ability or knowledge to participate in politics and her/his political participation could have an impact (Franz et al, 2007). Scholars studying political efficacy usually include both internal and external aspects of efficacy (e.g., Acock, Clarke, & Stewart, 1985; Finkel, 1985; Niemi, Craig, & Mattei, 1991). According to Niemi et al. (1991), "beliefs about the responsiveness of governmental authorities and institutions to citizens' demands" define external efficacy, and citizens' "competence to understand, and to participate effectively in, politics" describes internal efficacy (p. 1407). Kaid, Tedesco, and McKinney (2004) advanced political information efficacy that is closely related to internal efficacy but differs in that it focuses solely on the voter's confidence in his or her own political knowledge and its sufficiency to engage the political process. Previous studies have confirmed the significant relationships between political efficacy (e.g. external, internal, or political information efficacy) and political behaviors (Pinkleton & Austin, 1998; 2004; Kaid et al., 2007; Shah et al., 2007). This study attempts to use external and political information efficacy to examine their roles in political communication processes.

According to the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991), people act in accordance with their attitudes toward the behavior and subjective norms. Behavioral beliefs produce a favorable or unfavorable attitude toward the behavior; normative beliefs result in perceived social pressure or subjective norms (Ajzen, 2002). Both of attitudes toward the behavior and subjective norms can be measured directly (Ajzen, 1991). Empirical studies confirmed that individuals differ in the relative weights they place on subjective norms, and that the weights of these predictors also vary across behaviors (Trafimow & Finlay, 1996; Finlay et al., 1997). In terms of political communication, the normative influence on political interaction (Price, Nir & Cappella, 2006), voting behavior (Glynn, Huge, & Lunney, 2009), and public opinion process (Neuwirth &

Frederick, 2004; Glynn & Huge, 2007) were confirmed, though based on different theoretical frameworks. For example, Glynn, Huge, and Lunney (2009) found that perceived norms of voting was a consistent predictor of intention to vote.

Perception of social climates is one of the most frequently cited social normative influences impacting individuals' behaviors in multiple theories such as theory of planned behavior, social norm theory, and spiral of silence theory (Noelle-Neumann, 1984; Cialdini, Kallgren, & Reno, 1991; Ajzen, 1991). This study operationalized this variable as the perception of peers' political participation in the whole community to reflect respondents' estimate of social climate. Some experiments and surveys revealed that the influence of the perceptions of reference groups such as family and close friends on opinion expression and behaviors outweighs that of perceptions of social climate (Oshagan, 1996). To some extent, this study uses subjective norms of political participation to measure close friends' normative influence on political participation and uses perception of peers' political participation in community to measure the social influence on behaviors, so as to compare these two different social normative influences.

The relationships between communication processes and the cognitive and social normative mediating variables are straightforward and studied by scholars from many disciplines. Communication activity (e.g. information consumption and interpersonal interaction) have the potential to influence components in the present model: shaping perception of social climates (Noelle-Neumann, 1984, 1991; Price & Allen, 1990), improving political efficacy (Pinkleton & Austin, 1998; 2004; Kaid et al., 2007), and influencing subjective norms and attitudes toward behaviors (Atkin, Hocking, & Block, 1984; Neuwirth & Frederick, 2004; Bloom, Hogan, & Blazing, 1997). Thus, this study expects the following:

H3a: Communication activities (i.e. political news media use, online citizen media use, online political interaction, and offline political discussion) will positively predict subjective norms toward political participation.

H3b: Communication activities (i.e. political news media use, online citizen media use, online political interaction, and offline political discussion) will positively predict political efficacy (e.g. external and political information efficacy).

H3c: Communication activities (i.e. political news media use, online citizen media use, online political interaction, and offline political discussion) will positively predict perceptions of peers' political participation.

H4a: Subjective norms toward political participation will positively predict political participation behaviors.

H4b: Political efficacy (external and political information efficacy) will positively predict political participation behaviors.

H4c: Perceptions of peers' political participation will positively predict political participation behaviors.

METHODS

Procedures

A Web survey was conducted in four campuses of a large northwestern university. A probability-based sample of 5250 was retrieved from University Registrar's Office and Human Resource Service that include undergraduate, graduate, and university employees in all four campus. All 5250 participants were sent an email invitation from the researcher, with a short description of the study, information about confidentiality, and a link to the survey (see the appendix). In order to improve the confidentiality and anonymity of the answering process, all

respondents were clearly informed that their answers remained anonymous and only be accessed by principal investigators. Two reminder emails were sent. The survey was hosted on Surveymonkey (http://www.surveymonkey.com), an online survey hosting site, and was fielded in April 2009. Forty-seven email addresses of participants were invalid. The response rate is 24.8% (see Table 1 for demographic statistics of the sample).

[See Table 1 on Page 43]

Measures

Political Interest. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each of the following statements using a scale of 1-7, where 1 means strongly disagree and 7 means strongly agree: I'm interested in politics; I like to stay informed about the political or public affairs; I pay attention to the information about politics or public affairs; and I actively seek out information concerning the politics or public affairs. The alpha coefficient for the political interest index was .95.

Political News Media & Online Citizen Media Use. Respondents were asked to indicate the attention to 10 types of political information sources using a scale of 1-7, where 1 meant no attention and 7 meant a lot of attention. The sources includes: network TV news Web sites (e.g. CNN.com, ABCnews.com, or MSNBC.com); media news Web sites (e.g. New York Times or US News and World Report Web sites); news pages of Internet service providers (e.g. Google News, Yahoo News); ordinary citizens' blogs; video-sharing Web sites (YouTube); micro blogs; social networking Web sites (e.g. Facebook or MySpace); online forums/ discussion boards; television news shows; and newspapers. The principle components factor analysis with varimax rotation was executed. The factor analysis produced two primary factors with eigenvalues over 1, explaining a total 49.74% of variance with 32.24% explained by online citizen media use

(Cronbach's α = .78) and 17.% of variance explained by traditional and online political hard news use with Cronbach's α = .76 (See factor loading in Table 2).

Online Political Interaction. The online political interaction was measured by four items assessing how often respondents share political news, video clips, or others' blog posts online; write blog posts on political issues; participate in online political discussions (e.g. discussion boards or chat room); and exchange opinions on political issues via email, social networking Web sites, micro blogging (e.g. *Twitter*) or Instant Messenger (e.g. MSN, Google Talk). Respondents answered on a 7-point scale; scores across items was averaged. The alpha for this index is .81.

Offline Political Discussion. Based on Shah et al.,'s (2005) study, the offline discussions will be measured by five questions: how often respondents talked about politics at work, talked about politics with neighbors, talked about politics with friends, talked about politics with family, or talked about politics at volunteer groups. The alpha for this index is .81.

The results of principle components factor analysis with varimax rotation confirmed that online political interaction and offline political discussion as two unique factors. The factor analysis produced two primary factors with eigenvalues over 1, explaining a total 59.02% of variance with 41.87% explained by offline political discussion and 17.15% of variance explained by online political interaction (See factor loading in Table 3).

Political Efficacy. This study measured external and political information efficacy (Kaid, Tedesco, and McKinney, 2004). Respondents indicated the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each of the following statements using a scale of 1-7: My participation in public

affairs makes a difference; I have a real say in what the government does; I can make a difference if I participate in government; participation in politics gives people an effective way to influence what the government does. The alpha of the external efficacy index was .90.

The political information efficacy was measured by three items: I feel that I have a good understanding of politics; I am better informed about government than most; and I am better informed about politics than most. The alpha of the political information efficacy index was .93.

Subjective Norms of Political Participation. Based on Neuwirth and Frederick's (2004) method, the subjective norms toward political participation was measured by asking respondents to indicate the extent to which they believed their close friends would want them to behave with the 7-point Likert scale. The items are "My close friends expect me to attend political meetings, rallies demonstrations, boycotts, or marches;" "My close friends expect me to sign a petition on public issues;" "My close friends expect me to wear a campaign button or t-shirt;" "My close friends expect me to vote;" and "My close friends expect me to contribute money to a campaign." The alpha of this index was .82.

Perceptions of Peers' Political Participation. This study asked respondents to estimate the percentage of WSU students (or employees) who typically and frequently attend political meetings, rallies demonstrations, boycotts, or marches; encourage someone to register to vote; wear a campaign button or t-shirt; display a campaign bumper sticker or yard sign; work for a political organization; circulate a petition; contribute money to a campaign; and organize political activities. Scores across items will be averaged. The alpha of this index was .85.

Political Participation. Based on Shah et al.,'s study (2007), this index was created from eight items measuring on a 7-point scale how often respondents attend political meetings, rallies demonstrations, boycotts, or marches; encourage someone to register to vote; wear a campaign

button or t-shirt; display a campaign bumper sticker or yard sign; work for a political organization; circulate a petition; contribute money to a campaign; and organize political activities. The alpha of this index was .86. Descriptive statistics for the measures used in analyses can be found in Table 4.

[See Table 4 on Page 44]

Data Analysis

This study used the Amos 7.0 program to analyze data. A path analysis via this structural equation modeling approach is useful because it evaluates the general fit of the model and tests other competing models in comparison with the theorized model. To achieve both model parsimony and control, demographics variables were controlled using the residualization procedure. This involves regressing all of the study variables on the control variables and then using the residuals of the study variables in the substantive analyses.

Because these cross-sectional analyses do not resolve the causal direction, the path model in this study does not prove causality. It is simply a test of the statistical validity of the causal assumptions we made based on the theory. In addition, this study did not test alternate causal orderings of the ten sets of endogenous variable blocks contained in our model (i.e. political interests, news media use, citizen media use, online political interaction, offline political discussion, political information efficacy, external efficacy, perception of peers' participation, subjective norms, and political participation).

RESULTS

After testing this model that contained all anticipated and hypothesized paths, a final model emerged (Figure 2) that fit the data very well. The model fit was assessed with multiple goodness-of-fit indexes. In addition to a chi-square (χ^2) goodness-of-fit index, the following fit

indexes were considered together: the Root Mean Squared Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI). The fit indexes were designed to avoid some of the problems of sample size and distributional misspecification associated with the conventional overall test of fit (the χ^2 statistic) in the evaluation of a model (Browne & Cudeck, 1993; Hu & Bentler, 1999). All indexes confirmed a good fit of the model in this study, $\chi^2(30) = 36.28$, p = .20, RMSEA = .01, CFI = .998, and TLI = .994.

The variables included in this model accounted for 12% of the variance in political interest, 9% in social media political information use, 14% in news media use, 40% in online political interaction, 35% in offline political discussion, 6% in perception of peers' political participation, 21% in subjective norms of political participation, 28% in external political efficacy, 50% in political information efficacy, and 57% in political participation.

As is apparent from Figure 2, almost all predicted paths were statistically significant and in the hypothesized direction. The three exceptions, which were parsed from the initial model, are the expected direct links between political news media use and political participation (H1a) and between online citizen media use and political participation (H1b). Although direct relationships between these variables were not observed, indirect effects were detected. Besides, the hypothesized direct relationships between communication activities and social normative and cognitive variables are partially supported, that is, some specific communication activities are only directly associated with specific social influence and cognitive variables. The pattern of direct and indirect relationships observed in these data yielded an interesting portrait of the role of communication activities in political participation and the complex social normative and cognitive processes related to communication effects on political participation.

[See Figure 2 on Page 46]

The Entry Roles of Demographics and Political Interest

Before turning to the relationships observed among the endogenous variables, this study begins with the effects of exogenous variables in the model. This model includes five endogenous variables: age, gender, income, education, and political ideology. The results indicated that older respondents tended to be more interested in politics ($\gamma=.21$, p<.001), more reliant on news media ($\gamma=.13$, p<.001), more engaged in offline political discussion ($\gamma=.14$, p<.001) and political participation ($\gamma=.09$, p<.001), but less likely to use citizen media for political information ($\gamma=-.25$, p<.001). This is consistent with past research exploring generational differences. Men showed greater levels of political interest ($\gamma=.15$, p<.001), higher level of political information efficacy ($\gamma=.14$, p<.001) and were more frequently engaged in online political interaction ($\gamma=.08$, p<.001) than women. However, men paid less attention than women on news media ($\gamma=-.11$, p<.001) and had less level of perception of peers' political participation ($\gamma=-.12$, p<.001). Respondents' education levels were positively associated with political interest ($\gamma=.10$, p<.001), political information efficacy ($\gamma=.08$, p<.001), and subjective norms of political participation ($\gamma=.09$, p<.001). Those who reported higher level of income were less interested in politics ($\gamma=-.06$, p<.05), but had greater level of subjective norms of political participation ($\gamma=.10$, p<.001). Politically liberal respondents were more interested in politics ($\gamma=.15$, p<.001), had a higher level of political information efficacy ($\gamma=.07$, p<.001), and were more engaged in political participation ($\gamma=.09$, p<.001).

As the entry point of the initial model, the political interest was significantly associated with almost all endogenous variables in the model except for the political participation and perception of peers' political participation. The political interest positively predicted news media use ($\beta=.19$, p<.001), citizen media use ($\beta=.39$, p<.001), online political interaction ($\beta=.22$,

p<.001), offline political discussion (β=.45, p<.001), subjective norms of political participation (β=.13, p<.001), external political efficacy (β=.35, p<.001), and political information efficacy (β=.49, p<.001).

The Effects of News Media and Online Citizen Media Use

As shown in Figure 2, news media use was positively associated with offline political discussion (β=.07, p<.001), but negatively associated with online political interaction (β=-.12, p<.001). In terms of social normative and cognitive variables, news media use only positively associated with external political efficacy (β=.07, p<.05). No significant direct relationship between news media use and political participation was found.

Online citizen media use was positively associated with online political interaction (β=.58, p<.001) and offline political discussion (β=.24, p<.001). In terms of social and cognitive variables, online citizen media use was positively associated with perception of peers' political participation (β=.16, p<.001), subjective norms of political participation (β=.09, p<.05), and external political efficacy (β=.10, p<.01). However no significant direct relationship between online citizen media use and political participation was found.

The Effects of Online Political Interaction and Offline Political Discussion

The results showed that online political interaction was negatively associated with external political efficacy (β=-.10, p<.01), but it was positively associated with political participation (β=.13, p<.001). Offline political discussion was positively associated with subjective norms of political participation (β=.25, p<.001), external political efficacy (β=.22, p<.001), political information efficacy (β=.22, p<.001), and political participation (β=.12, p<.001).

The Roles of Social Influence and Cognitive Factors

The results showed that four social influence and cognitive factors significantly associated with political participation. The perception of peers' political participation positively associated with political participation (β=.11, p<.001). The subjective norms of political participation exerts the most important influence among four factors on political participation (β=.38, p<.001). The external political efficacy (β=.15, p<.001) and political information efficacy were also positively associated with political participation.

Indirect and Total Effects

As in the model of communication and political participation, the estimates of indirect effects (see Table 5) suggest that political interest exerted indirect influences on offline political discussion (.08, p<.001) and online political interaction (.06, p<.01), operating through news media use and citizen media use. Through communication activities, political interests also exerted significant indirect influences on perception of peers' political participation (.06, p<.01), subjective norms of political participation, (.17, p<.001), political information efficacy (.13, p<.001), and external political efficacy (.13, p<.001). Compared with the nonsignificant direct relationship between political interest and political participation, political interest had a strong indirect influence on political participation via communication activities and social normative and cognitive processes (.39, p<.001). In other words, the influence of political interest on political participation was completely mediated by communication activities and social normative and cognitive processes.

Through interpersonal communication activities, news media use had significant indirect effects on perception of peers' political participation (.01, p<.05) and external political efficacy (.03, p<.01); and online citizen media use had significant indirect effects on subjective norms of

political participation (.10, p<.001) and political information efficacy (.08. p<.001). Also, online citizen media use had a strong indirect effect on political participation (.22, p<.001) via interpersonal communication activities and social normative and cognitive processes. In terms of political interpersonal communication, offline political discussion had a strong indirect effect on political participation via social normative and cognitive processes (.17, p<.001).

Altogether, in terms of total effects on political participation, this path model indicated that news media use had no significant effect on political participation. Political interest exerted the strongest influence on political participation (.41, p<.001), but this influence was completely mediated by communication activities and social normative and cognitive processes. In terms of communication activities, offline political discussion had the strongest total effect on political participation (.29, p<.001). The online citizen media use also greatly impacted the political participation (.25, p<.001), but this effect was mainly mediated by interpersonal communication and social normative and cognitive processes. Online political interaction also exerted a strong total effect on political participation via the direct path instead of the indirect path (.14, p<.001).

Among four strong social normative and cognitive predictors, subjective norms of political participation had the strongest impact on political participation (.38, p<.001), and the perception of peers' political participation had the weakest influence on political participation (.11, p<.001).

[Insert Table 5 here]

Correlations among Endogenous Variables

Although not diagrammed in the figure, our analysis also provides evidence that news media use and online citizen media use were interrelated (ψ= .26, p< .001), and likewise offline political discussion and online political interaction were interrelated (ψ= .25, p< .001). Among

social normative and cognitive factors, political information efficacy was strongly interrelated with external political efficacy ($\psi = .38$, $p < .001$), subjective norms of political participation ($\psi = .23$, $p < .001$), and perception of peers' political participation ($\psi = -.13$, $p < .001$). Also, external political efficacy was interrelated with subjective norms of political participation ($\psi = .27$, $p < .001$).

DISCUSSION

The analyses of this study, which found considerable support for the theoretical model of political communication mediation, provides a range of important insights about the roles of four communication activities – political news media use, online citizen media use, online political interaction, and offline political discussions – in shaping political participation, and revealed the different social normative and cognitive processes related to these political communication activities.

Initially, the motivational nature of political interest has been supported in this study. Political interests significantly encouraged the respondents to pay attention to political information, to engage in interpersonal political communication, and consequently increasing political efficacy and shaping subjective norms of political participation. Previous research has clearly demonstrated the role of political interest in producing motivated information consumption and interpersonal communication (Austion & Pinkleton, 1999; Faber, Tims, & Schmitt, 1993; Kenski & Stround, 2006; Shah et al., 2005). Therefore, it is not surprising to find that political interest was significantly associated with respondents' political information consumption, interpersonal interaction, and social psychological outcomes. Although political interest is the strongest predictor of political participation in this model, the impact of political interest on political participation was completely mediated by communication activities and

social cognitive processes. These findings were consistent with prior cognitive mediation model (i.e. Eveland, 2002) as a new useful contribution to the study of political communication using survey data.

In terms of political news media use, both online and traditional news media use were combined into one unidimensional factor, which indicates that there is no significant difference between these two news resources. Yet whereas previous research considered online and traditional news use as two significantly different media behaviors, which would have different motives and predict different political outcomes (e.g. Shah et al., 2005), this study suggests that with the high Internet penetration rate in the U.S., especially in a university community with higher education levels and younger community members, online hard news consumption no longer shows significant differences with hard news consumption in mass media.

The positive effects of hard news use on offline political discussion and political external efficacy were also consistent with previous studies that both traditional and online new consumption would encourage offline political discussion and increase political external efficacy (Pinkleton & Austin, 2001; Shah et al., 2005; Eveland & Scheufele, 2000). However, surprisingly news media use was negatively associated with online political interaction, which is partially consistent with Zhou's (2008) finding that news media use did not predict people's online political expression or interaction. Although some scholars argued that news use would offer a resource for discussion and encourage political talks (Mutz, 2006; Eveland, et al., 2003), the research on political online interaction has revealed that people who are likely to interact in cyberspace via blogs or bulletin boards often are driven by traditional media dissociation with a general distrust and dislike of traditional media (Hwang, et al., 2006; Seipp, 2002), and consequently have a high preference for alternative media sources (Kaye, 2005). The

dissociation toward traditional media sources among online political participants may lead them to shift to other alternative or citizens' information resources. For example, compared with the negative relationship between news media use and online political interaction, this study found that online citizen media use is the strongest predictor for online political interaction (β=.58, p<.001).

The other surprising finding regarding the news media effect is that the news media use had no significant influence on political participation although news media use slightly improved respondents' political external efficacy (.09, p<.001). These findings indicate that the political mobilization effects of news consumption are questionable although prior studies have found that news media can greatly improve individuals' political knowledge, promote political discussion, and consequently increase political efficacy (McLeod et al., 1996; Kenski & Stroud, 2006; Eveland, Shah, & Kwak, 2003; Pinkleton & Austin, 1997). When recent scholars used the path models and structural equation models to simultaneously examine various communication activities' influences on political participation, their results showed that the impact of political news consumption on civic engagement or political participation is also pretty weak (for the review: Shah & Scheufele, 2006; Shah et al., 2007). These consistent findings of weak effects of news media use on political participation indicate that political information may be not a strong or even an important predictor for individuals' political participation.

Compared with the weak influence of news media use on political participation, online citizen media exerted a strong influence on political participation, although this influence was completely mediated by political interpersonal communication and social normative and cognitive processes. The results in this study showed that the attention to online citizen media was highly significantly associated with both online and offline political discussions. As an

interactive platform, citizen media not only allow individuals to observe and monitor their social environment and opinion climate, but also offer them opportunities to present their own opinions and exchange information with others (e.g. Ellison, Steinfield, &Lampe, 2007; Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Thus, it is not surprising to find the highly significant relationship between attention to citizen media and political interpersonal communication.

This study also revealed that the strong influence of citizen media on political participation was mediated by perception of peers' participation, subjective norms of political participation, political information efficacy, and external political efficacy. To a great extent, online citizen media (e.g. Facebook, YouTube, and blogs) are not pure information media. People often use them for maintaining and developing friendship and monitoring peers' or friends' personal life instead of education or purely political information seeking. In other words, individuals not only receive information, but also receive their friends' personal influence and consequently more precisely perceive the social climate from citizen media than solely from mass media. Besides, different from anonymous and information-oriented online bulletin boards and chat room where people discuss particular topics with strangers, citizen media especially online social media are kinds of offline social network oriented media where people interact with one another who shares offline social networks with them, which makes online social networks more homogenous. To some extent, the effects of citizen media in political mobilization greatly depend on personal influence on citizen media rather than information offered by citizen media. For example, politically engaged people typically know other politically engaged people, and online citizen sites create cavernous echo chambers as people reiterate what their friends posted. The analysis of this study suggested that the social normative processes greatly mediated the impact of citizen media use on political participation. This unique function of citizen media from

news media may offer some explanation on the significant difference of these two types of media use on political mobilization.

In terms of political interpersonal communication, the findings, which indicated the significant total effects of online political interaction (.14, p<.001) and offline political discussion (.29, p<.001), were consistent with prior empirical findings and theoretical arguments that political mobilization presumably depends on full-deliberation that is political discussions among citizens, not just isolated learning or intrapersonal rumination (Fishkin & Luskin, 2002; also see Shah, et al., 2007). Some theoretical frameworks offered some explanation on the strong effects of political discussion on mobilization (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Eveland, 2001; 2002). For example, interpersonal channels carry more political information for repeated exposure, help understand political content, clarify potential ambiguities in what they read or view from news media, encourage social responsibility, or offer opportunities for argument. Altogether, one could be tempted to conclude that interpersonal political communication exerted much stronger influence on political mobilization than informative media use.

In terms of online political interaction, although online political interaction was strongly and positively associated with political participation, no indirect mediation effect was found. In terms of offline political discussions, the analysis of this study offered the new evidence on social normative and cognitive mediation related to the strong influence of interpersonal channels on political mobilization that offline political discussion greatly increases respondents' perception of peers' political participation, subjective norms of political participation, political information and external efficacy. These findings were consistent with communication mediation models (Shah et al., 2007) and social normative theories (Glynn & Huge, 2007; Price, Nir, & Cappella, 2006; Noelle-Neumann, 1984).

In terms of social normative and cognitive processes, four factors – subjective norms of political participation, perception of peers' political participation, external political efficacy, and political information efficacy exerted strong influence on political participation. Based on these findings, this study might conclude that primary groups' influence (like close friends and family) is more important or somehow overrides other social normative and personal cognitive factors, since the subjective norms of political participation was the strongest direct predictor of political participation (β=.38, p<.001). In this study, primary groups' influence is reflected by subjective norms of political participation that was measured by the estimates of close friends' expectation of political participation, and social climate is reflected by perception of peers' political participation that was measured by the estimates of university community members' political participation. The stronger primary groups' influence on political participation was also consistent with prior empirical studies and theoretical argument that the influence of the estimates of primary group on behavior formation outweighs that of perceptions of majority behaviors (i.e. Scheufele & Moy, 2000; Scheufele, Shanahan, & Lee, 2001; Neuwirth & Frederick, 2004; Price, Nir, & Cappella, 2006).

As discussed above, political interest, online citizen media use, and offline political discussion were the strongest predictors of the subjective norms of political participation. In other words, individuals who are more interested in politics or public affairs have a higher estimate of reference groups' norms of political participation. In addition, citizen media use and offline political discussion seem to be a great resource for individuals to perceive reference groups' norms of political participation.

Political external efficacy was frequently cited as a strong predictor of political participation, and this study also found its strong influence on political participation. Although

political interest and communication activities were significant predictors for external efficacy, the political interest and offline political discussion were the strongest ones. Also, both of them were the strongest predictors for political information efficacy. In other words, respondents who are more interested in politics and are more engaged in offline political discussions tend to have a higher level of confidence on their political knowledge competence to engage in political process and on their ability to participate effectively in politics. However it is worthwhile to note that news media use did not show the influence on political information efficacy although news media was demonstrated to be a major resource for acquiring political knowledge (e.g. Eveland, 2002; 2003; Eveland, Shah, & Kwak, 2003; Pinkleton & Austin, 1997). However, this study did not examine the relationships between communication and actual political knowledge, so the non-significant relationship between news media use and political information efficacy did not mean that news media cannot improve audiences' political knowledge. Future studies should further examine the communication influences on individuals' perception/confidence in their political knowledge and their actual political knowledge to better understand how communication does influence political behaviors.

Also, we should not underestimate the role of news media in promoting political participation without caution. Although this study revealed the nonsignificant role of news media use in political communication, one reality is that news media are still among the most important information sources for political knowledge. Like the plants in the food chain, news media feed other media in the news "ecosystem" (like citizen media, interpersonal communication, or online interaction) with information. News media, unlike citizen media, employ copy editors, fact checkers and professional journalists trained to produce news that is accurate and comprehensive.

Based on social cognitive and normative theories, this study successfully revealed the different roles of communication activities in shaping individuals' perception of themselves and social reality and how individuals' perceptions influence their political behaviors. However, we should keep our eyes open to different qualities of media or information. Communication and information consumption not only helps us monitor the social climate and shape our perception of social reality, but also constantly shapes our beliefs and feed us with knowledge. With the development of information technology that is producing an increasing number of media, we should further examine how the different qualities of different media play roles in promoting politically collective actions.

Surprisingly, online political interaction did not predict political information efficacy and instead showed a negative influence on external efficacy. These unique functions of online political interaction may be based on measurement and characteristics of online interaction. Some studies have showed that people who are more engaged in online interaction showed lower confidence and trust in political system and traditional media coverage (Kaye, 2005; Seipp, 2002), which may greatly decease individuals' political efficacy since prior research has consistently found that cynicism and apathy were negatively associated with political efficacy. But the present study cannot offer further evidence on such a theoretical argument, and future study can examine more deeply on the mediation process related to the association between online interaction and political efficacy and political participation.

The other possible reason for the unique role of online political interaction in present model is the measurement. The measure of online political interaction in this study not only includes interpersonal discussion, but also includes information sharing behaviors and opinion expression via email, instant messenger, and blog writing. These behaviors go far beyond simple

person-to-person discussion, and contain more complex behaviors, such as blog writing, persuasion via email, and information sharing via social networking sites and video sharing sites. Online interaction is an uncharted territory for political communication research. Even though this study cannot offer more clear evidence or explanation on the relationship between online political interaction and social normative or cognitive variables, this study at the very least revealed the positive influence of such online political interaction on political participation. In particular, this influence is a direct influence instead of being mediated by other processes. Future study should pay more attention to complex online interpersonal interaction, its influences on political participation, and especially the related social-psychological processes.

CONCLUSION

This study provides interesting findings and indicates directions for future research as discussed above. As new communication tools and information resources, the Internet not only expands information access, but also braids people into a new personally-mediated society. While the Internet has fostered people's moving online to discuss politics, the influence of networked technologies on politics and society requires more theoretical construction and empirical examination. In general, this study indicates that opposed to the uniform effects in mass media, differential informative media use and interactive interpersonal channels play different roles in shaping political participation, and these effects are mediated by different social-psychological processes. In addition to cognitive mediation processes, scholars should also consider normative influence of communication activities on political participation, especially as people have more opportunities and channels to received information, communicate with other citizens, and voice their own opinions.

However, there are several limitations inherent to the current study that causes us to issue cautionary notes. First, the nature of the sample and low response rate place limitations on the current study's potential generalizability to a general population. However, given the current study's focus on examining important theoretical relationships among social psychological variables rather than on estimating population parameters, this study is still able to contribute to our theoretical and practical understanding of underlying processes involved in political participation. Second, since this study use self-report questionnaire, the social desirability may lead respondents to overestimate their behaviors or deliberatively distort their attitudes reported in the survey. Third, the cross-sectional nature of the current study hampers an examination of the dynamics that theoretical approaches such as social marketing and spiral of silence would appear to imply. There is a clear need for panel designs that will let researchers examine the real causal relationships among political interest, communication activities, social normative and cognitive processes, and political participation formation. Finally, due to the limitation of Amos software that was used in this study to analyze the path model, this study can only provide estimates and inferential tests for total indirect effects, but cannot provide any information about specific indirect effects and paths. For example, this study only report that offline political discussion has a strong indirect effect on political participation mediated by four social normative and cognitive factors, but this study cannot specify which social normative or cognitive factor is the most important mediator for that indirect effect. Future analysis can use more sophisticated statistic tools to specify the mediation paths in this model.

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Figure 1: A model of the political participation process
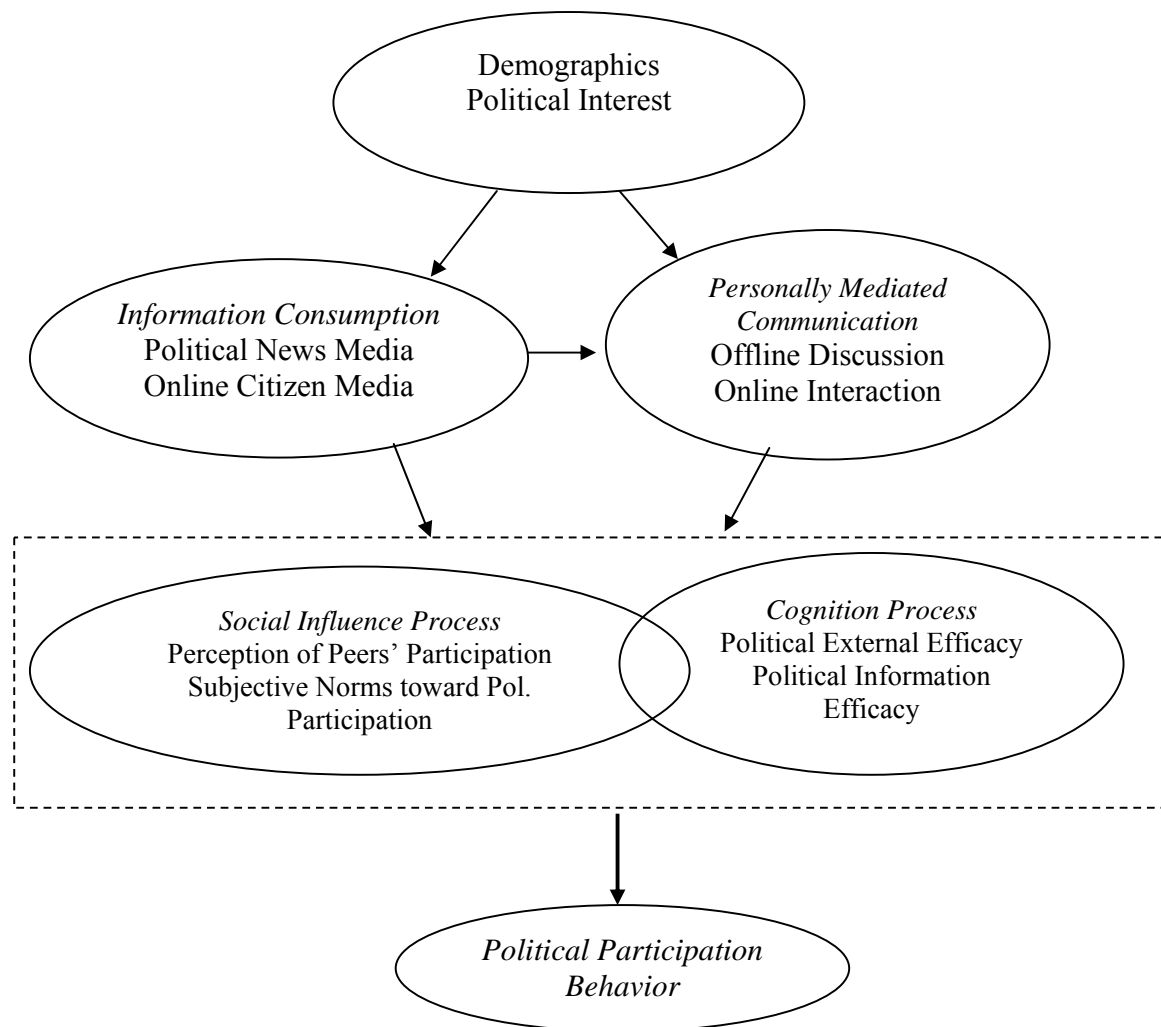
Table 1: Demographic Statistics of Sample

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean or % (N)	S.D.
Gender				.48
Male			40.2% (571)	
Female			55.8% (720)	
Age	18.00	69.00	34.27	14.38
Ethnicity				.96
White/Caucasian			74.7% (965)	
Black/African American			1.2% (16)	
Hispanic/Latino			3.1% (40)	
Asian			8.7% (112)	
Native American			1.7% (22)	
Political ideology (Liberalism=high)	1.00	5.00	3.15	1.08
Household income	1.00	9.00	4.00	2.55

Table 2: Factor loadings of political news media use and social media use

	Component	
	News media use	Online citizen media use
Network TV news Web sites	.728	
Television news shows	.725	
Newspaper	.648	
News pages of Internet service providers	.580	
Print media news Web sites	.543	
Video-sharing Web sites		.766
Social networking sites		.742
Micro blogs		.714
Ordinary citizens' blogs		.704
Online forums and discussion boards		.681

Table 3: Factor loadings of offline political discussion and online political interaction

	Component	
	Offline political discussion	Online political interaction
Talking about politics with friends	.808	
Talking about politics with family	.744	
Talking about politics at work	.706	
Talking about politics with neighbors	.673	
Talking about politics at volunteer groups	.673	
Writing blog posts on political issues		.805
Participating in online political discussions		.784
Exchanging opinions on political issues via email, social networking Web sites, micro blogging or Instant Messenger		.762
Sharing political news, video clips, or others' blog posts online		.752

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of Indices

Indices	Min.	Max.	*M*	S.D.	α
Political interest	1.00	7.00	4.81	1.53	.95
I'm interested in politics or public affairs.	1.00	7.00	4.77	1.74	
I like to stay informed about politics or public affairs.	1.00	7.00	5.05	1.61	
I pay attention to information about politics or public affairs.	1.00	7.00	4.97	1.54	
I actively seek out information concerning politics or public affairs.	1.00	7.00	4.45	1.74	
Political news media use	1.00	7.00	4.26	1.26	.76
Network TV news Web sites	1.00	7.00	4.29	2.00	
Print media news Web sites	1.00	7.00	3.90	1.99	
News pages of Internet service providers	1.00	7.00	4.21	1.96	
Television news shows	1.00	7.00	4.22	1.94	
Newspapers	1.00	7.00	4.64	1.75	
Citizen media use	1.00	7.00	2.12	1.15	.78
Ordinary citizens' blogs	1.00	7.00	1.86	1.40	
Video-sharing Web sites	1.00	7.00	2.41	1.72	
Micro blogs	1.00	7.00	1.56	1.16	
Social networking Web sites	1.00	7.00	2.48	1.86	
Online forums and discussion boards	1.00	7.00	2.27	1.62	
Offline political discussion	1.00	7.00	3.57	1.17	.78
Talking about politics/public affairs at work	1.00	7.00	3.30	1.67	
Talking about politics/public affairs with neighbors	1.00	7.00	2.62	1.62	
Talking about politics/public affairs with friends	1.00	7.00	4.58	1.49	
Talking about politics/public affairs with family	1.00	7.00	4.78	1.60	
Talking about politics/public affairs at volunteer groups	1.00	7.00	2.58	1.62	
Online political interaction	1.00	7.00	1.77	1.09	.81
Writing blog posts on political issues or public affairs	1.00	7.00	1.41	1.05	
Sharing political news, video clips, or others' blog posts online	1.00	7.00	1.99	1.53	
Participating in online discussions on politics or public affairs	1.00	7.00	1.58	1.24	
Exchanging opinions on political or public issues via email, social networking Web sites, micro blogging or Instant Messenger	1.00	7.00	2.08	1.59	
Perception of peers' political participation (%)	0	98.25	21.34	14.33	.85
Attending a political meetings, rallies, demonstrations, boycotts, or marches (%)	0	100.00	17.39	16.15	
Encouraging someone to register to vote (%)	0	100.00	36.99	27.71	
Wearing a campaign button or t-shirt (%)	0	100.00	26.32	22.53	
Displaying a campaign bumper sticker or yard sign (%)	0	100.00	30.31	27.06	
Working for a political organization (%)	0	100.00	14.54	14.63	

	Min	Max	Mean	SD	α
Circulating a petition (%)	0	100.00	13.11	14.61	
Contributing money to a campaign (%)	0	100.00	20.19	21.22	
Organizing political activities (%)	0	100.00	11.89	13.54	
Subjective norms of political participation	1.00	7.00	2.85	1.29	.82
My close friends expect me to attend political meetings, rallies, demonstrations, boycotts, or marches.	1.00	7.00	2.11	1.56	
My close friends expect me to sign a political petition.	1.00	7.00	2.72	1.88	
My close friends expect me to wear a campaign button or t-shirt.	1.00	7.00	2.04	1.54	
My close friends expect me to vote.	1.00	7.00	5.45	1.95	
My close friends expect me to contribute money to a campaign.	1.00	7.00	1.91	1.46	
External efficacy	1.00	7.00	4.00	2.55	.90
My participation in political activities makes a difference	1.00	7.00	4.02	1.67	
I have a real say in what the government does	1.00	7.00	3.32	1.66	
I can make a difference if I participate in government	1.00	7.00	4.27	1.71	
Participation in politics gives people an effective way to influence what the government does.	1.00	7.00	4.44	1.69	
Political information efficacy	1.00	7.00	4.13	1.54	.93
I feel that I have a good understanding of politics	1.00	7.00	4.36	1.58	
I am better informed about government than most	1.00	7.00	4.09	1.70	
I am better informed about politics than most	1.00	7.00	4.07	1.70	
Political Participation	1.00	6.50	2.38	1.14	.86
Attending a political meetings, rallies, demonstrations, boycotts, or marches	1.00	7.00	2.33	1.59	
Encouraging someone to register to vote	1.00	7.00	4.52	2.03	
Wearing a campaign button or t-shirt	1.00	7.00	2.28	1.69	
Displaying a campaign bumper sticker or yard sign	1.00	7.00	2.40	1.86	
Working for a political organization	1.00	7.00	1.82	1.39	
Circulating a petition	1.00	7.00	1.84	1.31	
Contributing money to a campaign	1.00	7.00	2.22	1.68	
Organizing political activities	1.00	7.00	1.62	1.18	

Figure 2: Predicting political participation (exogenous variables controlled)
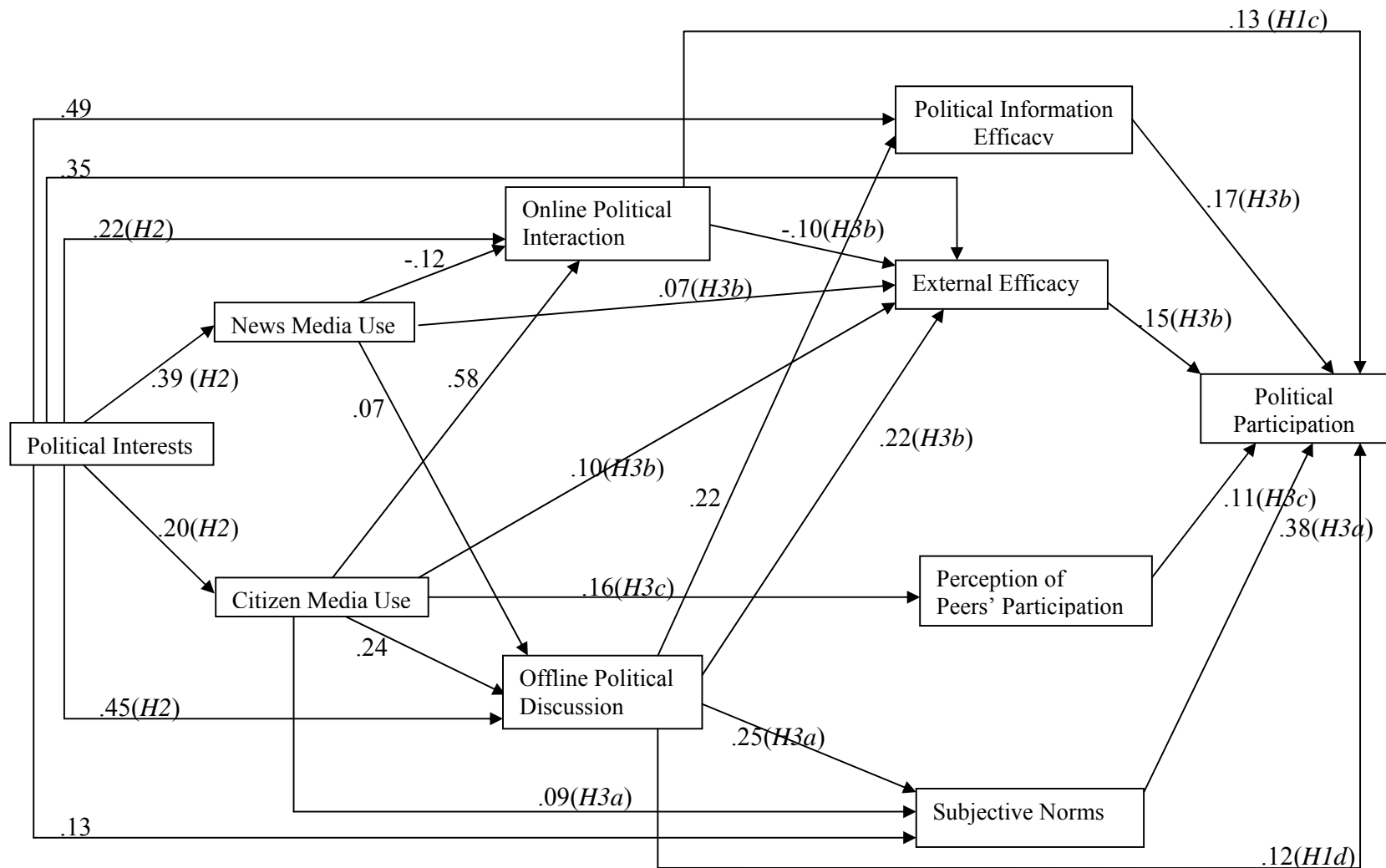
Note: Numbers are path standardized coefficients; all path coefficients shown are statistically significant (*p*<.01)

Table 5 Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects of Path Model

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1.Political interests	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
2.News media use	.39***	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
	.39***	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
3.Citizen media use	.19***	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
	.19***	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
4.Offline political discussion	.45***	.07**	.24***	--	--	--	--	--	--
	.08***	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
	.53***	.07**	.24***	--	--	--	--	--	--
5.Online political interaction	.22***	-.12***	.58***	--	--	--	--	--	--
	.06**	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
	.28***	-.12***	.58***	--	--	--	--	--	--
6. Perception of peers' participation	-.07	.04	.16***	.06	-.07	--	--	--	--
	.06**	.01*	-.02	--	--	--	--	--	--
	-.01	.05	.14***	.06	-.07	--	--	--	--
7. Subjective norms	.13***	.02	.09*	.25***	.07	--	--	--	--
	.17***	.01	.10***	--	--	--	--	--	--
	.30***	.03	.16***	.25***	.07	--	--	--	--
8. Political information efficacy	.49***	00	.05	.22***	.04	--	--	--	--
	.13***	.01	.08***	--	--	--	--	--	--
	.62***	.01	.13***	.22***	.04	--	--	--	--
9. External efficacy	.35***	.07*	.10**	.22***	-.10**	--	--	--	--
	.13***	.03***	-.01	--	--	--	--	--	--
	.48***	.09***	.06***	.22***	-10**	--	--	--	--
10. Political participation	.02	00	.03	.12***	.13***	.11***	.38***	.17***	.15***
	.39***	.03	.22***	.17***	.01	--	--	--	--
	.41***	.03	.25***	.29***	.14***	.11***	.38***	.17***	.15***

Note: Coefficient in the first row represent standardized direct effects, coefficients in the second row represent standardized indirect effects, and coefficients in the third row represent standardized total effects. * p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001

APPENDIX

Contact From

April 20, 2009

Dear [First Name] [Last Name]:

Civic engagement is the foundation for American democracy. We are writing to ask for your participation in a survey on citizens' political participation. We are asking students at WSU like you, to reflect your opinions about the media use, political attitudes, and civic participation.

You are one of only a small number that have been randomly selected in WSU to help in this study. Your responses to this survey are very important and will help us better understand the role of communication in promoting citizens' political participation.

This is a short survey and should take you no more than 15 minutes to complete. Please click on the link below to go to the survey.

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=CrQn7vElPmZvzI8_2b4a1z_2fA_3d_3d

(If clicking on the link doesn't work, try copying and pasting it into your browser.)

Your participation in this project is voluntary. Your identity information will not be gathered with survey data. All collected data is stored on restricted computers, and is only used for academic research purposes. Your response is extremely important to this study.

If you have any questions regarding the survey questions, please feel free to contact the principle researcher Douglas Hindman at dhindman@wsu.edu.

We appreciate your time and consideration in completing the survey.

Many Thanks,

Douglas Hindman, PhD

Associate Professor, Murrow College of Communication

Washington State University

Questionnaire

This survey is being conducted by Douglas Hindman, PhD, an associate professor of Murrow School of Communication, WSU. This survey will take approximately 15-20 minutes and is completely voluntary. You can refuse to answer any question and you can stop participation at any time. Your responses are completely confidential. We will not record your IP address or other personal information.

If you have any questions regarding the survey questions, please feel free to contact the principle researcher Douglas Hindman at dhindman@wsu.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or would like to report a concern or complaint about this study, please contact the Washington State University Institutional Review Board at (509) 335-3668, or e-mail irb@wsu.edu, or regular mail at: Albrook 205, PO Box 643005, Pullman, WA 99164-3005.

By agreeing to participate you are giving your consent for us to use the information you provide in academic research. Thank you very much for you participation.

Are you 18 years old or older?
- Yes
- No

(If no, the survey system will automatically stop the survey process.)

On a scale of 1 -7, please indicate whether you strongly disagree or strongly agree with each of the following statements concerning the elections and public affairs. On this scale, 1 means strongly disagree and 7 means strongly agree, so the lower the number the more you disagree with a statement, and the higher the number the more you agree with a statement.

	Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree
Political Interests	
I'm interested in politics.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I like to stay informed about the political or public affairs.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I pay attention to the information about politics or public affairs.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I actively seek out information concerning the politics or public affairs.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
External Political Efficacy	
My participation in political activities makes a difference	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I have a real say in what the government does	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I can make a difference if I participate in government	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Participation in politics gives people an effective way to influence what the government does.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Political Information Efficacy	
I feel that I have a good understanding of politics	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I am better informed about government than most	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I am better informed about politics than most	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Subjective Norms	

My close friends expect me to attend political meetings, rallies, demonstrations, boycotts, or marches.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
My close friends expect me to sign a political petition.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
My close friends expect me to wear a campaign button or t-shirt.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
My close friends expect me to vote.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
My close friends expect me to contribute money to a campaign.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Please estimate **the percentage** of **Washington State University students [colleagues]** who **typically** engage in the following behaviors

	Percentage
Attending a political meetings, rallies, demonstrations, boycotts, or marches	_____%
Encouraging someone to register to vote	_____%
Wearing a campaign button or t-shirt	_____%
Displaying a campaign bumper sticker or yard sign	_____%
Working for a political organization	_____%
Circulating a petition	_____%
Contributing money to a campaign	_____%
Organizing political activities	_____%

For political information, how much attention do you pay to each of the following?

	Very little attention A lot of attention
Network TV news Web sites	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Print media news Web sites	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
News pages of Internet service providers	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Television news shows	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Newspapers	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Ordinary citizens' blogs	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Video-sharing Web sites	
Micro blogs	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Social networking Web sites	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Online forums and discussion boards	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

How often do you engage in each of the following?

Online Interaction	Never All of the time
Writing blog posts on political issues or public affairs	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Sharing political news, video clips, or others' blog posts online	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Participating in online discussions on politics or public affairs	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Exchanging opinions on political or public issues via email, social networking Web sites, micro blogging or Instant Messenger	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Writing blog posts on political issues or public affairs	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Offline Discussion	

Talking about politics at work	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Talking about politics with neighbors	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Talking about politics with friends	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Talking about politics with family	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Talking about politics at volunteer groups	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

How often do **you** engage in each of the following?

	Never					All of the time	
Attending a political meetings, rallies, demonstrations, boycotts, or marches	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Encouraging someone to register to vote	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Wearing a campaign button or t-shirt	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Displaying a campaign bumper sticker or yard sign	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Working for a political party or candidate	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Circulating a petition	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Contributing money to a campaign	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Organizing political activities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Do you consider yourself to be:
- Very conservative
- Conservative
- Moderate
- Liberal
- Very liberal

What is your age? _____

What is your race or ethnicity?
- White
- African American
- Hispanic
- Native American
- Asian
- Others

What was your total annual household income before taxes in 2008?
- $10,000 or less
- $10,001 -$ 25,000
- $ 25,001 -$50,000
- $50,001-$75,000
- $75,001-$100,000
- $100,001-$150,000
- Over $150,000
- I don't know.

What is your gender?
- Female
- Male

Thank you for your time!