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## Different blog use, different participation

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# **Different Blog Use, Different Participation**

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## **Abstract**

Though it seems to be more popular for most people to discuss some issues with their friends on the micro blogs such as Twitter or community websites such as Facebook, there is still a doubt that these websites would play a role to facilitate civic engagement or promote the frequency for talking about public affairs.

It is said that the success of Obama's case did intrigue politicians' attention for the effect of blog in Taiwan. That is why the study should be traced to the experiences of blog in America. There are some surveys which improved that the number of blogs have grown since 2001(Levy, 2002; Henning, 2003). In this case, Wallsten (2007) indicated that political blogs seems to have been grown faster than other types of blogs. In order to find the relationship between blog use and political participation, this study will focus on political blogs.

Researchers pointed that the role of blog has become an open forum for users to address issues(Brunns, 2006; Cristol, 2002; Wall, 2006) and some researchers further claimed that blogs have been portrayed as political outlets (Kerbel and Bloom, 2005; Sweetser and Kaid, 2008; Trammell et al., 2006b) where allow users to express their self-perspective and access to different perspectives on an issue (Herring et al., 2004; Trammell and Keshelashvili, 2005; Papacharissi, 2004; Thompson, 2003). In brief, blog users also play a key role in the blog world. For this reason, the study will explore the connotation of blog users and further examine the relationship between blog use and political participation.

But it seems to be less studies about types of blog users that could assess the effects of communication on blogs more precisely. To target more real supporters, this article will categorize the types of users into three kinds and measure the extent to their separate behavior which linked to political participation.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Blogs has been deemed to be a kind of tools of political campaigns since the 2004 election that began with Howard Dean's 2004 presidential campaign (Lawson-Borders and Kirk, 2005; Stromer-Galley & Baker, 2006). Therefore, some researchers indicated that blogs have changed the way political communication works and there were evidences that have proved that blogs could influence political outcomes directly/indirectly (Drezner and Farrel, 2007; Woody, 2007). Those studies mentioned above confirm the importance of blogs.

According to the news that there have been more candidates or politicians who use blogs to interact with their supporters or other bloggers since the successful case of the winner of presidential election of 2008, Barack Obama. The newspaper in Taiwan named United Daily News said that the government of Ma Ying-jiou would attempt to build the blog of president Ma and official website on Wretch Blog(<http://www.wretch.cc/blog>), the biggest blog-website in Taiwan, which intend to communicate with young people (Li Ming-hsien, 2009/05/11).

One of bloggers in Taiwan expressed his comments regarding those political blogs which belong to politicians' that he found among those articles on Political Celebrity Blogs of UDN, legislators and celebrities of parties were occupied the majority based on his primary statistic (Scorpionprodigal, 2009/05/11). It seems to

explain why the Taipei mayor of Hao Lung-bin was reported that he imitated his rival Su Jen-chang's blog of style could become an issue during the Five Cities of Election (Wang Yu-cheng & Yu Po-chih, 2010/07/31).

However, there is some doubt about the effects of political blogs. Though Scorpionprodigal concluded his findings that politicians and government officials should set up their own blogs or websites as a channel for accessing to the public, Lai Yu-lin (2009) argued that it could be possible for politicians to intimately interact with young group when they give up their 'propaganda mindset'.

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As what the previous research has told us that there is a relationship between blog use and political participation. However, it seems to be less studies about types of blog users who may influence the extent to participation. Hence, the purpose in this article will further discuss the possible reasons among blog users, blog behavior, and political participation.

### **POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND MEDIA USE**

There have been many researchers who tried to define the meaning of political participation. In politics, it is well-known as four participants' (candidates, parties, activists, and inducing groups) interactions which usually pursue goals of winning the election, modifying rulings etc. (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993). However, there are four seminal dimensions which are defined more clearly: (1) elections (local and national); (2) campaigns ( attending meetings, contributing moneys, persuading others); (3) citizen-initiated contacts; (4) cooperative activities (Verba and Nie, 1972; Verba et al., 1995).

As the development of media, more and more people gradually view media as a tool of propaganda, especially in politics. Researchers have demonstrated that interpersonal political discussion and news media consumption which in political communication play important roles in civic participation (McLeod et al., 1996; Shah, McLeod, & Yoon, 2001). Especially media use, previous research refers news media to a resource which someone could discuss with others about politics even conflicting viewpoints (Mutz, 2002a; Mutz & Martin, 2001). That is, media is a chance to facilitate diversity of information.

#### *Traditional media use*

According to the past research, media use for political participation has been the issue all the time. Usually, researchers discuss the topic of media use into traditional media use and non-traditional media use. The relationship between traditional media use and political participation proved by McLeod et al. (1996, 1999). They claim that local news viewing and newspaper reading are related to civil participation. They also found traditional forms of participation related to newspaper hard news use, and political knowledge, etc (McLeod et al., 1999). On the other hand, the effect of political participation for non-traditional media use has become an issue.

#### *Non-traditional Media use: the Internet*

McLeod et al. (1999) have labeled “nontraditional forms of participation” for

some activities such as discussions in public forums where Scheufele, D., & Nisbet, M. (2002) called it combined with willingness to participate and speak out without pressure from different opinions. The new media which is deemed to be a powerful tool compared with traditional media is the Internet. The function of information-seeking is the central topic for Internet use. Thus, there are many research indicated that the relationship between Internet use and political participation does exist. Some researchers thought that the Internet provides political information and a place for expression (Dahlgren, 2000; White, 1997), some researchers pointed that it is due to flexibility of Internet where could get depth of issues, timely news, and diverse viewpoints (Davis, 1999; Jones, 1995; Rheingold, 1993), which strongly promote political participation.

Because of the assumption that Internet would foster civil participation through the form of behavior which Wang, S. I. (2007) classified into two dimensions—searching political information and expressing opinions from online community (Norris, 1998; Shah, McLeod, et al., 2001). Due to the characteristics of blogs which a kind of special forum, this article will examine the relationship between blogs and political participation.

## **HYPOTHESES & RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Reviewing the past studies about blogs, they can be categorized into some types:

one is credibility of blogs such as Johnson and Kaye (2004) judged that blogs are more credible than traditional sources because of the depth of information on blogs; some researchers further discussed about the motivation of blog use such as Johnson et al. (2007) considered that the credibility of blogs for blog users information inquiry which have become the motivation of political examination of people.

Of course, there are still another topic of blog research like blog users, political blog, and participation of blog etc. but they just constantly involved in the relationship between blog users and blog itself. Since some studies showed that Internet access has positive effects on civic engagement (Jennings & Zeitner, 2003; Tolbert & McNeal, 2003), this article will discuss the relationship between the use of blogs and online behaviors as well as online engagement:

H1a: Reading on blogs will be related positively to online political participation.

H1b: Commenting on blogs will be related positively to online political participation.

H2a: Reading on blogs will be related positively to online political campaigning.

H2b: Commenting on blogs will be related positively to online political campaigning.

Though Gil De Zúñiga et al.(2009) have examined the relationship between the use of blogs and offline political participation, it still doesn't mention how the different effect happen as the various behavior of blog users. Based on this perspective, this survey further examines that :

RQ1a: Will blog reading moderate the effect of Internet use on political participation?

RQ1b: Will blog reading moderate the effect of Internet use on online political campaigning?

RQ2a: Will commenting on blogs moderate the effect of Internet use on political participation?

RQ2b: Will commenting on blogs moderate the effect of Internet use on online political campaigning?

## METHOD

The data in this study which relies on the Pew Internet and American life project where provides the dataset known as November 2008 Post-Election which interviewed during November 20 and December 4. The total number of sample was 2,254 and the age of all the respondents was above 18. And the data set was with a margin of error of  $\pm 2$  percent for total sample results as well as with a margin of error of  $\pm 3$  percent for online political users results. Since the data set was a daily tracking

survey on Americans' use of the Internet which this article could find out some

Internet behaviors related to political participation for the research.

*Control variables* The control variables in this research could be categorized into a set of blocks which contains demographic variables, and media use. The first control block contains five demographic variables: gender, age, education, race, and income. Those five items of respondents are respectively as followed: gender (47.2% males and 52.8% females); age ( $M = 54.1$ ,  $SD = 17.8$ ); level of education (median = 'technical, trade or vocational school after high school'); income (median = \$40,000 to under \$50,000); race (82.8% white and 15% others). The second control block includes newspaper use ( $M = .7606$ ,  $S = .42678$ ), television use ( $M = .9688$ ,  $S = .17405$ ), and internet use ( $M = .2957$ ,  $S = .23358$ ) for looking for news.

*Independent variables* Some optimistic scholars believed that the abundance of political information available on the Internet may increase political interest and encourage opinion expression. It may also enhance voter information about candidates and elections, and thus increase political participation (Bonchek, 1997). That is why the research focus on the Internet behaviors here, especially emphasizes on the information or news seeking on the Internet. The independent variable here includes 'Portal news services 1,' 'Network TV news websites,' 'Websites of major national newspapers,' 'Websites of LOCAL news organizations in your area,' 'Issue-oriented websites,' 'The website of an

ALTERNATIVE news organization.’ ‘The website of an INTERNATIONAL news organization,’ ‘The website of a RADIO news organization,’ ‘News satire websites like The Onion or The Daily Show,’ and ‘Fact-checking sites.’ And this article reconstruct a scale for those news seeking online.

*Dependent variables* Since Jennings and Zeitner’s (2003) foundation that political use of the Internet had positive effects on several measures of civic engagement, even taking into account pre-Internet levels of civic engagement and key socioeconomic characteristics. That is, the purpose of this article here is to examine the factors for online campaigning and online political participation. The item ‘online campaigning’ represents that ‘Share photos, videos or audio files online that relate to the campaign or the elections,’ ‘Forward someone else’s political commentary or writing to others,’ ‘Forward someone else’s political audio or video recordings to others,’ ‘Customize a web page to display new political or campaign information that is especially interesting or important to you.’

*Moderating variables* The most important attention here in this article is moderating variables. As all we have known that the relationship between independent variables and dependent variables isn’t absolutely direct, that is why the moderating variables exist. Based on the hypotheses in this research, the moderating variables represent separately ‘read blogs’ and ‘comments on blogs.’ To examine

whether the moderating effect exists, the research develop two interaction here: ‘the interaction between Internet use and read blogs’, and the other ‘the interaction between Internet use and comments on blogs.’

## **RESULTS**

The results which shows in table 1 comes from hierarchical regression and interaction which are designed to test the hypotheses and research questions. The two blocks include demographics and media use represent the control variable while the third block in the table 1 indentifies ‘blog use.’ Since the purpose of this research focuses on the relationship between blog use and online political campaign as well as online political participation, this article technically chooses two moderating variables, ‘read blogs’ and ‘comments on blogs,’ into the forth block. All the Beats in table 1 are standardized regression coefficients.

As mentioned above, the control variables are organized by demographic and media use blocks. According to the table 1, the results of first block indicates that the relationship between demographics and online political campaigning is somewhat insignificant except for the correlation of income and online political campaigning ( $\beta = -.093, p < .05$ ) as well as the correlation of age and online political participation ( $\beta = .100, p < .05$ ). That is to say, the first control variable seems to be little impact on online political campaigning and online political participation.

The second block contains three variables known as media use which includes information or news seeking by using newspaper, television, and Internet. The results in table 1 are unsurprisingly identified that the correlation between the Internet use and online political campaigning ( $\beta = .311, p < .001$ ) and the correlation between the Internet use and online political participation ( $\beta = .362, p < .001$ ) which could mean that the Internet use would be a predictor for online political campaigning and online political participation.

In table 1, the most important function is to examine whether the hypotheses in this article are right and try to answer the research questions. Since the assessment of hypotheses for the relationship between reading on blogs and online political campaigning as well as online political participation, the results show there is no significant ( $\beta = .079$ ). However, the relationship between commenting on blogs and online political campaigning ( $\beta = .220, p < .001$ ) as well as online political participation ( $\beta = .121, p < .001$ ) is significant. The consequence of the statistics is to support H1b and H2b.

To further understand the real relationship between independent variables and dependent variables, the research questions want to find the moderating effects. Hence, the author test the interaction between Internet use and blogs reading as well as the interaction between Internet use and blogs commenting. The whole interaction

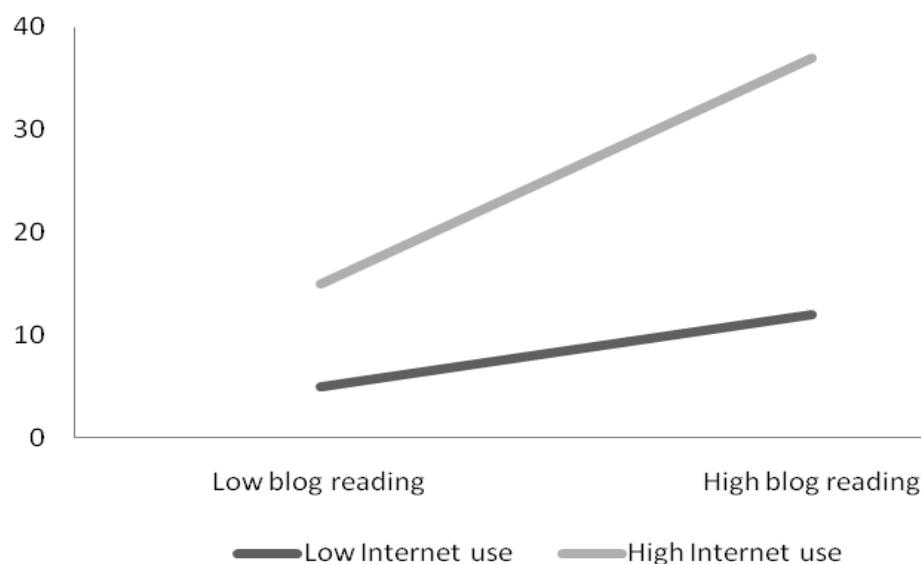
**Table 1 Hierarchical regression models and interactions**

	Online Political Campaigning	Online Political Participation
<b>Block 1: demographics</b>		
Gender(Male=0)	.022	-.042
Age	.072	.100*
Race(White=0)	-.006	.001
Education	.023	.061
Income	-.093*	-.019
<i>Incremental R<sup>2</sup> (%)</i>	1.4	2.3*
<b>Block 2: media use</b>		
Newspaper	.047	-.022
Television	-.022	-.006
Internet	.311***	.362***
<i>Incremental R<sup>2</sup> (%)</i>	18.3***	17.3***
<b>Block 3: blog use</b>		
Read blogs	.079	.049
Comment on blogs	.220***	.121**
<i>Incremental R<sup>2</sup> (%)</i>	5.0***	1.6**
<b>Block 4: interaction</b>		
Internet* Read blogs	.055	.145**
Internet* Comment on blogs	.021	.150***
<b>Total R<sup>2</sup> (%)</b>	24.7	21.2

*Note:*

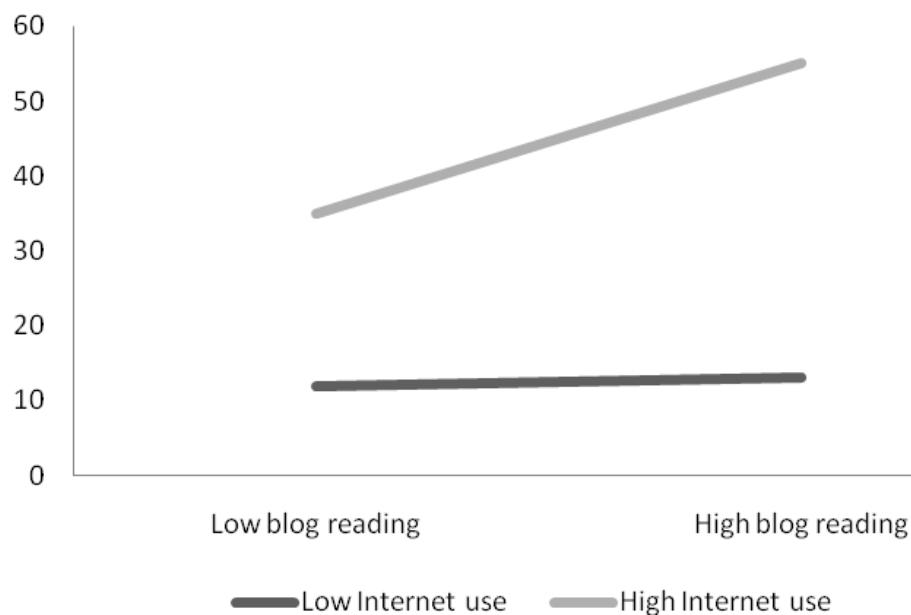
1. All Betas are standardized regression coefficients.
2. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $P < .001$ .
3. Both Online campaigning and Online Political Participation,  $N=1,186$ .

represent in Figure 1-4 to see how the trends of interaction display. Due to the results in the table 1, the interpretation for the forth block could be indicated that the interaction between Internet use and blog reading is rare impact on online political campaigning, and so does the blog commenting. While it is clear that the interaction between Internet use and blog reading for online political campaigning ( $\beta = .145$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and so does the interaction between Internet use and blog commenting for online political participation ( $\beta = .150$ ,  $p < .001$ ) are significant. That is to say, the research questions which could be answered that blog reading moderates the effect of Internet use on participation and commenting on blogs moderates the effect of Internet use on participation as well.

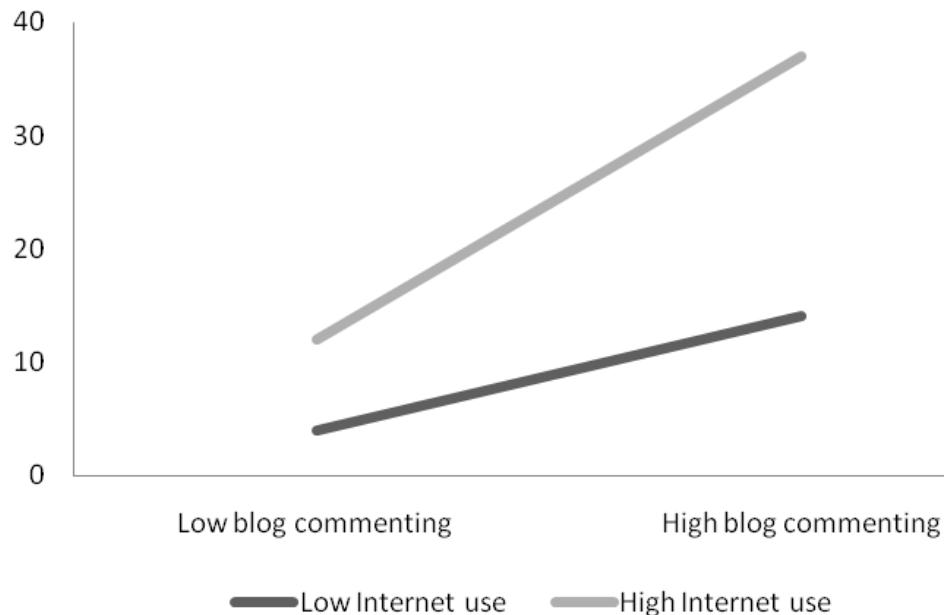


**Figure 1.** Interaction effects of Internet use and blog reading for online political

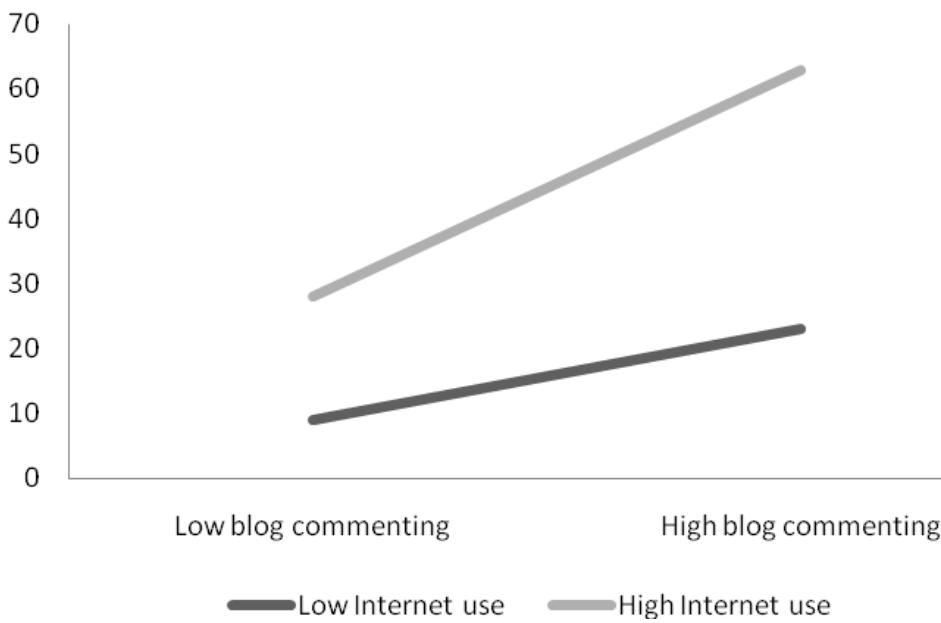
campaigning.



**Figure 2.** Interaction effects of Internet use and blog reading for online political participation.



**Figure 3.** Interaction effects of Internet use and blog commenting for online political campaigning.



**Figure 4.** Interaction effects of Internet use and blog commenting for online political participation.

## CONCLUSION & DISCUSSION

Since researchers have proved that In the past research, some scholars assessed that the different results for media attentiveness and political involvement illustrate the importance of distinguishing across measures of civic engagement (Jennings, M., & Zeitner, V., 2003). Based on this perspective, that is why the research try to find out what is the difference between the Internet use and online political participation.

According to the results, hypotheses of H1b and H2b will be supported consequently.

The most important topic in this article is whether the differences exist between the Internet use and political participation. In addition, some scholars indicated that online behaviors complement traditional news media use and political talk to promote

civic participation or simply create the impression of communicative action without the tangible benefits that come from small-group interactions (Bimber, 1999, 2001; Cornfield, 2000; Olson, 1965). That is why this paper focuses on the blog use and further describe that the relationship between Internet use and political participation does exist.

Because this article try to find the relationship between the different types of blog use and political participation, there will be more factors which influence the relationship between the Internet use and online political participation. There are still some possibility to assess from those independent variables and dependent variables, it may exist other unexpected consequences such as blog users' interesting or political parties tendency etc. This study is just an initiative survey for the possible interaction of moderating variables. There is need more precise to find out other moderating variables so that they may predict the effect of political campaign and political participation more focused. The most important point is that the data set used in this research is from American. The suggestion here is that the future research could try to find some survey in Taiwan.

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