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Political engagement and government informing seeking: Increasing role of social media and mobile devices

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Political Engagement and Government Information Seeking:
Increasing Role of Social Media and Mobile Devices

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Abstract

Using OLS and binary logistic regression, in combination with the OSOR-model on a secondary dataset, the 2010-post election survey by Pew Internet and American Life project, this paper traces the direct paths of Facebook, Twitter, and mobile phone on online political participation and online political and government information seeking, as well as the indirect paths through wider view exposure and credibility.

Findings provide support for the political use of Facebook and mobile phones as credible sources in both online political participation and online political information seeking, while not for Twitter. This suggests that Twitter is not seen as a platform for credible political engagement or information seeking or exposure to diverse views. By comparison, the path for Facebook through wider view exposure is also seen to lead to political participation and online political information through the path of credibility. This implies that any policy attempt to censor or control social media is a move in the wrong direction. There are also some implied findings for the need of an opinion leader.

Keywords: Political participation, online political information seeking, Facebook, Twitter, mobile phones, wider view exposure, credibility, critical debate, opinion leader.

Political Engagement and Government Information Seeking: Increasing Role of Social Media and Mobile Devices

The 2008 US election showed how far the US government and political candidates had come to establishing an online presence through social media to engage citizens spending more of their time online. 2011 also saw a wave of uprisings and democratisation in North African and Arab states, which emphasise potential roles of social media (Harb, 2011)¹.

Using OLS (ordinary least square) regression and structural equation modelling on the 2010-post election survey, by Pew Internet and American Life project, this research hopes to find a positive association between Facebook, Twitter, and mobile phone political use, and the two dependent variables: online government and political information seeking and online political participation. This paper hopes to contribute to existing scientific research a distinguishable difference between social media platforms, highlighting an increasing role of mobile phones, and the role credibility and wider view exposure. Discussion is also linked to present policy debate in the US regarding SOPA (Stop Online Piracy Act), in order to highlight the effects of regulating social media, directly or otherwise.

This paper implements the OSOR-model and structural equation modelling to provide a clear theoretical framework. Previous research using the OSOR model did so mostly within a traditional media environment (see: Cho et al., 2009, D.M. McLeod & Perse, 1994, J.M. McLeod et al., 1996, Jack M. McLeod & Scheufele, 1999), the broad and general context of the internet (see: Shah, Cho, et al., 2007), and the context of online news consumption (see: Shah, McLeod, et al., 2007). This paper extends this to social media and the mobile phones.

Background: Democratic Use & US Policy

The potential of social media and mobile devices, especially in combination, become an essential role-player in political participation. It becomes a tool for democratisation, as was

¹ Also See: (Abouzeid, 2011; Cottle, 2011; Harb, 2011; Hoffmann & Kornweitz, 2011; Hounshell, 2011; Miladi, 2011; Tunisian, 2011; Van Niekerk, Pillay, & Maharaj, 2011).

seen in the Arab Spring (Cottle, 2011), and a means to maintain a democracy, as is seen in the US elections (Ellison et al., 2007).

Social Media in US Political Campaigns

Social media made its US-campaign debut with the usage of social networking site “meeting.com” during the Howard Dean political candidacy campaign in 2004 (Wolf, 2004). A voter created a social media page for Howard Dean in order to garner support and funding. As the campaign progressed, the platform began to grow as more and more supporters began to organise their own promotional and fund raising activities, which the Dean party decided to allow by minimising their direct role and so permitting direct political participation by the individual supported (Wolf, 2004). Wolf (2004) summarised the role of social media:

Along comes this campaign to take back the country for ordinary human beings, and the best way you can do that is through the NET (p1).

Participation activities were also extended offline in a variety of ways. Volunteers went door-to-door, wrote and disseminated personal letters, organised and hosted meetings, and distribute flyers, all of this without even being asked or ordered to do so (Wolf, 2004), which suggests that social media inspired a resurgence of social capital that Putnam (1995) found lacking in traditional media. However, critics found that this use was limited in its intent to garnering money, neglecting to use the more interactive capabilities to more actively engage the audience and eventually falling short in gaining voter support (Hindman, 2005).

These limitations were largely addressed by the 2008 Obama campaign, where communication links were opened directly with potential voters to encourage feedback and direct communication, with the continued presence of credible sources. Following the success of this campaign, companies like ‘Blue State Digital’ were found on the principle of designing interactive web2.0 applications catered for political parties (D'Aprile 2009). This resulted in other online media use spreading to political parties in other parts of the world, including Israel and South Africa. This popularity persisted into the 2010 US election

campaign, where those who actively access online politics, directly and through social media, (Smith, 2011b) increased significantly and extended to mobile phone use (Smith, 2011c).

US Government: Social Media and Regulatory Policy

At present US government and federal state departments employ Facebook in a variety of contexts to supply information and interact with the public. The Hawaii State Senate acknowledges the following in the purpose section of their policy, while the Washington State Senate also recognizes the advantages, and the necessity, of social media in communicating with the public. However, they also note a need to control its political use:

The Senate recognizes that such technology should be made available to both its members and the public, and opportunities for public communication through emerging media should be explored and utilized... recognizes that the technology or medium being utilized for communications should not be the sole controlling factor in determining the propriety of a communication; instead, the nature and content of the communication, itself, should be used to determine whether it is appropriate under applicable ethics and Senate guidelines (Policies Related to Legislative Use of Social Media, 2012).

This need to control is better understood by looking at the disruptive potential of social media during the 2011 Arab Spring. A single event, where a Tunisian citizen set himself on fire, was caught on a camera phone and disseminated via social media, inspiring mass protest that spread uncontrollably to neighbouring countries, and which could not be censored or regulated by government (Harb, 2011; Hounshell, 2011; Miladi, 2011; Tunisian, 2011), leading to the end of regimes in Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, and more violent end in Libya.

Justin Roux (2012), senior vice president of Communications at Luvata, argue that social media subjects politicians to “Trial by majority”, raising the question, “... should we trust the twitter generation to measure right from wrong?”. He fears that public ignorance will lead to sensationalist participation, removed from educated and critical thinking.

Governments and politicians then rightly fear the complete freedom of expression with its extended reach through social media, especially since the US 1st Amendment has

overthrown all past attempts to regulate the internet and its content. Rather than targeting the platforms, US recent policies try to target illegal practices. The most recent regulation attempt, ‘Stop Online Piracy Act’ (SOPA), is by intention a policy written to stop online piracy. However, this gives power to government to “shut down whole web domains on the basis that it believes them to be associated with piracy -- without a trial or even a traditional hearing (SOPA: Washington Vs. The Web, 2012).” Opposition argues that this amounts to censorship, attacking free speech, and placing job security at risk by association to a website at risk of violation. For a social media website where content is uploaded and distributed by the individual, such violation is inevitable (SOPA: Washington Vs. The Web, 2012). This raises the question, is regulation justified, or is the fear of social media over exaggerated?

Theoretical Framework

The OSOR model is a stimulus response model that permits for possible mediation through a second set of orientations originating from media use. A set of orientations (O1) is expected to influence how people experience a media stimulus (S) which in turn produces a second set of orientations (O2) that are expected to mediate the relationship between the communication medium and a behavioural response (R) (Feldman & Price, 2007).

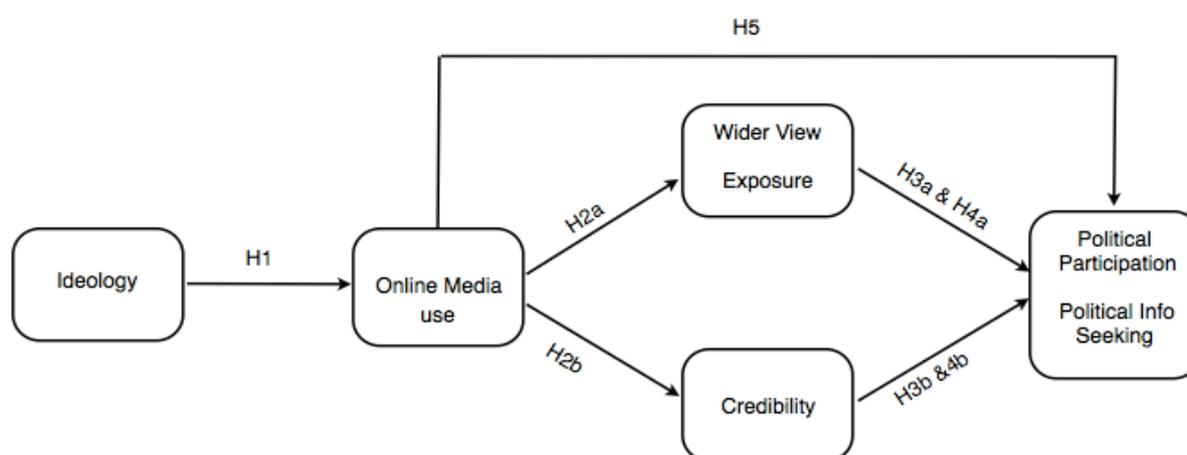


Figure 1. OSOR-Model: Direct And Indirect Association of Online Media

Note: All coefficients are based on OLS regression path analyses. The demographic variables (Block 1), and traditional media (Block 3), are used for control purposes and is not indicated here in order to enhance focus on the hypothesized relationships. ‘Online media use’ is replaceable with, Facebook, Twitter, and cell phone information use. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

O1: Demographics and Ideology

Because of the high levels of dispersal common to online media use, demographics become potentially redundant measures for online political participation (Lenhart 2010). This paper therefore chooses a more stable indicator for political support, namely political ideology (Shah, Cho et al. 2007; Shah, McLeod et al. 2007; Cho, Shah et al. 2009).

S: Communication Variables

Both Facebook and Twitter are defined as social media, although they are technically distinguishable, with Facebook housing media rich content such as embedded (Kluver and Soon 2005; Soon and Kluver 2007), while Twitter is limited 140 characters and hyperlinks. In another difference, Facebook holds a potentially balanced friend network with weak and strong ties, useful for spreading information and encouraging participation (Ellison, Lampe & Lin, 2007), while Twitter is potentially mostly weak with a higher dissemination rate, reaching a potential audience of 1000 with each repost (Kwak et al., 2010).

Mobile phones, a technical platform, bring an additional unique nature, being able to supplement online use as a mobile platform. Smith (2010) found that 83% of Americans have a mobile phone, of which 39% use them to access the internet, and 26% used them to participate in political activities during the 2010 election campaign.

This paper then firstly tests for an association of political ideology as factor affecting media use, and expects that a stronger ideology will increase use.

H1: Political ideology strength will be positively associated with media use².

O2: Potential Mediators

Strait (2008) identifies motivations for use as being different in non-traditional media than in new media. These motivations of use depend on the nature of the media used, as they are likely to change based on the functions available in the media. These mediators are found

² Media use is interchangeable with Facebook, Twitter, and Mobile phone political use.

to originate from the friend networks established through the use of the above media. Firstly, is wider view exposure, followed by credibility (Ellison et al., 2007, Steinfield et al., 2008).

Three hypotheses are composed to test for the relationship:

H2a: Media use will be positively associated with wider view exposure.

H2b: Media use will be positively associated with credibility.

R: Political Participation

The last section of the OSOR model deals with the response of the audience, and thus the effects of the media and their mediators. According to Verba and Nie (1987) political participation refers to activities that directly influence the process of politics. Hardy and Scheufele (2005) offers such a list: having written a letter to a newspaper editor, calling into a public affairs radio talk show, circulating a petition for a candidate or issue, voting for an elected official, working for a political campaign, contacting a public official, calling other people to raise funds for a political organisation, and contributing money to a political organisation or candidate. Gibson, Lusoli, and Ward (2005) argue that online political participation is a continuation of the above definition on the online arena.

Political and government information seeking are also expected acts of political participation (Hardy & Scheufele, 2005) separated because of their informational exposure, as opposed to being its origin.

Hypotheses 3 investigates the association of wider view exposure

H3a: Wider view exposure will be positively associated with political participation.

H3b: Wider view exposure will be positively associated with information seeking.

And for credibility:

H4a: Credibility will be positively associated with political participation.

H4b: Credibility will be positively associated with information seeking

This paper also wishes to test for direct association:

H5a: Media use will be positively associated with political participation.

H5b: Media use will be positively associated with information seeking.

Methodology

Recognising the limitations of a secondary dataset, this focussed on testing the association of three communication variables for direct and indirect association on online government information seeking and online political participation. Results combine the two dependent variables in three models for the three media variables, separated for clarity.

Sampling

This research makes use of a secondary dataset obtained from the Pew Internet & American life project, conducted by the Princeton Survey Associates International, collected between November 3 to November 24 2010 via telephone and cell phone nationwide survey.

The survey was based on a sample of $N=2.257$ of ages 18 and older, which includes 755 cell phone interviews with margin of error about plus or minus 2.4% percentage points for $N=2.275$, while 2.8% for internet users $n=1.628$ (Smith, 2011). Due to the intent of this paper, N is filtered to test only for those who actively use the internet.

Measures

Table 1 about here.

All measures included here are those directly relevant to the model, while demographics and traditional media are controlled for.

Demographics and political ideology.

The sample consists of 1,628 respondents: age 18 and older ($M = 44.66$, $SD = 16.86$) with gender 44.8% male and women slightly over represented at 55.2% female, 79% white, 8.2% Hispanics, and 17.9% people of other ethnicities. Education ($M = 4.98$, $SD = 1.48$, Range = 6) is a continuous variable on a 7-point scale that ranges from 0 = none or grade 1 - 8, to 7 = postgraduate training or professional school after college and the mean being equal

to 'some college'. Income ($M = 5.36$, $SD = 2.09$) investigates total family income in the last year, before tax reductions and ranges from 1 = less than \$10,000 to 9 = \$150,000 or more, with the mean being equal to \$40,000 to \$50,000. Political ideology ($M = 3.05$, $SD = 1.63$) which is operationalised as a 5 point continuous variable (1 = very conservative, 5 = very liberal) and asks the respondent: "In general, would you describe your political views as..."

Communication variables.

Traditional media is operationalised as a computation of two categorical variable, recoded into traditional media to include television, radio, magazines, and newspaper news sources ($M = 2.04$, $SD = .92$), with a category for internet excluded from the computation to avoid conceptual overlap, and asks the responded: "Overall, how have you been getting most of your news about this years campaigns and elections from television, from newspapers, from radio, from magazines, or from the Internet? [Accept two answers]".

Facebook political use ($M = .46$, $SD = .94$, $KR20 = .73$) is operationalised as a summative scale based on 4 dichotomous items asking the respondents to think about what they did during the November 2010 elections (0 = no, 1 = yes): "Get any campaign or candidate information on social networking sites?, Sign up on a social networking site as a 'friend' of a candidate, or a group involved in the campaign such as a political party or interest group?, Post content related to politics or the campaign on a social networking site?, Join a political group, or group supporting a cause on a social networking site?". A factor analysis was run on two items potentially conceptually overlapping with what is considered online information use (Verba and Nie 1987; Hardy and Scheufele 2005). Results of the factor analyses found that both items: "Discover on a social networking site which candidates your friends voted for this year?" ($r = .38$), and "Start a political group, or group supporting a political cause on a social networking site?" ($r = .27$), were not statistically correlated when compared to the other items listed here.

Twitter political use ($M = .46$, $SD = .93$, $KR20 = .69$) is operationalised as a summative scale of 4 dichotomous items that ask the respondent to think about what they did on Twitter during the November elections (0 = no, 1 = yes) and if they had happened to: “Get any campaign or candidate information on Twitter?, Follow a candidate, or a group involved in the campaign such as a political party or interest group on Twitter?, Include links to political content in your tweets?, Use Twitter to follow the election results as they were happening?”

Mobile phone political use ($M = .62$, $SD = 1.13$, $KR20 = .69$) has been operationalised as a summative scale constructed from 7 dichotomous items that ask the respondents (0 = no, 1 = yes) firstly whether they a cell phone in the months leading up the elections to: “Keep up with news related to the election or politics? Share photos or videos related to the election campaigns?, Download or use any software applications or 'apps' that provide updates from a candidate or a group involved in the campaign such as a political party or interest group?”, and whether they used it on the day they voted to: “Inform others that you voted?, Let others know about conditions at your voting location, such as delays, long lines, low turnout or other problems?, Did you happen to use your cell phone to monitor the results of the election as they occurred, or did you not do this?”

Potential mediators.

Wider range of views exposure is recoded into a dichotomous variable with 1 = yes 64.9% and 0 = about the same 35.1%, asking the respondent if they think the internet exposes them to a wider range of views than traditional media: “Do you think that the internet exposes people to a wider range of political views than they can get in the traditional news media, or is most of the political info you can find online the same as what you can get elsewhere?”

Credibility has been operationalised into a dichotomous variable with 1 = easy 37.3% and 0 = difficult 62.7%, that asks whether it is easy or difficult to tell what is true online from

what is not: “Thinking about the political information you find online, would you say it's usually easy or difficult for you to tell what is true from what is not true?”

Response variables.

Online political and government information seeking ($M = 2.37$, $SD = 1.72$, $KR20 = .75$) is operationalised as constructed as a summative scale of 6 dichotomous items (0 = no, 1 = yes) asking respondents if they did any of the following in the months leading up to the election: “Look for information online about candidates' voting records or positions on the issues?, Watch video online about the candidates or the election, Use the internet to research or 'fact check' claims made during the campaign, Get news online?, and Look online for news or information about politics or the 2010 campaigns?”.

Online political participation ($M = .49$, $SD = 1$, $KR20 = .68$) is operationalised as a summative scale of 6 dichotomous items coded (0 = no, 1 = yes), asking respondents if they did any of the following leading up to the election: “Sign up online to receive updates about the campaign or the elections, Send email related to the campaign or the elections to friends, family members or others; Contribute money online to a candidate running for public office; Use the internet to participate in volunteer activities related to the campaign—like getting lists of voters to call, or getting people to the polls; Take part in an online discussion, listserv or other online group forum like a blog related to political issues or the campaign; Share photos, videos, or audio files online that relate to the campaign or elections.”

Results

To test the hypotheses, ordinary least squares (OLS) and binary logistic regressions are applied to test for direct and indirect association of media on political and government information seeking and online political participation. Results were collected in 3 figures and table 1. Each figure includes 2 models for two dependent variables, and each model 4 blocks.

Table 1 about here.

Model 1: Facebook political use

Overall, this model is supported explaining 39.5% of total variance for political participation: demographics 3%, ideology .1%, media use 34.9%, second level orientations 1.6%. For information seeking it explains 30% of total variance: demographics 9.7%, ideology .3%, media use 17.4%, and second level orientations 2.6%.

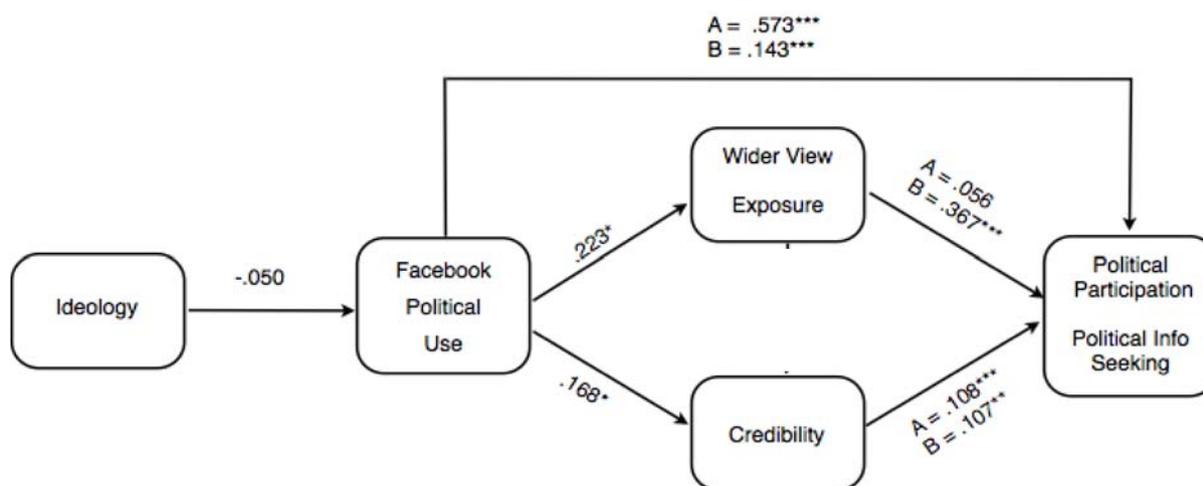


Figure 2. OSOR-Model: Association of Facebook Political Use

Note: All coefficients are based on OLS regression path analyses. The demographic variables (Block 1), and traditional media (Block 3), are used as controls and are not indicated here to emphasise the hypothesized relationships. A = online political participation, B = political information seeking. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

No support is found for (H1) Ideology ($\beta = -.050$, $p > .05$), while support is found (H2a) for Facebook political use on wider view exposure ($\beta = .223$, $p < .05$), and for (H2b) credibility ($\beta = .168$, $p < .05$). No support is found for wider view exposure (H3a) on political participation ($\beta = .056$, $p > .05$), but is found (H3b) for information seeking ($\beta = .367$, $p < .001$). Full support is found for the path of credibility for (H4a) political participation ($\beta = .108$, $p < .001$) and (H4b) information seeking ($\beta = .107$, $p < .01$). Support is also found for direct association for (H5a) political participation ($\beta = .573$, $p < .001$) and information seeking ($\beta = .143$, $p < .001$).

Model 2: Twitter political use

This model is supported explaining 41.4% of total variance for political participation: demographics 7.6%, ideology 1.9%, media use 31.5%, and second level orientations .4%. The

model for information seeking explains 26.4% of total variance: demographics 10.2%, ideology .1%, media use 15.4%, and second level orientations .6%.

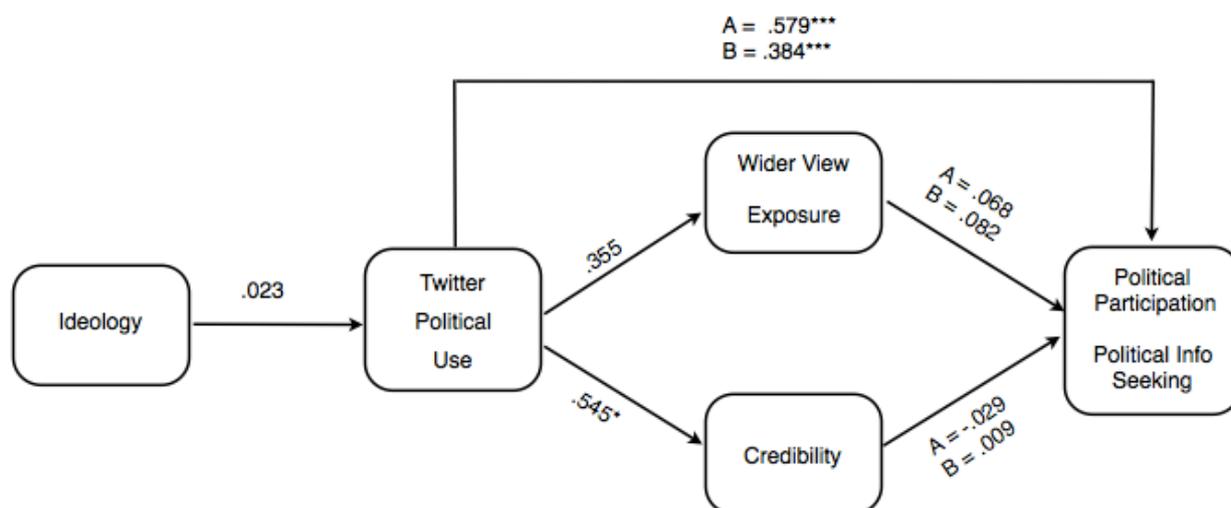


Figure 3. OSOR-Model: Association of Twitter Political Use

Note: All coefficients are based on OLS regression path analyses. The demographic variables (Block 1), and traditional media (Block 3), are used as controls and are not indicated here to emphasise the hypothesized relationships. A = online political participation, B = political information seeking. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

No support is found for (H1) ideology ($\beta = .023$, $p > .05$), or Twitter on (H2a) wider view exposure ($\beta = .355$, $p > .05$), but is supported for (H2b) credibility ($\beta = .545$, $p < .05$).

No support is found for association of wider view exposure on (H3a) political participation ($\beta = .068$, $p > .05$) or (H3b) information seeking ($\beta = .082$, $p > .05$), and also for credibility on (H4a) political participation ($\beta = .029$, $p > .05$) or (H4b) information seeking ($\beta = .009$, $p > .05$). Full support is found for direct association for (H5a) political participation ($\beta = .579$, $p < .001$), and (H5b) information seeking ($\beta = .384$, $p < .001$).

Model 3: Mobile phone political use

Overall this model is supported, explaining 23.3% of total variance for political participation: demographics 1.8%, ideology .1%, media use 18.6%, and second level orientations 2.8%. Information seeking is also supported, explaining 28.1% of total variance: demographics 9.6%, ideology .1%, media use 14.3%, and second level orientations 4.1%.

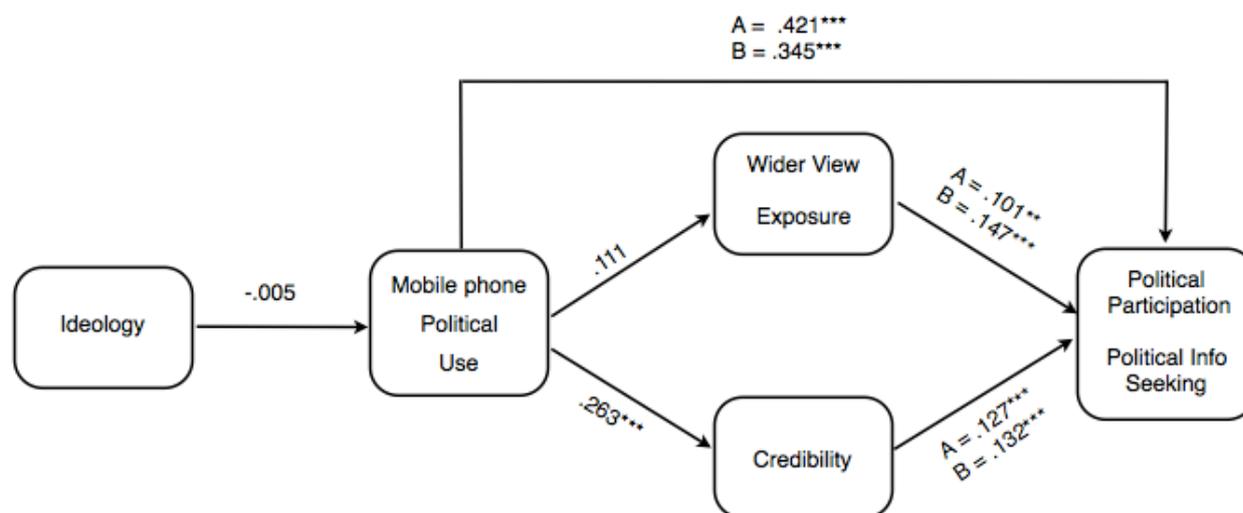


Figure 4. OSOR-Model: Association of Mobile phone Political Use

Note: All coefficients are based on OLS regression path analyses. The demographic variables (Block 1), and traditional media (Block 3), are used as controls and are not indicated here to emphasise the hypothesized relationships. A = online political participation, B = political information seeking. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

No support is found for Ideology (H1) ($\beta = -.005$, $p > .05$), or (H2a) association of mobile phone use on wider view exposure ($\beta = .111$, $p > .05$), but is found for (H2b) credibility ($\beta = .263$, $p < .001$). Full support is found for wider view exposure on (H3a) political participation ($\beta = .101$, $p < .01$) and (H3b) information seeking ($\beta = .147$, $p < .05$), and also for credibility on (H4a) political participation ($\beta = .127$, $p < .001$) and (H4b) information seeking ($\beta = .132$, $p < .001$). Direct association is also supported for (H5a) political participation ($\beta = .421$, $p < .001$) and (H5b) information seeking ($\beta = .345$, $p < .001$).

Discussion

Overall results confirm direct association of social media and mobile phone political use on online political and government information seeking and online political participation, as also experienced by previous authors (Abouseid 2011; Cottle 2011; Strait 2008; Wolf 2004) in various situations. The indirect paths are less consistent and elaborated on by path.

Wider View Exposure

Results from figure 2 indicates that only Facebook political use leads to a wider view exposure, supporting an argument for a Facebook friend network as information

disseminator, above that of the much more looser Twitter network (figure 3) and mobile phone network (figure 4). This suggests that media richness prevails as provider of diverse information, liberalising diverse views, and might also suggest the presence of a superior 'weaker friend network' as argued by Zube et.al., (2009). However, whether as a result of counter-persuasion or information overload, this does not lead to political participation, only to an increase online information seeking.

Credibility

The path of credibility finds more support, being seen as important in all models, however for Twitter it leads nowhere, suggesting that Twitter is overall not yet a media ready to support politics through either indirect paths.

The strongest support is found for mobile phones, which leads to both a credible path for online information seeking and political participation. This confirms recent findings of an increasing political role by this media, and suggests a continuation of a close-knit offline friend network to its online functions (Lenhart 2010; Smith 2010). This adds mobile phone to an arsenal of media available political uses. However, special note is taken of demographic variables, which indicate the existence of significant access divides.

When looking at the case for Facebook, although much less significant, it is seen as a media variable positively increasing participation and information seeking online. When also taking note of its wider view exposure, a previously unconsidered argument forms, that a wider view exposure also leads to credibility. A bivariate correlation was run to test for this, results indicating that there is a perfect positive significance between wider view exposure and credibility, $r(1) = 0.124$, $p < 0.01$, indicating that as wider view exposure increases, credibility also increases. This relationship explains 1.54 % of the variance in credibility.

This brings forward the concerns of Justin Roux (2012) who, in an editorial, wonders aloud whether a media not subject to credibility is consistent with the elements of a preferred

democracy. "... should we trust the Twitter generation to measure right from wrong?" While this fear seems to be founded for Twitter, Facebook provides a media platform that overcomes this situation by conforming to the libertarian theory needs of being a diverse information provider (Fourie, 2001), while also needing to be credible. On Facebook, this path of credibility requires the presence of a trusted 'profile' which in turn is owned either by an individual, or a known organisation, who act as opinion leaders (Zube et. Al., 2009).

Combining the findings of wider view exposure with credibility, it becomes evident that social media users do not simply participate because they are exposed to a variety of information sources, where potentially false information can be spread just as quickly. This finding also satisfies the fear that social media do not lead to critical debate.

This paper proposes an argument that any step to censor social media risks jeopardising this wider view exposure, which in turn would reduce the efficacy of Facebook in inspiring political participation and information seeking online. In other words, censoring is counterproductive to the fear of this medium leading to behaviour perceived as disruptive by governments. Reducing wider exposure potentially increases disruptive potential instead.

Furthermore, this paper questions notions of a 'revolution of orphans' during the Arab Spring, where political participation was described as having no leaders (Abouzeid, 2011). This paper agrees that a single event spread through social media triggered a volatile situation, but it opposes the notion of no opinion leader. By its nature, information spread along social media requires a credible source, or sources (Lampe et. Al, 2007; Zube et.al., 2009). The failure of the Dean campaign shows what the lack of an opinion leader results in during long-term use. This paper then argues that opinion leader is needed to sustain any prolonged political action.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

A major limitation relates to the valid sample for Twitter ($n = 79$) after listwise deletion and dealing with missing variables and non-users. To test for more accurate findings for the association of Twitter in the above scenarios, this paper suggests future research should endeavour to obtain a large, more Twitter focussed sample.

This paper also formulates an argument that an opinion leader of some sort is needed to facilitate credibility, although cannot specifically elaborate. This paper suggests that perhaps it is time to test again for a two-step-flow relationship as was done by Zube et. al. (2009).

Conclusion

Findings support a case for Facebook and mobile phone use to play a role in political participation and online political information seeking, in both a direct and indirect capacity. Both Facebook and mobile phones are also found to lead to the dependent variables through a path of credibility. Furthermore, a wider view exposure for Facebook is also seen as facilitating a more credible association. This paper also finds some evidence that indicates the need for an opinion leader. Also, notably, this paper argues that any attempt to regulate social media use is a move in the wrong direction. As such regulation may affect the wider diversity exposure, and its link of credibility to eventual participation.

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Tables and Figures

Table 1.

Predicting Effects of Online Media

	Model 1: Facebook		Model 2: Twitter		Model 3: Mobile	
	Participation	Info Seeking	Participation	Info Seeking	Participation	Info Seeking
O1: Demographics						
Age	.146***	.048	.128	.105	.114***	-.017
Sex (Male)	.019	.065	-.023	-.072	-.023	.013
Race	-.016	.014	-.007	.016	.075*	.079**
Hispanic	.022	.014	-.096	-.152	-.006	-.042
Education	.029	.140***	.122	.073	.066*	.138***
Income	.019	.136***	-.117	.051	-.021	.127***
<i>Incremental R² (%)</i>	3.0%	9.7%	7.6%	10.2%	1.8%	9.6%
O1: Political Orientation						
Ideology	-.019	-.046	.145	.018	-.044	-.045
<i>Incremental R² (%)</i>	.1%	.3%	1.9%	.1%	.1%	.1%
S: Communication Variables						
Traditional Media	.076*	.143	-.083	.084	.057*	.112***
Facebook	.573***	.143***				
Twitter			.579***	.384***		
Mobile phones					.421***	.345***
<i>Incremental R² (%)</i>	34.9%	17.4%	31.5%	15.4%	18.6%	14.3%
O2: Second level Orientations						
Exposure to Wider View range	.056	.367***	.068	.082	.101***	.147***
Easier to tell the Truth	.108***	.107**	-.029	.009	.127***	.132***
<i>Incremental R² (%)</i>	1.6%	2.6%	.4%	.6%	2.8%	4.1%
Total R² (%)	39.5%	30%	41.4%	26.4%	23.3%	28.1%

Note: Betas are after entry Betas. All Betas are standardised coefficients. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001.