THE IMPACT OF NEWS PLATFORM SELECTION ON POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: SOCIAL MEDIA NEWS AND THE MEDIATING ROLE OF ONLINE EXPRESSION

by

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(Under the Direction of John Soloski)

ABSTRACT

This study evaluates the relationship between news platform selection and political participation using the 2016 Pew Research Center's American Trends Panel Wave 14 sample. The results indicate that the use of most news platforms have a positive impact on a person's likelihood to participate in politics. However, social media news consumption negatively impacts political participation unless consumers engage in online political expression. For social media news consumers, participation is mediated by online expression.

INDEX WORDS: Social Media, Online Expression, News Consumption, Voting, Political Discussion, Mediation Analysis, Political Participation, Voter Behavior

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DEDICATION

For my family. This is just the beginning.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, social media[1] networking and news have been inextricably tied to contemporary democratic processes like political debate, protest movements and election campaigns (Bennett, Segerberg and Yang, 2018; Casteltrione, 2016; Lee, Shah, and McLeod, 2012; Enjolras, 2012; MacKinnon, 2011; Sasaki, 2017). On September 17, 2011 in New York City, Occupy Wall Street protests began. Within weeks, the protests spread to other U.S. cities and later all over the world. Before the event subsided, demonstrations occurred in approximately 951 cities and 82 countries (Rogers, 2014). Dubious investment practices led to bank failures across the world and resulted in a global economic crisis known as the Great Recession. Public sentiment reflected frustration with the knowledge that many bankers whose lending practices were responsible for bank failures were too economically insulated to suffer the impact of the crisis. Anger over the perceived unfairness associated with the crisis evolved into global protests against social inequality (Bennet, Segerberg and Yang, 2018).

The prolific nature of the Occupy protests was facilitated by the exponential growth of online support networks. “Like many movements in the digital age, OccupyWall Street used an impressive array of social media and digital platforms to reach and include large audiences” (Bennett, Segerberg and Yang, 2018). The public

[1] While the word media is typically a plural noun, this paper will refer to social media as singular noun because of the specificity of the context with which it is used.

attention online was so overwhelming that it became a focal point of the mainstream media. Due to the sheer crowds of people that were gathering in cities across the world, having been recruited from the extensive reach of Facebook, Twitter and Youtube, law enforcement everywhere faced a major challenge to maintain order (Barberá et al., 2015; Bennett, Segerberg and Yang, 2018). Standing parallel to Arab Spring, the event dominated the political conversation online, "an unprecedented amount media content flowed through multi-layered networks," including everything from citizen-journalist cell phone videos to traditional news reports to legacy media outlets (Bennett, Segerberg, and Walker, 2014).

Events like these indicate that the Internet may be expanding the boundaries of the traditional spheres in which political life transpires (Schroeder, 2018). In 2018, Pew Research Center found that 89% of adults regularly use the Internet, and nearly 70% of all adults and 88% of young adults in the United States use social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter (Pew, 2018). The Internet and social media have radically transformed and augmented human communication. This new communication ecology is divergent from conventional mass media in that it allows not only for self-reflection through the production of messages, but also immediate interactivity and feedback with citizens and institutions alike (Shah et al. 2017; Enjolras, 2012).

Recent scholarship asserts that Internet communication, and especially social media, may encourage civic engagement more than traditional media because of their architectural features. (Casteltrione, 2016; Lee, Shah, and McLeod, 2012; Enjolras, 2012; Sasaki, 2017). According to Kobayashi (2006), there are different types of social

media: collaborative projects, virtual worlds, blogs, content communities, and social networking. There is some indication that social networking platforms in particular, like Twitter and Facebook, have expanded the public sphere and transformed social and political processes (Mukhopadhyay, 2016).

According to Mukhopadhyay (2016), during the Occupy protests, networking technologies went beyond accelerating the expansion of network forms-they also aided in the formation of new political inclinations centered on "the network as an emerging political and cultural ideal." This is not to say that every person used digital technology or that it has entirely changed the way social movements operate, but that the incorporation of digital technology has added a new dynamic of activism that intimately acknowledges the power of digital networks as well as accelerates the diffusion of political ideas (Mukhopadhyay, 2016). For example, the popularity of the Occupy protests on Facebook and Twitter played a role in executing the mobilization of millions of people around the world. Even though the Occupy movement was adapted by each nation to address specific political issues that hindered their democracies, the unique use of the media by modern activists created a model to follow for promoting and organizing interrelated protest events (Mukhopadhyay, 2016).

The Public Sphere

According to Habermas, an independent public sphere is a requirement for a functioning democracy (Habermas, 1981; Holub, 1991; Mukhopadhyay, 2016). Habermas explained the concept of the public sphere as an arbiter between society and the state. A "public sphere" consists of "a diverse and independent mass media along

with the inclusion of the mass audiences" and is a virtual "place" where public opinions are formed without fear of state retribution but parallel in breadth with public authority (Habermas,1991). Habermas further described the public sphere as the stage upon which political participation is acted out by society through discourse, deliberation, and the forming of public opinion. The formation of public opinion then influences governance, and is therefore essential to democratic life (Habermas, 1981).

The concept of Habermas's public sphere has experienced a structural and connotative evolution in tandem with the onset of new communication technology and the resulting expansion of society's concept of mass media (Mukhopadhyay, 2016). The advent of Internet technology has redefined how mass communication functions in the public sphere because of the capacity for Internet users to engage in complex multi-directional communication flows (Monbiot, 2000; Mukhopadhyay, 2016). According to Mukhopadhyay (2016), the way people engage with news online, and especially on social media, has transformed from a one direction flow to a multi-direction flow. This has created a communication environment where through "its virtual characteristic, the cultural dimension of communicative interaction has amplified."

The Internet's global reach and integration into the daily lives of millions of people has solidified it as social infrastructure that supports in civil and political communication as well as commerce. (Wu, 2010; MacKinnon, 2011; Kreiss and McGregor, 2018; Plantin, Lagoze, and Sandvig, 2018). However, due to its relative "newness" and its distinctive individual relation to publics of varying social and political structures, there is a "need for further investigations of existing premises and tenets

related to possible technological influences on democracy and political participation" (Nam, 2016). Although traditional media, like newspapers, radio shows, or cable content can be folded into the Internet in a digital form, the Internet is steadily supplanting traditional media as a primary source of news consumption (Baum and Groeling, 2008). Furthermore, news accessed through social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter are becoming the main source of news for younger generations (McLeod, 2000; Lee, Shah, and McLeod, 2012).

Social media news is divergent from traditional news in both the way that the presentation of the news is tailored to previous news selections made by a user as well as the way that it is modified to incorporate paid content by companies that purchase advertising space from the platforms themselves (Kreiss and McGregor, 2018). Social media news also differs from traditional news because it is accessible to people who may not have sought news if it had not been presented to them while they are using social media platforms for communicating with others and entertainment, as well as because people can comment, re-post, interact with the posters and sometimes author the news itself (Enjolras, 2012).

Some minority populations, people with low income, people who have less education, and younger people are considered to be traditionally underrepresented in political life (Enjolras, 2012). Some evidence indicates that social media platforms are fostering political discussion and interest in the governing principles of society among these groups that were previously disinterested or removed from political life (Sasaki, 2014). The unique features of social media news indicated above suggest the possibility

that the accessibility, horizontality, and feedback ability of social media news is stimulating interest in public affairs and political engagement in these communities (Enjolras, 2012). If this is true, this would have a positive impact on the public sphere in terms of its expansion and resulting accessibility.

Habermas stressed that whether or not all members of society have an opportunity to engage in political life is indicative of the health of democracy. He also indicated that people should be able to speak truthfully and engage in a deliberative process that fosters greater understanding between people with opposing viewpoints (Habermas, 1987). The ability of a public sphere to foster consensus is critical to the its function of maintaining a somewhat cohesive sense of reality amongst participants in a society. According to Habermas, "participants overcome their merely subjective views and, owing to the mutuality of rationally motivated conviction, assure themselves of both the unity of the objective world and the inter-subjectivity of their lifeworld" (Habermas, 1987).

While some evidence exists that the Internet as a communication medium has the potential to foster democracy because of its ability to bring many people together in one "space" and therefore advance the expansion of civil society through social networking (Enjolras, 2012; Sasaki, 2017), others fear that control over what can be shared and seen on platforms like Google or Facebook and the high customization of news algorithms (MacKinnon, 2011; Kreiss and McGregor, 2018), have the power to manipulate or polarize the public in ways that are damaging to the public sphere (Shah, et al., 2017; Wu, 2010).

The divergent narratives surrounding the role of the Internet as an instrument of democracy commonly slip into two technologically deterministic perspectives with undercurrents of utopian or dystopian sentiment (Lim, 2012). According to Nam (2017), techno-optimism "supports the notion that the Internet reduces the costs of information acquisition and inter-personal/organizational communication and provides marginalized groups with opportunities to be heard in the public sphere" therefore mobilizing "new participants into politics" and "contributing to more equitable societies." In contrast, techno-pessimists perceive the Internet as a major threat to democracy because of the ways "governments and corporations use it to manipulate users and legitimize their identities" as well as by decreasing the quality and value political discourse (Lim, 2012).

Techno-pessimists have a more powerful argument concerning the development of Internet communication technology in non-democracies where a robust public sphere isn't encouraged by the government. This is because the Internet can "provide tools for governments to directly impose heavy compulsory censorship on information and communications on the Internet" (Nam, 2017). Broken down, "the optimists tend to believe that the Internet is a platform for political discussion, which, thereby, diffuses democratic ideas across jurisdictional boundaries, whereas the pessimists focus on the censorship and filtering of online content" (Nam, 2017).

However, these explanations have received criticism for exaggerating and oversimplifying effects (DeLisle, Goldstein, and Yang, 2016; Khamis and Vaughn, 2012; Kraidy, 2013). Khamis and Vaughn caution scholars to avoid a "technologically deterministic approach which prioritizes the role of social media over face-to-face mass

action in bringing about political change" (Khamis and Vaughn, 2012). For example, referring to Egypt's revolution as a "Facebook Revolution" undermines the amount of physical will and mental determination exerted by millions of Egyptians who risked their safety and their lives to rally in the streets for 18 days (Khamis and Vaughn, 2012). They state that while social media may be a necessary tool, it is not sufficient within itself "to achieve a sociopolitical transformation" (Khamis and Vaughn, 2012). Kraidy (2013) imparted a profound criticism to the over-emphasis on the role of digital technology in the Arab Spring uprisings: "The literature tends to espouse various levels of technological determinism and historical presentism. Emphasizing technology instead of users ascribes agency to machines rather than to humans. Focusing on platforms instead of processes essentially reduces ''communication'' to ''media'' in fundamentally uncritical fashion (Kraidy, 2013).

The vastness and complexity of the Internet defies the oversimplification of purely dualistic theoretical perspectives (DeLisle, Goldstein, and Yang, 2016). Many scholars argue that how established media serve society is inextricably tied to a society's economic and political structure (Christians et al., 2009; DeLisle, Goldstein, and Yang, 2016; Kreiss and McGregor, 2018). The potential for information sharing to support democracy is well-established (Habermas, 1981; McQuail, 2005; Norris, 1997), but the democratizing ability of media is dependent upon who controls it and how it is used-its social, economic, and political context (McQuail, 2005). Hence, the growth and efficacy of online movements across the world have had greatly different outcomes. "Technology does not cause political change…but it does provide new capacities and impose new constraints on political actors" (Howard, 2011).

When contemplating the expansion of the public sphere into cyberspace, it may also be wise to consider ways in which "cyber space" diverge from other environments where news is distributed and information sharing occurs. For example, unlike the proverbial "wall" between advertising and newsrooms in newspapers, the agency exercised by Internet platforms in their active pursuit of political advertising revenue has a direct impact on how news and other information is ordered and prioritized (Kreiss and McGregor, 2018). Until recently, political communication literature considered technology firms as "distribution channels and technologies for political communication" (Kreiss and McGregor, 2018).

Kreiss and McGregor (2018) conducted an analysis of how Facebook, Twitter, Microsoft, and Google, shape communication in electoral campaigns in the United States. Their findings indicate that the business relationship between election candidates and these technology firms is straightforward: "Technology firms derive ad revenues and build relationships with campaigns and their candidates, while campaigns optimize their advertising and extend the reach of their messaging." Firms like Google, Facebook, and Twitter utilize their extensive and intimate data on subscribers, including demographics, behavior, interest, and measures of attention to help campaigns strategically target voters (Kreiss and McGregor, 2018). Google, for instance, helps candidates profile the types of people engaging with search ads, like working class voters, and decide which sites to target advertising, a process that includes tracking individual users across the massive cyber-terrain of Google's reach (Kreiss and McGregor, 2018).

A frightening aspect of this process is that unlike traditional media forms, advertising is easily mistaken for regular news, and many people are unaware of how

search engines and social media firms influence the public sphere by shaping the flow of social and political information (Tufekci, 2015; Kreiss and McGregor, 2018). An example of one of Google's many strategies is "search advertising" where Google works with clients to help create and run advertising and imbed them around searches for their opponents' names as well as imbed search advertising around major news events in an attempt to "reframe issues in a way that is more advantageous for their candidate" (Kreiss and McGregor, 2018).

Scholars combining infrastructures studies and platform studies have concluded that companies like Facebook are functioning like public infrastructure that has traditionally supported the public sphere, similar to the telephone and radio monopolies of the 20th century, but without the same government oversight and regulation (Plantin et al., 2016). While this makes public access cheaper and sometimes more efficient, it has also created a situation where private companies are acting as public institutions, but with the explicit goal of maximizing the profits of their shareholders. Scholars contend that this situation may have a precarious effect on the democratic processes and other institutions necessary for democracy, like political campaigns and a thriving press (Plantin et al., 2016; Kreiss and McGregor, 2018). "If the news industry, or possibly even the Trump campaign, offers any foreshadowing, we might be on the precipice of something akin to click-bait campaign ads, where the technological ability and incentive to monetize engagement by both firms and campaigns leads to increasingly sensationalized and targeted political communication" (Kreiss and McGregor, 2018).

This complex state of affairs generates a critical question: If the Internet is in fact an expansion of public sphere, in what ways will this new communication technology affect society's political discourse, deliberation, and action? With the growing tie between political life and social media, as well as the increasing reliance on social media by younger generations as a primary news source, understanding how social media news differs from traditional platforms and how society is affected by those differences is essential to maintaining a public sphere that fosters liberal democracy as it expands to cyberspace. This study is an empirical examination into whether social media news differs from traditional news platforms in its ability to support and maintain the public sphere. Whether or not social media news is fostering online and offline discussion, prompting voter participation, and fostering social equality are all critical factors in the examination process.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

News Consumption, Political Attitudes and Participation

Communication scholars have been examining the nature of the relationship between American media and politics for nearly a century (Ha, 2014; Bennett, 2009; Entman, 2004) and have repeatedly demonstrated that mass media has some influence on citizens' political attitudes and political participation (Lee, Shah, and McLeod, 2012; McLeod, 2000; Newton, 1999; Norris, 1997; Ostman, 2014; Skoric, Zhu, Goh, & Pang, 2016; Soroka, Loewen, Fournier, and Rubenson, 2016). Political participation refers to "the set of activities influencing or aiming to influence governments' actions and other individuals' political behaviors, and/or reflecting individuals' interest and psychological involvement in politics" (Casteltrione, 2016).

According to Soroka, Loewen, Fournier, and Rubenson (2016), news consumption has a powerful impact on public attitudes towards government policy. After conducting a series of framing experiments, they provided empirical evidence for the argument that news content impacts public attitudes which in turn inform political behaviors like voting (Soroka et al., 2016). This also provides evidence for the theoretical existence and importance of the public sphere.

Becoming a participant in the public sphere is dependent upon multiple influences. That said, many scholars indicate that participation in politics is becoming more reliant on engagement with digital media like cell phones, the Internet, and online networking platforms (Dimitrova and Matthes, 2018; Lee, Shah, and McLeod, 2012; Shah, et al., 2017; Casteltrione, 2016; Enjolras, 2012; Gil de Zuniga, et al., 2013). At the level at which news is consumed by the user, Norris (2000) indicates that attention to the news gradually reinforces political engagement, just as political engagement prompts attention to the news. Norris (2000) refers to this process as a "virtuous circle." Likewise, according to Castelrione (2016), "the effects of digital technologies on political participation are manifold–reinforcement does not exclude mobilization and vice versa – and must be assessed as part of a continuum, rather than being considered in neat, mutually exclusive categories" (Casteltrione, 2016).

One's ability to participate in in the public sphere is dependent upon the development of capacities and skills necessary to participate meaningfully and effectively in the democratic processes (Habermas, 1981; Bennett, 2008; McLeod & Shah, 2009). For this reason, communication at home, at school, with peers, and through media develops democratic abilities and impetus for participation (Lee, Shah, and McLeod, 2012). "Communication mediation" is one important factor in understanding what eventually leads people to engage in politics (Lee, Shah, and McLeod, 2012).

Communication mediation refers to "the process in which news consumption and political discussion shape and direct social structural influences on civic and political engagement" (Lee, Shah, and McLeod, 2012). The concept above all emphasizes that

political socialization is a process of interpersonal and public interactions, in which indirect relationships between variables and mediation is to be expected. According to Lee, Shah, and McLeod (2012), the process of becoming a political participant is becoming more reliant on digital technology as a result of the changing media environment. “Networked digital media tools, such as instant messaging, blogging, and social networking, have emerged as daily resources for social communication, information access, discussion, and expression” (Lee, Shah, and McLeod, 2012).

For participants to successfully engage in the public sphere, information sharing begins with news consumption but should extend to interpersonal discussion with peers and family and eventually lead to political action like voting (Lee, Shah, and McLeod, 2012, McLeod, 2000; Ostman, 2014). How different news platforms might have different effects on participants’ discussion habits could provide clues as to how conducive a medium is in supporting democratic processes. Ostman (2014) found both direct and indirect relationships between how often participants consumed news media, discussed issues with family and friends, and the degree to which they engaged in behavior that reflected their political awareness. His study also noted that communication with family and friends plays a key role in the translation of political knowledge acquired from news media to everyday life, ultimately instigating social behaviors congruent with their political learnings (Ostman, 2014).

The relationship between voting, income, and education as well as the relationship between voting and social media are of particular interest to current research in political communication (Han, 2008; Sasaki, 2017). In recent years, scholars have

attempted to understand different dimensions of political participation by examining the impact of different types of news consumption on aspects of political participation like interpersonal discussion and voting behavior. Social media has gained extraordinary attention in the role of political campaigns and has been purported in recent scholarship to have an impact on political behavior (Gil de Zuniga et. al., 2010, Sasaki, 2017).

In the case of social media news consumption, researchers have also sought to understand if political expression bridges the relationship between consumption and behavior (Shah, et al., 2017; Casteltrione, 2016; Enjolras, 2012; Gil de Zuniga, et al., 2013). Casteltrione (2016) conducted a cross-national study focusing on how Facebook influences citizens' political participation. He found that Facebook can add to the political activity of already active citizens by providing new venues of participation while helping users with lower levels of political participation by creating a more flexible and accessible environment that offers them exposure to political information and participation opportunities. Important to this study, Casteltrione (2016) distinguished between political mobilization and political expression and discovered that Facebook's influence on political participation "varies in relation to the different dimensions of undertaken political activity."

Voting is arguably the most effective way for citizens to participate in politics. However, research indicates that voter turnout has been on a steady decline and there are specific groups within the population that have historically demonstrated low participation (Han, 2008; Sasaki, 2017; Miller and Shanks, 1996; Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980). According to Verba and Nie (1972) "voting is the most widespread

and regularized political activity, and in terms of the overall impact of the citizenry on governmental performance it may be the single most important act." Furthermore, "voting and campaign activity are thus two of the major ways in which individuals can participate in politics" (Verba and Nie, 1972).

Although voting is considered a powerful tool for self-governance in a representative style democracy, voter turnout has been in a perpetual state of decline for U.S. presidential elections for over four decades (Han, 2008). In the year 2000, the voter turnout was only 50.4% (Han, 2008). Studies on traditional voter turn-out have been at a consensus that people who were over thirty (Conway, 1991), more affluent (Miller and Shanks, 1996), and more highly educated were more likely to vote (Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980), although whether age, income, or education was the strongest predictor was sometimes debated (Han, 2008).

Research indicates that people with a low socioeconomic status (SES) are more likely to disengage from politics because they require mental, financial, and time-related resources unavailable to them because their occupations or financial state of affairs (Miller and Shanks, 1996; Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980). Socioeconomic status is the social standing or class of an individual or group. It is often measured as a combination of education, income and occupation (American Psychological Association, 2019).

Investigations of socioeconomic status illustrate how "inequities in access to resources, plus issues related to privilege, power and control" (American Psychological Association, 2019). Research shows how a scarcity of resources, including financial resources, shapes everyone's decisions and behaviors. Specifically, scarcity of resources

drains mental resources, increases negative emotions, and contributes to the cycle of poverty because people are often forced to cope with the challenges of scarcity by taking actions that are useful in the short-term (Shah, Mullainathan, and Shafir, 2012; Lund, Breen, Flisher, Kakuma, Corrigall, Joska, and Patel, 2010).

Two specific aspects of socioeconomic status, education and income, have consistently been correlated with low voter-turnout (Han, 2008; Sasaki, 2017; Miller and Shanks, 1996; Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980). It is widely accepted among scholars that individuals with more education are more likely to feel capable in affecting the political process and to participate in politics (Dalton, 2008; Milbrath, 1965; Verba & Nie, 1972; Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980). Similarly, people with lower incomes suffer from situations where scarcity of resources force them to post-pone actions like voting that could lead to long-term gains in terms of policy implementation could lessen their burden and augment their ability to participate in the public sphere (Shah, Mullainathan, and Shafir, 2012; Lund, Breen, Flisher, Kakuma, Corrigall, Joska, and Patel, 2010). Miller and Shanks, 1996).

However, in a recent study, Sasaki (2017) found that online political participation does not require education as much as offline participation does, and that Internet use might supplement what education provides. Likewise, other findings indicate that the Internet may be an alternative source of information used by individuals with lower income. While exploring how social media affected participation in offline demonstrations, Enjolras et al. (2012) found that social media recruitment for offline demonstrations was more likely to mobilize younger individuals and individuals with

lower socioeconomic status than other venues. They also found that “connections to information structures through social media exert a strong and independent effect on mobilization” and that “social media therefore seems to offer a channel that supplements established political and civil society organizations, by reaching different and less privileged groups” (Enjolras et al., 2012).

A reoccurring explanation for increased engagement of citizens with lower income and education is that an Internet user can contact people and institutions that would otherwise be socially inaccessible to them. Likewise, political leaders and powerful institutions are now an audience to constituents they would traditionally not encounter. (Gil de Zuniga et. al., 2010; Sasaki, 2017). This lends hope that Internet use may be able to foster “an equalization of the existing political power imbalance” (Sasaki, 2017).

Age is also of significant interest to research concerned with political participation and news consumption because young adulthood has traditionally been correlated with low voter-turnout. However, in recent years, youth has had a very high correlation with social media use and social media news consumption (Han, 2008; Sasaki, 2017). Investigating whether social media plays a part in motivating young people to vote could shed light on whether or not social media has the potential to shift voter demographics, ultimately affecting the composition of the public sphere. Han (2008) provided evidence of this trend when he examined the effects of Internet use and sociodemographic characteristics on voter turnout in the 2000 presidential election. He found that older, more educated people were more likely to vote than those who were less

educated and younger. In his study, young people were more likely to use social media, but old people were more likely to vote. However, he also found that actively seeking political information online (which at the time was relative to higher education and income), raised likelihood of voting (Han, 2008). Six years later, Vissers and Stolle (2014) found that Facebook use promotes political participation of young people who typically would not participate without it.

Arab Spring is a commonly cited explanation of how the Internet can engage young people in politics by reaching them with political information in their social spheres. In the case of Egypt's 2011 revolution, social media was a space for political dissidents to connect, gain consensus, and organize beyond the reach of its authoritarian regime as well as campaign their cause to the global community (Khamis, et al.2012; Lim, 2012). According to Lim (2012), social media was especially effective at connecting to and mobilizing middle-class and urban youth opposed to the regime. "Social media helped a popular movement for political change to expand the sphere of participation, especially by reaching the country's unemployed and disaffected urban youth" (Lim, 2012).

Racial demographics have not demonstrated disparity in voter-turnout in recent years (Stout, 2014). However, low socioeconomic status is disproportionately attributed to many ethnic and racial minorities. In the United States, 39% of African American families and 33% of Latino families are experiencing poverty, which is more than double the poverty rate for non-Latino, white, and Asians. (Kids Count Data Center, 2014).

Minority racial groups are more likely to experience multidimensional poverty than their white counterparts (Reeves, Rodrigue, and Kneebone, 2016). For example, African American unemployment rates are typically double that of Caucasian Americans and African-American men earn only 72% of the average earnings of comparable Caucasian men (Rodgers, 2008). Furthermore, despite dramatic changes, large gaps remain when education attainment and outcomes are compared to white Americans. When multi-dimensional poverty experienced by racial minorities is considered, an examination of the impact of minority status, low income and education on news consumption, political discussion and voter turnout may shed light on the composition and overall ability of the public sphere to support social equality (Darby and Levy, 2017).

Mediation in Political Communication Research

Scholars are continually reaching a consensus that the growth of social media use has become so prolific that it is now an essential part of political life the United States (Kreiss and McGregor, 2018; Skoric, Zhu, Goh, and Pang, 2016; Dimitrova and Matthes, 2018). Parallel to Habermas's public sphere, it is a stage upon which political participation is acted out by society. Evidence for this is found in the way platforms like Facebook and Twitter have transformed "the way politicians and the public access and share political information, the way [people] learn about politics, form opinions and attitudes, and ultimately engage in or disengage from the political process" (Dimitrova and Matthes, 2018).

When conducting research on the impact of social media news consumption on political participation, looking at specific groups, contexts, and mediating relationships is key to understanding how people are engaging with and affected by the medium (Dimitrova and Matthes, 2018; Cho et al., 2009). A 2016 meta-analysis by Skoric, Zhu, Goh, & Pang found social media to have an effect on social capital, civic engagement, and political participation, while examining 116 effects reported in over 20 studies (Skoric, Zhu, Goh, & Pang, 2016). However, while the impact of social media on politics is undeniably present, scholars have yet to extricate blatantly clear or large effects. A common explanation for the absence of large effects is that "social media effects may depend on multiple factors," including what kind of channels are examined, audience characteristics and predispositions, user motivations, types of social media use captured, and the political campaign context overall (Dimitrova and Matthes, 2018). For example, in comparison with the general population, social media studies examining youth populations are more likely to detect a significant effect on political participation (Boulianne, 2015).

While identifying the mediating role of debate viewing between news use and voting behavior, Holbert (2005) asserted that political research doesn't focus enough on the interaction between different types of media when assessing the comparative effects of consumption of news from different outlets on dependent variables (such as sharing political information, participating in a protest, or voting). "[Studies] fail to adequately address the relationships that exist among various forms of media use." It is important to identify "the relationships that exist among various forms of media use prior to assessing comparative media effects on a given dependent variable" (Holbert, 2005).

Nine years after Holbert's findings, Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2014) concurred that there is a need for research in this area that includes both "discerning between different patterns of use within different social media sources" along with "observing more nuanced and complex models that would develop a deeper understanding of the relationship between social media and political engagement" (Gil de Zúñiga et al. 2014). Nam (2016) echoed this sentiment while examining the relationship between democracy and/or oppression globally by identifying mediating roles of specific aspects of interaction with the technology, such as e-participation and online filtering.

According to Cho, et al. (2009), identifying indirect relationships may be the key to understanding how we are affected by the architecture of social media as a place for political discussion and news sharing. Cho, et al. (2009) identified face-to-face political conversation, online political messaging, and cognitive reflection as mediators of campaign and news influence. By merging data sets of tracked content and placement of campaign messages and a traditional digital and media consumption survey and found that "political conversation, political messaging, and cognitive reflection mediate the effects of campaign advertising exposure and news consumption on political participation and knowledge" (Cho et al., 2009). These findings may have similar implications for news consumption.

Cho, et al. (2009) used a framework that subsumes different models of mediated communication effects, to conclude that "political discussion along with cognitive reflection play crucial roles in the process of campaign influence." Their framework is important for understanding the complex ways in which media can have implications for

campaign effects research. “The indirect process encompasses multiple steps, including information seeking and deliberative processes. If one of the goals for campaigns is mobilization through information, elite campaigns generate their effects through their interaction with citizens’ everyday communication practices” (Cho et al., 2009). Most important, the abundance of mediation effects in communication research suggests that people “are not simply a passive public influenced by elite campaign inputs, but instead are an active public, reworking and rethinking campaign communication efforts through their words and thoughts” (Cho, et al., 2009).

Arguing that Internet dialogue has the potential to parallel face-to-face interaction, Shah, et al. (2017) state that the expansion of public sphere into cyberspace necessitates a model that account for online conversation. They assert that a mediation model must stress the significance of online and offline conversation in democratic life, “while considering how mediational and self-reflective processes that encourage civic engagement and campaign participation” (Shah, et al., 2017). Since political discussion typically begins with “individuals interpreting and making sense of media content” it is therefore in a mediating position between news consumption and civic engagement” (Shah, et al., 2017). This gives the idea that consuming media does not directly influence political participation, but indirectly affects it through political discussion (Sotirovic & McLeod, 2001).

While effects may be hard to identify because of varying influences, some scholars assert that the ability to express oneself and interact with information may be a key facet as to whether or not social media news is having an effect. Pingrin (2007)

stresses that message production is more powerful than message consumption because expressing oneself in verbal or written form has a greater impact on information retention and the formation of identity (Pingree, 2007). In this way, social media may diverge from traditional media in its ability to impact political engagement, but only to the extent that users are interacting, and not merely observing content (Shah, et al., 2017). In consideration for an overwhelming amount empirical evidence from education research, communication theorists are beginning to give more serious attention to the "possibility of expression affecting the expresser" (Pingree, 2007). Findings by Gil de Zuniga, et al. (2013) indicate that only expressive uses of social media-not merely consumption-predict online and offline political participation. Likewise, Dimitrova and Bystrom (2017) found that active social media use positively affects caucus participation while passive use has a negative effect.

Democratic Media Participant Theory

This study will use democratic participant media theory as a framework with which to evaluate the interaction between news platform use, interpersonal discussion, and voting behavior in the United States. Like social media, democratic participant theory challenges many traditional notions associated with the functioning of media in a society. It draws from other democratization theories that consider liberalization and development (Rasul and Proffitt, 2013; McQuail, 2005). Traditional normative theories focus on the relationship between political systems and media at the macro level. The democratic participant theory approaches the interaction between media and society at the micro level, with prioritization of the communication rights of citizens in a deliberative

democracy (Rasul and Proffitt, 2013; McQuail, 2005). For the purpose of this study, democratization is defined as "a complex, long term, dynamic, and open-ended process...of progress towards a more rule-based, more consensual and more participatory type of politics" (Whitehead, 2002).

Scholarship concerning the relationship between media and politics through the lens of democratization revolves around two major themes. One is the process of social democratization through media. The other is the democratization of the media themselves (Hackett and Zhao, 2005; Jebril et. al, 2015). In this way, media freedom has been observed as an indicator of democratic reform, as well as a prerequisite for functional democratic institutions (Berman and Witzner, 1997; Dahl, 1989). Democratic participant theory focuses on the democratization of the media. It is especially applicable to the use of social media because it "favors diversity, small scale, local range, de-institutionalized forms of mass media, the interchangeability of the roles between broadcaster and audience, the horizontal nature of the communication relations on all levels of the society, interactivity and consensus" (Piontek, 2016).

The democratic participant media theory also includes asserting the right of individual recipients and takes issue with the power, ideology, and hegemony of media institutions established under libertarian and social responsibility models (McQuail, 2005). It criticizes concentration of media ownership, the corporatization of mainstream news and state control of public broadcasting (McQuail, 2005). Democratic participant media theory is not without its own set of issues. Namely, because political culture frequently determines relations between political institutions and the media, institutional

solutions applying the theory are frequently borne in conflict. This is because of the questionable independence of public institutions that wish to exercise control over electronic media. Also, "the social, organizational and market contexts impact the media's willingness and ability to self-regulate" (Piontek, 2016).

It is possible that some of the problem has the capacity to resolve itself within the theory. First, because the theory favors diversity and small-scale outlets. Also, according to the Held (2010), a "participant society" is conducive for a sense of political efficacy, while stimulating interest in common welfare and helping to mold informed citizens who can maintain their interest in the process of ruling. A prerequisite for such a society is an open information system ensuring informed decision-making and limiting the bureaucratic authorities' impact on public and private lives (Held, 2010; Piontek, 2016).

Supporting the values of horizontality and the ability for feedback, democratic participant theory is well-suited to explain "the sense of community among the [Internet] users, regardless of who one is, enhancing democracy (Sharoni, 2012). While different aspects of democratization theories are stressed for different types of economies and statehoods worldwide, these findings help explain why and how the Internet, particularly social media, was a critical instrument in activists' efforts to garner a global audience in the Arab Spring, the Occupy Wall Street Movement, and the Obama election campaigns (Sasaki, 2017; Wagner and Gainous, 2013; Gainous et. al., 2015).

On the other hand, how democratic participant theory accounts for the treacherous behavior of paid-to-manipulate companies like Cambridge Analytica and the Russian interference scandal surrounding the United States 2016 presidential election has yet to

be understood. A cynical evaluation on the democratizing potential of digital technology could cite both occurrences as evidence of citizens' lack of agency "within the virtual spaces they now increasingly inhabit" (Siwak, 2018). Some scholars argue that he growth of corporate libertarian ideals and relative inactivity on behalf of the Department of Justice to break up the market control of Facebook and Google have put the companies in domination of the cyber "market when one considers that the twenty first century has seen the explosive growth of an economic approach that uses the concept of absolute individual liberty to delegitimatize social, public, or common good-related institutions and policies" (Pickard, 2011).

While not without issues like censorship and algorithmic manipulation, there is evidence of new-found agency in oppressive environments. DeLisle, et al. (2016) observe evidence of this in China, arguing that because of limited speech rights and strictly governed civil society, social media interactions are a type of civic engagement, empowering groups to articulate experiences and participate in debates amongst themselves. Gil de Zúñiga, et al. (2014) identified a need for research in the area of digital technology and political participation that includes both "discerning between different patterns of use within different social media sources" along with "observing more nuanced and complex models that would develop a deeper understanding of the relationship between social media and political engagement" (Gil de Zúñiga, et al. 2014).

CHAPTER 3

THIS STUDY

This study will apply the underlying principles of democratic participant media theory (McQuail, 2005) and the concept of the "virtuous circle" of news consumption instigating civic participation and vice versa (Norris, 2009). The demographic variables investigated will be: race, income, age, and education. Their relationship to interpersonal news discussion and voting behavior will be explored to examine the relationship between news platform selection, news discussion, and voting behavior. Afterward, social media news consumption will be explored in depth to examine the relationship between social media activism and voting behavior.

This study aims to assess what role news platform choice plays in news discussion and voter behavior and if social media news differentiates from traditional media. Specifically, whether social media news consumption has a weaker or stronger influence and whether the horizontality of communication designed by the interactivity and feedback features of social media contributed to people's likelihood to participate in politics in a different way than traditional news sources might. To do this, a series of research questions and hypotheses must be analyzed. First, it is important to identify what populations are engaging with social media news use, and how that compares with populations engaging with other types of news platforms. RQ1 was devised to help identify these relationships.

RQ1: What is the relationship between basic demographic variables and news platform choice?

For RQ1, the demographic variables involved include age, income, education, and race. The types of news platforms include network television news, cable news, newspaper news, radio news, web news, and social media news. After assessing the types of populations that engage with each type of news platform, the next step will be to look at how those platforms influence interpersonal discussion. As earlier noted, Ostman (2014) found that consumption of news prompted audiences to discuss news media content more. Additionally, Norris's (2000) virtuous circle theorizes that the more often one consumes news information the more likely they will be to engage in news discussion and vice-versa (Norris, 2000). Hence, the creation of Hypothesis 1:

H1: There will be a positive relationship between all types of news platform use and offline interpersonal news discussion.

Next, it is important to determine the relationship between each type of news platform use and voting behavior. Han (2008) stated that as individuals seek out political information, their likelihood to vote increases. Therefore, this study hypothesizes that, even when controlling for demographic variables, that there will be a positive correlation between all types of news platform use and a person's likelihood to vote. Thus, Hypothesis 2:

H2: There will be a positive relationship between all news platform use variables and likelihood to vote, even when controlling for demographic variables such as race, age, income, and education.

Once the relationships between news platform choice, interpersonal discussion, and voter behavior have been determined, a deeper analysis of how the interactivity and feedback features of social media might set it apart from traditional platforms is required. This is the point at which social media activism and the role it plays in influencing interpersonal discussion and voting behavior should be examined. First, whether or not there will be a significantly positive relationship between social media activism and likelihood to vote should be considered. To test the assertions of democratic media participant theory (McQuail, 2005), Hypothesis 3 proposes that social media activism will indeed be positively correlated with a person's likelihood to vote.

> *H3: There will be a positive relationship between a person's engagement in social media activism and their likelihood to vote even when controlling for other potential factors such as age, income, education, and other media use habits.*

Knowing that social media activism is correlated to voting is useless without understanding what kinds of factors result in one's likelihood to engage in social media activism. This study hypothesizes that the consumption of all types of news, especially social media news, will result in greater levels of online activism. Thus influencing the creation of Hypothesis 4:

> *H4: There will be a positive relationship between all types of news platform consumption and social media activism.*

Additionally, it is important to determine whether any demographics are likely to impact a person's likelihood to engage in social media activism. For this reason, the second research question states:

> *RQ2: What is the relationship between demographic variables such as race, age, income, and education on likelihood to engage in social media activism?*

Finally, because democratic participant media theory (McQuail, 2005) and expression theory (Pingrin, 2007) imply that interactivity and intentional expression may be key factors as to whether the sharing of information evolves into political action, this study hypothesizes that social media activism will at least partially explain any relationship between social media news use and a person's likelihood to vote. Therefore, Hypothesis 5 states:

> *H5: Social media activism will have a mediating effect on the relationship between social media news use and an individual's likelihood to vote.*

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

Data

This study used data from the 2016 PEW Research Center's American Trends Panel Wave 14 to attempt to answer the research questions. This particular survey was conducted from January 12, 2016 to February 8, 2016. In total, of the original 6,775-member sample, 4,654 members completed the survey, with 4,339 participating by Web and 315 participating by mail. Non-institutionalized persons age 18 and over, living in the US were the target population for Wave 14. The results were weighted to protect the proportions of the initial sample. Survey weights were provided to account for differential probabilities of selection into the panel as well as differential nonresponse to the panel recruitment survey, the panel invitation, and the panel survey itself. The margin of sampling error for full sample weighted estimates is ± 1.95 percentage points (Pew, 2016). While at this time, the data assessed were approximately two years old. It was used as it represented a snapshot of a critical time in American politics. The survey was conducted during the lead up to the primary season of the most recent American presidential election, which is purported to have been greatly impacted by the circulation of news on social media platforms (Dimitrova and Matthes, 2018).

Variables

The first set of variables are all demographic in nature designed to answer *RQ1*, "What is the relationship between basic demographic variables and their news platform choice?" Their purpose is to create a profile for the types of people engaging with social media news and more traditional platforms news platforms.

The first independent variable, Income, was measured on a nine-point scale where 1 = "less than $10,000," 2 = "10 to under $20,000," 3 = "20 to under $30,000," 4 = "30 to under $40,000," 5 = "40 to under $50,000," 6 = "50 to under $75,000," 7 = "75 to under $100,000," 8 = "100 to under $150,000," 9 = "$150 or more," and 10 = "don't know/refused". Income was recoded only to exclude 10 = "don't know/refused" (M = 5.56, SD = 2.412).

The second independent variable, education, was originally coded on a three-point scale so that 1 = "college grad", 2 = "some college", 3 = "high school or less", and 4 = "refused." Education was then recoded in reverse so that the least amount of education will be the lowest number and the highest amount of education will be the highest number. "Refused" (4) was excluded in the recoding process (M = 2.32, SD = .759).
The third independent variable was age. This survey measured respondents age in a four-point categorical manner where people between the age of 18 and 29 were coded as 1, people between the age of 30 and 49 were coded as 2, people between 50 and 64 were coded as 3, and people over 65 years of age were coded as 4 (M = 2.68, SD = 1.007).

The fourth independent variable was race. 76.9 % of survey respondents identified as White (N = 3578), 8.2% of respondents identified as Black (N=382), about 8% identified as Hispanic (N = 370), and just under 6% identified as another race (N = 274). To assess the relationship between participants' race and the dependent variables in the study, dummy coding the race variable into several different individual variables was necessary. For example, the variable representing respondents who identified as White was coded so that if they identified themselves as White then they were assigned a value of 1 and if they identified themselves as any other race they were assigned a value of 0. This process was repeated for those who responded as Black or Hispanic as well. While separately looking at each race in relation to the dependent variables is not the most efficient method, the design of this study was limited to the information available from the 2016 PEW Research Center's American Trends Panel Wave 14 survey.

The fifth independent variable was news platform. Respondents were asked to report on a scale of one to four how often they get news from a variety of different news platforms in order to measure how often they used each one on average. The platforms included were newspapers, radio, network TV, cable TV, web sites, and social media. The original survey also contained local television, but it was excluded because preliminary analyses indicated evidence of co-multilinearity between local and network television. The assumption is that because local news is available both on network and cable, it is unnecessary to isolate it. The news platform variables were derived from the question, "How often do you get your news from these platforms?"

The possible answers were originally coded as follows: 1 = “often”, 2 = “sometimes”, 3 = “hardly ever”, 4 = “never”, and 5 = “refused”. The news platform variables were recoded so that a lower numerical value indicated less use of a specific news platform and the higher numerical value indicates more use. “Refused” (5) were excluded from the analysis. Therefore, the news mediums measured included radio (M = 2.838, SD = 1.016), newspapers (M = 2.654, SD = 1.043), network television (M = 2.708, SD = 1.101), cable television (M = 2.791, SD = 1.092), news websites (3.0251, SD = .989), and social media (M = 2.501, SD = 1.129). The second set of variables were necessary to test Hypotheses 1-5, as well as answer RQ 2. Dependent variables include interpersonal news discussion, voting behavior, and social media activism. It should be noted that social media activism will operate as an independent and dependent variable in different parts of the analysis.

The first dependent variable was interpersonal news discussion. In order to evaluate *H1*, “There will be a positive relationship between all types of news platform use and offline interpersonal news discussion,” a news discussion variable was included. The news discussion variable asked participants, “How often do you discuss the news with others?” The answers were originally coded as 1 = “Nearly every day”, 2 = “A few times a week”, 3 = “A few times a month”, 4 = “Less often”, and 5 = “refused”. News discussion was recoded in reverse so that the least amount of discussion will be the lowest number and the highest amount of education will be the highest number. “Refused” (5) was excluded in the recoding process (M = 3.149, SD = 0.839).

The second dependent variable was voter behavior. To evaluate *H2*, "There will be a positive relationship between all news platform use variables and likelihood to vote, even when controlling for demographic variables such as race, age, income, and education," participants were asked, "How often do you vote in each type of election?" The three types of elections presented were national elections for U.S. president, primary elections for U.S. president, and local elections. The possible answers are coded as follows: 1 = "Always", 2 = "Nearly always", 3 = "Part of the time", 4 = "Seldom", and 5 = "Never". This variable was recoded from lowest to highest, so that lower numerical values indicated less frequent voting and the higher numerical values indicated more frequent voting. Then, all three of the respondent's voting scores were averaged together to give a total vote score (M =3.975, SD =1.162).

The third dependent variable was social media activism. In order to answer *H3* and *H4*, "There will be a positive relationship between a person's engagement in social media activism and their likelihood to vote even when controlling for other potential factors such as age, income, education and other media use habits." and "There will be a positive relationship between all types of news platform use and social media activism," as well as *RQ2*, "What is the relationship between demographic variables such as race, age, income and education on likelihood to engage in social media activism?" and *H5:* "Social media activism will have a mediating effect on the relationship between social media news use and an individual's likelihood to vote.," a social media activism variable was required. The social media activism variable was used as an independent and dependent variable in separate analyses.

The fifth dependent variable also functions in some analyses as an independent variable. The variable, called social media activism, was created as an index based on 8 yes/no questions provided as a complete and isolated subset of questions by Pew. Participants who affirmed that they use at least one social networking site where asked a subset of questions. The subset of questions asked were: "Thinking specifically about posts and activities on social media related to politics, do you ever use social networking sites to: a. Post links to political stories or articles for others to read, b. Post your own thoughts or comments on political or social issues, c. Encourage other people to take action on a political or social issue that is important to you, d. Encourage other people to vote, e. Repost content related to political or social issues that was originally posted by someone else, f. "Like" or promote material related to political or social issues that others have posted, g. Change your profile picture to draw attention to an issue or event, h. Contact a politician or public official?"

The subset was named "Social Media Activism" because activism is defined by the Cambridge Dictionary as "the use of direct and public methods to try to bring about social and political changes that you and others want" (Cambridge Dictionary) and the questions were intended to focus "specifically about posts and activities on social media related to politics" (Pew, 2016). Before the index score was computed for each participant, the entire series of social media activism answers was recoded. Originally, 1 = "yes", 2 = "no", and 3 = "refused". The recoding set "no" = 0, "yes" = 1, and "3" or "refused" was excluded from the analyses.

For each answer “yes” a value of one was assigned and for each answer “no” a value of zero was assigned, and then the sum was taken for each participant so that they had an online activism score between zero and eight (M = 2.854, SD = 2.585).

Procedure

This study used Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) to conduct a serious of linear regression analyses. Also, the “bmem” package of R Statistical Programming Language was used to test a structural equation mediation model. The details of each analysis are explained in order in the results section.

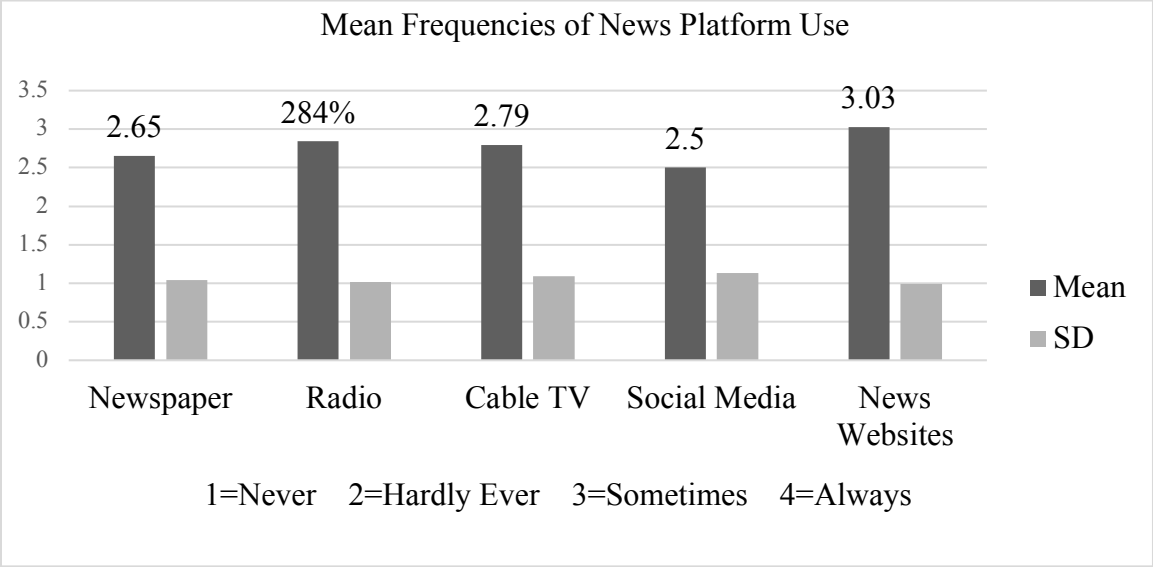


Figure 1: Mean Frequencies of News Platform Use

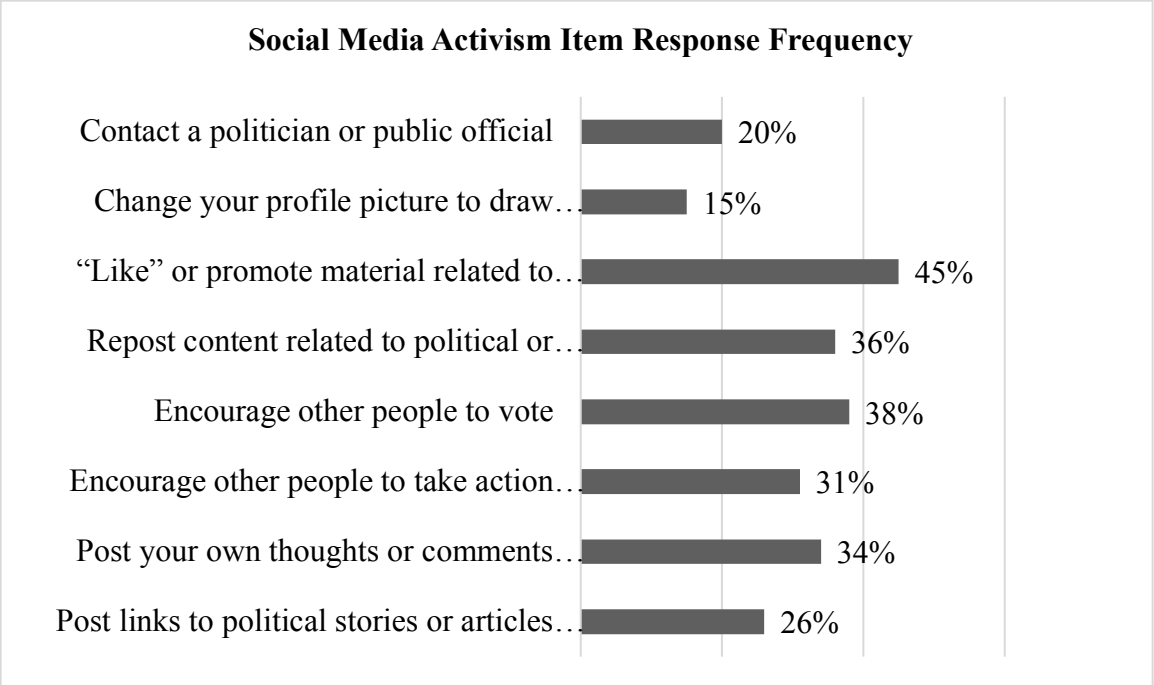


Figure 2: Item Response Frequency for Social Media Activism Index

Mean Score = 2.85

Std. Dev. = 2.585

N = 3,998

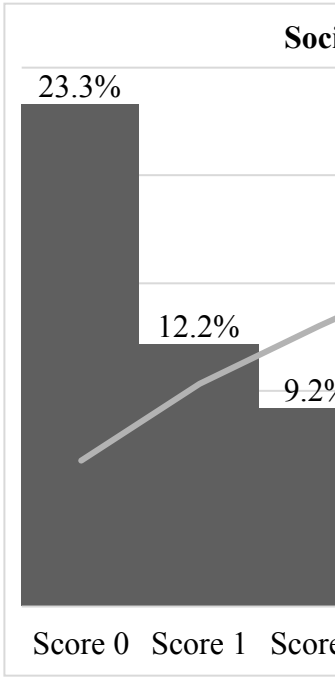


Figure 3 Social Media Activism Score Frequency

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

News Platform Choice and Demographic Variables

Six regression analyses were conducted to examine the relationship between the demographic variables and the news platform variables in order to answer *RQ1:* "What is the relationship between basic demographic variables and their news platform choice?" The figure below illustrates that education is positively correlated with website news (.175, $p < .001$), radio news (.111, $p < .001$), and to a lesser extent, newspaper news consumption (.048, $p < .05$). Education was negatively correlated network (-.166, $p < .001$), and cable news consumption -.165 $p < .001$), with no significant relationship between education and social media news consumption. Income was positively correlated with website news (.060, $p < .001$), radio news (.048, $p < .001$), and cable news consumption (.037, $p < .001$), and negatively correlated with network television (-.036, $p < .001$) and social media news (-.026, $p < .001$).

There was no relationship between income level and radio news consumption. Age was positively correlated with all traditional platforms (newspaper (.373, $p < .001$), radio (.036, $p < .05$), Network (.332, $p < .001$), and cable television (.340, $p < .001$). However, social media news (-.373, $p < .001$) and web news (-.188, $p < .001$) were significantly more likely to be consumed by younger people.

In terms of race, non-white populations were slightly more likely to consume web news .136, $p < .05$), and African Americans were more likely to consume network (.341, $p < .001$), and cable (.203, $p < .05$) television news than other racial groups. The results of these analyses can be viewed in Figure 4.

News Platform Choice and Interpersonal News Discussion

To test Hypothesis 1, "There will be a positive relationship between all types of news platform use and offline interpersonal news discussion.," a hierarchical linear regression analysis was performed to control for income, education, age, and race. The analysis as seen in Model 2 of Figure 5, indicated that website news (.165, $p < .001$), radio news (.114, $p < .001$), newspaper (.096, $p < .001$), network television (.055, $p < .001$), and cable news (.138, $p < .001$), and social media news consumption (.043 $p < .001$) all significantly predicted the likelihood of engaging in interpersonal news discussion. Therefore, hypothesis one was supported. The relationships between demographics, news platform choice, and interpersonal news discussion are outlined in Model 1 of Figure 5. In terms of demographic variables, people who are older (.052, $p < .001$), with higher incomes (.038, $p < .001$), and more education (.05, $p < .001$), are more likely to engage in interpersonal news discussion. Race was not a significant determinant in ones' likelihood to engage in interpersonal news discussion.

In Figure 5, the relationship between news discussion and demographics is illustrated. Notably, people who are older (.100, $p < .001$), with higher incomes (.059, $p < .001$), and more education (.068, $p < .001$), are more likely to engage in interpersonal news discussion. There was also a small but significant finding that African American participants were more likely to engage in interpersonal news discussion than their Hispanic or white counterparts (.150, $p < .05$). Figure 6 illustrates data that answer multiple hypotheses in this study, each of which will be evaluated in order.

Demographics, News Platform Choice, and Voting Behavior

To answer hypothesis two, "There will be a positive relationship between all news platform use variables and likelihood to vote, even when controlling for demographic variables such as race, age, income and education.," a hierarchical linear regression was run to determine the impact demographic variables (Model 1), and news platform choice (Model 2), on a person's likelihood to vote. Model 3 looks at social media activism, which will be discussed when Hypothesis 3 is addressed below.

Model 1 in Figure 6 illustrates demographic analysis of voter likelihood indicates that before news platform choice or social media activism are considered, people who are older (.426, $p < .001$), who have more money (.055, $p < .001$), and higher education (.199, $p < .001$), are significantly more likely to vote. Whites were slightly more likely to vote than non-whites (.147, $p < .05$), and African Americans were significantly more likely than non-blacks to vote (.266, $p < .01$).

There was no significance for Hispanic populations. However, it should be noted that citizenship was not a pre-requisite for survey participation, therefore it is possible that Hispanic voter-behavior is not properly represented in these data set.

Model 2 of Figure 6 evaluates the relationship between news platform choice and likelihood to vote while controlling for the demographic variables outlined above. There was a positive correlation between the likelihood to vote and newspaper (b = .116, p < .001), radio news (b = .102, p < .001), network television news (b = .038, p < .05), cable television news (b = .075, p < .001), and web news consumption (b = .087, p < .001). However, given the high number of participants for the study it is most likely best to use a more stringent alpha level of 0.001 to determine significance. If this more stringent alpha level is applied, then the network television news consumption variable would lose significance. Importantly, there does not seem to be any significant relationship between likelihood to vote and social media news consumption (b = .017, p = ns). Therefore, Hypothesis 2 can only be partially supported, as the social media news use variable does not positively predict likelihood to vote. Social media activism, along with all of the other variables in the model, accounted for 28.7 percent of the variance in the dataset. A very important finding to note later for Hypothesis 5 is that is that when social media activism was introduced into the regression model the social media news use variable showed negative significance (b= -.076, p < .001).

Social Media Activism: Voting and Demographics

Model 3 of Figure 6 evaluates the relationship between social media activism and likelihood to vote while controlling for the demographic variables and news platform selection. When looking at the results in tandem with Hypothesis 3, "There will be a positive relationship between a person's engagement in social media activism and their likelihood to vote even when controlling for other potential factors such as age, income, education and other media use habits.," there was a statistically significant positive correlation between social media activism and likelihood to vote (b = .102, $p < .001$). For this reason, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

Hypothesis 4, "There will be a positive relationship between all types of news platform consumption and social media activism" was not fully supported but its analysis did provide a greater understanding of the types of news media that impact social media activism. Figure 7 illustrates the findings of a hierarchical linear regression analysis. Unsurprisingly, the most powerful predictor of social media activism in the model was how much news one gets from social media (b = .908, $p < .001$) with the next most powerful predictor being web news use (b = .301, $p < .001$). Radio (b = .116, $p < .01$), and cable television (b = .167, $p < .001$) consumption were all significant as well. Hypothesis 4 was only partially supported because newspaper use was not a significant predictor of social media activism and network news consumption was a significantly negative predictor of social media activism (b = -.097, $p < .05$).

However, as mentioned before, because of the high number of participants for the study, if a more stringent alpha level were applied, then the network television news consumption variable might lose significance.

To answer RQ 2, "What is the relationship between demographic variables such as race, age, income and education on likelihood to engage in social media activism?," Figure 7 illustrates the impact of demographics on a person's likelihood to engage in social media activism. Throughout this study, race has not played a very significant role in examining news platform selection, voter behavior, or social media activism.

However, in Figure 7, one can see that those who are younger b = -.087, $p < .05$), make less money b = -.066, $p < .01$), and are more educated b = .0151, $p < .05$) engage in social media activism more. However, as with results on network television, the sample size of this dataset is better evaluated with an alpha of .001 and the aforementioned demographic variables did not meet that low of a p-value. The adjusted R square was also low. While not dismissible findings, these values do not explain much of the variance in the dataset.

Hypothesis 5 stated that "Social Media activism will have a mediating effect on the relationship between social media news use and an individual's likelihood to vote." In order to evaluate this, a simple structural equation modeling analysis was conducted using the "bmem" package of R statistical programing software. Earlier, Figure 6 indicated that there was no significant relationship between likelihood to vote and social media news consumption (b = .017, p = ns).

However, when social media activism was introduced into the regression model the social media news use variable showed negative significance (b = -.076, $p < .001$). Adding to this inconsistency, Figure 7 indicated the most powerful predictor of social media activism in the model was how much news one gets from social media (b = .908, $p < .001$). These finding were indications that there was a mediating variable. The results of that analysis can be seen in Figure 8. Figure 8 illustrates that social media activism has a strong mediating effect on the relationship between social media news use and voting behavior. Because the path a*b was statistically significant (a*b = .113, $p < 001$), Hypothesis 4 was supported.

The mediation model also indicated that the relationship between the variables is an example of "inconsistent mediation," where the mediated effect has a different sign than the direct effect (Mackinnon, Fairchild & Fritz, 2007). This is important because it means that social media news use and voting would be more negatively correlated if not for the impact that social media activism has on motivating people to vote.

Demographics and News Platform Choice

	Social Media	Web News	Newspaper	Radio News	Network TV	Cable TV
Constant	3.780***	2.883***	1.523***	2.151***	2.371***	2.182***
Education	-.038	.175***	.048*	.111***	-.166***	-.165***
Income	-.026***	.060***	-.001	.048***	-.036***	.037***
Age	-.373***	-.188***	.373***	.036*	.332***	.340***
White	-.084	-.136*	.021	.079	-.155	-174**
Black	.033	-.101	.103	.025	.341***	.203*
Hispanic	-.044	-.149	-.007	.021	.040	-.035
Adjusted R^2	.123	.077	.129	.032	.132	.116

Notes
All *b* unstandardized
*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Figure 4: Demographics and News Platform Choice

Interpersonal News Discussion, Demographics, and News Platform Choice

Model 1	*(Constant)*	*2.375***
	Income	0.054***
	Education	0.06**
	Age	0.115***
	White	0.042
	Black	0.121
	Hispanic	0.028
Model 2	*(Constant)*	0.902***
	Income	0.038***
	Education	0.05**
	Age	0.052***
	White	0.089
	Black	0.07
	Hispanic	0.058
	Newspaper	0.096***
	Radio	0.114***
	Network TV	0.055***
	Cable TV	0.138***
	Website	0.165***
	Social Media	0.043***

Notes
All *b* unstandardized
*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Figure 5: Interpersonal News Discussion, Demographics, and News Platform Choice

Likelihood to Vote

Model	1	2	3
Constant	1.972***	1.002***	1.133***
Age	0.426***	0.357***	0.336***
Income	0.055***	0.045***	0.052***
Education	0.199***	0.190***	0.177***
White	.147*	.169*	.190**
Black	.266**	.205*	.191*
Hispanic	-.165	-.149	-.127
Newspaper News Use		0.116***	0.113***
Radio News Use		0.102***	0.090***
Network TV News Use		0.038*	0.048*
Cable TV News Use		0.075***	0.059***
Web News Use		0.087***	0.057**
Social Media News Use		0.017	-0.076***
Social Media Activism			0.102***
Adjusted R^2	0.207	0.245	0.287

Notes
All b unstandardized
*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Figure 6: Hierarchical Linear Regression and Likelihood to Vote

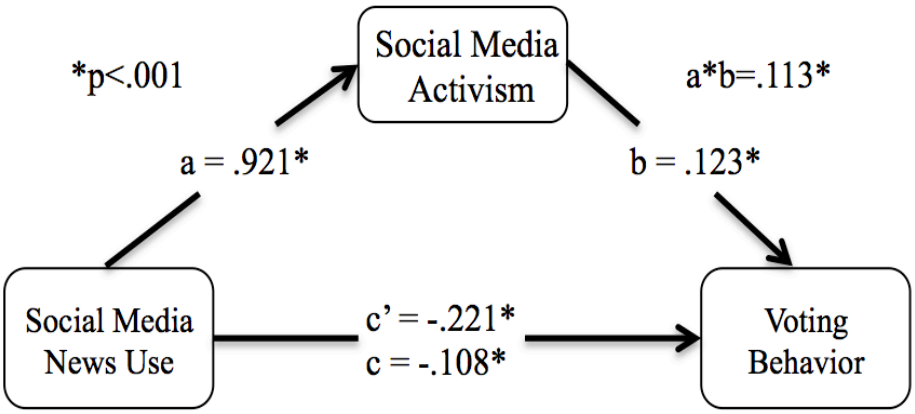
Demographics, News Platform Choice, and Social Media Activism

Model 1 (Constant)	3.338***
Income	-0.066**
Education	0.151*
Age	-0.087*
White	-0.296
Black	0.14
Hispanic	-0.313
Adjusted R Square	.007
Model 2 (Constant)	-1.284***
Income	-0.072***
Education	0.122*
Age	0.202***
White	-0.208
Black	0.137
Hispanic	-0.218
Newspaper	0.032
Radio	0.116**
Network TVs	-0.097*
Cable TV	0.167***
Website	0.301***
Social Media	0.908***
Adjusted R Square	.180

Notes
All *b* unstandardized
*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Figure 7: Demographics, News Platform Choice, and Social Media Activism

The Mediating Effect of Social Media Activism



Notes
All *b* unstandardized
*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Figure 8: Mediating Effect of Social Media Activism

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Some meaningful findings surfaced in this study that provide insight into how Internet communication will affect the public sphere in terms of society's political discourse, deliberation, and political action. The most obvious of these findings indicate the expansion of the public sphere into cyberspace as a result of an increasing shift toward Internet-mediated political communication. For example, there was a clear dichotomy between younger and older participants in their news platform selection. Specifically, that young people were significantly more likely to get news from the Internet while older populations were significantly more likely to get news from traditional platforms. This suggests the Internet will play an even bigger role in political information sharing as time goes on and younger populations replace older populations.

This expansion of the public sphere indicates that cyberspace, and social media platforms in particular, are stages upon which political participation is acted out by society through discourse, deliberation, and the forming of public opinion. Consequently, they may need civil protections to maintain a healthy public sphere "essential to democratic life" (Habermas, 1981). This is especially a concern for the United States, where, unlike other western democracies, regulatory institutions have left the unprecedented growth and business activities of Internet companies relatively untouched by oversight. Therefore, it might behoove policymakers to consider regulatory framework

that fosters transparency and accessibility in terms information sharing and algorithm use as well as develop regulations for political campaigning within these platforms (Kreiss and McGregor, 2018). This would help to ensure that the underlying architecture that guarantees public protections, free speech, and upholds the democratic process in the public sphere may also to extend to cyberspace (Lessig, 2006).

In terms of how social media news platforms foster discourse and deliberation within the public sphere, there seemed to be a divergent trend for social media news consumers in terms of interpersonal discussion. Every other type of news consumption had a much stronger relationship with interpersonal news discussion than social media news. Furthermore, social media news consumption was a much greater predictor of social media activism than it was of interpersonal discussion. In essence, social media activism can be interpersonal and interactive in ways similar to discussion. People post links of political articles to share with others, post their own thoughts on political or social issues, comment and reply on other people's posts and comments, encourage other people to get involved, etc.

The possible implications of the shift in how discussion and debate occur within the public sphere are many. On one hand, online interaction as opposed to interpersonal discussion could foster "an equalization of the existing political power imbalance" within the public sphere (Sasaki, 2017) because of increased engagement of citizens with lower income and education and the accessibility of constituents to politicians and institutions and vice-versa (Gil de Zuniga et. al., 2010; Sasaki, 2017). On the other hand, some scholars fear that the Internet's key features can radicalize behavior by fragmenting news

broadcasts and communication networks into echo chambers, and normalizing extremist views as well uncivil behavior like “pro-social mobbing” and “cyber bullying” that silences others and forces them out of the public sphere (Keats Citron, 2014).

The trend in online interaction as opposed to interpersonal discussion also suggests the online interaction will become a more common form of information sharing within the public shere as time goes on and younger populations replace older populations. While more education was a positive predictor of interpersonal news discussion for both younger and older populations, younger people were more likely to engage in social media activism, and the opposite was true for offline interpersonal news discussion, where older and more affluent populations had a greater likelihood of engaging. This may indicate that online political discussion may one day be more prevalent than interpersonal political discussion.

The fact that almost every type of news consumption increased the likelihood for people to vote (with the exception of social media news consumption) and engage in social media activism (with the exception of network news) provides evidence to support Habermas’s “public sphere” (1981) and Norris’s “virtuous circle” (2000) of news driving civic engagement and vice-versa. Furthermore, evidence from this study indicates that the expansion of the public sphere into cyberspace has the potential to foster social equality. Also, the fact that younger people and people with lower income were slightly more likely to engage in online activism may provide more evidence for the notion that the Internet will be an instrument of mobilization for underrepresented voter populations.

African American and Hispanic participants were just as likely to engage in online activism as white populations, which lends to previous research support about accessibility for minority populations.

There were also other indications that expansion of the public sphere into cyberspace has the potential to foster social equality. Not surprising, education was positively correlated with website news, radio news, and newspaper news consumption while negatively correlated with all television news consumption. Likewise, income was positively correlated with website news, radio news, and cable news consumption, and negatively correlated with network television, and social media news. However, it is notable that there was no relationship between education and social media news consumption, and a significantly negative correlation between income and social media news consumption. This speaks to Enjolra's assertion that social media may have the power to reinforce the cycle of civic engagement and news consumption for the lower class.

This study's results also indicated that inequality in regard to voter turnout falls along lines of age, education, and economic status more so than race. In the analyses above, race was not critically divisive factor in news consumption, voting behavior, or social media activism. These data suggest that age, income, and education played a much greater role in whether or not someone would select a specific type of news, turnout to vote, or engage in social media activism. With that being said, African American participants seemed slightly more likely to engage in interpersonal political discussion or turn out to vote than their non-black counterparts.

This study could not conclude whether or not the expansion of the public sphere into cyberspace will foster as much political participation in terms of voting. This is a concern worthy of continual evaluation. According to democratic participant media theory, the more people engage in discussions about politics, the more likely they are to engage in democratic behaviors, such as activism and voting. Democratic participant media theory also contends that the more community-based, and horizontally oriented a news community or organization is, the more its members will actively participate in politics.

While there was no relationship between social media news consumption and voting, there was a strong relationship between online activism and voting. That may mean that the more people interface with the interactive tools of this technology, as opposed to treating it as a digital newspaper, the more likely they are to reap the benefits of its mobilizing effects. However, the continual small effects and the significant role mediation played in this study may indicate that, as Kraidy (2013) suggested, the power of media isn't in how it affects people, but in how people interpret and adopt it.

A limitation of this study is that an attention variable was not incorporated into the models. It is possible that social media news and network news consumption might have had a stronger relationship to interpersonal discussion or voter behavior had this study been able to discern whether participants' "news consumption" meant seeing headlines while scrolling through social media or actually reading articles as they were posted. Likewise, knowing whether "news consumption" meant hearing pieces of network news while engaged in other domestic activities or sitting down and listening

closely to the broadcast would have shed more light into why network news differed from cable significantly in its impact on political participation. Another limitation resided in the lack of variables exploring participants' likelihood to volunteer for a political campaign, join a protest, or circulate a petition. Understanding how people participate in civil society beyond engaging in discussions, voting, and social media activism could shed more light on the way traditional and new media are affecting the public sphere.

This study examined how social media news differs from traditional news platforms in ability to support and maintain the public sphere. Of particular importance was whether or not the medium fosters the robust discourse and participation necessary for democracy as well as encourages social equality by aiding in the efficacy and mobilization of traditionally less politically participant groups. While this study provides some small evidence that there is an effect if the mediating power of interactivity, called "social media activism," is considered, it cannot answer whether the normative aspiration for an increase in liberal democratic ideas and behaviors will be met.

The role of interactivity and galvanization of identity through expression may have implications beyond the reach of this paper, both in terms of the growth of non-traditional and sometimes extreme political parties as well as the growth of civil society in authoritarian environments where political speech in traditional contexts is otherwise prohibited. Future studies that investigate whether or not social media and web news differs significantly from legacy media in the way that it impacts political ideological shifts, audience polarization and media trust could shed light on how supportive this new form of information sharing is to the public sphere.

Such studies have the potential to reveal whether or not the interactivity and expression-oriented features of new media are having unintended consequences to structural trust and agreed-upon interpretations of reality.

The Internet, and especially social media platforms, may have the capacity to wield an unprecedented amount of influence on information sharing (Lessig, 2006). Right now, the government and commerce institutions are reshaping the architecture of the Internet, and whether or not the democratic implications of its governance have received full consideration has yet to be seen. The challenge in the near future "will be to assure that essential liberties are preserved in this environment of perfect control" (Lessig, 2006). For this reason, scholars must race the exponential growth of digital technology to grasp how publics and institutions engage with this media and what impact it will have on democratic processes and social institutions. This is the only way to ensure the making of policy recommendations that protect and sustain the public sphere and its liberal democratic ideals.

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APPENDIX

2016 PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S AMERICAN TRENDS PANEL WAVE 14

JANUARY 12-FEBRUARY 8, 2016[2]

ASK ALL:
LOCALRATING Overall, how would you rate your community as a place to live?

1 Excellent
2 Good
3 Only Fair
4 Poor

ASK ALL:
LOCALIMPACT How much impact do you think people like you can have in making your community a better place to live?

1 A big impact
2 A moderate impact
3 A small impact
4 No impact at all

ASK ALL:
LIVE3 How close do you currently live to where you grew up?

1 Less than 10 miles
2 10-25 miles
3 26-50 miles
4 51-100 miles
5 More than 100 miles

ASK ALL:
WORKCLOSE How close do you currently live to your workplace?

1 Less than 5 miles
2 5-10 miles
3 11-20 miles
4 21-50 miles
5 More than 50 miles
6 I don't work

---

[2] Open-end responses are excluded from public datasets to protect the confidentiality of ATP panelists. Lines across page designate a page break.

ASK ALL:
NEIGHBORS Do you happen to know the names of your neighbors who live close by to you or no?

1 Yes, know them all
2 Yes, know some of them
3 No, do not know any of them

ASK ALL:
COMATTACH In general, how attached do you feel to your local community?

1 Very
2 Somewhat
3 Not very
4 Not at all

ASK ALL:
SOCTRUST Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?

1 Most people can be trusted
2 Can't be too careful

ASK ALL:
COMTRUST Now thinking specifically about your local community, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?

1 Most people can be trusted
2 Can't be too careful

NEWS INTEREST/CONSUMPTION:

Now, we are going to ask you some questions about the news you get. By news we mean information about events and issues that involve more than just your friends or family.

ASK ALL:
NEWSPOS_OE Thinking about the news media overall, what is the most POSITIVE thing they do, if anything?

[OPEN ENDED TEXT BOX]

ASK ALL:

NEWSNEG_OE Thinking about the news media overall, what is the most NEGATIVE thing they do, if anything?

[OPEN ENDED TEXT BOX]

Soft prompt: "If you're sure you want to skip, click Next."

ASK ALL:

NEWS_LEVEL How closely do you follow…

a. International news
   1 Very closely
   2 Somewhat closely
   3 Not very closely
   4 Not at all closely

b. National news

   1 Very closely
   2 Somewhat closely
   3 Not very closely
   4 Not at all closely

c. Local news

   1 Very closely
   2 Somewhat closely
   3 Not very closely
   4 Not at all closely

d. News about your neighborhood

   1 Very closely
   2 Somewhat closely
   3 Not very closely
   4 Not at all closely

ASK ALL:

NEWS_TOPIC How closely do you follow each type of news, either in the newspaper, on television, radio, or the internet? **[RANDOMIZE]**

a. Government and politics

   1 Very closely
   2 Somewhat closely
   3 Not very closely
   4 Not at all closely

b. People and events in your own community

   1 Very closely
   2 Somewhat closely
   3 Not very closely
   4 Not at all closely

c. Sports

1 Very closely
2 Somewhat closely
3 Not very closely
4 Not at all closely
5

d. Business and finance

1 Very closely
2 Somewhat closely
3 Not very closely
4 Not at all closely

e. Science and technology

1 Very closely
2 Somewhat closely
3 Not very closely
4 Not at all closely

f. Entertainment

1 Very closely
2 Somewhat closely
3 Not very closely
4 Not at all closely

g. Crime

1 Very closely
2 Somewhat closely
3 Not very closely
4 Not at all closely

h. Health news

1 Very closely
2 Somewhat closely
3 Not very closely
4 Not at all closely

ASK ALL:

NEWS_DEVICE Thinking about news (by news we mean information about events and issues that involve more than just your friends and family), how often do you get news… **[RANDOMIZE]**

a. On a desktop or laptop computer?

1 Often
2 Sometimes
3 Hardly ever
4 Never

b. On a mobile device (such as a smartphone or tablet)?

1 Often
2 Sometimes
3 Hardly ever
4 Never

Soft prompt: "If you're sure you want to skip, click Next."

ASK IF GETS NEWS ON BOTH COMPUTER AND MOBILE DEVICE (NEWS_DEVICEa=1-3 & NEWS_DEVICEb=1-3):
NEWSDIGPREF Do you prefer to get your news…

1 On a desktop or laptop computer
2 On a mobile device (such as a smartphone or tablet)

ASK ALL:
NEWS_PLATFORM And how often do you… **[RANDOMIZE]**

a. Read any newspapers in print?
1 Often
2 Sometimes
3 Hardly ever
4 Never

b. Listen to news on the radio?
1 Often
2 Sometimes
3 Hardly ever
4 Never

NO ITEM C

d. Watch local television news?
1 Often
2 Sometimes
3 Hardly ever
4 Never

e. Watch national evening network television news (such as ABC World News, CBS Evening News, or NBC Nightly News)?
1 Often
2 Sometimes
3 Hardly ever
4 Never

f. Watch cable television news (such as CNN, The Fox News cable channel, or MSNBC)?
Often
1 Sometimes
2 Hardly ever
3 Never

g. Get news from a social networking site (such as Facebook or Twitter)?
1 Often
2 Sometimes
3 Hardly ever
4 Never

h. Get news from a news website or app?
1 Often
2 Sometimes
3 Hardly ever
4 Never

Soft prompt: "If you're sure you want to skip, click Next."

ASK IF GETS NEWS FROM MORE THAN ONE PLAFORM IN NEWS_PLATFORM (NEWSPLATFORMa-h=1-3). DO NOT ASK IF ONLY GETS NEWS ON TV AND NO OTHERS (IF ONLY NEWS_PLATFORMd-f=1-3).

NEWS_PREFER Which of the following would you say you prefer for getting news?

[SHOW THOSE THAT WERE AT LEAST "HARDLY EVER" IN NEWS_PLATFORM (NEWSPLATFORMa-h=1-3); SHOW "Watch news on television" if NEWS_PLATFORMd=1-3 OR NEWS_PLATFORMe=1-3 OR NEWS_PLATFORMf=1-3]

1 Reading news in a print newspaper
2 Listening to news on the radio
3 Watching news on television
4 Getting news from a social networking site (such as Facebook or Twitter)
5 Getting news from a news website or app

ASK ALL:
NEWS_FORM Whether online or offline, do you prefer to get your news by…?
[RANDOMIZE]

1 Reading it
2 Watching it
3 Listening to it

NEWS DISCUSSION:

ASK ALL:
NEWS_DISCUSS How often do you discuss the news with others?

1 Nearly every day
2 A few times a week
3 A few times a month
4 Less often

ASK ALL:

NEWSAPPRE Thinking about who you typically share your opinions with about the news, do you tend to share them with…

1 People I know well, but also those I don't know very well
2 Just people I know well, such as friends and family
3 I do not typically share my opinions about the news with others

---

ASK ALL:

NEWSSHARE When you share a news story with others, what is the most common way you share it? **[RANDOMIZE 1-4]**

1 By talking with them either in person or by phone
2 Through email or text message
3 Through social networking sites
4 In hard copy

ASK ALL:

FAMNEWSSHARE When family or friends share a news story with you, what is the most common way they share it? **[RANDOMIZE 1-4IN SAME ORDER AS NEWSSHARE]**

1 By talking to you either in person or by phone
2 Through email or text message
3 Through social networking sites
4 In hard copy

MEDIA TRUST/ATTITUDES:

RANDOMIZE MEDIALOYAL1-4:

ASK ALL:

Thinking about the sources you get your news from beyond your friends and family…

MEDIALOYAL1 Which of the following statements comes closer to your view? **[RANDOMIZE]**

1 I don't give much thought to the sources I get my news from
2 I give a good deal of thought to the sources I get my news from

RANDOMIZE MEDIALOYAL1-4:

ASK ALL:

MEDIALOYAL2 Which of the following statements comes closer to your view? **[RANDOMIZE]**

1 I usually turn to the same news source(s) when I get news
2 I don't usually turn to the same news source(s) when I get news

RANDOMIZE MEDIALOYAL1-4:

ASK ALL:

MEDIALOYAL3 Which of the following statements comes closer to your view? **[RANDOMIZE]**

1 I consider myself to be loyal to the news source(s) I get my news from
2 I am not particularly loyal to the news source(s) I get my news from

RANDOMIZE MEDIALOYAL1-4:

ASK ALL:

MEDIALOYAL4 Which of the following statements comes closer to your view? **[RANDOMIZE]**

1 I often recommend the news sources I use to others
2 I do not typically recommend the news sources I use to others

[PROGRAMMING NOTE: Use forced desktop rendering for mobile]

RANDOMIZE WHETHER LOCALMEDIA_JOB AND NATLMEDIA_JOB ARE ASKED FIRST:
ASK ALL:

LOCALMEDIA_JOB Regardless of how closely you follow news about YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY, how well do the LOCAL news media keep you informed of the most important local stories of the day?

1 Very well
2 Fairly well
3 Not too well
4 Not at all well

RANDOMIZE WHETHER LOCALMEDIA_JOB AND NATLMEDIA_JOB ARE ASKED FIRST:
ASK ALL:

NATLMEDIA_JOB Regardless of how closely you follow NATIONAL NEWS, how well do the NATIONAL news media keep you informed of the most important national stories of the day?

1 Very well
2 Fairly well
3 Not too well
4 Not at all well

ASK ALL:

FAMNEWS Thinking about the news you get from your friends, family and acquaintances, which of the following statements best describes you…

1 Friends, family and acquaintances are the most important way I get news
2 Friends, family and acquaintances are an important way I get news, but not the most important way
3 Friends, family and acquaintances are not a very important way I get news

---

ASK ALL:

GROUP_TRUST How much, if at all, do you trust the information you get from…?

a. National news organizations

1 A lot
2 Some
3 Not too much
4 Not at all

b. Local news organizations

1 A lot
2 Some
3 Not too much
4 Not at all

c. Friends, family, and acquaintances

1 A lot
2 Some
3 Not too much
4 Not at all

d. Social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter

1 A lot
2 Some
3 Not too much
4 Not at all

RANDOMIZE WATCHDOG_1 & WATCHDOG_3:
ASK ALL:

WATCHDOG_1 Some people think that by criticizing leaders, news organizations keep political leaders from doing their job. Others think that such criticism is worth it because it keeps political leaders from doing things that should not be done. Which position is closer to your opinion?

1 Keep political leaders from doing their job
2 Keep political leaders from doing things that shouldn't be done

RANDOMIZE WATCHDOG_1 & WATCHDOG_3:
ASK ALL:

WATCHDOG_3 In presenting the news dealing with political and social issues, do you think that news organizations deal fairly with all sides, or do they tend to favor one side?

1 Deal fairly with all sides
2 Tend to favor one side

ASK IF TEND TO FAVOR ONE SIDE (WATCHDOG_3=2):

WATCHDOG_3OE What side do you think news organizations tend to favor?

[OPEN ENDED TEXT BOX]

DIGITALLY CONNECTED/DIGITAL NEWS:

Now we are going to ask you some questions about the news you get online, whether on a computer, phone, or tablet. Again, by news we mean information about events and issues that involve more than just your friends or family.

ASK IF GETS NEWS DIGITALLY (NEWS_DEVICEa=1-3 OR NEWS_DEVICEb=1-3):

NEWS_SOURCE How often do you get news online from… **[RANDOMIZE]**

a. People that you are close with

1 Often

2 Sometimes

3 Hardly ever

4 Never

b. People you are not particularly close with

1 Often

2 Sometimes

3 Hardly ever

4 Never

c. News organizations

1 Often

2 Sometimes

3 Hardly ever

4 Never

ASK IF GETS NEWS DIGITALLY (NEWS_DEVICEa=1-3 OR NEWS_DEVICEb=1-3):

NEWSROUNDUP And how often do you get news from digital news roundups that bring together stories from a variety of sources?

1 Often

2 Sometimes

3 Hardly ever

4 Never

RANDOMIZE ORDER OF NEWSACC AND NEWSINTERESTS:

ASK IF AT LEAST HARDLY EVER TO AT LEAST 1 ITEM IN NEWS_SOURCE (NEWS_SOURCEa-c=1-3); SHOW ONLY THOSE AT LEAST HARDLY EVER IN NEWS_SOURCE (NEWS_SOURCEa-c=1-3):

NEWSACC How accurate, do you think, is the news posted online by… **[KEEP IN SAME ORDER AS NEWS_SOURCE]**

a. People that you are close with

1 Very accurate
2 Somewhat accurate
3 Not too accurate
4 Not at all accurate

b. People you are not particularly close with

1 Very accurate
2 Somewhat accurate
3 Not too accurate
4 Not at all accurate

c. News organizations

1 Very accurate
2 Somewhat accurate
3 Not too accurate
4 Not at all accurate

RANDOMIZE ORDER OF NEWSACC AND NEWSINTERESTS:

ASK IF AT LEAST HARDLY EVER TO AT LEAST 1 ITEM IN NEWS_SOURCE (NEWS_SOURCEa-c=1-3); SHOW ONLY THOSE AT LEAST HARDLY EVER IN NEWS_SOURCE (NEWS_SOURCEa-c=1-3):

NEWSINTERESTS How near to your interests is the news posted online by… **[KEEP IN SAME ORDER AS NEWS_SOURCE]**

a. People that you are close with

1 Very near to my interests
2 Somewhat near to my interests
3 Not too near to my interests
4 Not at all near to my interests

b. People you are not particularly close with

1 Very near to my interests
2 Somewhat near to my interests
3 Not too near to my interests
4 Not at all near to my interests

c. News organizations

1 Very near to my interests
2 Somewhat near to my interests
3 Not too near to my interests
4 Not at all near to my interests

ASK IF SEES INACCURATE NEWS ONLINE (NEWSACCa-c=2-4):

DIGNEWSFACT When you are online and come across information in a news story that you think is inaccurate, how often do you take it upon yourself to figure out whether it is accurate?

1 Often
2 Sometimes
3 Hardly ever
4 Never

ASK IF GETS NEWS DIGITALLY (NEWS_DEVICEa=1-3 OR NEWS_DEVICEb=1-3):

DIGWDOG_3 Thinking about the news that your friends, family and acquaintances post or send you online about political and social issues, overall, do you think the mix of news you get from them… **[RANDOMIZE 1 & 2; KEEP 3 LAST]**

1 Represents just one side
2 Represents more than one side

INCLUDE SPACE

3 They don't send me news about political and social issues

ASK IF TEND TO FAVOR ONE SIDE (DIGWDOG_3=1)

DIGWDOG_3OE What side do you think the news they post tends to favor?

[OPEN ENDED TEXT BOX]

ASK IF TEND TO FAVOR ONE SIDE (DIGWDOG_3=1):

DIGFAVOR Would you prefer that the news your friends, family and acquaintances post or send you online about political and social issues has a greater mix of views from all sides, or do you think it's okay that overall it represents just one side?

1 Would prefer a greater mix of views
2 It's okay that overall it represents just one side

ASK IF GETS NEWS DIGITALLY (NEWS_DEVICEa=1-3 OR NEWS_DEVICEb=1-3):

DIGNEWSFIRST Which statement best describes how you get news online, whether on a computer, phone, or tablet, even if neither is exactly right? **[RANDOMIZE]**

1 I mostly come across news online because I'm looking for it
2 I mostly come across news online when I'm doing other things online

---

ASK IF GETS NEWS DIGITALLY (NEWS_DEVICEa=1-3 OR NEWS_DEVICEb=1-3):

DIGNEWSEXP When online, some people interact a lot with others about the news, while others tend to keep more to themselves. What comes closer to what you do? **[RANDOMIZE]**

1 I tend to interact with others online about the news
2 I tend to not really interact with others about the news I get online

---

ASK IF GETS NEWS BOTH DIGITALLY (NEWS_DEVICEa=1-3 OR NEWS_DEVICEb=1-3) AND NOT DIGITALLY (ANY NEWS_PLATFORMa-f=1-3):

DIGNEWSSAME Which of the following phrases better describes your news habits? **[RANDOMIZE]**

1 I mostly turn to the SAME news sources online as I do offline
2 I mostly turn to DIFFERENT sources for news depending on whether I am getting news online or offline

---

ASK IF GETS NEWS BOTH DIGITALLY (NEWS_DEVICEa=1-3 OR NEWS_DEVICEb=1-3) AND NOT DIGITALLY (ANY NEWS_PLATFORMa-f=1-3):

DIGNEWSMORE Which of the following statements comes closer to your view of the online news you get? Getting news online… **[RANDOMIZE]**

1 Exposes me to a wider range of news stories than I would get otherwise
2 Does not expose me to more news stories than I would have gotten otherwise

ASK ALL WEB:

NEWSDIG Thinking about all the time you spend online, how much of that time is spent getting news?

1 A lot
2 Some
3 Not much
4 None at all

ASK ALL WEB:

SNS Do you use any of the following social networking sites? *[Check all that apply]* **[RANDOMIZE WITH "OTHER" ALWAYS LAST]**

a. Facebook
b. Twitter
c. Google Plus
d. LinkedIn
e. Instagram
f. Vine
g. Tumblr
h. YouTube
i. Reddit
j. Snapchat
k. Other

Prompt: You have not selected any of the sites. If this is correct, click Next.

ASK IF AT LEAST YES TO 1 ITEM SNS; SHOW ONLY THOSE SITES USED (SNSA-J=1):

SNSNEWS Do you ever get news or news headlines on any of the following sites? Again, by news we mean information about events and issues that involve more than just your friends or family. **[RANDOMIZE]**

a. Facebook

1 Yes
2 No

b. Twitter

1 Yes
2 No

c. Google Plus

1 Yes
2 No

d. LinkedIn

1 Yes
2 No

e. Instagram

1 Yes
2 No

f. Vine

1 Yes
2 No

g. Tumblr

1 Yes
2 No

h. YouTube

1 Yes
2 No

i. Reddit

1 Yes
2 No

j. Snapchat

1 Yes
2 No

ASK IF AT LEAST YES TO 1 ITEM SNSNEWS (SNSNEWSA-J=1):

SNSSOURCE When you follow a link to a news story on a social networking site, how much attention, if any, do you pay to the news source the link takes you to?

1 A lot of attention
2 Some attention
3 Very little attention
4 No attention at all

ASK IF AT LEAST YES TO 1 ITEM SNSNEWS (SNSNEWSA-J=1):

SNSACT Thinking about when you are on a social networking site, how often, if at all, do you… **[RANDOMIZE]**

a. Click on links to news stories

1 Often
2 Sometimes
3 Hardly ever
4 Never

b. Post links to news stories yourself

1 Often
2 Sometimes
3 Hardly ever
4 Never

c. Share or repost links to news stories originally posted by someone else

1 Often
2 Sometimes
3 Hardly ever
4 Never

d. "Like" news stories

1 Often
2 Sometimes
3 Hardly ever
4 Never

e. Comment on news stories

1 Often
2 Sometimes
3 Hardly ever
4 Never

f. Post my own photos or videos of a news event

1 Often
2 Sometimes
3 Hardly ever
4 Never

g. Discuss issues in the news with others on that site

1 Often
2 Sometimes
3 Hardly ever
4 Never

ASK IF POST OR COMMENT ON NEWS STORIES (SNSACT_B=1-3 OR SNSACT_E=1-3):

HASHTAG When you post or comment on news stories on social networking sites, how often do you use a hashtag (#)?

1 Often
2 Sometimes
3 Hardly ever
4 Never

ASK IF AT LEAST YES TO 1 ITEM SNS (SNSA-K=1):

SNS2 Now, thinking specifically about posts and activities on social media related to politics, do you ever use social networking sites to... **[RANDOMIZE]**

a. Post links to political stories or articles for others to read **[SHOW ONLY IF POSTS LINKS IN SNS (SNSACTb=1-3)]**

1 Yes
2 No

b. Post your own thoughts or comments on political or social issues

1 Yes
2 No

c. Encourage other people to take action on a political or social issue that is important to you

1 Yes
2 No

d. Encourage other people to vote

1 Yes
2 No

e. Repost content related to political or social issues that was originally posted by someone else

1 Yes
2 No

f. "Like" or promote material related to political or social issues that others have posted

1 Yes
2 No

g. Change your profile picture to draw attention to an issue or event

1 Yes
2 No

h. Contact a politician or public official

1 Yes
2 No

ASK IF CHANGED PICTURE (SNS2g=1)

SNSPICTURE What issues or events did you change your profile picture for?

[OPEN ENDED TEXT BOX]

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT:

Turning to a different topic, we are going to ask you a few questions about your local community.

ASK ALL:

LOCAL_PLATFORM How often, if ever, do you get information about YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY from each of the following sources, whether online or offline?

a. Local newspaper

1 Every day
2 Several times a week
3 Several times a month
4 Less often
5 Never

b. Local television news

1 Every day
2 Several times a week
3 Several times a month
4 Less often
5 Never

c. Local radio

1 Every day
2 Several times a week
3 Several times a month
4 Less often
5 Never

d. A blog about your local community

1 Every day
2 Several times a week
3 Several times a month
4 Less often
5 Never

e. A person or organization you follow on a social networking site

1 Every day
2 Several times a week
3 Several times a month
4 Less often
5 Never

f. A newsletter or email listserv about your local community

1 Every day
2 Several times a week
3 Several times a month
4 Less often
5 Never

g. Word of mouth from friends, family, co-workers and neighbors

1 Every day
2 Several times a week
3 Several times a month
4 Less often
5 Never

ASK ALL:
TALKJOUR Have you ever spoken with or been interviewed by a local journalist or reporter?

1 Yes
2 No

ASK ALL:
LOCMED_INTOUCH Overall, would you say that local journalists in your area are mostly in touch or out of touch with your local community?

1 In touch
2 Out of touch

RANDOMIZE SOCIALCAP1-4:
ASK ALL:
SOCIALCAP1 My local community is a place where… **[RANDOMIZE]**

1 People socialize with one another
2 People mostly keep to themselves

RANDOMIZE SOCIALCAP1-4:
ASK ALL:
SOCIALCAP2 My local community is a place where… **[RANDOMIZE]**

1 People mostly share the same values as one another
2 People mostly don't share the same values

RANDOMIZE SOCIALCAP1-4:
ASK ALL:
SOCIALCAP3 My local community is a place where… **[RANDOMIZE]**

1 People frequently work together to fix or improve something
2 People do not typically come together to fix or improve something

RANDOMIZE SOCIALCAP1-4:
ASK ALL:
SOCIALCAP4 My local community is a place where… **[RANDOMIZE]**

1 People tend to share the same political views
2 There are a lot of different political views

ASK ALL:
VOTE How often do you vote in each type of election?

a. NATIONAL ELECTIONS for U.S. president. These elections have about 55% voter turnout.

1 Always
2 Nearly always
3 Part of the time
4 Seldom
5 Never

b. PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY ELECTIONS, that is the elections where the parties choose their candidate for the general election. These elections have about 15% voter turnout.

1 Always
2 Nearly always
3 Part of the time
4 Seldom
5 Never

c. LOCAL ELECTIONS, such as for mayor or a school board. These elections have about 20% voter turnout.

1 Always
2 Nearly always
3 Part of the time
4 Seldom
5 Never

ELECTION QUESTIONS:

ASK IF AT LEAST YES TO 1 ITEM SNS; SHOW ONLY THOSE SITES USED (SNSA-J=1):
SNSELECT In the PAST WEEK, did you learn something about the presidential campaign or candidates from each of the following sites? **[RANDOMIZE]**

a. Facebook

1 Yes
2 No

b. Twitter

1 Yes
2 No

c. Google Plus

1 Yes
2 No

d. LinkedIn

1 Yes
2 No

e. Instagram

1 Yes
2 No

f. Vine

1 Yes
2 No

g. Tumblr

1 Yes
2 No

h. YouTube

1 Yes
2 No

i. Reddit

1 Yes
2 No

j. Snapchat

1 Yes
2 No

ASK ALL:

PLATFORMELECT Now, in the PAST WEEK did you learn something about the presidential campaign or candidates from each of the following sources? **[RANDOMIZE]**

a. Cable television news (such as CNN, The Fox News cable channel, or MSNBC)

1 Yes
2 No

b. Local TV news

1 Yes
2 No

c. National nightly network television news

1 Yes
2 No

d. News websites or apps

1 Yes
2 No

e. Your local daily newspaper in print

1 Yes
2 No

f. News on the radio

1 Yes
2 No

g. National newspapers in print

1 Yes
2 No

h. Late night comedy shows

1 Yes
2 No

i. Candidate or campaign websites, apps, or emails

1 Yes
2 No

j. Issue-based group websites, apps, or emails

1 Yes
2 No

ASK IF ANSWERED YES TO 2 OR MORE SITES AND/OR SOURCES FROM SNSELECT/ PLATFORMELECT (SNSELECTA-J/ PLATFORMELECTA-J=1); SHOW <u>ONLY</u> THOSE ANSWERED YES IN SNSELECT (LEARNELECTTOP_1 through LEARNELECTTOP_10) AND PLATFORMELECT (LEARNELECTTOP_11 through LEARNELECTTOP_20). RANDOMIZE LIST:

LEARNELECTTOP Of all the places you learned something about the presidential campaign or candidates in the past week, which one would you say has been most helpful to you? **[ACCEPT ONLY ONE RESPONSE.]**

1 Facebook
2 Twitter
3 Google Plus
4 LinkedIn
5 Instagram
6 Vine
7 Tumblr
8 YouTube
9 Reddit
10 Snapchat
11 Cable television news (such as CNN, The Fox News cable channel, or MSNBC)
12 Local TV news

13 National nightly network television news
14 News websites or apps
15 Your local daily newspaper in print
16 News on the radio
17 National newspapers in print
18 Late night comedy shows
19 Candidate or campaign websites, apps, or emails
20 Issue-based group websites, apps, or emails

ASK IF YES TO AT LEAST 1 ITEM FROM SNSa-k:

ELECTPOST In the past week, did you yourself use a social networking site to share news or information about the presidential campaign or candidates, such as by posting, or replying to or commenting on a post?

1 Yes
2 No

ASK ALL:

PRIMDEB Did you happen to watch any of the presidential debates for the Republican and Democratic presidential nominations?

1 Yes, have watched more than one debate
2 Yes, watched one of the debates
3 No, have not watched any of the debates

ASK IF WATCHED ONE DEBATE (PRIMDEB=2):

DEBBOTH1 Did you watch a debate for the Republican or Democratic candidates?

1 Debate for the Republican party's candidate
2 Debate for the Democratic party's candidate

ASK IF WATCHED MORE THAN ONE DEBATE (PRIMDEB=1):

DEBBOTH2 Did you watch debates for both the Republican and Democratic candidates, or just one of the parties?

1 Debates for both party's candidates
2 Debates for the Republican party's candidate
3 Debates for the Democratic party's candidate

ASK ALL:

INT_FREQ1. How often did you USUALLY access the Internet over the last year?

1 Every day
2 More than once a week but not every day
3 Once a week
4 Once a month
5 Less than once a month
6 Never

ASK IF ACCESS THE INTERNET EVERY DAY (INT_FREQ1=1):

INT_FREQ3. How many hours per day do you USUALLY use the Internet, including time spent at
work?

[PROGRAMMING NOTE: SINGLE LINE TEXT FIELD, ACCEPT WHOLE NUMBERS BETWEEN 0 AND 24]

_____

[ERROR MESSAGE: The number you enter must be a whole number between 0 and 24.]

EXPERIENTIAL OPT IN:

ASK IF GETS NEWS DIGITALLY (NEWS_DEVICEa=1-3 OR NEWS_DEVICEb=1-3) AND ARE WEB PANELISTS:

At the end of February we plan to do a special follow up study for our panelists. Panelists who agree to take part in this study would complete a set of very short follow up surveys on their smartphone, tablet, laptop or desktop computer.

These surveys take no more than two minutes each, conducted twice a day for seven days. Invitations to these surveys will be sent via text message and email.

We would give you $5 for agreeing to take part in the follow up surveys, $1 for each of the 14 follow up surveys you complete and an additional $5 for completing 10 or more of the follow up surveys. If you complete all the surveys you'd receive $24 in total. It's important we have respondents complete as many surveys as possible over the week.

The purpose of this follow up study is to understand how people interact with news online. The information will be based on your answers to the survey questions.

FOLLOW_UP Would you be willing to take part in these follow up surveys?

1 Yes
2 No

ASK IF IN FOLLOW UP SAMPLE:

TEXTCONSMOD_DIARY
Thank you for agreeing to be part of our special follow up study.

It is important that you complete each follow up survey within 2 hours of receiving the invitation. For that reason, we would like to send you invitations to these follow up surveys via text message in addition to email. If you agree to this, you would receive a total of 14 text messages across the seven days. Standard text messaging rates may apply, depending upon the plan you have with your cell phone service provider.

May we have your permission to send you invitations to these follow up surveys via text message? We may or may not already have your permission to send you text messages for our regular surveys and this will not impact that permission.

CATEGORIES
1 Yes
2 No

IF PERMISSION TO TEXT (TEXTCONSMOD=1) AND NO CELLPHONE NUMBER FROM TYPOLOGY OR PRIOR WAVES (F_CELLPHONE_FINAL=0,99):
CELLNUMA_DIARY So that we may send you invitations to the follow-up surveys via text message what is your cell phone number including area code?

(_ _ _) _ _ _ - _ _ _ _

IF PERMISSION TO TEXT (TEXTCONSMOD=1) AND HAVE A CELLPHONE NUMBER FROM TYPOLOGY OR PRIOR WAVE (F_CELLPHONE_FINAL=1):
CELLNUMB_DIARY So that we may send you or invitations to the follow-up surveys via text message, is this the best cell phone number to use? [**Auto populate with cell phone number on file (VARIABLE = CELLPHONE)**]

(_ _ _) _ _ _ - _ _ _ _

CATEGORIES
1 Yes
2 No

Soft prompt: "If you're sure you want to skip, click Next."

IF RESPONDENT SAYS AUTOFILL NUMBER IN CELLNUMB IS NOT THEIR CELLPHONE NUMBER ASK:
CELLNUMC_DIARY So that we may send you invitations to the follow-up surveys via text message what is your cell phone number including area code?

(_ _ _) _ _ _ - _ _ _ _

Soft prompt: "If you're sure you want to skip, click Next."

ASK IF IN FOLLOW UP SAMPLE:

TIMEZONE_CONFIRM So that we send you invitations at the correct times, can you please confirm that this is the time zone you will be in from February 24 to March 1?

[AUTOPOPULATE WITH TIME ZONE BASED ON MOST RECENT SELF-REPORTED ZIPCODE OR RSTATE (VARIABLE = TIMEZONE)]

1 Yes this is the correct time zone
2 No, this is not the correct time zone

ASK IF IN FOLLOW UP SAMPLE AND
(TIME ZONE ABOVE IS INCORRECT OR REFUSED (TIMEZONE_CONFIRM =2,99)

TIMEZONE_ASK So that we send you invitations at the correct times, can you please tell us what time zone you will be in from February 24 to March 1?

1 Eastern Time Zone
2 Central Time Zone
3 Mountain Time Zone
4 Pacific Time Zone
5 Alaskan Time Zone
6 Hawaiian Time Zone
7 Other (SPECIFY)
8 Not Sure

ADD SOFT PROMPT IF ANSWERS TIMEZONE_ASK = 8/NOT SURE OR 99/SKIPPED/REFUSED: If we don’t know what time zone you will be in from February 24 to March 1, we will not be able to include you in the special follow-up study.