

Communication Behaviors as Mediators: Examining Links Between Political Orientation, Political Communication, and Political Participation

Yan Tian

This study reveals the mediation process of mass and interpersonal communication between antecedent political orientation variables and the outcome response variable of political participation. It provides insight into the direct and indirect effects of political communication on political behavior using an advanced social cognitive approach. The study explores the interrelations among political orientations, communication behaviors, and political participation using the theoretical framework of the Orientation 1–Stimulus–Orientation 2–Response model (Markus & Zajonc, 1985; McLeod, Kosicki, & McLeod, 2002). A structural equation model was built and supported by 2004 American National Election Survey data. After controlling for demographic variables, both political interest and need for cognition had direct effects on political media use, whereas political interest and need to evaluate had direct effects on interpersonal political discussion. These results suggest that need for cognition and need to evaluate—2 important personality constructs—affect political communication on 2 different levels. Meanwhile, as antecedent orientation variables, political interest, political extremity, and need to evaluate all contribute to political participation. Both political media use and interpersonal discussion directly affect political participation while they also mediate the effect of the political orientation variables on political participation. Furthermore, interpersonal political discussion mediates the effect of political media use on political participation,

Yan Tian (Ph.D., Temple University, 2004) is an associate professor in the Department of Communication at the University of Missouri, St. Louis. Correspondence: Yan Tian, Department of Communication, University of Missouri–St. Louis, 590 Lucas Hall, One University Blvd., St. Louis, MO 63121; E-mail: tiany@umsl.edu

and political media use mediates the effect of political interest and need for cognition on interpersonal political discussion.

Keywords: Media Effects; Political Participation; Mediation; Structural Equation Modeling

Political participation is the foundation of a democratic society. Through political participation, citizens choose their representatives at different levels of political institutions. Political participation provides a means for citizens to have their voices heard and for “empowering the powerless in society” (Eveland, 1993, pp. 24–25). When citizens are actively engaged in political activities, democracy becomes more vital. Although research has documented the decline of civic engagement and political participation in the United States (Putnam, 2000), some argue that the rights-based monitorial citizen model should replace the informed-citizen model, with “plural equality” taking the place of shared knowledge and participation as the foundation of contemporary society (Schudson, 1998).

Examining the debate on the decline of civic engagement and the rights-based monitorial citizen model, McLeod, Kosicki, and McLeod (2002) argued that citizens need knowledge and skills to be actively engaged in society, and media can provide citizens with content that “helps them to reflect on and connect whatever facts they acquire to their own lives and to larger issues frameworks” (p. 244). Despite the time displacement hypothesis, which suggests that time spent on social activities, including political participation activities, is often spent instead watching television (Putnam, 2000), many studies in mass communication have identified the positive effects of news media use on political knowledge and participation (McLeod et al., 2002).

Research into media effects on individuals and society has been influenced by the evolution of social psychology. According to Markus and Zajonc (1985), research in social psychology has developed from a simple stimulus–response (S–R) approach into more complicated social cognitive approaches, among which the Orientation 1–Stimulus–Orientation 2–Response (O1–S–O2–R) model is gaining attention from scholars. According to this model, orientation functions as a selective control of use of stimuli (O1–S) while it also mediates the effects of the stimulus on the responses (S–O2–R). Therefore, the model extends the S–O–R paradigm highlighted by Baron and Kenny (1986).

The O1–S–O2–R model has been applied in different areas of communication research. Peter and Valkenburg (2006), for example, tested the model with adolescents’ exposure to sexually explicit online materials and their attitudes toward sex. They found support for the mediator role of the perceived realism of those materials between the stimuli (sexually explicit online materials) and the response (recreational attitudes toward sex). Similarly, researchers in political communication are also applying this O1–S–O2–R model to explain the selective control of media use and the mediation process of media effects on political orientations and cognitive and behavioral outcomes, with the assumption being that media effect is conditional instead of universal (Holbert, 2005; Kwak, Williams, Wang, & Lee, 2005; McLeod et al., 2002; McLeod, Scheufele, & Moy, 1999). Taking into consideration both direct

and mediation effects, the O1–S–O2–R model provides an integrative theoretical framework for studying the antecedents and outcomes of political communication.

Following the lead of McLeod and colleagues (1999), who investigated the role of mass media and interpersonal discussion in local political participation with the O1–S–O2–R model, this study uses the model to examine links among political orientation, political communication, and political participation. This study extends the McLeod et al. (1999) work in the following ways: (a) It integrates need for cognition and need to evaluate as O1 variables, which have not been explored by any previous OSOR study; (b) it includes use of political information on the Internet, the importance of which has been increasing dramatically in recent years as a component of the media use variable; (c) it focuses on political communication and political participation in national presidential campaigns; and (d) it studies not only the direct but also the indirect process between the antecedent orientation variables, stimulus, outcome orientation variable, and outcome response variable. Indirect effect, an important component of total media effect, has not received appropriate attention in empirical research (Holbert & Stephenson, 2002, 2003). As Raykov and Marcoulides (2000) stated, “If an indirect effect does not receive proper attention, the relations between two variables of interest may not be fully considered” (p. 7). Therefore, it is important to investigate how political orientations and political media use indirectly affect political activities.

The study starts with the simple direct effect process including O1–S, S–O2, O2–R, O1–O2, O1–R, and S–R. Then, it moves on to more complicated mediation relations, including O1–S–O2, O1–O2–R, and S–O2–R.

O1–S Hypotheses

O1 “represents the set of structural, cultural, cognitive, and motivational characteristics the audience brings to the reception situation that affect the impact of the messages” (McLeod et al., 2002, p. 238). The O1–S relation is consistent with the uses and gratifications theory in mass communication research, focusing on how individuals’ social circumstances and psychological dispositions affect their patterns of media use, as well as the expectations and assessment of media use experience (Katz & Gurevitch, 1974; McQuail, 1987). Individuals choose particular communication channels or contents to gratify their needs (Graber, 1993; Shah, 1998; Zillman & Bryant, 1985). Motivation variables, such as political interest and political extremity, can be predictors of news exposure (Tsfati & Cappella, 2003). Therefore, this study hypothesizes a positive relation between political interest, political extremity, and political media use:

H1a: Individuals with more interest in politics will have more political media use than those with less interest in politics.

H1b: Individuals with more extreme political orientations will have more political media use than those with less extreme political orientations.

The need for cognition, an individual-difference concept, can also affect the selective control of media use for political information. Need for cognition, originally defined as “a need to structure relevant situations in meaningful, integrated ways,” is a need “to understand and make reasonable the experiential world” (Cohen, Stotland, & Wolfe, 1955, p. 291). The concept has been refined by Cacioppo, Petty, Feinstein, and Jarvis (1996), who considered need for cognition to be “a stable individual difference in people’s tendency to engage in and enjoy effortful cognitive activity” (p. 197). Need for cognition, an important personality variable, has been found to be positively associated with news media exposure to follow political campaigns because individuals high in need for cognition like to think. They are more attracted to political information and more likely to seek political information from mass media (Bizer, Krosnick, Petty, Rucker, & Wheeler, 2000). Therefore, we posit the following:

H1c: Individuals with higher need for cognition will have more political media use than those with lower need for cognition.

Need to evaluate is another important personality construct that can be applied in political communication research. Need to evaluate is defined as “an individual difference variable that measures the extent to which people spontaneously evaluate objects or experiences as either good or bad” (Bizer et al., 2004, p. 997). Because evaluation is an important process in the political area, need to evaluate can affect cognitive and behavioral outcomes (Bizer et al., 2004). In the 1998 American National Election Survey (ANES) pilot study and the 2000 ANES, Bizer et al. (2004) found that high-need-to-evaluate individuals were more likely to have used the media for political information. Their rationale was that individuals with a high level of need to evaluate are more attracted to political information presented in the media because they like to hold attitudes on political figures and political issues (Bizer et al., 2004). Therefore, this study hypothesizes the following:

H1d: Individuals with a higher level of need to evaluate will have more political media use than those with a lower level of need to evaluate.

S–O2 Hypotheses

The O2 variable in this study is the interpersonal political discussion variable. With the two-step flow model of communication, interpersonal discussions can mediate the effects of mass media on the audience (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). Scheufele (2001) proposed the differential gains model, which suggests that interpersonal communication contributes to individuals’ consumption of information from mass media. The moderator role of interpersonal discussion was supported in both face-to-face discussions and computer-mediated interactions (Hardy & Scheufele, 2005; Scheufele, 2001). Whereas the two-step flow model looks at interpersonal discussion as a mediator between mass media and audience, the differential gains model looks at interpersonal discussion as a moderator (Scheufele, 2001). This study

examines interpersonal political discussion as a mediator variable, which means that the effects of mass media on audience behavior function at least partially through interpersonal political discussion. This partial mediation process helps the audience to make sense of the political information it gains from mass media. The rationale is related to the reasoning process proposed by Shah et al. (2007), who suggested that reasoning should be an important component in the O1–S–O2–R model. Shah et al. conceptualized reasoning as “mental elaboration and collective consideration, encompassing both intrapersonal and interpersonal ‘ways of thinking’” (p. 698), and they found empirical support for the mediator effects of political conversations between news consumption and political participation.

Therefore, this study tests the variable of interpersonal political discussion as a reasoning process through which individuals make sense of and evaluate political information gained through mass media. Thus, a positive relation between mass media use for political information and interpersonal discussion is proposed:

H2: Individuals with more political media use will have more interpersonal discussions on political issues than those with less political media use.

O2–R Hypothesis

Interpersonal political discussion is conceptualized as a mediator between mass media and audience behavior. This suggests that interpersonal discussion is predicted by political mass media use, as hypothesized in *H2*; and it also predicts audience behavior, which in this study is the outcome response variable, political participation. A modest effect of interpersonal discussion on institutionalized local political participation has been reported in prior research (McLeod et al., 1999). Meanwhile, discussions on political issues help individuals to gain mobilizing information from mass media, thereby increasing individuals’ willingness to participate in political activities (Hardy & Scheufele, 2005). Hence, the third hypothesis tests the effects of interpersonal discussion on political participation:

H3: Individuals with more interpersonal discussions on political issues will participate in political activities more than those with less interpersonal discussions on political issues.

O1–O2 Hypotheses

The O1 variables can affect interpersonal political discussions. Individuals who are more interested in politics and who have more extreme political views than those with less interest and less extreme political orientations are more likely to talk about politics. Meanwhile, because interpersonal discussion is viewed as a reasoning process—that is, the process through which the audience makes sense of the political information it gains from mass media (Shah et al., 2007)—individuals with a high level of need to evaluate will be more likely than others to participate in political discussions because they enjoy the evaluation process more. A direct relation between

need for cognition and interpersonal political discussion is not hypothesized because need for cognition is more likely to affect interpersonal political discussion indirectly: Individuals look for media political information and then use that information to participate in interpersonal discussions on political issues. Therefore

- H4a: Individuals with more interest in politics will have more interpersonal political discussions than those less interested in politics.*
- H4b: Individuals with more extreme political orientations will have more interpersonal political discussions than those with less extreme political orientations.*
- H4c: Individuals with a higher level of need to evaluate will have more interpersonal political discussions than with a lower level of need to evaluate.*

O1–R Hypotheses

Individuals more interested in politics will be more motivated to participate in political activities than those less interested. Meanwhile, those who have more extreme political orientations will be more active in political engagements to support what is consistent with their own beliefs and boycott what is against their beliefs than those with less extreme political orientations. The positive effects of need for cognition and need to evaluate on political participation have also been reported (Bizer et al., 2000; Bizer et al., 2004). As such, the next hypothesis posits the following:

- H5a: Individuals with more interest in politics participate more in political activities than those with less interest in politics.*
- H5b: Individuals with more extreme political orientations participate in political activities more than those with less extreme political orientations.*
- H5c: Individuals with a higher level of need for cognition participate more in political activities than those with a lower level of need for cognition.*
- H5d: Individuals with a higher level of need to evaluate participate more in political activities than those with a lower level of need to evaluate.*

S–R Hypotheses

Communication variables can have direct effects on response variables. McLeod et al. (1999) suggested that newspaper hard-news use has strong effects on institutionalized local political participation, such as attending neighborhood meetings and voting for locally elected officials. Xenos and Moy (2007) revealed a positive relation between exposure to online political information and civic and political engagement, although the relation is moderated by political interest. As mass media provide citizens with the content they need for political cognitions and behaviors, many studies in mass communication have identified the positive effects of news media use on political participation (McLeod et al., 2002). Therefore, this study hypothesizes a positive effect of mass media on political participation:

- H6: Individuals with more political media use will participate in political activities more than those with less political media use.*

Mediation Hypotheses

With the O1–S–O2–R framework, S can be a mediator between O1 and O2, whereas both S and O2 can mediate the effects of O1 on R. It is important to study mediation effect because “mediating variables exist at every stage of the media effects process” (Holbert & Stephenson, 2003, p. 558). The general overlook of mediation or indirect effect makes this even more important (Holbert & Stephenson, 2002, 2003). With communication studies published between 1995 and 2000 using structural equation modeling (SEM), an advanced multivariate statistical technique offering mediation effect testing, only 14.4% of those studies investigated mediation effects (Holbert & Stephenson, 2002). Based on this theoretical framework and the most recent research finding of reasoning as a mediator (Shah et al., 2007), the following hypotheses on the mediation process are proposed:

- H7a: Interpersonal political discussion will mediate the effect of political media use on political participation.*
- H7b: Political media use will mediate the effect of political orientation variables on interpersonal political discussions.*
- H7c: The communication variables, including both political media use and interpersonal political discussion, will mediate the effect of political orientation variables on political participation.*

The theoretical model integrating all the aforementioned hypotheses is presented in Figure 1

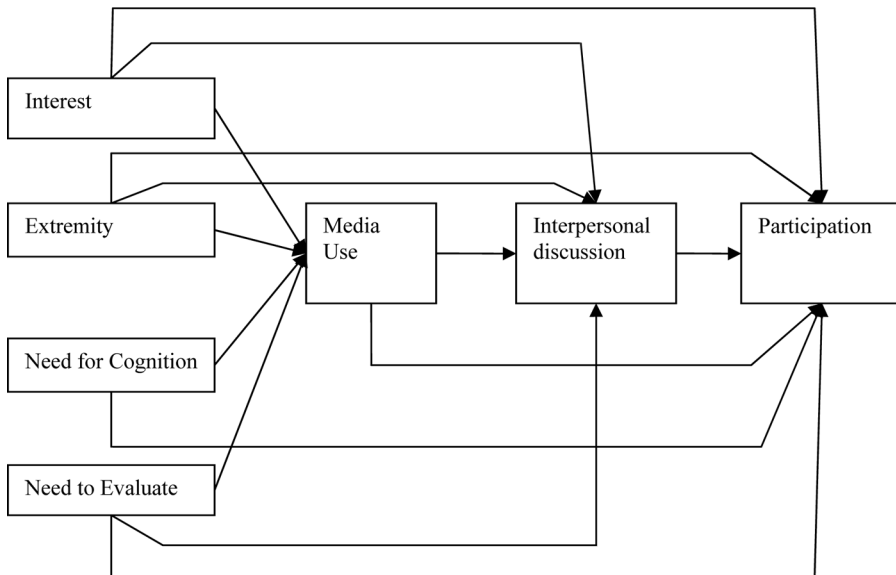


Figure 1 The Theoretical Model.

Method

Data

A secondary analysis of the 2004 ANES data was conducted to test the hypotheses. The 2004 ANES data were gathered from pre-election interviews conducted September 7 through November 1, 2004 and post-election interviews conducted November 3 through December 20, 2004. A total of 1,212 individuals participated in the pre-election interviews; 1,066 of those individuals also participated in the post-election interviews.

To improve the internal validity of the research and to test the mediation effects of the communication variables, only respondents who completed all questions on the variables in the O1–S–O2–R model and the controlled variables were selected for the sample; the final sample size was 501. Among these respondents, 240 (47.9%) were men, the average age was 45.02 ($SD = 15.64$), 238 (47.5%) had a bachelor's degree or higher, and 397 (79.2%) were White.

Measurement

O1 variables. Political interest was measured by the question, "Some people don't pay much attention to political campaigns. How about you? Would you say that you have been very much interested, somewhat interested, or not much interested in the political campaigns so far this year?" Following literature in political science and social psychology, the data were recoded as 0 = not much interested, .50 = somewhat interested, and 1 = very much interested ($M = 0.73$, $SD = 0.31$).

Political extremity was measured with the following question:

We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. Here is a seven-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged, from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this? (1 = extremely liberal, 7 = extremely conservative).

The data were recoded as 0 = moderate or middle-of-the-road, .33 = slightly liberal/conservative, .66 = liberal/conservative, and 1 = extremely liberal/conservative ($M = 0.41$, $SD = 0.31$).

Need for cognition was measured using two items: (a) "Some people like to have responsibility for handling situations that require a lot of thinking, and other people don't like to have responsibility for situations like that. What about you? Do you like having responsibility for handling situations that require a lot of thinking, do you dislike it, or do you neither like it nor dislike it?" The data were recoded as 0 = dislike a lot, .25 = dislike somewhat, .50 = neither dislike nor like, .75 = like it somewhat, and 1 = like it a lot; and (b) "Some people prefer to solve simple problems instead of complex ones, whereas other people prefer to solve more complex problems. Which type of problem do you prefer to solve: simple or complex?" The data were recoded as 0 = simple and 1 = complex.

The mean of the two items was calculated as the value of the construct of need for cognition ($M = 0.67$, $SD = 0.33$; $\alpha = .57$). Need to evaluate was also measured by two items: (a) "Some people have opinions about almost everything; other people have opinions about just some things; and still other people have very few opinions. What about you? Would you say you have opinions about almost everything, about many things, about some things, or about very few things?" The data were recoded as 0 = very few things, .33 = some things, .66 = many things, and 1 = almost everything; and (b) "Compared to the average person, do you have fewer opinions about whether things are good or bad, about the same number of opinions, or more opinions? Would you say that you have a lot [more/fewer] opinions or just somewhat [more/fewer] opinions?" The data were recoded as 0 = a lot fewer, .25 = somewhat fewer, .50 = about same, .75 = somewhat more, and 1.00 = a lot more. Additive index was used for the value of the construct need to evaluate ($M = 0.63$, $SD = 0.19$; $\alpha = .64$). The reliability of need for cognition and need to evaluate was adequate, which is consistent with research in political science with the ANES data (Bizer et al., 2002; Bizer et al., 2004).

Stimulus variable. Political media use is the stimulus variable. It was measured by the following four items: (a) "Did you watch any programs about the campaign on television?," (b) "Did you read about the campaign in any magazines?," (c) "Did you listen to any speeches or discussions about the campaign on the radio?," and (d) "Have you seen any information about this election campaign on the Internet/Web?" The data were recoded as 0 = no and 1 = yes. The means of the scores of the four items were averaged as the value for the variable political media use ($M = 0.67$, $SD = 0.26$).

O2 variable. Interpersonal political discussion was the O2 variable in this study, as it was the process of making sense of the political information people gain through mass media. Interpersonal political discussion was measured by the question, "How many days in the past week did you talk about politics with family or friends?" ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 2.43$).

Response variable. Political participation was the response variable in the model. It was measured by the following questions: (a) "We would like to find out about some of the things people do to help a party or a candidate win an election. During the campaign, did you talk to any people and try to show them why they should vote for or against one of the parties or candidates?"; (b) "Did you go to any political meetings, rallies, speeches, dinners, or things like that in support of a particular candidate?"; (c) "Did you wear a campaign button, put a campaign sticker on your car, or place a sign in your window or in front of your house?"; (d) "Did you do any (other) work for one of the parties or candidates?"; (e) "Did you give money to an individual candidate running for public office?"; (f) "Did you give money to a political party during this election year?"; and (g) "Did you give any money to any other group that supported or opposed candidates?" The data was recoded as

0 = no and 1 = yes. Scores of these items were averaged for the value of political participation ($M = 0.19$, $SD = 0.20$).

Statistical Analysis

To control the effects of the demographic variables on the variables in the O1–S–O2–R model, separate regression analysis was performed on each variable in the model. In each regression analysis, the O1–S–O2–R variable (e.g., political interest or political media use) was the dependent variable, and the five demographic variables including age, gender, race (recoded as 0 = minority and 1 = White), education, and party identification (recoded as 0 = no preference and 1 = having a preference) were predictors. The standardized residuals from each regression analysis were saved as the new O1–S–O2–R variables. Through this series of regression analyses, the effects of the demographic variables on each of the O1–S–O2–R variables were controlled for.

A maximum likelihood structural equation model was built to test the hypotheses. Political interest, political extremity, need for cognition, and need to evaluate were exogenous variables predicting political media use, interpersonal political discussion, and political participation. Political media use and interpersonal political discussion were antecedent endogenous variables, with the former predicted by all the orientation variables and the latter predicted by political interest, political extremity, and need to evaluate.

The two communication variables, in turn, predicted political participation. Political participation was the outcome endogenous variable in the model, predicted by all the other variables. Both direct and indirect effects of the related variables were calculated. In addition, a bootstrap for each model (number of bootstrap samples is 200) was performed, and 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals were used to test the significance of the direct and mediation effects.

Results

The model fit the data extremely well. The $\chi^2(1) = .002$ and $p = .96$. Furthermore, the comparative fit index = 1.00, the goodness-of-fit index = 1.00, and the root mean square error of approximation = .00. All the aforementioned indexes indicated a very good fit between the model and the data. The significant direct paths of the model were presented in Figure 2.

H1a and H1c were supported. Political interest ($\beta = .28$, $p < .001$) and need for cognition ($\beta = .21$, $p < .001$) were significant predictors of political media use. H1b and H1d were rejected; political extremity ($\beta = .06$, $p = .15$) and need to evaluate ($\beta = .05$, $p = .30$) were not significant predictors of political media use. Therefore, the O1–S hypotheses were partially supported.

H2 was supported. Political media use significantly and positively predicted interpersonal political discussions ($\beta = .13$, $p = .004$), which suggested that individuals with more political media use were more likely to have interpersonal discussions

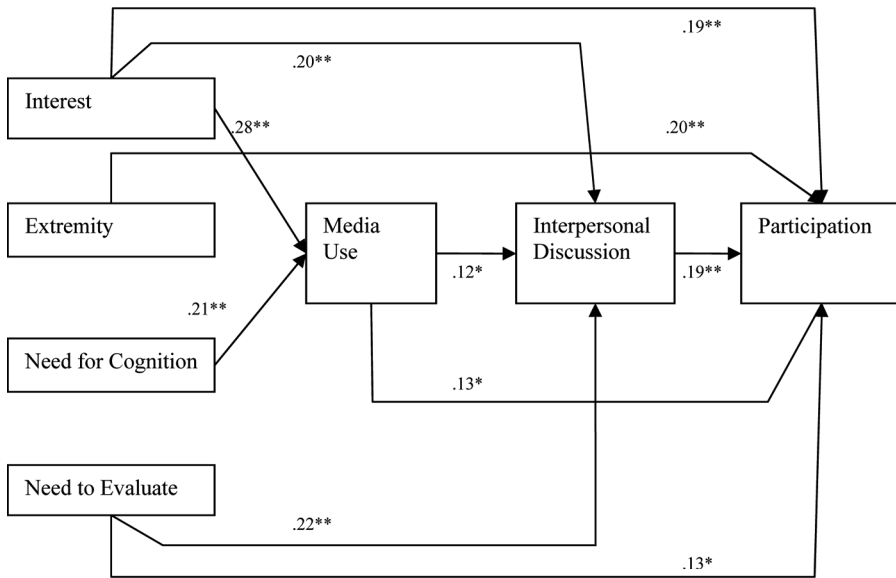


Figure 2 Model with Significant Standardized Paths. * $p < .01$. ** $p < .001$.

on political issues than those who had less political media use. Thus, the S–O2 hypothesis was supported.

H3 was supported. Interpersonal discussion was a significant predictor of political participation ($\beta = .19$, $p < .001$), which suggested that individuals with more interpersonal discussions on political issues would participate in political activities more than those with less interpersonal discussions on political issues. Hence, the O2–R hypothesis was supported.

H4a and H4c were supported. Political interest ($\beta = .20$, $p < .001$) and need to evaluate ($\beta = .22$, $p < .001$) were significant predictors of interpersonal political discussions. However, H4b was rejected because political extremity did not have a significant effect on interpersonal discussions ($\beta = .07$, $p = .13$). Thus, the O1–O2 hypotheses were partially supported.

H5a, H5b, and H5d were supported. Political interest ($\beta = .19$, $p < .001$), political extremity ($\beta = .20$, $p < .001$), and need to evaluate ($\beta = .13$, $p = .001$) all significantly predicted the response variable of political participation. H5c, however, was rejected, as need for cognition ($\beta = .00$, $p = .91$) did not have an effect on political participation. Therefore, the O1–R hypotheses were partially supported.

H6 was supported. Political media use was a significant predictor of political participation ($\beta = .13$, $p = .002$), suggesting that individuals with more political media use would participate in political activities more than those with less political media use. Therefore, the S–R hypothesis was supported.

H7a was supported. The standardized indirect effect of political media use on political participation, mediated by interpersonal political discussion, was .024, and it was significant ($p = .006$). Hence, interpersonal political discussion mediated the

effect of political media use on political participation in a significant way, which suggests the S–O2–R mediation process was supported.

H7b was partially supported. The standardized indirect effects of political interest and need for cognition on interpersonal political discussion, mediated by political media use, were .03 ($p = .003$) and .03 ($p = .002$), respectively. Both were significant. The standardized indirect effects of political extremity (.01, $p = .065$) and need to evaluate (.01, $p = .34$) on interpersonal political discussion, however, were not significant. Hence, the O1–S–O2 mediation process was partially supported.

H7c was supported. The standardized indirect effects of political interest, political extremity, need for cognition, and need to evaluate on political participation, mediated by the communication variables including political media use and interpersonal political discussion, were .08, .02, .03, and .05, respectively. The mediator effects all were significant ($p = .012$, .02, .00, and .01, respectively). This suggested that the communication variables mediated the effect of the political orientation variables on political participation, supporting the whole O1–S–O2–R mediation process.

Discussion

This study provides important insights for understanding the antecedents of political communication behavior, both on the mass and interpersonal levels. It reveals the important roles of political interest and political extremity with respect to their effects on political media use and interpersonal political discussions. More important, this study incorporates the concept of need for cognition and need to evaluate as political orientation variables. Need for cognition and need to evaluate are two important individual-difference concepts in social psychology and political science (Bizer et al., 2000; Bizer et al., 2004; Cacioppo & Petty, 1982; Cacioppo et al., 1996), yet they have not received much attention from communication researchers. This study examines these two concepts as antecedents of political communication and political participation activities.

It is interesting to note that this study reveals that need for cognition and need to evaluate function in different ways. Need for cognition was found to be a significant predictor of political media use, whereas need to evaluate was found to be a significant predictor of interpersonal political discussion. It seems that need for cognition does not have a direct effect on interpersonal political discussion. Instead, individuals high in need for cognition turn first to mass media for political information and then use the information they gain from mass media in interpersonal discussions. Need to evaluate, however, does not affect political media use significantly, although it does have a direct effect on interpersonal political discussions. Mass media provides individuals with opportunities to seek political information for the pleasure of thinking, whereas interpersonal discussions allow individuals to evaluate the political information gained from mass media. Extending previous research, this study reveals that the two related personality concepts directly affect political communication on two different levels, suggesting the importance of orientation variables as selective controls of different types of communication activities.

Meanwhile, this study suggests the positive effects of communication behaviors on political participation. Both political media use and interpersonal political discussion significantly and positively predict political participation. Moreover, interpersonal political discussion mediates the effect of political media use on political participation in a significant way. This suggests that interpersonal political discussion, as a reasoning and evaluation process, can help individuals to make sense of the political information they receive from media, and the consumption and understanding of political information can translate into political participation behavior. Therefore, interpersonal political discussion contributes to political participation, and it also acts to mediate between political media use and political participation.

More important, this study reveals both the direct and indirect effects of political orientation variables on the outcome political participation variable. Political interest, political extremity, and need to evaluate all significantly and positively predict political participation in a direct way. Need for cognition, on the other hand, does not have a direct effect on political participation. Nevertheless, the indirect effect of need for cognition on political participation, mediated by political media use and interpersonal political discussion, is significant. It seems that individuals high in need for cognition are not necessarily more engaged in political activities than those low in need for cognition. Political media use and interpersonal discussion on political issues are processes that help individuals gather political information from mass media and make sense of the information, and therefore to become more active in political engagement. The findings suggest that the traditional S–R approach is overly simplistic, and more complicated cognitive processes have to be considered when studying media effects (Markus & Zajonc, 1985; McLeod et al., 2002). In fact, the direct effect process and the mediation process work at the same time in determining the effects of mass media use and interpersonal communication.

This study has several limitations. First, similar to other OSOR studies in communication and the majority (78%) of SEM articles (Holbert & Stephenson, 2002), the study used cross-sectional data; hence, the conclusion of causation cannot be drawn in this study, although the model follows the theoretical line of social cognitive approaches to political communication, and the causal links are statistically supported. Second, it used a scale to measure political media use. As the direct and mediation effects of political communication might be different with each specific type of medium (McLeod et al., 1999), it would be interesting to test the theoretical framework in this study across various media channels. Finally, this study used single-item measurements for constructs such as political interest and interpersonal political discussions, which could affect the reliability of those constructs, although the ANES has been a respectable source for many years.

Nevertheless, this study provides original insights for understanding political communication on both mass and interpersonal levels. Theoretically, it integrates two important concepts in social psychology that have been overlooked in communication research—need for cognition and need to evaluate—into the conceptual model as orientation variables of the O1–S–O2–R framework. It indicates the importance of studying communication behaviors as mediators instead of as simple stimuli.

It reveals the relations among political orientations, political media use, interpersonal discussions on political issues, and political participation with the effect of demographic variables including age, gender, education, race, and party identification being controlled. Both mass and interpersonal political communication behaviors directly affect political participation while simultaneously mediating the effects of political orientations on political participation.

With the recent 2008 presidential campaigns, Web 2.0 has become an important channel for candidates to reach citizens, especially the younger generations. This provides a very interesting test bed for the O1–S–O2–R model, with young citizens' general indifference to politics and the higher interactivity of Web 2.0 compared to more traditional types of Internet-based communication. It would be interesting to test how the orientation variables predict political participation and communication behaviors in ways that differed from the 2004 election. Future research will explore how social cognitive approaches to political communication operate in the new political and communication context.

References

- Baron, R. M., & Kenny, D. A. (1986). The moderator–mediator variable distinction in social psychological research: Conceptual, strategic, and statistical considerations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *51*, 1183–1182.
- Bizer, G. Y., Krosnick, J. A., Holbrook, A. L., Wheeler, S. C., Rucker, D. D., & Petty, R. E. (2004). The impact of personality on cognitive, behavioral, and affective political processes: The effects of need to evaluate. *Journal of Personality*, *72*, 996–1027. doi: 10.1111/j.0022-3506.2004.00288.x
- Bizer, G. Y., Krosnick, J. A., Petty, R. E., Rucker, D. D., & Wheeler, S. C. (2000). *Need for cognition and need to evaluate in the 1998 National Election Survey pilot study* (National Election Studies Report) Available at <ftp://ftp.nes.isr.umich.edu/ftp/nes/bibliography/documents/nes008-997.pdf>.
- Cacioppo, J. T., & Petty, R. E. (1982). The need for cognition. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *42*, 116–131.
- Cacioppo, J. T., Petty, R. E., Feinstein, J. A., & Jarvis, W. B. G. (1996). Dispositional differences in cognitive motivation: The life and times of individuals varying in need for cognition. *Psychological Bulletin*, *119*, 197–253. doi: 10.1037/0033-2909.119.2.197
- Cohen, A. R., Stotland, E., & Wolfe, D. M. (1955). An experimental investigation of need for cognition. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, *51*, 291–294. doi: 10.1037/h0042761
- Eveland, W. P. (1993). *Political participation of the elderly: The influence of community structure* (Unpublished master's thesis). Newark, DE: University of Delaware. Retrieved from <http://www.udel.edu/communication/web/thesisfiles/evelandthesis.pdf>
- Graber, D. A. (1993). *Mass media and American politics* (3rd ed.). Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press.
- Hardy, B. W., & Scheufele, D. A. (2005). Examining differential gains from Internet use: Comparing the moderating role of talk and online interactions. *Journal of Communication*, *55*, 71–84. doi: 10.1111/j.1460-2466.2005.tb02659.x
- Holbert, R. L. (2005). Intramedia mediation: The cumulative and complementary effects of news media use. *Political Communication*, *22*, 447–461. doi: 10.1080/10584600500311378
- Holbert, R. L., & Stephenson, M. T. (2002). Structural equation modeling in the communication sciences, 1995–2000. *Human Communication Research*, *28*, 531–551. doi: 10.1093/hcr/28.4.531

- Holbert, R. L., & Stephenson, M. T. (2003). The importance of indirect effects in media effects research. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 47, 556–572. doi: 10.1207/s15506878jobem4704_5
- Katz, E., & Gurevitch, M. (1974). Utilization of mass communication by the individual. In J. G. Blumler & E. Katz (Eds.), *The uses of mass communication* (pp. 19–32). London, England: Faber.
- Katz, E., & Lazarsfeld, P. F. (1955). *Personal influence*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Kwak, N., Williams, A. E., Wang, X., & Lee, H. (2005). Talking politics and engaging politics: An examination of the interactive relationships between structural features of political talk and discussion engagement. *Communication Research*, 32, 87–111. doi: 10.1177/0093650204271400
- Markus, H., & Zajonc, R. B. (1985). The cognitive perspective in social psychology. In G. Lindzey & E. Aronson (Eds.), *The handbook of social psychology* (3rd ed., pp. 137–229). New York, NY: Random House.
- McLeod, J. M., Kosicki, G. M., & McLeod, D. M. (2002). Resurveying the boundaries of political communication effects. In J. Bryant & D. Zillman (Eds.), *Media effects: Advances in theory and research* (2nd ed., pp. 215–267). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- McLeod, J. M., Scheufele, D. A., & Moy, P. (1999). Community, communication, and participation: The role of mass media and interpersonal discussion in local political participation. *Political Communication*, 16, 315–336. doi: 10.1080/105846099198659
- McQuail, D. (1987). *Mass communication theory: An introduction*. London, England: Sage.
- Peter, J., & Valkenburg, P. M. (2006). Adolescents' exposure to sexually explicit online material and recreational attitudes toward sex. *Journal of Communication*, 56, 639–660. doi: 10.1111/j.1460-2466.2006.00313.x
- Putnam, R. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Raykov, T., & Marcoulides, G. A. (2000). *A first course in structural equation modeling*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Scheufele, D. A. (2001). Democracy for some? How political talk both informs and polarizes the electorate. In R. P. Hart & D. Shaw (Eds.), *Communication and U.S. elections: New agendas* (pp. 19–32). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Schudson, M. (1998). *The good citizen: A history of American civic life*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Shah, D. V. (1998). Civic engagement, interpersonal trust, and television use: An individual-level assessment of social capital. *Political Psychology*, 19, 469–496. doi: 10.1111/0162-895X.00114
- Shah, D. V., Cho, J., Nah, S., Gotlieb, M. R., Hwang, H., Lee, N., McLeod, D. M. (2007). Campaign ads, online messaging, and participation: Extending the communication mediation model. *Journal of Communication*, 57, 676–703. doi: 10.1111/j.1460-2466.2007.00363.x
- Tsfati, Y., & Cappella, J. N. (2003). Do people watch what they do not trust? Exploring the association between news media skepticism and exposure. *Communication Research*, 30, 504–529. doi: 10.1177/0093650203253371
- Xenos, M., & Moy, P. (2007). Direct and differential effects of the Internet on political and civic engagement. *Journal of Communication*, 57, 704–718. doi: 10.1111/j.1460-2466.2007.00364.x
- Zillman, D., & Bryant, J. (Eds.). (1985). *Selective exposure to communication*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Copyright of Communication Quarterly is the property of Taylor & Francis Ltd and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.