CONFIRMING MEDIA EFFECTS IN VOTING BEHAVIOR: A MEDIA DEPENDENCY PERSPECTIVE

by

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Dedicated to the loving memory of my paternal grandmother

Ella B. Childs

whose belief in me provided the inspiration to press forward during those moments of questioning.

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ABSTRACT

Researchers from many intellectual disciplines in the social sciences, as well as those who set policy in both the public and private sectors of society, have long sought a comprehensive understanding of the role the mass media play in one's voting behavior in the United States. Much of this concern stems from the possibility that the mass media could affect how people vote, thus taking control away from the electorate and giving it to the gatekeepers of the mass media.

This dissertation provides empirical support that the mass media do, indeed, have *effects* on one's political deicision-making process. However, it clearly shows that such effects are "contextual" in nature; that is, they manifest themselves in different ways depending upon the point one is at during his or her decision-making process. Specifically, for example, the mass media play an "information-seeking" role in helping individuals, prior to deciding who to vote for, in reaching one's goal of being able to discriminate between candidates running for the same office; but then play an "attitude reinforcement" role after one decides who to vote for.

These findings were due, in large part, to the adopted notion in this research effort that one important shortcoming of past research efforts concerning this phenomenon was that researchers limited the dependent variable in their research designs to the act of voting itself. In order to overcome this inherent limitation, a structural equation model of the role the mass media play in voting behavior was created that incorporated such other dependent variables as: (1) one's ability to discriminate between candidates running for the same public office, and their respective political parties; and (2) the level of difficulty one experiences in deciding how to vote.

The primary theoretical explanation for the findings reported in the dissertation comes out of a paradigm in the mass communications literature called *media dependency*. However, it is argued further that a comprehensive explanation of one's political decision-making process does not rest in a single theoretical perspective, nor in a single intellectual discipline. Therefore, additional theoretical paradigms were incorporated from the communication literature (e.g., uses and gratifications, and agenda setting); plus from two other intellectual disciplines, psychology (passive learning) and social psychology (theory of attitude centrality). Of course, the theoretical framework for this study was also embedded in the current body of knowledge within political communications and political science.

While, as noted above, the main thrust of this research effort was to provide a better explanation of the role the the mass media play "collectively" in one's voting behavior, it also deals with the role that each of four medium play individually: television, radio, magazines, and newspapers. Hypothesized differences between the respective media were, indeed, empirically supported.

Perhaps of equal importance, however, is that this portion of the dissertation creates a baseline for pointing out possible important differences in the role these individual media play in voting behavior at the higher levels of politics (e.g., presidential, senatorial, and gubernatorial) compared to the lower-levels of politics (e.g., city, county, state assembly, and congressional). The dissertation concludes with a "call for research" that would focus on these important differences, thus adding another vital step in providing a comprehensive understanding of the role mass media play in voting behavior in the U.S.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

> *...The powerful audience of the uses and gratifications approach (Blumler and Katz, 1974) most likely coexists with the powerful media that uses and gratifications rejects (Katz, 1980)* [Ball-Rokeach, 1985:503].

Even after years of comprehensive research by scholars in many different intellectual disciplines, research findings regarding the **effects** of the mass media on human behavior remain inconclusive. Nowhere is this more true than in assessing mass media effects on political decision-making such as voting behavior.

Clearly, a great deal of progress has been made in recent years toward developing a more comprehensive understanding of media effects on one's political behavior. On the one hand, there is compelling evidence that mass media effects indeed exist. On the other hand, efforts to explain precisely what these effects are and how they impact one's voting behavior have not led to conclusive findings. Whatever these media effects are, however, it is clear that they are **contextual** in nature. For example, the mass media likely play one role prior to an individual having made one's decision regarding how to vote, yet a different role after making one's decision regarding how to vote (e.g., who to vote for). This thinking is reflected in Ball-Rokeach's conclusion (cited above), which sets the theme for the research effort that is the focus of the present dissertation.

A fundamental premise of the present dissertation is that the next logical step to achieving a more comprehensive understanding of the role that the mass

media play in the political decision-making process is not to develop a new theory; rather, it is to blend existing theoretical perspectives from multiple intellectual disciplines. Thus, no effort is made here to create a new theory of media effects in voting behavior. Instead, the primary focus of the president dissertation is three-fold: (1) to posit a more comprehensive explanation than has, to date, been set forth regarding the role the mass media play in individuals' voting behavior; (2) to build a theoretical model to test this more comprehensive explanation of media efects; and finally (3) to test the theoretical model posited.

Further, the intent of the present research effort is to provide a theoretical framework, that does not exist today, for testing yet another important phenomenon at some point in the future: differences in the role the mass media play in the decision-making process at the more local and regional levels of politics (e.g., city, county, state assembly, and United States Congress) compared to such higher levels of campaigning as state and national elections (e.g., governor, state and national senate, and president of the U.S.). The inherent promise to conducting such research can be seen in the claim by Rothchild (1975) and Becker & Whitney (1980) that direct media effects are far more likely to materialize for lower-level offices then for higher-level offices. Findings from the present research will provide baseline results for making meaningful comparisons in future research efforts.

The theoretical explanation of media effects in voting behavior being tested in the present research effort resides primarily within three intellectual disciplines: Communications theory, psychology, and social psychology. A wealth of theory has evolved through the years from such other disciplines as political science and political communications. Contributions from such work will be incorporated into the present, more comprehensive explanation.

The theoretical model being tested in the present research effort focuses upon a theoretical perspective called *media dependency*, which includes the uses and gratifications paradigm. By itself, however, the media dependency perspective is insufficient for providing a comprehensive understanding of media effects in voting behavior. Therefore, an additional paradigm in communication theory is incorporated into the model: *Agenda-setting*. Further explanation of observed media-dependent behavior is explained by a psychological theory called: *Passive Learning*. The final theoretical perspective that contributes to a more complete explanation of media effects on voting behavior comes from social psychology and is called the *Theory of Attitude Centrality*. Each of these theories will be discussed in Chapter 3.

The present research effort also makes a concerted effort to overcome a common theoretical weakness of earlier efforts to explain the role of the mass media in voting behavior, that of limiting their outcome measure (the dependent variable) solely to the act of voting (Roberts, 1979). By so doing, one ignores the possibility of a very important potential media "effect": That information gathered through the mass media can literally deactivate an individual, thus resulting in an individual deciding not to vote (O'Keefe, 1975; Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur, 1976; Dryer and Rosenbaum, 1976).

Therefore, a theoretical model was designed that is in keeping with O'Keefe's notion that while the traditional demographic variables and an individual's political dispositions are useful indicators of voting behavior, perhaps more useful constructs are: (1) the use one makes of the **mass media** in one's voting behavior, (2) the amount of attention one pays to **pre-campaign activities**, (3) one's **time of decision** with regards to deciding for whom to vote, and (4) the **level of difficulty** one experiences at arriving at that decision (OKeefe, 1975). As

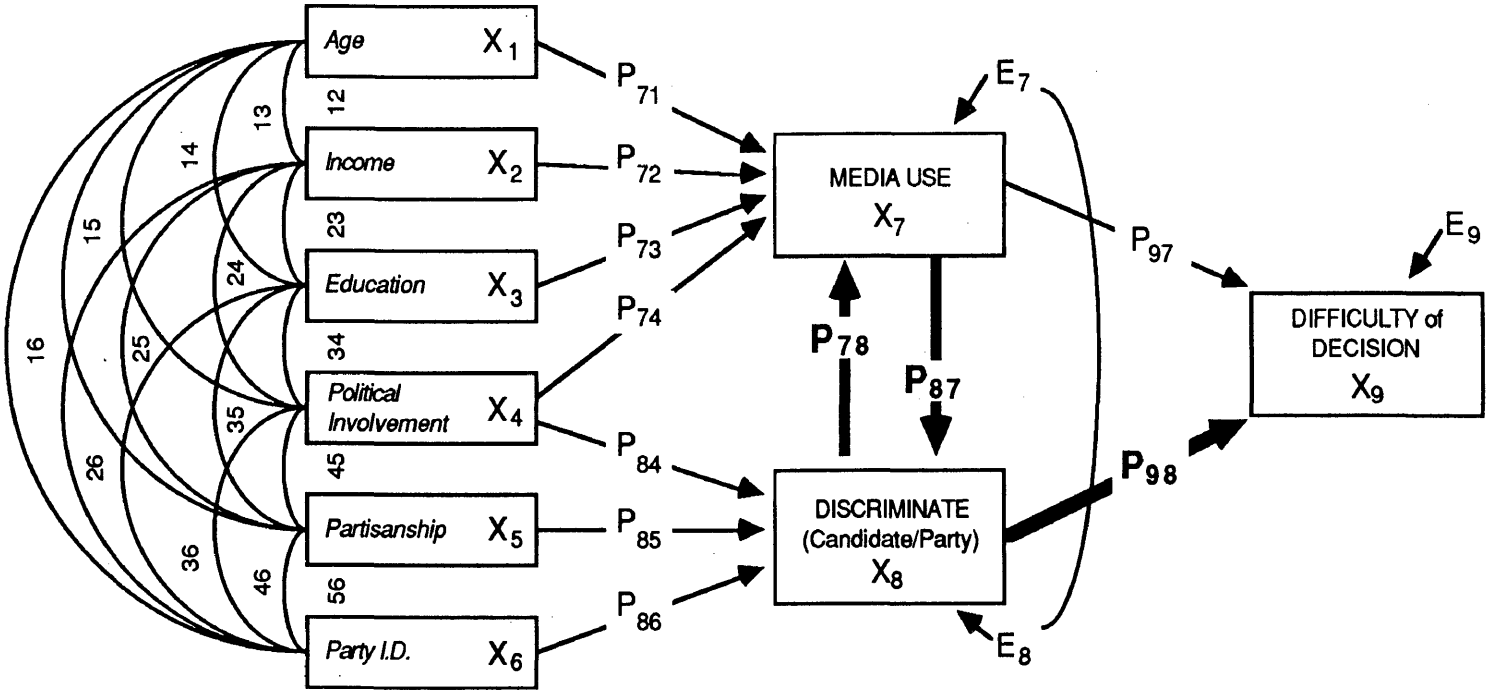
such, the present model coincides with O'Keefe's conclusion that, "Subsequent research would benefit from more penetrating measures of these (above identified) concepts."

By creating constructed variables, the present research design utilizes a causal model of voting behavior that incorporates the following theoretically important concepts (Figure 1): (1) use of the **mass media** in political decision-making, (2) one's ability to **discriminate** between the candidates (and their respective political parties) who are running for the same public office, and (3) **difficulty of decision** (measured by whether or not an individual voted, and if so, time of decision regarding for whom to vote). Further, the model controls for three traditional demographic variables: **Age**, **income**, and **education**; as well as for **political identification**, intensity of **partisanship**, and level of **political involvement**. The full theoretical model will be discussed in detail in subsequent sections of the present dissertation, including the theoretical and methodological reasoning for the specific indexes that comprise the constructed variables in the structural equation model.

This more comprehensive approach to studying the role of the mass media in voting behavior proved to be instructive (see Figure 2), as will be demonstrated in later chapters. Employing both LISREL and Logit modelling techniques, hypothesized media effects did, indeed, materialize, even after controlling for the three demographic variables and for the three political variables. Further, the findings from the present research effort are consistent with various theoretical arguments that individuals use the mass media for different purposes, under different conditions. As such, the present findings will support the media dependency perspective that the role of the mass media is a contextual one.

Figure 1

Theoretical (Hypothesized) Causal Model of Mass Media Use, Voter Discrimination, and Difficulty of Decision in a U.S. Presidential Campaign



Note: Bold lines indicates hypothesized relationships, narrow lines indicate control relationships.

Figure 2

Conceptual Relationships, Constructed Endogenous Variables (including indexes), Theories that Underlie the Structural Equation Model Being Tested, and Classical Studies for Each Theory

Conceptual Relationships *(Constructed Endogenous Variables)*	***Constructed Variables*** *(Index for Constructed Variables)*	***Theories***	***Classic Studies***
1. Media use to ability to discriminate	Media use constructed from measures of one's use of: a. Television b. Radio c. Magazines d. Newspapers	1.1 Media dependency (goal attainment) 1.2 Agenda-setting 1.3 Passive learning	1.1.a Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976 1.1.b Ball-Rokeach, Rokeach & Grube, 1984 1.1.c Ball-Rokeach, 1985 1.2.a McCombs & Shaw, 1972, 1977 1.2.b Davidson & Parker, 1972 1.2.c Westley, 1976 1.2.d Patterson & McClure, 1976 1.2.e Weaver, et al., 1981 1.2.f Gandy, 1982 1.2.g Rogers & Dearing, 1987 1.3.a Krugman & Hartley, 1971 1.3.b Patterson & McClure, 1976 1.3.c McCombs & Shaw, 1977 1.3.d Zukin & Snyder, 1984
2. Ability to discriminate to media use	Ability to discriminate constructed from measures of absolute numbers of: a. Likes for Demo candidate b. Dislikes for Demo candidate c. Likes for Rep candidate d. Dislikes for Rep candidate e. Likes for Demo party f. Dislikes for Demo party g. Likes for Rep party h. Dislikes for Rep party	2.1 Media dependency (uses & gratifications) 2.2 Attitude centrality	2.1.a Katz, 1959 2.1.b Blumler & McQuail, 1969 2.1.c Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1973 2.2.a Krech & Crutchfield, 1948 2.2.b Sherif & Cantril, 1947 2.2.c Festinger, 1957 2.2.d Scott, 1968 2.2.e Krosnick, 1986
3. Ability to discriminate to difficulty of decision	Difficulty of decision constructed from measures of: a. Whether voted or not voted b. For those who voted, time of decision	3.1 Media dependency (goal attainment) 3.2 Agenda-setting 3.3 Attitude centrality	3.1 (See 1.1.a thru 1.1.c) 3.2 (See 1.2.a thru 1.2.g) 3.3 (See 2.2.a thru 2.2.e)

Evidence was found, for example, supporting the argument that individuals use the mass media for securing information necessary for being able to discriminate between candidates who are running for the same public office, and their respective political parties. This finding is perhaps best explained by the media dependency notion of powerful media that holds that the mass media are one's primary source for gaining access to information regarding candidates running for national office. A more comprehensive explanation results when the two additional theoretical perspectives are considered: **Agenda-setting** and **passive learning**. These findings and theoretical perspectives are discussed at length in subsequent sections of the dissertation.

Another finding indicates that even after one is able to discriminate between the two competing candidates for a given public office, the mass media continue to play an important role in determining one's political behavior. In explaining this finding it will be argued, however, that the role of the mass media changes from an information-seeking role before one is able to discriminate between the candidates, to one of attitude reinforcement after one is able to discriminate between them (particularly subsequent to making one's decision regarding how to vote). This explanation will be based primarily upon the "powerful audience" notion embedded in the **uses and gratifications** perspective (and is also accounted for in media dependency theory) that holds that individuals selectively enlist the mass media to reinforce existing attitudes and/or opinions. As before, a more comprehensive explanation is forthcoming when additional theoretical perspectives are considered. Such additional understanding materializes when the **theory of attitude centrality** is also incorporated into the explanation.

An additional finding was that indirect media effects (manifested through one's ability to discriminate between candidates) consistently materialized with regards to one's level of difficulty of deciding, first, whether or not to vote; and then, for those who decided to vote, who to vote for. This effect remained even after the direct effect of one's media use was controlled for. The present findings also made it clear that the more one discriminates between candidates running for the same office (and their respective political parties) the less difficult it is for one to decide who to vote for.

The research design included a component that was intended to establish an improved basis for generalizing the present findings to other types of state and national elections. One major difference between types of campaigns that could alter one's voting behavior is whether the campaign is perceived by the media and the electorate as being a close race or one-sided. It was posited that should one's decision-making process remain basically the same under both conditions, then it could be safely argued that the observed behavior would hold over other types of elections. In order to establish this argument, the present study used data from the 1976 presidential race between Gerald Ford (the incumbent) and Jimmy Carter (who won), representing a horse race; and then replicated the analysis using data from the 1984 presidential race between Ronald Reagan (the victorious incumbent) and Walter Mondale (the Democratic challenger), representing a landslide condition.

The research findings were, indeed, largely replicated in both types of elections, thus providing some evidence for their generalizability. Perhaps more important, is a finding that was not hypothesized a priori, yet that is extremely relevant to understanding media effects.

It was discovered that the mass media had a direct effect on one's decision to vote or not vote during the close race, but not in the landslide condition. This finding supports the notion that media effects are largely determined by the context in which the media consumer is functioning. This effect was in addition to the indirect impact of the mass media (through one's ability to discriminate between candidates) on an individual's decision of whether or not to vote and, for those who voted, one's time of decision (the difficulty of decision). A full explanation for this finding is included in the final chapter of this dissertation.

Until this point, the present dissertation is in concert with Ball-Rokeach, Rokeach and Grube's (1984:5) structural dependencies notion that it is most instructive to focus research regarding media effects on the media system as a whole, rather than upon specific media. "We must understand the general role of the media system within society and within individual lives before we can meaningfully address ourselves to dependencies on specific media" (Ball-Rokeach, Rokeach and Grube, 1985:5).

Understanding the role of the media system as a whole, however, does not negate the importance of understanding the role of the respective media that comprise the mass media. Such understanding is made possible in the present research effort due to the fact that the mass media variable in the structural equation model was constructed from measures of one's use of **television**, **radio**, **magazines**, and **newspapers** in one's political decision-making process. Therefore, following the analysis of media effects in the aggregate, each of the four media will be analyzed and compared with regards to its role in helping the individual discriminate between the candidates and their respective political parties.

Because a full theoretical explanation of the findings in the present study involves multiple intellectual disciplines, it is instructive to possess an historical

overview of political communications, which turns out to be a blending mostly of communication theory and political science. Chapter 2 is dedicated to presenting such an historical overview.

Each of the theoretical paradigms that are relevant to the present research effort is discussed in detail in Chapter 3, which concludes by presenting the specific hypotheses.

The research methodology is presented in Chapter 4. The focal point of Chapter 4 is a comprehensive discussion regarding each of the three endogenous (outcome) variables, including measurement issues, in the hypothesized structural equation model of voting behavior.

The findings of the present research effort are presented in Chapter 5. The findings discussed in Chapter 5 include both the 1976 and 1984 Presidential elections. Also included are the findings regarding differences between the four respective media (television, radio, magazines, and newspapers) that comprise the constructed mass media variable.

The present dissertation concludes with Chapter 6. This chapter presents a discussion of the findings of the present research effort and highlights the appropriate conclusions. A brief discussion regarding ways in which the present study can be replicated at some point in the future at lower levels of political decision-making (e.g., congressional and local elections) is included. The present dissertation ends with a call for future research, upon which the author plans to base his own future research agenda.

Chapter 2

UNDERSTANDING MEDIA EFFECTS: THE EMERGENCE OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATIONS

Through the years, the question of whether or not the mass media have direct effects on human behavior has been the locus of a great deal of research among scholars in various intellectual disciplines, especially among communication scholars and political scientists. Indeed, this issue played a major role in the emergence of political communications as a viable intellectual discipline. Today, this question remains a topic of concern and controversy among such other special interest groups as journalists, legislators, non-elected government officials, and the two major political parties that comprise America's political system.

Not surprisingly, much of the research in political communications has been concerned with assessing media effects on voting behavior (Blumler and McQuail, 1969; Shaw and McCombs, 1977; Weaver, 1977; Ball-Rokeach, Rokeach, and Grube, 1984). The literature regarding this general topic is voluminous (see Chaffee and Hochheimer, 1985; Nimmo and Sanders, 1981; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1981; Nie, Verba, and Petrocik, 1979; Chaffee, 1975).

2.1 **Early Perspectives:** *A Series of Non-rational Models*

Most scholars believe that, in his early work, Lasswell (1930, 1935) was arguing for a *hypodermic needle* model (or "bullet theory") in which the mass media had direct effects on human behavior and, in particular, on the decision-making process (e.g., Schramm, 1971; Davis and Baran, 1981; Dominick, 1983). Other researchers (e.g., Chaffee and Hochheimer, 1985) report little evidence of this position in Lasswell's writings. Regardless, it is clear that by the 1940s and into the 1950s that conventional wisdom had literally reversed

itself with most researchers who were studying media effects arguing that the mass media literally had no effects on human behavior.

Beginning with the now classical 1940 Erie County study, Lazarsfeld and his colleagues at Columbia University began arguing for a "limited effects" model in which media effects on human behavior did, indeed, materialize through a *two-step flow* process (Lazarsfeld et al., 1948; Berelson et al., 1954). According to this model of media effects, individuals relied more on the opinions of other individuals who they held in high esteem (referred to as "opinion leaders"), as opposed to the mass media, for information upon which to base their decisions (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955). These opinion leaders, in turn, relied heavily upon the mass media for their information. Therefore, the result was a two-step process in which the media had only minimal direct effects on the masses and much more indirect effects through opinion leaders. Even aggregated, they argued, the net result was only limited effects of the media on the masses. This school of thought became known as the "Columbia School."

In the 1950s, researchers at the University of Michigan's Survey Research Center initiated their own studies and began arguing that psychological factors (e.g., one's party identification and intensity of partisanship) were better predictors of voting behavior than were the Columbia School's sociological factors (e.g., demographic variables) (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1981). Out of this came a new school of thought, called the "Michigan School," in which another classical work emerged entitled: **The American Voter** (Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes, 1960). This perspective, too, held that voting behavior was a "non-rational" process (Herstein, 1985), in which having knowledge of one's political affiliation was often sufficient for predicting that individual's voting

behavior (Chaffee, 1981; Scott and Hrebenar, 1979; Nie, Verba, and Petrocik, 1979; Crotty and Jacobson, 1980).

Therefore, even though the Columbia School (Lazarsfeld et al., 1948; Berelson et al., 1954; McPhee and Glaser, 1962) and the Michigan School (Campbell et al., 1960) argued for different indicators of one's political behavior, both schools of thought held that one's voting patterns could be predicted by knowing one's political party affiliation. In other words, individuals simply voted along party lines.

This perspective was further reinforced by Klapper (1960) who identified three processes which he labelled: selective exposure, selective perception, and selective retention (Kraus and Davis, 1976; Chaffee and Hochheimer, 1985). According to the selective paradigm, people are inclined to expose themselves to messages (e.g., via the mass media) that coincide with their existing attitudes and beliefs, and to avoid those messages that do not. Likewise, individuals perceive these messages in accordance with these predispositions and, for the most part, remember only those that fall within these perceptions. As noted above, researchers argued that political predispositions are reflected, and often influenced, by their respective political party.

In their efforts to more fully explain how the minimal effects perspective operated, researchers soon rallied around a somewhat broader paradigm (Severin and Tankard, 1979) called "uses and gratifications" (Blumler and McQuail, 1969; Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch, 1973, 1974). The uses and gratifications paradigm holds that consumers of the media use the media in ways, and for purposes, that are self-gratifying. Therefore, media effects may be difficult to detect largely because these effects serve to reinforce existing attitudes and behaviors.

The uses and gratifications paradigm was first described by Katz (1959) in answer to a charge by Berelson (1954) that the field of communications research was either dead or dying (in Severin and Tankard, 1979). Since then, this paradigm has been the focus of much research (e.g., Atkin, 1973; Katz, Gurevitch, and Haas, 1973; McCombs and Weaver, 1973; McLeod and Becker, 1981). Even today, when researchers are once again arguing that the mass media have direct effects, the uses and gratifications paradigm lives on.

2.2 **New Politics:** *A Rational Model of Voting Behavior*

Conventional wisdom regarding the role of the mass media in political decision-making owes its roots in no small measure to a concept called the "new politics." New politics represents a move away from a non-rational perspective of voting behavior and toward a **rational** perspective. Rational behavior is defined as being a cognitive process in which behavioral decisions under one's own control as opposed to one's behavior being a product of his or her personality characteristics or demographics.

"New politics" is a term which describes the observed decline of partisanship in the United States (Crotty and Jacobson, 1980; Harmel and Janda, 1982; Ippolito and Walker, 1980; Kleppner, 1982; Nie, Verba and Petrocik, 1979; Scott and Hrebenar, 1979; Sorauf, 1980). So pronounced is the phenomenon called new politics that some scholars consider it the single most dramatic political change in American politics in the past two decades (e.g., Nie, Verba, and Petrocik, 1979). Political scientists and political communication scholars attribute this movement to three factors:

(1) Changing attitudes towards the political system (Abramson, 1983; Nie, Verba, and Petrocik, 1979), resulting in increased political skepticism (Klepp-ner, 1982; Sorauf, 1980).

(2) The introduction of the mass media in society (Chaffee, 1981; Wattenberg, 1982; Linsky, 1986; Rogers and Dearing, 1987) thus giving voters a source other than their respective party for securing political information.

(3) The introduction of new computer technologies into the political system (Sorauf, 1980; Wattenberg, 1982), giving elected officials, candidates for office, and campaign managers faster and less costly methods for communicating with the electorate, such as creating and maintaining stratified mailing lists for fund raising and other promotional activities.

While there are various paradigms which attempt to explain this shift to a more rational behavior in political decision-making (e.g., Shapiro, 1969; Enelow and Hinich, 1982; Fishbein and Coombs, 1974; see Herstein, 1985), they all more or less resemble Downs' (1957) cost benefit (economic) model. "Issues" enter into the equation. People have attitudes regarding certain issues (e.g., inflation, national pride) and vote for the individual whom they believe will be most effective (from their viewpoint) in handling these issues.

The changing attitudes and subsequent change in voting behavior found in the American electorate during this present era of new politics are attributable to a number of additional social and political factors. These include: (1) the electorate itself is better educated, more affluent, more sophisticated and, in general, younger (Scott and Hrebener, 1979; Harmel and Janda, 1982); (2) the appearance and increasing importance of new issues which caught the public's attention and penetrated into their personal lives (e.g., quality of life issues, environment issues) (Nie, Verba, and Petrocik, 1979); (3) the growing disillusionment with the electoral process, especially among younger voters, resulting in an increased number of independent voters. The Viet Nam War, Watergate, and similar events caused many American voters to eventually turn off to politics (Crotty and Jacobson, 1980; Kleppner, 1982).

Whereas voters in the 1940s and 1950s made up their minds in terms of (1) party, (2) group affiliation, (3) candidates, and (4) issues -- in that order; today's voter decides more on the basis of candidate preferences and issues (Scott and Hrebener, 1979). Crotty and Jacobson (1980) argue that party does play a small role in today's voting, but only in cases of uncertainty regarding candidate support issues.

As noted above, the mass media have played a vital role in the development of the era called "new politics." Television, in fact, has been called the "new political God" (Crotty and Jacobson, 1980:6), having become the electorate's chief source of information and influence in voting behavior. Without the mass media, candidates and elected officials have little incentive to operate independent of the party, regardless of the party's status. However, with the mass media (and the new computer technologies) providing this crucial link to the electorate, the American electoral scene is literally being reshaped (Wattenberg, 1982).

2.3 **Contemporary Perspective:** *Information Processing (Cognitive) Paradigms*

Some scholars argue (e.g., Miller and Miller, 1977) that in order for voting behavior to be fully understood both the rational and non-rational factors must be taken into account, as well as their interactions. Still other scholars hold that accounting for both the rational and non-rational forms of voting behavior is not sufficient for gaining such understanding. Many of these researchers, for example, argue that the key to understanding mass media effects specifically, and voting behavior in general, is embedded within the information processing perspective.

Well over a decade ago, O'Keefe (1975:141) wrote, "Despite the wealth of data on voting, little attention has been paid directly to relationships between decision processes of voters and corresponding communication behavior." While concepts rooted in the psychology of cognition have been making their way more and more into the political communication literature, few attempts have been made to apply such thinking to the specific realm of voter decision-making (Carter, 1965; Chaffee et al., 1969; Atkin, 1973; Edelstein, 1973, 1975).

Perhaps this line of thinking was expressed best by Krause (1985:293): "We know a good deal about media's impact on the social and political behavior of individuals. But although we know more and more about media effects we seem to know less (and less) about how individuals take the information they receive from other individuals and the mass media, how they **think** about it (author's emphasis), change or accept it, and finally arrive at a conclusion that prompts their actions."

The information processing perspective sees the voter as playing a far more active role in the process of reality construction (Perloff and Kraus, 1985). Specifically, those who hold to an information processing perspective argue that the decision-making process begins with the acquisition of information, which is either sought out or acquired incidentally. Researchers have found, however, that people use only a limited amount of the information that is readily available to them (Graber, 1984) in making their decisions (e.g., how to vote). In accounting for this, Newell and Simon (1972) and Miller (1956) stress that humans are severely limited (cognitively) in the amount of information they can process. In voting, for example, Herstein (1985) argues that individuals base most decisions on only three to five pieces of information which the individual considers to be most important.

If individuals are so severely limited in their information processing capacity, then one must ask what, if any, impact this inherent (physiological) cognitive processing restraint has regarding media effects during the political decision-making process. On the surface, the above information processing notion implies that the media have only minimal effects.

An enlightening explanation appears to rest within a traditional concept in social psychology called a Theory of Attitude Centrality (see Krosnick, 1986). This theoretical perspective holds that people attend to information that is closely associated with their central attitudes. Such attitudes, of course, develop slowly over time, are often extreme, and are resistant to change. "These [central] attitudes tend to be frequent subjects of conscious thought and conversation with others. They focus attention on relevant information in one's environment (e.g., through the mass media)..." (Krosnick 1986:139). For this reason, highly central attitudes are likely to have a strong influence on information processing. But the question remains: What kinds of influences are these, particularly with regard to the effects of the mass media on political decision-making?

At first glance, the attitude centrality perspective appears to reinforce two paradigms briefly discussed earlier: uses and gratifications and the selective process (exposure, perception, and retention). In other words, individuals use the media in ways that are self-gratifying, which results in people: (1) voluntarily exposing themselves mostly to information that reinforces existing (central) attitudes, or (2) perceiving and selectively retaining information they come in contact with through their daily routines within the context of these pre-existing attitudes. Clearly, this attitude reinforcement process does account for some portion of the known media effects in political behavior. Limiting oneself to such an interpretation, however, would be grossly misleading. The role of the

mass media in voting behavior is far more complex than a purely uses and gratifications-based perspective can account for.

Most contemporary researchers agree. For example, Schoenback and Weaver (1985:172-173) argue that no single behavioral model is sufficient for explaining the role that the mass media play in voting behavior. "There seem to be different conditions under which different models provide the best possible explanation, rendering it rather pointless to push either the stimulus-response approach or the uses and gratifications model as the only way to describe the process of media effects."

Regardless of the respective model a given contemporary researcher argues for, most support the notion that voting behavior is an **interactive** process (e.g., Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur, 1976; DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach, 1982; Ball-Rokeach et al., 1984; Graber, 1984; Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch, 1974; Kraus and Perloff, 1985). In arguing for a media dependency perspective, for example, Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur (1976) hold that cognitive, affective, and behavioral effects are a result of an interactive ("tripartite") relationship among three components: The audience, the media, and the consumer's respective society. Similarly, proponents of the **transactional paradigm** see mass media effects as being a by-product of the interaction, which they call "transaction," of three similar components: Message factors, audience factors, and context factors (see Graber, 1984).

It is this interaction characteristic that has led to "political communications" gaining acceptance as a viable intellectual discipline, as opposed to remaining a subset of the more traditional discipline of political science. "Political outputs are the result of human interaction, and the medium through which this interaction occurs is communication" (Meadow, 1980:6). Meadow acknowledged that political

science does, indeed, deal with human interaction and political institutions; however, he argues that political scientists do so only in terms of processes and outputs. "The exchange of messages per se in the processes is of less importance than the social and institutional framework, which allows the communication relationship to be established or the policy outputs to follow from the exchange (Meadow, 1980:5)." While stressing that certain interdisciplinary-minded political scientists have, indeed, made meaningful contributions to communications theory and research, "...On the whole, the discipline has not (to date) considered political communication adequately" (Meadow, 1980:5). As a result, much of the progress made to date in understanding the communication processes that are imbedded in one's political behavior (e.g., the role of the mass media in voting) have been left to communication scholars. Both the media dependency and the transactional perspectives noted above, for example, are only two of many competing paradigms in which communication scholars are attempting to explain the role of the mass media with regard to such phenomena as voting behavior.

Finally, with respect to developing a comprehensive understanding of the role of the mass media in voting behavior (which is the primary focus of this dissertation) the media dependency perspective appears to have a specific characteristic that renders it particularly useful for gaining such an understanding this process. That is, the media dependency paradigm appears to encompass, and even subsume, many of the other theoretical paradigms that contribute to achieving this goal. Accordingly, the theoretical underpinnings of this dissertation are highly influenced by the **media dependency** perspective.

Chapter 3

A MEDIA DEPENDENCY PERSPECTIVE

3.1 Media Dependency Theory

> *...The degree of audience dependence on media information is a key variable in understanding when and why media messages alter audience beliefs, feelings, or behavior* (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976:5).

Media dependency theory grew out of the notion that, "...When it comes to 'staying in touch with the world,' there are few, if any, functional alternatives to the media system for the average American" (Ball-Rokeach, 1985:496-97). Ball-Rokeach (1985:489) argued further that, "...Individuals are born into societies where the media system has, through its resources and relations with other social systems, a range of information/communication roles. It is that range of media roles that sets the range of **potential** (the present author's emphasis) media dependencies of individuals." For example, when one is unable to interpret what is happening in one or more salient aspects of his or her social environs (e.g., one's personal life, the nation, the world), "pervasive ambiguity" sets in (Ball-Rokeach, 1973, in Ball-Rokeach, 1985). In an effort to reduce such ambiguity, individuals seek information from whatever sources are useful and available. Media dependency is hightened when, "...the media system is perceived to be the 'best' or, in fact, is the primary information system available" (Ball-Rokeach, 1985:500).

Media dependency theory holds that an individual's dependency on the media system is the product of five macrolevel and microlevel factors

(Ball-Rokeach, Rokeach, & Grube, 1984:3-4): (1) **structural factors**, the pattern of the media's interdependent relations with political, economic, and other systems; (2) **contextual factors**, the nature of the social environment within which individuals and social groups act, particularly the extent to which the social environment is threatening, predictable, and interpretable; (3) **media factors**, the nature and quality of the media system's activities in constructing, and defining the utility of, its messages; (4) **interpersonal network factors**, the ways in which interpersonal networks shape individuals' media-relevant expectations and motivations; and (5) **individual factors**, the individual's goals that may be served by media use. "These factors constitute a cluster of sociological and psychological variables that interact with one another to create both the type and the intensity of an individual's dependencies on the media system. Once established, media system dependencies are conceived to have consequences for an individual's selective exposure decision and, then, for the effects of such exposure on cognitions and behaviors" (Ball-Rokeach, Rokeach, & Grube:4). Ball-Rokeach (1985) argues further that one will gain a far more comprehensive understanding of mass communications effects by taking these variables into account individually, interactively, and systematically.

A media dependency perspective, therefore, can prove to be particularly useful, since it explains how an individual might use the media in somewhat of an objective fashion during the information-seeking phase of decision-making (e.g., gathering information on which to base one's decision of how to vote), but use the mass media in a totally different manner (attitude reinforcement) once the individual has made one's decision regarding how to vote.

This component of the individual's use of the mass media is embedded in the notion that **goal attainment** is at the base of how one utilizes the mass media.

"The individual is assumed to be a rational problem solver whose main motivation is to obtain information, information that is anticipated to be useful for attaining one or another personal goal. [However,] because goals and such perceptions vary greatly from one person to another, we cannot assume that all persons will exhibit the same media system dependencies" (Ball-Rokeach, Rokeach, & Grube, 1984:6). The authors stress that both the nature and level of one's media dependency vary according to specific *contextual* or situational factors that stem from one's goals and priorities and these are contingent upon the media's capacity to (1) create and gather, (2) process, and (3) disseminate information that is perceived as being necessary for attaining one's goals (Ball-Rokeach, 1985).

In sum, scholars holding a media dependency perspective hypothesize that one's dependency on the media affects three factors that play intervening roles in the effects process. The greater the media dependency: (1) the greater the level of **attention** during exposure, (2) the greater the level of **affect** toward the message and its senders, and (3) the greater the likelihood of **postexposure** communication about the message -- and, thus, the greater probability of **message effects**, intended or unintended.

3.2 Agenda-Setting

> *...Individuals learn information from the mass media about which agenda items are more important than others; this task is accomplished by the mass media, even though these media are much less capable, research shows, of changing directly attitudes and opinions* (Rogers & Dearing, 1987:69).

If goal attainment is at the base of determining one's level of media dependency, as argued by the creators of the media dependency paradigm, then having an understanding of how individuals establish these goals is essential to gaining a comprehensive understanding of the role that the mass media play in such political behavior as voting. One might ask, for example: How much does a given individual rely upon the mass media for determining (1) What to think about?; and, once determined, (2) How to think about these things? In other words, what role do the media play in setting an individual's agenda?

Perhaps a more controversial and sensitive area of concern, in terms of understanding media effects, is: Can the mass media literally alter one's belief system (i.e., change one's opinions and/or attitudes, thus potentially altering one's behavior)?

These kinds of questions have been addressed by mass media researchers studying a phenomenon called *agenda-setting*. Rogers and Dearing (1987) pointed out that while the public does rely on the mass media as a primary information resource, especially regarding political matters, it is not at all clear that the mass media play a particularly influential role in terms of shaping or altering one's attitudes and/or beliefs.

It is interesting to note, however, that some researchers have found a positive correlation between the amount of media exposure a candidate for public office receives and the amount of public support the candidate receives (Davidson & Parker, 1972). Other researchers (e.g., Weaver, Graber, McCombs & Chain, 1981) found that the mass media impact both voter evaluations and cognitive images of candidates running for public office (reported in Rogers & Dearing, 1987). Iyengar and Kinder (in Kraus, 1985:313) report that television news, "...Alters the public sense of national priorities." Each of these findings is in

keeping with the agenda-setting hypothesis that, "...Suggests (for a defined period) a positive relationship between what the media report and the issues believed to be important by the public" (Kraus, 1985:309).

The danger that underlies this notion, of course, is that if it turns out that the media, indeed, establish the public's agenda (e.g., that of the registered voters), then it could make relatively unimportant items salient at the time of (voters') decision (Kraus, 1985). Yet, as cited at the outset of this section, contemporary wisdom holds that there is little threat to the general public of being unknowingly influenced (either intentionally or unintentionally) by the media's agenda.

How, then, does the conclusion that the media do not markedly influence one's decisions regarding how to vote square with the media dependency paradigm?

The answer is embedded in the notion (introduced in Chapter 2) that there exists a tripartite interaction between the audience, the mass media, and the respective society; and especially between the agendas of the mass media and the media consumer. "The agenda-setting function may be symbiotic; the public's beliefs and actions, and the media's portrayal of events may affect each others' priorities" (Kraus, 1985:313). Media dependency scholars note that, "Neither the media nor the political system could survive and prosper without fundamental cooperation of the other; cooperation based on mutuality or central dependencies" (Ball-Rokeach, 1985:492).

Mass media scholars argue further that it is this interdependence between the political system and the mass media that shapes how individuals can and do depend on media resources (Blumler & McQuail, 1969; Shaw & McCombs, 1977; Patterson, 1980; Ball-Rokeach, 1985). "Individual politicians or citizens may not

like this state of affairs and may even distrust the media, but to the extent that they are involved in elections, interest group activities, movements, and other political matters, they must depend to a considerable extent on the information resources of the media system" (Ball-Rokeach, 1985:492).

Researchers are moving from seeing the "audience" as being the primary unit of analysis to seeing the "individual" as the primary unit of analysis. "We have done so because we do not believe either that the mass audience acts as a coordinated unit vis-a-vis the media or that the audience as such controls resources or has shared goals that are necessary to meaningful analysis of dependency relations. It is the individual, rather than the audience, who has ongoing dependency relations with the media system, relations that are asymmetric rather than symmetric: individuals have goals that are contingent on the information resources of the media, but media system goals are not directly contingent on the resources of any particular individual" (Ball-Rokeach, Rokeach, & Grube, 1984:5).

The question remains, therefore: If the major role of the mass media is to provide information to individuals, then what determines the types of information a given individual will chose to attend to? The answer appears to be in keeping with the media dependency paradigm: "People seek out and attend to those messages which have relevancy for them" (Rogers & Dearing, 1987:48). Perloff (1985) reports that such behavior has been found in a number of laboratory experiments in recent years (e.g., Chaiken, 1980; Petty & Cacioppo, 1984; Petty et al., 1981). And, while most scholars hold that there is little threat of the mass media altering one's belief system, they do admit that media can, under certain conditions, alter one's opinion(s) and/or behavior. For example, "Even if individuals initially disagree with the position being advocated (in a media

message), they may change their minds about the issue, provided the message contains enough compelling arguments to convince them that it is in their self-interest to adopt the advocated position" (Perloff, 1985:178).

Researchers studying these issues have identified two major determinants of the types of information that individuals will attend to: (1) topics that an individual has been exposed to previously either through their respective interpersonal network or via the mass media; and (2) issues that are perceived to be important to the members of one's interpersonal network.

Some scholars believe that this latter factor (interpersonal networks) is an all-important determinant of media effects on voting behavior. Sheingold (1973:715), for example, argued: "(Personal) network attributes may be more important than individual attributes in determining the likelihood of new information reaching an individual." Ball-Rokeach (1985:502) sees interpersonal networks playing different, but equally important, role in one's media use habits: "...The 'agenda' of interpersonal discourse shapes the individual's media-dependency relation by affecting the individual's personal goals. In turn, we assume that the interpersonal discourse is, to some degree, shaped by the message foci of the media system. Thus, we seek to bring the interpersonal networks into the 'agenda-setting' hypotheses (Shaw & McCombs, 1977; Gandy, 1982) as a key intervening variable between the media system and the individual."

Ball-Rokeach (1985) offers an overall conceptual rubric for identifying the **determinants** of the nature of one's dependency on the media system for information upon which to formulate one's attitudes (e.g., toward political candidates and issues) and decisions (e.g., how to vote). These determinants can be identified by asking the following six questions:

1. Is there a discernible media system within the society(ies) under investigation? If the answer to the first question is yes, then,

2. What structural dependency relations exist, and how do they bear upon the availability of functional alternatives to the media?

3. For the population(s) at issue, what levels of ambiguity and threat are present in salient social environs?

4. What are the foci of messages disseminated by the media?

5. What are the discourse foci of interpersonal networks?

6. Ask the individual: What are the structural locations and what are their personal goals?

"These six questions incorporate the determinants of individual-level media-system dependencies, determinants that should vary in explanatory power relative to the specific focus on an inquiry" (Ball-Rokeach, 1985:506).

3.3 The Theory of Attitude Centrality

> ...*People pay attention to only a small amount of the available information* (Graber, 1984:2).

Assuming Graber is correct, and assuming further that the average voter indeed relies on the mass media for securing the majority of his or her political information upon which to formulate opinions and base one's political decisions (a media dependency perspective), then even minor media effects can have major implications with regard to the media consumers' attitude formation and ultimate voting decisions. This possibility is of obvious concern to political candidates, policymakers in both the public and private sectors, and scholars alike.

A useful theoretical paradigm for gaining further insight into the intensity of potential media effects is one that comes from the tradition of social psychology called the theory of attitude centrality. According to this theory, new information, more often than not, will have only "limited effects" on one's political attitudes and voting behavior, mostly due to the fact that the majority of one's opinions and behaviors are based on long-standing **central attitudes** that are inherently robust. Arguing that "policy attitudes" are key predictors of how one votes, Krosnick (1986:4) holds that such highly central attitudes, "...Are likely to involve stronger affective reactions, to be highly accessible (to one's self for basing decisions upon), ...to be bolstered by relatively large volumes of schematically-structured knowledge, to be consistent with (one's) other attitudes and basic values, and to be resistant to change." Graber (1984:3) provided further reinforcement of this perspective. "As the years go by, most people accumulate a substantial backlog of information about the nature of political campaigns and even about various candidates. This permits them to use new information largely as a filler and fresher for the perceptions that have been previously developed." Other researchers reported similar findings (Lau & Eber, 1985; Hastie, 1981; Taylor & Crocker, 1981; Rumelhart & Ortony, 1977).

Krosnick (1986:140) argued further that, in fact, an individual's central attitudes are so robust as to be among the most powerful of all predictors of how one will vote. He believed that, "...High centrality attitudes are a useful basis for predicting citizens' votes, even over and above the implications of party affiliation, location in the social structure (as defined by demographic variables), ideological principles, and assessments of [the] incumbent's performance."

On its surface, portions of attitude centrality perspective may appear to contradict the media dependency paradigm. For example, a fundamental

component of media dependency is goal attainment, which could be seen as being synonymous to self-interest motivations. Proponents of the theory of attitude centrality argue that these motivations play a lesser role in determining political attitudes and behaviors than one's central attitudes. Upon closer reflection, however, the attitude centrality perspective fits nicely into the media dependency perspective.

Krosnick (1986:138-139) saw the United States as being an, "...Amalgamation of issue publics who share salient points of view on specific topics. Members of these issue publics [e.g., the Sierra Club or the John Birch Society] share common characteristics and their attitudes toward the respective common issue(s) are extreme. These [central] attitudes tend to be frequent subjects of conscious thought and conversation with others. They focus attention on relevant information in one's environment, leading each individual to attend to an ideosyncratic set of the nation's information flow." Membership in such issue publics tend to inspire individuals to become involved in such activities as giving money to political (or other) organizations and to write letters to government officials expressing their points of view.

The mass media do indeed play an important role within these special interest groups. Traditionally, however, the role is one of reinforcement of existing attitudes, which operates through a "selective" process as opposed to the more "objective" process of information-seeking. Nonetheless, members of these issue publics rely heavily upon the mass media both for gaining access to much of the information they need for initiating discussions regarding their respective interest area(s), and for promoting their point(s) of view to the public at large. Further, the theory of attitude centrality supports the conventional thinking of scholars studying agenda-setting who, as noted in the previous section of the

dissertation, argue that there is little danger of the mass media altering individuals' attitudes to any significant degree.

3.4 **Passive Learning**

> *The mere absence of resistance, rather than the presence of motivation and purposive involvement, is all that is necessary for learning to occur* (Zukin & Snyder, 1984:629).

Communication scholars studying media effects have traditionally focused primarily on such theoretical paradigms as agenda-setting, uses and gratifications, the selectivity process, etc. All of these theoretical paradigms assume some amount of effort on the media consumers' part for seeking out information they believe to be important or relevant to their goals. However, there is yet another, perhaps more subtle, concept that clearly explains some portion of the variance in accounting for media effects. This phenomenon is called **passive learning.**

As stated above, this theoretical paradigm stems from the notion that "learning" takes place when one is simply exposed to information. This learning takes place whether or not this information is sought by the individual(s) being exposed to it, and whether or not one even has a desire to attain the specific knowledge being presented about a given topic (Krugman and Hartley, 1971; McCombs & Shaw, 1977; Zukin & Snyder, 1984; Cozzens, 1987). Its relevance is further highlighted in the cognitive and political campaign literature where it is argued that, "...very little effort is needed to block or avoid unwanted information (e.g., Berelson et al., 1954; Graber, 1984; Klapper, 1960; Lazarsfeld et al., 1944; Lachman et al., 1979" (in Kraus, 1985:305).

Passive learning was demonstrated by Becker and Dunwordy (1982) who found compelling evidence of a link between one's use of the media and his or her knowledge of public affairs (also see Kaid, 1981; in Cozzens, 1987). This form of learning also accounts for much of the effect of political advertising (Patterson & McClure, 1976), which turns out to be awareness of campaign issues and candidate positions on issues (in Cozzens, 1987).

This indirect form of learning is particularly relevant to gathering knowledge regarding political matters. Greenberg (1975) demonstrated passive learning when he studied a group of college students (in Chaffee, 1981). The students were asked to keep notes on conversations they had overheard in public places. Of the conversation involving political issues, 76 percent included references to the media, whereas only 40 percent of the conversations on other topics referred to media.

Today's media-saturated environment is inherently conducive to such learning. "The tremendous expansion of the information environment over the past two decades, coupled with habitual exposure to local and national television news, has fostered a climate in which passive learning can flourish" (Zukin & Snyder, 1984:630).

3.5 Differences Among the Respective Media

> *...newspapers and other printed media (e.g., magazines) require more physical and mental effort to use than do television and radio* (Schoenback & Weaver, 1985:160).

Katz (1980:124) argued that, "Newspapers (and other print media, such as news magazines) are more important than television for people who care about politics...." The print media are undoubtedly perceived as being more important to concerned individuals than are the electronic media due, in large part, to the fact that these media are better able to provide more detailed information regarding the candidates and issues at hand. As a result, the more concerned voter is undoubtedly more willing to go to the extra effort (noted above by Schoenback and Weaver) than is required to use the print media.

Katz's position does not appear, however, to square with a subsequent observation made by Iyenger and Kinder (1985:135): "By a wide margin, Americans believe that television -- not newspapers, radio, or magazines -- provides the most intelligent, complete, and impartial news coverage (Bower, 1983). This conclusion has been mirrored by other scholars. For example, Dreyer and Rosenbaum (1976) pointed out that since 1963, television has consistently been rated by American citizens as being their primary and most believable source of news. In fact, they argue that only about half as many individuals consider newspapers as their most believable media, and further, that only 20 percent of those interviewed found any other source to be useful or believable for seeking out political information.

While these two positions appear to contradict one another, it is likely that they are both accurate. The key to clarification may lie within the words: "for people who care about politics...." The majority of Americans simply may not be very interested in politics. Therefore, those few individuals (relative to the general public, or even the electorate) who do care about politics probably do (as Katz suggests) rely largely upon the print media for gathering political

information; while the majority of people in America look to television for their political information.

The above conclusion is further supported by findings that show that those who are better **educated** (Bush, 1967; Quarles, 1979; Becker & Whitney, 1980; Miller & Asp, 1985), earn higher **incomes** (O'Keefe, 1975); the better **informed** (Kraus, 1985), and those who are more **interested** (Miller & Asp, 1985) and/or **highly involved** (Miller & Asp, 1985; Perloff, 1985) in politics rely heavily upon the print media (e.g., newspapers and magazines) for their political information, as opposed to television. Clearly, individuals with these characteristics are likely to be more interested in the political process.

The obvious concern this conclusion brings out was perhaps best expressed by Iyenger and Kinder (1985:135): "As Americans have welcomed Rather, Brokaw, and Jennings into their homes, they have made themselves vulnerable to a powerful influence."

One reason that television plays such an important role in the dissemination of political information to the masses is that it is perceived by most as having access to experts for securing accurate information. This characteristic is called source credibility (see McGuire, 1981, for a thorough discussion regarding source credibility). "Expert and trustworthy sources exert more influence than inexpert, untrustworthy sources" (Iyengar & Kinder, 1985:118). Further, the impact of television news is also due to an inherent emotional component which often results in the viewer feeling the news. "The vivid pictures and dramatic stories that are the networks' standard fare may evoke strong emotions in viewers...Merely feelings of anger, sadness, or fear may cause viewers to alter their political judgements (Zajonc, 1979; 1984)" (cited in Iyengar & Kinder, 1985:119).

In reporting findings from earlier work (Robinson, 1975, 1976; Robinson & Zukin, 1976; and Robinson, 1977), Becker and Whitney (1980:96) wrote: "...Television dependence is associated with political cynicism, political inefficacy, partisan disloyalty and acceptance of third-party candidates, and misperceptions of candidate strength."

There are other noteworthy differences between the print and broadcast media that affect their respective roles in the political decision-making process. Becker and Whitney, (1980:97) wrote, for example, "...newspapers were superior to television in informing people about such things as the assets and liabilities to political contenders in election races...while television focuses more on the peripheral aspects of the news, often as a result of its search for exciting visuals (Harney & Stone, 1969; Lowry, 1971; Wamsley & Pride, 1972; Epstein, 1973; Frank, 1973; Lefever, 1974; Carey, 1976; Meadow, 1976; Patterson & McClure, 1976; Patterson, 1977; Robinson & McPherson, 1977; Hofstetter & Zukin, 1979)."

Robinson (1975) argued further that television news is more negative and conflictual than newspaper news, and is artificially balanced to present both sides of issues even when the two sides are clearly unequal (in Becker & Whitney, 1980). "Problems are emphasized at the expense of solutions...and national issues are given more attention than local problems" (Becker & Whitney, 1980:98).

Having a comprehensive understanding of the different role each of the respective media play in political decision-making requires an understanding of the determinants of one's use of one medium over another medium (e.g., television, radio, newspapers, magazines). Becker and Whitney (1980:99) argued for a media dependency explanation: "Audience members are dependent on a given medium to the extent they have needs which are being fulfilled by the medium." Indeed, a great deal of research has been conducted through the years

to identify and understand the operational properties of these media use determinants.

Several of these determinants were, of course, identified above. These include: Level of education, level of interest and involvement in politics, and how well informed one is. Another determinant of one's media use habits is age. For example, while older people tend to rely more than younger individuals upon newspapers for securing their political information (Becker & Whitney, 1980); when younger people do turn to the newspaper, they seem to do so for some specific reason (as opposed to habit) and, therefore, they tend to acquire more information from newspaper accounts than do older people (Quarles, 1979). "Unlike network news, newspapers appear to inform their young audience. The newspaper's major problem (however) appears to be in attracting this (younger) audience" (Quarles, 1979:434).

Magazine usage operates much like newspaper usage, even though relatively little has been written about magazine usage. Dryer and Rosenbaum (1976:153) acknowledged, however, "The small group of magazine readers possess strikingly different political characteristics from those of the audiences of other media. Those who rely principally on magazines ranked higher than other media group in willingness to express opinions on issues and in disposition to appraise government performance on the issues. They also followed the campaigns through other media and tended to be much more active in politics than other media users" (see Key, 1961).

Very little has been written to date about the effects on political decision-making of media messages delivered via direct mail, telephone banks, and the like. However, with the relatively recent introduction into society of the

new communication technologies (e.g., personal computers, videotext, intelligent telephones), future research efforts should include such media outlets as well.

3.6 Hypotheses

> *What is needed now is a new way to view the voter: A paradigm that can account for both the rational and nonrational aspects of the voting process* (Herstein,1985:24).

As noted in Chapter 2, Miller and Miller (1977) argued that in order for today's voting behavior to be fully understood, both rational and nonrational factors must be taken into account, as well as their possible interactions. This notion was reinforced by Sheingold (1973:716) when he wrote: "If the political dynamics of elections vary (over time), is it not likely that the dynamics of the decision-making process lying behind voting also vary with differences in historical situations?" Sheingold believed that it is this simple point that initially brought into question the findings of both the Columbia and Michigan schools of thought, since these studies were conducted during a stable phase of American political history.

As stressed at the outset of the present dissertation, perhaps the key to building such a dynamic voting behavior model is to incorporate into the model dependent variables other than the traditional "act of voting" itself. O'Keefe (1975) spoke precisely to this issue when he argued that researchers, in addition to voting, should begin studying such political behavior as one's "use of the mass media" in their decision-making process (e.g., deciding how to vote), one's "time of decision" with respect to such behavior, and the "level of difficulty" one experiences in arriving at his or her decision.

It is in keeping with this line of thinking that the voting behavior model being tested here was derived (as was shown in Figure 1). As the theoretical model shows, all three outcomes (media use, discrimination between candidates, and one's level of difficulty in coming to a decision of how to vote) have been incorporated as endogenous variables.

The primary focus of this dissertation is to gain a richer understanding of the role the mass media play in determining one's political behavior. In an effort to address this issue in an instructive manner, the theoretical model was designed to specifically focus on: First, the role the mass media play on one's ability to discriminate between candidates running for the same office (and their respective political parties); and, in turn, how one's ability to discriminate between the candidates and their respective parties impacts the level of difficulty one experiences in deciding who to vote for. In this light, the structural equation model was designed to test the following hypotheses (as will be shown in Figure 3; also, see Addendum A):

> H-1: The more one uses the mass media for gathering information regarding political candidates running for the same public office, the more one will be able to discriminate between the candidates and their respective political parties.[1]
>
> H-2 The more one discriminates between candidates running for the same public office, and their respective political parties, the less difficult it will be to decide for whom to vote.

The role of the mass media, including their potential effects, on voting behavior have been discussed here in some detail. The need for including media use in any meaningful decision-making model of contemporary voting behavior is clear.

Figure 3

Theoretical Basis for Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3

Theoretical Explanations

Hypothesis 1

- Media Dependency (goal attainment)
- Agenda-setting
- Passive Learning

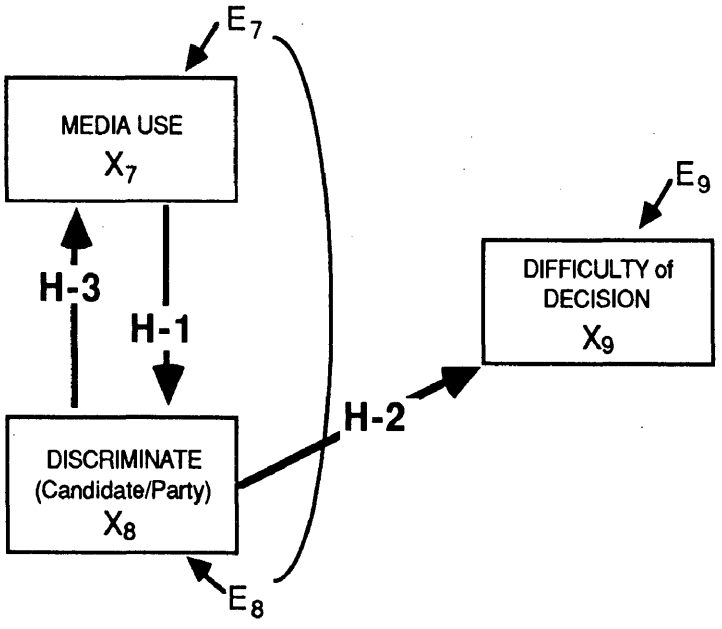
Hypothesis 2

- Media Dependency (goal attainment)
- Agenda-setting
- Attitude Centrality

Hypothesis 3

- Media Dependency (uses & grats)
- Attitude Centrality

Empirical Model



Researchers have identified several determinants of one's level of difficulty in deciding how to vote. O'Keefe (1975), for example, argued for the following determinants: (1) the number of alternatives facing the decision-maker, (2) the number of discriminating attributes between alternatives (e.g., competing candidates for a respective office), (3) a lack or excess of information, (4) a felt importance of the decision in terms of its consequences, and (5) how public one's decision regarding how to vote will be. The level of difficulty one experiences in deciding how to vote can, indeed, manifest itself in different ways. For example, Chaffee (1981) pointed out that one possible outcome as being a decision to simply not vote at all.

One's level of difficulty in how to vote is often reflected by when (during the campaign) an individual actually makes the decision regarding who to vote for. This notion is supported by O'Keefe (in Roberts, 1979:795) when he wrote: "People who spend little time reading about a political campaign or discussing it are also likely to remain undecided late in the campaign, and to report difficulty in making a decision."

The majority of voters, however, apparently make their decisions regarding how to vote early in the campaign; and, therefore, do not experience a great deal of difficulty in deciding who to vote for (at least at the national level as opposed to local level of politics). Dreyer and Rosenbaum (1976) argued that between one-half to two-thirds of the eventual voters make their candidate choice for president before the nominating conventions conclude.

Subsequent to making one's decision, the mass media (and other campaign-related materials) play a different role for individuals who decide early. "If voters decide early in the campaign, their exposure to campaign-related media will be primarily limited to searching out and reacting to materials that will be

supportive of, or that will justify, their earlier decisions" (O'Keefe, 1975:137). O'Keefe also noted that these individuals become rather dogmatic about their choices.

One's **time of decision** during the campaign period has additional implications to voting behavior. Weaver et al. (1981, in Garramone, 1985) found that members of the electorate are more interested in the personal characteristics of the candidates early in the campaign, while becoming more interested in the issue positions during the latter days of the campaign period. As such, "...political information provided at the end of a campaign may be processed somewhat differently than political information provided at the beginning of the campaign" (Garramone, 1985:216). For example, for individuals who are concerned with the outcome of an election, but who have not yet made up their minds late in the campaign regarding how to vote, media messages are far more likely to have a behavioral impact (O'Keefe, 1975).

The relevance to political decision-making of one's ability to **discriminate** between candidates has continued to increase in recent years as partisanship has continued to decline in the U.S. Chaffee (1981) and others (Key, 1966; Converse et al., 1969; Flanigan, 1972; Sears & Whitney, 1973; Sherrod, 1971; in McLeod, Glynn & McDonald, 1983) argued that this is due to the general rise in issue-based voting. "Recent research indicates that while it no doubt helps a candidate to gain support from a voter if they are both of the same party, it is equally important that they share opinions on what voters regard as salient issues (Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960; Converse, Clausen, & Miller, 1965; Key, 1966; Converse, Miller, Rusk, & Wolfe, 1969; Flanigan, 1972; Miller, Miller, Raine, & Brown, 1973; Sears & Whitney, 1973; in O'Keefe, 1975:147). "Or, more to the point, it is important that the voter perceives such agreement,

whether accurately or inaccurately (Sherrod, 1971; Mendelsohn & O'Keefe, 1975; in O'Keefe, 1975:147).

This notion of basing one's vote on issue salience, as opposed to voting along party lines, of course, highlights one's added dependence upon the mass media in recent times. Perhaps it was best expressed by Chaffee (1981:187): "To learn a candidate's party and cast one's vote accordingly is a simple matter; but to learn his positions on a number of political issues and compare them to the positions of other candidates requires a great deal of communication."

There is yet another interesting question regarding the role the mass media plays in one's political behavior that this theoretical model permits one to test. Even after the differences between candidates running for the same office become clear to an individual, the mass media continue to play a major role in one's decision-making process. To test this notion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H-3: The more one discriminates between candidates and their respective political parties, the more one uses the mass media.

If O'Keefe is correct in his argument that individuals who decide early how to vote use the mass media to reinforce their decision (as noted above), then it could be argued further that individuals not only continue to rely upon the mass media after making up their minds about who to vote for, but that one actually relies upon the media even more for their campaign-related information throughout the remainder of the campaign period. If this is true, one would expect this reciprocal path between **discrimination** and **media use** to be statistically significant (significantly different from zero).

Sheingold (1973:716) pointed out, "...the classical voting studies all suggested that attributes the individual brings with him to the campaign effectively determine voting behavior." It is being posited here, however, that the mass media have the effects hypothesized above on one's voting behavior even after the explained variance from these traditional antecedents are removed from the equation. In order to test this notion, six antecedents to voting behavior were controlled in the research design. These include three demographic variables: one's **age**, level of **income**, and **education**; and three political variables: one's **political identification**, intensity of **partisanship**, and level of **political involvement**.

As stressed in Chapter 1, while it is indeed important to seek further understanding regarding the role the mass media system as a whole plays in such phenomena as one's voting behavior (Ball-Rokeach, Rokeach and Grube, 1984), it is equally important to understand how each of the respective media that comprise the mass media contribute to the overall media system. In an effort to gain such understanding, the usage patterns for each of the four media that comprise the "media use" variable (television, radio, newspapers, and magazines) were analyzed. This component of the research design allowed the following hypotheses to be tested:

H-4: One's use of each of the four media will affect one's ability to discriminate between candidates running for the same public office and their respective political parties.

H-5: Newspapers, magazines, and the radio provide media consumers with more relevant information regarding political campaigns then does television, thus are more useful in helping individuals to discriminate between candidates running for the same public office, and their respective political parties.

H-6: Television and newspapers play an important role in one's political decision-making process even after one is able to discriminate between candidates; while one's use of the radio and magazines will cease playing an important role.

With regard to H-4, while television, radio, magazines, and newspapers would be expected to play an important role in helping one to discriminate between candidates running for the same office, and their respective political parties, it would not be expected that each would have the same level of effect on one's decision-making process with regard to deciding who to vote for. For example, individuals who rely on the print media (and even radio) for securing their political information are known to normally be more interested, and more active, in the political process. Therefore, H-5 hypothesizes that these three media should play a more important role than television.

Once individuals discriminate between two candidates and, therefore, presumedly makes their decision regarding how to vote, their level of effort expended on information-seeking can be expected to diminish. They can, however, be expected to remain sensitized to these issues and candidate; the difference being that they will participate more in a selective (exposure, perception, and retention) process. Therefore, whether one attends more to television or the newspaper will be determined by one's normal media use habits (e.g., higher educated individuals will attended more to newspapers, while lesser educated people will attend more to television). Regardless, both media can be expected to have a significant (reinforcement) effect on one's opinions and discussions. Magazines and the radio, on the other hand, would undoubtedly play a far less important role.

A final component of the present research effort will be to generalize the findings to other major elections that rely largely upon the mass media for informing the electorate regarding political matters. One characteristic of an election that could make a difference in determining the role the mass media

play in one's voting behavior might be whether the election is perceived by both the media and the electorate as being close (a horse race), or a landslide (no contest). Should the role of the mass media be replicated under both conditions, then a compelling case could be made that such **media effects** indeed exist in most major elections. Thus, it is hypothesized:

> H-7: The pattern of media effects within a given national election will be consistent for both a close election, and an election that is not close.

In order to test this hypothesis, a decision was made to replicate the present study using data from the 1976 Presidential campaign between Gerald Ford (the incumbent) and Jimmy Carter (who won) as representing a "horse race," and data from the 1984 Presidential race between Ronald Reagan (the victorious incumbent) and Walter Mondale (the Democratic challenger) as representing a "landslide" condition. All data-analyses were conducted first using the data from the 1976 presidential campaign. Once completed, each procedure to be replicated was conducted using the 1984 presidential data set.

Therefore, while it will not be argued here that the findings from the present study can be generalized to lower levels of political behavior (e.g., congressional and/or local campaigns), clearly the intent is to generalize the findings at least to most state and national campaigns.

FOOTNOTES

1. Hypothesis 1 implies that there will be a positive correlation between media use and one's ability to discriminate between candidates and their respective parties. Hypothesis 3, the reciprocal relationship from discrimination back to media use, also implies a positive correlation between the two variables. Because of the inherent simultaneity between these hypothesized relationships, this correlation cannot be used in estimating these causal paths. Therefore, they are estimated by use of instrumental variables (as shown in Figure 1). Further, the correlation between the two endogenous variables is used to assess the correlation between the two error terms.

Chapter 4

METHODS

4.1 Sample

The data used in the present study are part of the American National Election Study, and were made available through the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research. The data were originally collected by the Center for Political Studies of the Institute for Social Research, the University of Michigan, under a grant from the National Science Foundation. Principal investigators were: (1) for the 1976 survey, W.E. Miller and A.H. Miller; and (2) for the 1984 survey, W.E. Miller.

Respondents in the 1976 study were interviewed both before and after the presidential election. The pre-election questionnaire was administered to 2,248 respondents and the post-election questionnaire was administered to 1,909 respondents. The design of the 1976 study incorporated a subset of respondents who had been previously interviewed in both the 1972 post-election survey and the 1974 study. Another set of respondents was then selected to provide a representative cross-section of U.S. citizens when combined with the non-moving panel of respondents.

The 1984 election also comprised two waves, a pre- and post-election survey panel. The number of respondents interviewed in each panel was 2,257.

The pre-election wave of the 1984 study was conducted entirely by personal interviews; while in the post-election wave, half the respondents were interviewed in person and half by telephone. The telephone respondents received an abbreviated version of the in-person instrument.[1] A comprehensive discussion of the research design for both the 1976 and 1984 studies is included with the

NES/CPS American National Election Study code book for each of the respective data sets.

4.2 Measurement

The theoretical structural equation model tested in the present research effort (as shown in Figure 1) contains the following variables: **Age, income, education,** one's level of **political involvement,** intensity of **partisanship, political identification,** level of **media use,** one's ability to discriminate between candidates (and their respective political parties) running for the same public office, and the **level of difficulty** one experienced in deciding who to vote for. Specific operationalizations for each of these conceptual variables are given below.

In a preliminary analyses, the relationships between the control variables and outcome variables in the model were inspected.[2] This was done by collapsing the control variables into categories of approximately equal numbers. Accordingly, the demographic antecedents of respondents' age, annual income, and education were collapsed into the following

categories:

Age	18-29 30-59 60 & older
Annual Income	$ 0 - $ 5,000 $ 6,000 - $10,000 $11,000 - $15,000 $16,000 and above
Education	Less than high school High school graduate Some college through grad school

Similarly, the measure for one's political identification was collapsed as follows:

Party Identification	Democrat Republican Independent

Next, levels of one's media use (light, moderate, and heavy) and levels of one's ability to discriminate between candidates and their respective parties (low, moderate, high) were analyzed across outcome variables in the hypothesized model.

These categorical variables were replaced when regression-based methods of analysis (e.g., LISREL) were used. In that situation, the full detail of the variables is invoked (for example, age in years) as a single indicator. For the purposes of regression-based analysis, party identification was collapsed into a bivariate measure of: "Democrat" or "other" (which included those who consider themselves to be Republican or an Independent).[3]

The measure for one's level of partisanship employed a seven-point scale of party preference, with the respondent ranking oneself as being a strong Republican at the one extreme, independent at the center point, to strong Democrat at the other extreme. These measures were subsequently collapsed and recoded to create a four-point scale: (1) independent-independent, (2) party-independent, (3) weak party, (4) strong party. Those at the low end of the scale would be considered extremely low in partisanship and those at the high end of the scale would be considered highly partisan.

In the present research, political involvement represented a variety of behavioral activities related to one's reported interest and political activities. Specifically, the composite measure for one's level of political involvement was constructed from five indictors: (1) reported **interest** in the presidential race [INT]; (2) whether or not the respondent tried to **influence** another's vote [INFL]; (3) whether or not the respondent **attended** any meetings, rallies,

speeches, dinners, or similar events in support of a candidate [MTG]; (4) whether or not the respondent **worked** for either one of the candidates or their respective political party [WK]; and (5) whether or not the respondent **gave money** to either of the candidates or respective party [MNY]. The first indicator, "interest," was measured on a three-point scale (not much interested=0, somewhat interested=1, very interested=2); while the remaining four indicators were measured on a two-point scale (1=yes, 0=no). Thus, the composite variable of political involvement can be represented as the following sum:

Political Involvement = INT + INFL + MTG + WK + MNY

While each indicator reflects a different aspect of one's level of political involvement, it is assumed that each contributes in a similar manner as the others.[4] For example, while it does not necessarily follow that one who attempts to influence another regarding which candidate to vote for, also attends meetings and rallies on behalf of that candidate; both behaviors are indicators of one's level of political involvement in that particular campaign. Therefore, the reliability scores reported in Table 1 for this composite variable (.58 and .55 for the 1976 and 1984 Presidential campaigns, respectively) are not seen as being problematic. Correlations among the five indicators of political involvement are reported in Appendix A.

The summed indicators of political involvement yielded a seven-point scale representing one's level of involvement in the political process, and specifically the respective campaign of interest. The respondent with the highest aggregated value in the scale would be ranked the most involved and the one with the lowest total on the scale would be ranked the least involved.[5]

Media use was measured by a composite index involving one's reliance on television, radio, magazines, and newspapers for information regarding the presidential campaign. Rather than using the respondent's opinion about how much he or she relied upon each of the four media, respondents were asked about how many times they were exposed to stories about the campaign through each media source: none, one or two, several, a good many. These values were coded: 0=none, one or two=2, several=3, and a good many=4. This scale represents somewhat of a global measure of media use, therefore, the respective reliability scores of .68 and .65 for the 1976 and 1984 campaigns (see Table 1) seem reasonable. Correlations among the four media that comprise the media use variable are reported in Appendix B. The measure for one's media use can be represented by the following equation:

Media use = AmTV + AmtRad + AmtMags + AmtPaper

As stated elsewhere in this dissertation, an important concept that is being measured in the theoretical model being tested in the present research effort is one's ability to perceive differences between candidates running for the same public office, and their respective political parties, that the voter thinks are important. That is, the voter must be able to discriminate between the candidates in order to decide who to vote for. The measure for one's ability to discriminate between candidates running for the same office, and their respective political parties, was constructed from eight variables in the data set. Each respondent was asked specifically what he/she "liked" about each of the candidates and each of the respective political parties, and what they "disliked" about each candidate and respective party. The interviewer kept asking for more reasons until the respondent reported having no more. The final measure was

calculated by adding the number of likes for the Democratic candidate; then subtracting the number of likes for the opposing, Republican, candidate; and taking the absolute value. Then, the difference in the number of dislikes for each candidate was calculated in the same fashion. This procedure was repeated in order to quantify the respondents' perceptions towards the two candidates' respective political parties. Finally, values were aggregated and this number became each respondent's final score representing one's level of discrimination between the competing candidates and their respective political parties. The reliability scores for this constructed variable are .69 and .70 for the 1976 and 1984 Presidential campaigns, respectively (Table 1). Conceptually, the equation for determining a respondent's score regarding the 1976 Presidential race can be written as follows:

Discrim = |**likes** for **Carter** - **likes** for **Ford**| +
|**dislikes** for **Carter** - **dislikes** for **Ford**| +
|**likes** for **Dems** - **likes** for **Reps**| +
|**dislikes** for **Dems** - **dislikes** for **Reps**|

Due to the inherent complexity of this measure, the relationships among the indicators of one's ability to discriminate were inspected further to determine if they were both logical and consistent. One way to access such a complicated index is to examine the interrelationships between its constituent parts for sign consistency. If the items are consistently related, a table that reflects liking for one party or its candidate will be negatively correlated with dislikes for the same party and candidate, negatively correlated with likes for the opposite party and candidate, and positively correlated with dislikes. Of 56 correlations involving both the 1976 and 1984 Presidential elections, all but 8 have appropriate signs. Since these data are, for the most party, internally consistent (Table 2), it can be

Table 1

Reliability Coefficients (Standardized Alphas) for Constructed Variables: Political Involvement, Media Use, and Discrimination

	1976	1984
Political Involvement	.58 N = 1885	.55 N = 1934
Media Use	.68 N = 1848	.65 N = 1923
Discrimination	.69 N = 2248	.70 N = 2257

Table 2

Correlations for Indicators of Ability to Discriminate

	Likes for Democratic Candidate		Likes for Republican Candidate		Dislikes for Democratic Candidate		Dislikes for Republican Candidate		Likes for Democratic Party		Likes for Republican Party		Dislikes for Democratic Party		Dislikes for Republican Party	
	1976	1984	1976	1984	1976	1984	1976	1984	1976	1984	1976	1984	1976	1984	1976	1984
Likes for Democratic Candidate	1.000	1.000														
Likes for Republican Candidate	-.0504	-.2166	1.000	1.000												
Dislikes for Democratic Candidate	-.1209	-.1437	.5481	.4467	1.000	1.000										
Dislikes for Republican Candidate	.4905	.4826	-.1258	-.1768	.0360	-.0310	1.000	1.000								
Likes for Democratic Party	.4298	.5246	-.0064	-.0350	.0116	.0340	.3974	.4872	1.000	1.000						
Likes for Republican Party	-.0190	-.1237	.4844	.5191	.4483	.4978	-.0238	-.0917	.0866	.0862	1.000	1.000				
Dislikes for Democratic Party	-.0334	-.0415	.4068	.4467	.4923	.5346	.0837	.0244	.0581	.1700	.5511	.6349	1.000	1.000		
Dislikes for Republican Party	.3691	.4826	.0620	-.0139	.1442	.0981	.4807	.5129	.4845	.5973	.1263	.1037	.3068	.2346	1.000	1.000

NOTE: With an 'N' this large (approximately 2,000), a correlation ≥ .045 in absolute magnitude is significantly different from zero at $p < .05$, with a two-tail test.

assumed that this constructed variable is an appropriate measure for one's ability to discriminate.

The theoretical model being tested in the present research effort is also concerned with the amount of difficulty one experiences in deciding who to vote for. One's level of difficulty in reaching a decision about the respective candidates was measured by two different indicators: (1) whether or not the respondent voted at all; and for those who did, indeed, vote, (2) when they made their decision of who to vote for (time of decision). The time of decision was determined by asking the respondent to recall, to their best recollection, precisely when they made their decision regarding who to vote for. The respondents were given six alternative times to choose from: (1) before the convention, (2) before the televised debates, (3) after two debates, (4) two weeks before the election, (5) at the end of the campaign, and (6) on election day. Therefore, the first of the two composite variables aimed at determining one's level of difficulty of deciding how to vote was a dichotomous (0=no, 1=yes) measure of whether or not one actually voted;[6] while the second variable was a six-point scale measuring when, during the election process, that one actually made their decision regarding how to vote.

4.3 **Data-analysis**

The primary data-analysis method employed was the Linear Structural Relations (LISREL) covariance analysis (version VI, Jorsekog & Sorbom, 1985).[7] While LISREL is a method of analysis that is especially known for estimating the structural relations between latent independent and dependent variables when these variables are reflected by multiple indicators (Fornell, 1982; Joreskog, 1970; Joreskog, 1973; Joreskog & Sorbom, 1981), it is also widely used for estimating

structural equation models in which the measured variables are regarded as identical to the latent ones. Also, LISREL is particularly useful for analyzing reciprocal causation, measurement errors, and correlated error (Fornell, 1982). Because LISREL is a theory-driven (as opposed to a data-driven) method of analysis, the researcher must have a set of strong theoretical propositions to start with (Kuo, 1984). "In the case that empirical data tends to falsify the theoretical model, a researcher, then, will have two options: (1) stick to the theory and try the model on multiple sets of data; or (2) revise the theory and try the model on the same data set again" (Kuo, 1984:17).

With one exception (the voted/not voted component of difficulty of decision), the observed measures for each endogenous variable in the structural equation model tested here are conceptually interval in nature, thus indicating that LISREL is an appropriate method of analysis to employ. The one exception, the variable voted/not voted, was dealt with in the following manner. It was first included in the LISREL model in order to determine whether or not the hypothesized trends in relationships among key theoretical variables materialized. Then, it was tested once again using logit (in SPSS-X, 1983), which is a special case of the general log-linear model created especially for analyzing dichotomous variables in which one is treated as dependent, and the rest are used as independent variables. Therefore, the appropriate method (logit) was used in somewhat of a confirmatory fashion to support the tentative findings that showed through in the LISREL model. For the purpose of clarity, the findings from both methods were reported in a combined table (Table 3).

After the analyses of the hypothesized structural equation model was completed, an effort was made to study the effects of the **respective media** that comprise the constructed media use variable in one's voting behavior. First, a

Table 3

Alternative Equations (showing standardized coefficients) for One's Decision to Vote and, for Those Who Voted, Time of Decision during the 1976 and 1984 U.S. Presidential Election

Predictors	VOTED/NOT VOTED														TIME OF DECISION									
	MODEL 1						MODEL 2						MODEL 3		MODEL 1						MODEL 2			
	Voted/ Not Voted		Media Use		Discriminate		Voted/ Not Voted		Media Use		Discriminate		Voted/ Not Voted		Time of Decision		Media Use		Discriminate		Time of Decision		Media Use		Discriminate	
	1976	1984	1976	1984	1976	1984	1976	1984	1976	1984	1976	1984	1976	1984	1976	1984	1976	1984	1976	1984	1976	1984	1976	1984	1976	1984
Media Use	.143	-.050*	—	—	.234	.440	.315	-.002	—	—	.234	.440	.120	-.003	.041	.040	—	—	.234	.440	.015	.006	—	—	.234	.440
Discriminate	.041*	.052*	.130*	.119*	—	—	.095	.082	.130*	.119*	—	—	.038	.157	-.169	-.255	.130*	.119*	—	—	-.232	-.282	.130*	.119*	—	—
Age	.125	-.008	.208	.180	—	—	—	—	.208	.180	—	—	—	—	-.103	.037	.208	.180	—	—	—	—	.208	.180	—	—
Income	.128	-.037*	.114	.013	—	—	—	—	.114	.013	—	—	—	—	.010	-.073	.114	.013	—	—	—	—	.114	.013	—	—
Education	.110	.073†	.252	.219	—	—	—	—	.252	.219	—	—	—	—	.053	-.046*	.252	.219	—	—	—	—	.252	.219	—	—
Political Involvement	.139	.057*	.413	.469	.173	.098*	—	—	.413	.469	.173	.098*	—	—	-.043	-.032	.413	.469	.173	.098*	—	—	.413	.469	.173	.098*
Partisan	.114	.034	—	—	.209	.253	—	—	—	—	.209	.253	—	—	-.205	-.160	—	—	.209	.253	—	—	—	—	.209	.253
Political I.D.	-.069	-.029	—	—	.063	-.020	—	—	—	—	.063	-.020	—	—	.075	.165	—	—	.063	-.020	—	—	—	—	.063	-.020

	MODEL 1		MODEL 2		MODEL 3		MODEL 1		MODEL 2	
	1976	1984	1976	1984	1976	1984	1976	1984	1976	1984
Total Coefficient of Determination =	.545	.544	.507	.539			.543	.558	.507	.539
Chi Square	1.800	15.500	104.070	27.870	2,032.246	1,251.539	1.800	15.500	97.420	65.840
Degrees of Freedom =	3.000	3.000	9.000	9.000	1,906.000	1,432.000	3.000	3.000	9.000	9.000
Probability =	.615	.001	0.000	.001	.022	1.000	.615	.001	0.000	0.000
Root Mean Square Residual =	.004	.014	.037	.021			.004	.015	.045	.026
Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit =	.995	.949	.911	.976			.995	.959	.918	.943

Note: Model 1 – Full Measurement Model with All Predictors to Final Outcome Variable
Model 2 – Hypothesized Measurement Model
Model 3 – Logit Model for Dichotomous Outcome Variable (Voted/Not Voted)

Underline Indicates Statistical Significance at $p < .01$
Underline Plus † Indicates Statistical Significance at $p < .05$
Underline Plus * Indicates Statistical Significance at $p < .10$

preliminary analysis was made by observing the movement of the means of the four control variables across the four media: television, radio, magazines, and newspapers (see Table 4). Next, usage patterns for each media were compared for the two indicators of the level of difficulty one experiences in deciding how to vote: whether or not one voted; and for those who did vote, time of decision (see Table 5). Finally, these usage patterns could be compared with conventional wisdom regarding one's media dependency behavior to see if they are operating in the manner that these traditional theoretical paradigms posit. For example, conventional wisdom holds that as one's level of education increases, so does one's dependence upon magazines and newspapers as opposed to television.

Differences among one's use of television, radio, magazines, and newspapers for political decision-making were further analyzed by estimating four slightly **modified** structural equation models (see Figure 4), using data from the 1976 Presidential race. This exercise permitted an analysis of the **differences among the four media** regarding the role of each media in helping individuals discriminate between candidates running for the same public office, and their respective political parties; as well as the reciprocal relationship (path) between one's ability to discriminate and one's use of the mass media in political behavior after having discriminated between the candidates and their respective parties.

With the intent of being able to **generalize** the findings of this research effort beyond a single election or type of election, the full (hypothesized) structural equation) model was tested on two different sets of data, the first set being from the 1976 Presidential race. After all data analyses involving the theoretical model were completed using the 1976 data set, the exercise was replicated using 1984 Presidential data. The findings regarding both sets of data, the 1976 and 1984 Presidential campaigns, are presented in Table 3.

Table 4

Analysis of Means for Categories within Predictors for Outcome Variables of Four Respective Media that Comprise Measure of Media Use in Voting Behavior

PREDICTOR VARIABLES	OUTCOME VARIABLES			
	TV	Radio	Magazines	Newspapers
Age				
18 thru 29	1.650	0.714	0.918	1.598
30 thru 59	1.990	0.902	1.016	2.175
60 and older	2.142	0.992	0.078	2.157
Income (Annual)				
$ 0 - $ 5,000	1.799	0.825	0.483	1.380
$ 6,000 - $ 10,000	1.933	0.920	0.793	1.833
$ 11,000 - $ 15,000	1.904	0.798	0.946	2.017
$ 16,000 and above	2.102	0.980	1.350	2.615
Education				
Less than high school	1.856	0.775	0.325	1.419
High school graduate	1.847	0.821	0.858	1.953
Some college thru grad school	2.126	1.038	1.512	2.636
Political Involvement				
Low	1.496	0.591	0.474	1.312
Moderate	2.232	1.050	1.150	2.414
High	2.585	1.372	1.958	3.339

Note: Scale range for outcome variables:

TV	0	to	3
Radio	0	to	3
Magazines	0	to	3
Newspapers	0	to	4

Table 5

Analysis of Means for the Amount One Uses Each of Four Respective Media in Predicting Whether or Not One Votes; and for Those Who Do Vote, One's Time of Decision

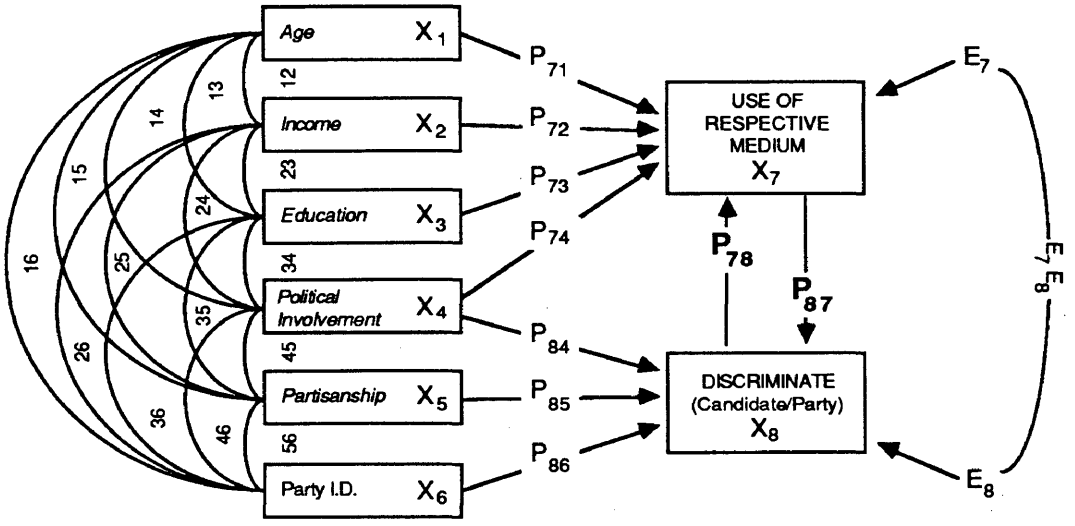
INDICATORS	OUTCOME VARIABLES				
	Voted		Time of Decision		
	No	Yes	Early	During	Last Minute
Television	1.503	2.106	2.149	2.092	1.989
Radio	0.614	0.977	1.020	0.952	0.929
Magazines	0.494	1.094	1.120	1.088	1.102
Newspapers	1.217	2.319	2.454	2.220	2.155

Note: Scale range for indicators:

TV	0	to	13
Radio	0	to	20
Magazines	0	to	1
Newspapers	0	to	6

Figure 4

Theoretical (Hypothesized) Causal Model for Measuring Differences in 'Media Effects' between Television, Radio, Magazines, and Newspapers



- Hypotheses 4 and 5 tested via P_{78}
- Hypothesis 6 tested via P_{87}

Finally, in estimating the complete structural equation model, two strategies were employed. In the first, in addition to the hypothesized paths in the original theoretical model (see Figure 1), paths were opened from all six control variables to **difficulty of decision** (whether or not one **voted** and, for those who did vote, one's **time of decision**). The second strategy was devised for the purpose of measuring the theoretical model **exactly as hypothesized.** The findings from both estimations are also presented in Figure 3.

FOOTNOTES

1. The 1984 study incorporated a third component that was not included in the 1976 study. This component consisted of 3,496 telephone interviews taken in 46 independent, consecutive samples using a random digit dialing procedure. However, these data were not incorporated into the present research effort.

2. Before beginning a correlation regression analysis, one is well advised to inspect the form of the relationships between the major variables in the model. The purpose of conducting such an exercise, of course, is to see to what extent the relationships are likely to be distorted by the assumption of linearity. Obviously, something will be lost by assuming linearity and, indeed, some relationships may not be monotonic even though they have a clear direction. In the present case, there is good theoretical reasons to believe, however, that most of these relationships will be nill or monontonic. In this circumstance, inspecting the basic bivariate relationships serves to alert one not just to strong curvilinear relational forms, but also to aberations in the data which could be attributed to sampling error.

3. In creating this variable, Democrat vs. other, one may well have created the alternative or Republican vs. other. Or one might have chosen to introduce both dummy variables with "independent" becoming the missing category in a trichotomous variable. While there is nothing wrong with choosing this latter strategy, it does result in producing a somewhat awkward causal model, owing to the fact that there is necessarily negative correlation between the dummy variable for Democrats and the dummy variable for Republicans; therefore, the decision was made to create a dichotomous variable. The decision of Democrat vs. other

was based on the fact that the electorate is comprised of more registered Democrates than registered Republicans; therefore, the variable would ultimately be more numerically balanced. In addition, there is no good theoretical reason to believe that party I.D. has any major impact on the endogenous variables in our the model being tested here. It is correlated with some of the other exogenous variables and its inclusion here was more of a safety valve (in case the supposition about its impact was in error) and to provide a little more leverage in the estimation of simultaneity.

4. Adding these items as an indicator of political involvement (and for media use) is rather like adding together correct responses to items of differential difficulty in creating an I.Q. score. There is no theoretical reason to think that their weights would be unequal; and if they prove to be so in any factor analysis, one wouldn't know if one had discovered serendipitously some underlying structure, or was simply detecting errors in the data. It is, of course, crucial that these items be positively correlated, and they are (Appendixes B & C); and that they yield a substantial reliability coefficients, and they do (Table 1).

5. This is not an operational use of the scale; rather, it is intended for use only as an interpretation of the scale given the respondent has no missing data.

6. Voting participation is also used in some studies as a measure of political apathy, but with political involvement controlled for it becomes a reasonable indicator of decision difficulty.

7. In the computation of correlation and covariance matrices in both the 1976 and 1984 data sets missing data was omitted on a pairwise basis. The convention employed in the estimation of all measurement and theoretical models was that the value of N was based on the minimum pairwise number of cases for the variables included in the respectivequation. The minimum pairwise number of cases available for analysis was appoximately 1,200 in both data sets.

Chapter 5

RESULTS

This research effort yielded empirical support for each of the three hypothesized media dependent relationships being tested here that deal with the role the mass media (collectively) play in one's voting behavior. Two of the three hypotheses regarding differences among the four media that comprise the measure of mass media being used in this study were also empirically supported, while one was not supported. The one hypothesis not empirically supported, however, proved to be both interesting and instructive. The final hypothesis regarding the generalizability of the findings across most types of national elections was also empirically supported.

As stated in prior chapters of this dissertation, the theoretical structural equation model in Figure 1 was designed especially to test the following notions: (1) that one's use of the mass media impacts one's **ability to discriminate** between candidates (and their respective political parties) running for the same public office; (2) that one's ability to discriminate between the candidates and their respective parties, in turn, affects **how difficult** it will be for that individual to decide who to vote for; and finally, (3) that one's ability to discriminate between the candidates and their respective parties will result in an individual continuing to **use the media** for staying abreast of campaign-related activities through election day.

Further, it is being argued that the hypothesized relationships exist even when several theoretically important antecedents are controlled for in a statistical sense. These include three demographic variables: age, income, and education;

and three political variables: one's political identification, intensity of partisanship, and one's level of political involvement.

5.1 Preliminary Findings

Prior to estimating the LISREL model of hypothesized relationships, a preliminary analysis was made of the relationships in the structural equation model between the control variables and their respective outcome variables in the 1976 data set. As noted in Chapter 4, this was accomplished by breaking each exogenous variable into categories of approximately equal size, and then computing means across these categories for each predictor with respect to all outcome variables in the model.

For the most part, the predictors were indeed operating according to conventional wisdom. For example, the more formal education one had (O'Keefe, 1975; Quarles, 1979; Petty & Cacioppo, 1983; Miller & Asp, 1985; Reynolds & Davis, 1987) and the higher one's income (O'Keefe, 1975), the more one reported using the media for securing his or her political information (Table 6).

Further, those who reported being highly involved in political activities also reported being heavy consumers of the mass media, particularly compared to those who reported not being involved very much in political activities (Chaffee & Hochheimer, 1985; Perloff, 1985; Tan, 1980; O'Keefe, 1975). In fact, the ratio of media use for highly involved respondents to low involved respondents turned out to be 3-to-1 (Table 6).

The data also show that those who are weak in partisanship rely less on the media than those who are highly partisan, which is in line with the modern-day trend of declining partisanship, in which the party is being replaced by the mass media as one's primary source for political information. In other

Table 6

Means Across Categories within Each Exogenous Variable (Indicator) in Voting Behavior Model with All Endogenous (Outcome) Variables for 1976 Presidential Campaign

PREDICTOR VARIABLES	OUTCOME VARIABLES					
	Media Use	Discriminate	Voted/ Not Voted	Time of Decision	n	N
Age						***2,234***
18 thru 29	4.835	4.432	0.593	2.456	579	
30 thru 59	6.045	4.790	0.793	2.389	1,065	
60 and older	6.004	5.000	0.748	1.846	590	
Income (Annual)						***2,079***
$ 0 - $ 5,000	3.475	4.000	0.410	1.708	485	
$ 6,000 - $ 10,000	3.625	4.396	0.591	1.761	468	
$ 11,000 - $ 15,000	4.444	4.760	0.622	2.231	495	
$ 16,000 and above	6.031	4.860	0.756	2.285	631	
Education						***2,238***
Less than high school	4.371	4.375	0.598	1.956	712	
High school graduate	5.451	4.392	0.720	2.354	807	
Some college thru grad school	5.537	7.262	0.861	2.350	719	
Political Involvement						***1,909***
Low	3.838	3.589	0.576	2.467	842	
Moderate	6.784	5.531	0.827	2.222	878	
High	9.233	6.656	0.958	1.840	189	
Partisanship						***2,233***
Weak	5.445	3.871	0.669	2.748	813	
Moderate	4.523	5.348	0.714	2.303	874	
Strong	6.515	6.833	0.861	1.636	546	
Party I.D.						***1,687***
Democrats	6.219	5.447	0.868	2.265	796	
Republicans	6.332	5.031	0.923	2.000	489	
Independents	6.078	4.470	0.899	2.503	402	

Note: Scale range for outcome variables:

Media Use	0	to	13
Discriminate	0	to	20
Voted/Not Voted	0	to	1
Time of Decision	0	to	6

words, highly partisan individuals are still extremely concerned with political issues and activities, however, they depend more on the mass media than they do the party for securing information regarding such matters. It should be stressed, however, that party identification and level of partisanship should not be discounted as meaningful predictors of one's political behavior. "Although a growing number of voters appear to be vulnerable to the short-term political forces transmitted by the media, this trend has not yet reached the magnitude that would cause analysts to abandon their earlier emphasis on the importance of party identification as a major factors motivating the vote" (Dryer & Rosenbaum, 1976:158).

The relationships between the antecedents and one's ability to discriminate between candidates running for the same public office, and their respective political parties, also followed sensible patterns. As one's reported age, income, and education increased, so did one's ability to discriminate. Likewise, as one's reported level of political involvement and intensity of partisanship increased, so did his or her ability to discriminate between the candidates and their respective parties.

The patterns between the control variables and the two indicators of the **level of difficulty** one experienced in deciding how to vote (whether or not one **voted** and, for those who did vote, **time of decision**), also proved sensible. A similar trend held for all directional predictors: age, income, education, level of political involvement, and intensity of partisanship. As each increased, so did the likelihood that one would vote. While this consistency did not hold between the antecedents and time of decision (for those who voted), each relationship did, indeed, make sense. The older one was, the earlier he or she decided for whom to vote. Individuals with more education and a higher income took longer to

make up their minds regarding how to vote. Finally, the highly partisan and those who were highly involved in the political process took less time, as would be expected, to decide who to vote for (Table 6).

It also proved useful in the preliminary analysis to inspect the relationship between one's level of media consumption and one's ability to discriminate, with the three outcome variables in the structural equation model (Table 7). The more one used the mass media, the more that individual was able to discriminate between the candidates and their respective parties, and vice versa. Further, the more one used the media and the more one could discriminate between the candidates, the more likely he or she was to vote. And, as would be expected, the more one was able to discriminate between the candidates, and their respective political parties, the earlier he or she reported making his or her decision regarding which candidate to vote for. Finally, heavier media consumers made their decision regarding how to vote relatively early, while there was little difference between light and moderate media consumers.

5.2 Findings

The hypothesized structural equation model (Figure 1) was estimated using data from two different Presidential races: (1) the 1976 Presidential campaign; and (2) the 1984 Presidential campaign. As stated in prior chapters, the first campaign represented a "horse race," and the latter campaign, a "landslide." This strategy was employed in an effort to build a reasonable case that the findings can be generalized across all Presidential races, and most types of national-level and state-level campaigns.

For the most part, the 1976 findings were indeed replicated in 1984 (Table 3). That is, both the direction and magnitude (strength) of the standardized path

Table 7

Means Across Categories within Each Predictor Endogenous Variable in Voting Behavior Model with Both Outcome Variables

PREDICTOR VARIABLES	OUTCOME VARIABLES			
	Media Use	Discriminate	Voted/ Not Voted	Time of Decision
Media Use				
Light	—	3.343	0.525	2.306
Moderate	—	4.876	0.755	2.345
Heavy	—	6.008	0.887	2.142
Discriminate				
Low	4.146	—	0.589	2.756
Moderate	5.657	—	0.739	2.396
High	7.062	—	0.831	1.864

Note: Scale range for outcome variables:

Media Use	0	to	13
Discriminate	0	to	20
Voted/Not Voted	0	to	1
Time of Decision	0	to	6

coefficients, as well as levels of statistical significance, for each of the hypothesized relationships among the endogenous variables in the theoretical model were similar in each of the two data sets. Further, the total coefficients of determination for the respective models turned out to be quite close when comparing results from the 1976 data set with those from the 1984 data set.

On whole, however, the models being tested in this research effort do not fit the data. This is not seen as being problematic, however, since the chi-square test is inherently sensitive to large sample sizes. The sample size in this study comprises approximately 2,000 respondents.

Since large sample sizes inherently tend to yield statistical significance level for standardized path coefficients of at least $p<.10$ or even $p<.05$, reporting significance levels this low may be brought into question. It could be argued, for example, that only those standardized coefficients at $p<.01$ or better should be noted and discussed. Yet, even though the majority of path coefficients in the present study are, indeed, statistically significant at $p<.01$, those coefficients that are significant at the levels of $p<.10$ and $p<.05$ are also being reported. This is being done for the following reason.[1]

While the reciprocal path from one's level of discrimination back to one's use of the mass media proved statistically significant at only $p<.10$, when it was anticipated to be far more significant, this finding does bring attention to an interesting possibility. Perhaps there are differences among the respective media that comprise the media use variable (TV, radio, magazines, newspapers) that are impinging upon the role of the mass media as a whole and, as such, are camouflaging important effects of the other respective media. Therefore, this finding points out the need to look closely at statistical differences among the respective media with regard to each one's effect on an individual's ability to

discriminate between candidates and his or her subsequent use of that medium in one's political behavior throughout the remainder of the campaign. Indeed, it turned out that these differences proved to be instructive.

One additional step was taken in an effort to ensure that any observed media use effects due to one's ability to discriminate between candidates and their respective political parties, both in the 1976 and 1984 data sets, did indeed exist. The theoretical model was estimated with the paths leading from all six control variables to the final outcome variables (representing the level of difficulty one experienced in deciding how to vote) being opened. As anticipated, the important media use effects were observed under both conditions (Table 3). As a result, the findings reported here will be restricted to Model 2, which represents the theoretical structural equation model presented in Figure 1.

In order to make the comparisons between the 1976 and 1984 data sets clear, the findings for each hypothesized relationship among the endogenous variables in each of the two data sets will be reported concurrently.

5.3 Control Variables

With few exceptions, all six control variables in Model 2 (Table 3) turned out to be similar in direction and magnitude in levels of statistical significance for both the 1976 and 1984 data sets. The paths from age, education, and political involvement to media use were statistically significant at $p<.01$. The coefficients estimated in the 1976 and 1984 models respectively were: age, .208, .180; education, .252, .219; and political involvement, .413, .469. The paths between partisanship and discrimination were also statistically significant at $p<.01$ and were similar in direction and magnitude in the two data sets: .209, .253, respectively.

There were some differences in the path coefficients of the control variables. But none proved to be problematic. In the 1976 data set, for example, the path between income and media use was .114 at $p<.01$, but the path coefficient for the 1984 data set was non-significant at .013. Due to their low level of magnitude, combined with the fact that the other two demographic control variables were operating as anticipated, this finding does not present a problem. Similarly, the path from party I.D. to discrimination was not consistent in both data sets. In 1976, the path coefficient was .063 at $p<.01$; while in 1984, the path coefficient, -.010, was not statistically significant. Once again, with the other political control variables operating in the anticipated fashion, combined with the fact that the magnitude of the 1984 path coefficient was virtually zero, this inconsistency was judged as being nothing to be concerned over. Finally, the levels of statistical significance for the respective paths from political involvement to one's ability to discriminate were marginally inconsistent: .173 at $p<.01$ in 1976; and .098 at $p<.10$ in 1984.

In summary, nothing unusual was observed with the manner in which the control variables were operating, therefore, the findings regarding the exogenous variables in the structural equation model are seen as being meaningful. Further, since the good of including these variables was to control for possible spurious findings in the central hypotheses, the findings that differ from the 1976 and 1984 elections were not a problem.

5.4 Hypothesized Relationships

The first hypothesized media-dependent effect holds that one's use of the mass media affects his or her ability to discriminate between candidates running

for the same office, and their respective political parties. Specifically, the hypothesis states:

H-1: The more one **uses the mass media** for gathering information regarding political candidates running for the same public office, the more one will be able to **discriminate** between the candidates and their respective political parties.

Indeed, this hypothesized effect showed through clearly in both the 1976 and 1984 data sets (.234 and .440 respectively, $p<.01$). In other words, in both elections the more one used the mass media to seek out information regarding the Presidential campaign at hand, the more one is able to discriminate between the candidates and their respective political parties. One notable difference between the two political campaigns is that the magnitude of the observed effect in the 1984 campaign (the landslide) is nearly twice that of the 1976 horse race. The theoretical explanation for this finding will be presented in Chapter 6.

The present findings also support the second hypothesis in both the 1976 and 1984 elections. Specifically, it was hypothesized that:

H-2: The more one **discriminates** between candidates running for the same public office, and their respective political parties, the **less difficult** it will be to decide for whom to vote.

The concepts underlying this hypothesized relationship are more complex than those embedded in the first hypothesized relationship. The measure for the level of difficulty one experiences in deciding how to vote is two fold: (1) whether or not one decides to vote; and (2) for those who decide to vote, the time of decision (how early or late in the campaign) with regard to making up one's mind of who to vote for.

The first notion here is that the more one is able to discriminate between the candidates and their respective political parties, the easier it is to make a decision. Second, if the decision is easily made, the more likely it is that one will vote. Therefore, it would be anticipated that the relationship between one's ability to discriminate between candidates (and their respective parties), and one's decision to vote, would be statistically significant and positive. Indeed, such was the case in both the 1976 and 1984 Presidential elections.

The second notion embedded in this hypothesized relationship is that the more one is able to discriminate between the candidates (and their respective political parties), the earlier one will arrive at a decision regarding who to vote for. Therefore, the relationship between one's ability to discriminate and time of decision will be statistically significant and negative. Once again, this finding showed through both in the 1976 and 1984 Presidential campaigns. Further, the magnitude of these relationships in both years are relatively close (-.232 and -.282, $p<.01$, respectively).

Therefore, it is concluded that the second hypothesis, like the first hypothesis, is empirically supported in both types of elections, the horse race and the landslide conditions.

Yet another interesting finding came out of studying the differences between the role of the mass media in a landslide election compared to a close election. The path between one's use of the mass media and difficulty of decision was incorporated into the structural equation model as a control for removing any direct media use effects from the equation in testing the relationship between one's ability to discriminate and the level of difficulty one experiences in deciding how to vote. While not hypothesized a priori, it turned out that the relationship between one's media use patterns and one's decision to

vote or not vote (one of the two measures for difficulty of decision) was very different in each of the two conditions.

In 1976, the year of the horse race, the relationship was in a positive direction, high in magnitude, and statistically significant (.315, $p<.01$); but in 1984, when the election was one-sided, the relationship essentially zero (-.002). This difference will be discussed in Chapter 6.

The third hypothesis was also empirically supported, but not as clearly as the first two hypotheses. This hypothesis states:

H-3 The more one **discriminates** between candidates and their respective political parties, the more one **uses the mass media.**

Both in the 1976 and the 1984 Presidential campaigns, the direction and magnitude of this reciprocal path were similar and as hypothesized (.130 and .119, respectively). However, both were statistically significant only at the $p<.10$ level. At first glance, therefore, one might conclude that neither the magnitude nor the level of statistical significance of these path coefficients justify the claim of empirical support for this hypothesized relationship.

Upon further reflection, however, this may not be the case. For example, when considering the probable differences between the four measures of one's media use (television, radio, magazines, and newspapers), the fact may be that these respective media do, indeed, operate differently *after* one has made up his or her mind regarding who to vote for. While the theoretical explanations that underlie this notion will be presented in the next chapter of the dissertation, as pointed out in a previous section, these empirical findings reinforce the need to investigate further any differences among the four media with regard to this specific relationship. These potentially important findings are reported next.

5.5 Empirical Findings Regarding Differences Among Respective Media

Important differences were found among the four respective media that comprise the index of the media use variable in the theoretical structural equation: Television, radio, magazines, and newspapers. In analyzing these differences, of the endogenous variables in the structural equation model, only those leading from each of the four medium to one's ability to discriminate between candidates, and the four respective reciprocal paths were estimated (Figure 5), since these are the only paths in the measurement model where direct media effects are being hypothesized. Of course, all of the exogenous variables were estimated. Further, because the findings between the 1976 and 1984 data sets in the full structural equation model proved to operate in similar ways, the differences among the four media were analyzed using only the 1976 data set (the close race). It is being assumed here that these findings would also be quite similar in a one-sided election.

As with the full structural equation model, the control variables operated basically as anticipated in all four models (Figure 5) and, therefore, will not be discussed here.

The first hypothesized relationship regarding how the respective media are expected to operate states:

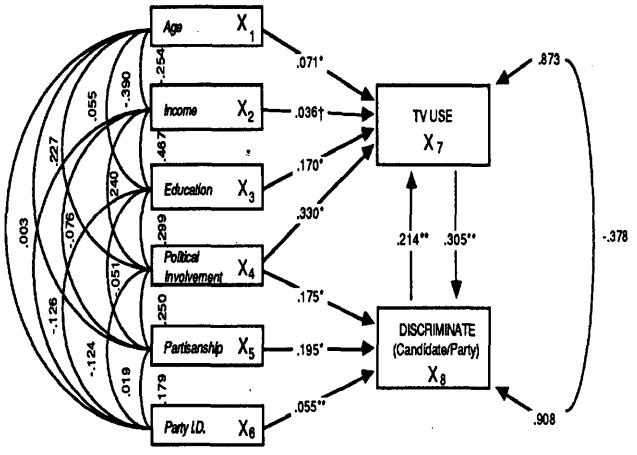
H-4: One's use of **each of the four** respective media will **affect** one's ability to **discriminate** between candidates running for the same public office and their respective political parties.

Indeed, all four media operate as was hypothesized (Figure 5). In each case, the relationship between one's use of the respective medium and one's

Figure 5

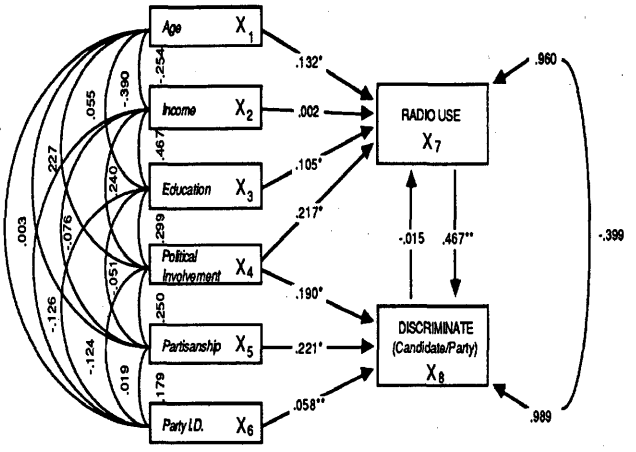
Differences in 'Media Effects' between Television, Radio, Magazines, and Newspapers during the 1976 Presidential Election

Television



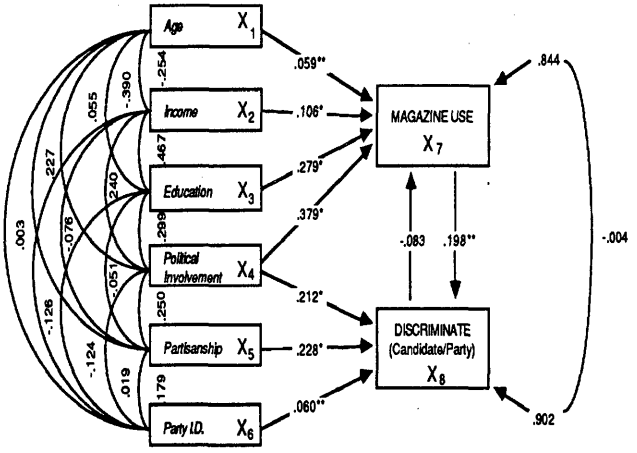
Total coefficient of determination for structural equation is 0.412
Chi square = 3.86 / Df = 3 (probability = .278)
Root mean square residual = 0.009 / Adjusted goodness-of-fit index = .991

Radio



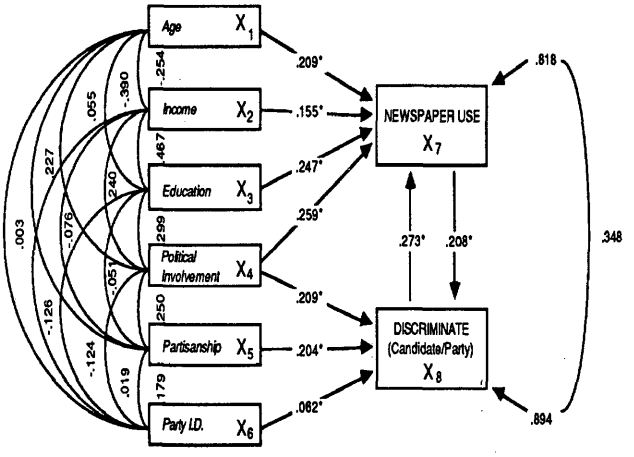
Total coefficient of determination for structural equation is 0.225
Chi Square = 9.14 / Df = 3 (probability = 0.28)
Root mean square residual = 0.014 / Adjusted goodness-of-fit index = .978

Magazines



Total coefficient of determination for structural equation is 0.384
Chi square = 2.35 / Df = 3 (probability = .503)
Root mean square residual = 0.006 / Adjusted goodness-of-fit index = .994

Newspapers



Total coefficient of determination for structural equation is 0.480
Chi square = 0.47 / Df = 3 (probability = .925)
Root mean square residual = 0.002 / Adjusted goodness-of-fit index = .999

* Indicates Statistical Significance at p < .01
** Indicates Statistical Significance at p < .05
† Indicates Statistical Significance at p < .10

ability to discriminate between candidates is positive and statistically significant at a level of $p<.05$ or higher.

Differences among the respective media were anticipated, however. The first of these differences was spelled out in Hypothesis 5:

H-5: **Newspapers**, **magazines**, and the **radio** provide media consumers with more relevant information regarding political campaigns then does **television**, thus are more useful in helping individuals to discriminate between candidates running for the same public office, and their respective political parties.

While differences among these relationships did indeed materialize, these differences did not manifest themselves exactly as hypothesized (Table 3). As anticipated, newspaper use proved to play a more important role (significant at the $p<.01$ level) in helping one to discriminate between candidates than did television use (significant at the $p<.05$ level). In a lesser sense, so did one's use of the radio. That is to say, that while the path coefficient for this relationship was significant at the $p<.05$ level (same as for TV), the magnitude of this path coefficient was somewhat larger (.467 for radio use, and .305 for TV use). The path coefficient for one's magazine use was lower in magnitude than for newspaper use (.196 and .305 respectively), but had the same level of statistical significance ($p<.05$).

While not hypothesized a priori, the magnitude of the path coefficient between one's use of the radio proved to be twice that of one's use of magazines (.467 and .198, respectively) for securing information that allows one to discriminate between candidates and their respective political parties. Upon reflection, however, this finding does appear to be a sensible, as indicated below in Chapter 6.

Perhaps of most interest with regard to differences among the four respective media, however, are those that relate to the reciprocal paths between one's ability to discriminate between candidates (and their respective parties) and one's use of the respective medium after having discriminated between the candidates. It turns out that the findings regarding these differences among the respective media are, indeed, in keeping with the sixth hypothesis:

H-6: **Television** and **newspapers** will continue to play an important role in one's political decision-making process even after one is able to discriminate between candidates; while one's use of the radio and magazines will cease playing an important role.

Newspapers play an important role (.273 at $p<.01$), as does television, (.214 at $p<.05$), in one's political behavior subsequent to being able to discriminate between the candidates and their respective political parties. Both the radio and magazines simply do not have a role in one's political behavior at this point in a campaign (both the magnitude and statistical significance levels for each being basically zero). Certainly, this accounts for the hypothesized path in the full structural equation model not being as statistically significant as was originally anticipated, which supports the notion that differences among the respective media do indeed matter.

The above findings regarding differences among the respective media with regard to one's voting behavior is especially compelling in light of the fact that the effects of one's age, income, education; as well as one's party identification, intensity of partisanship, and level of political involvement, have already been taken into account via the control variables.

Since the findings regarding each hypothesized relationship between variables in the structural equation model were reported together, it is now clear that by far the majority of the findings were replicated in both the close race

and in the landslide victory. Therefore, the seventh hypothesis was largely supported, which states:

H-7: The pattern of **media effects** within a given national election will be consistent for both a **close** election, and an election that is **not close**.

Based on H-7 being supported, therefore, an argument can be made that the findings in this study can, indeed, be generalized to most higher-level state and national political campaigns. The one important exception to this involves the second hypothesis and was reported above. The appropriate theoretical interpretation of this finding will be discussed in Chapter 6, as will all of the findings reported above.

FOOTNOTES

1. With regards to simultaneity, convention holds that when findings show a sensible pattern and reasonable magnitude among path coefficients at a statistical significance of $p<.10$, or better, one is perfectly free to discuss these findings. In this case, this strategy is particularly reasonable, since the study was replicated and the overall trends and patterns turned out to be similar in both data sets.

Chapter 6

DISCUSSION

> *It is very likely that the mass media are still the primary source of political information, whereas, interpersonal communication is more influential in transmitting political values and attitudes* (Kuo, 1984:15-16).

There appears to be a consensus among researchers studying the effects of the mass media on voting behavior that, in general, the probability of the mass media having **direct effects** on such behavior are **minimal** (Chaffee, 1981; McLeod et al., 1974; Robinson, 1976).

Kuo's above comment makes clear, however, that just because the mass media do not routinely have strong direct effects on one's voting behavior, one should not conclude that the mass media do not play a vital role in one's political decision-making process. Certainly, for example, the mass media are one's principal resource for gathering political information necessary for making informed decisions regarding how to vote.

As stressed at the outset of the dissertation, this research effort is based upon the premise that what is now needed is a synthesizing of existing theoretical perspectives from multiple intellectual disciplines, as opposed to trying to create new theory, in order to provide a more comprehensive explanation of the effects of the mass media on voting behavior than what currently exists. Specifically, the intent of this dissertation is three-fold: (1) to posit a more comprehensive explanation than has, to date, been set forth regarding the role the mass media play in one's individual voting behavior; (2) to build a theoretical

model to test this more comprehensive explanation of media effects; and finally (3) to test the theoretical model posited.

There is one additional purpose for conducting this research effort: to create a theoretical and empirical baseline, including a testable model, for use in future research efforts that focus specifically on hypothesizing and testing differences in the role the mass media play in political decision-making in higher level campaigns (e.g., for governor, state and U.S. senate, president of the U.S.), compared to the role the mass media play in one's decision-making process in lower-level campaigns (e.g., for city council, county supervisor, state assembly, congress). Few empirical efforts have, to date, been conducted that focus on these differences.

While it is true that through the years a great deal of research regarding media effects in one's political behavior has been conducted involving higher level campaigns, the majority of this work was flawed (as reported in Chapters 1 and 3) in that the dependent variable was limited to the act of voting itself (O'Keefe, 1975; Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur, 1976; Dryer and Rosenbaum, 1976; Roberts, 1979). In a concerted effort to overcome this shortcoming, two additional dependent variables were incorporated into the research design (Figure 2): (1) one's ability to discriminate between the two candidates running for the same public office, as well as between their respective political parties; and (2) the level of difficulty one experienced in deciding who to vote for, which included measures of not only whether or not one voted, but for those who did vote, their time of decision.

Indeed, the findings clearly illustrate the benefits of incorporating the above strategy in building a more comprehensive and instructive measurement model. As reported in Chapter 5, the more one used the mass media: (1) the

easier it was for one to discriminate between candidates, and their respective political parties; (2) the more likely one was to vote; and (3) for those who voted, the earlier one made up his or her mind regarding how to vote. Therefore, a compelling argument can be made that these particular dependent variables did, indeed, prove instructive with regards to developing a more comprehensive understanding of the role the mass media play in the political decision-making process.

6.1 H-1: Media Use Affects One's Ability to Discriminate

The explanation for the finding that the more one uses the mass media for gathering information regarding political candidates running for the same public office, the more one is able to discriminate between both the candidates (and their respective political parties), is embedded in three theoretical perspectives (Figure 3): *media dependency* (goal setting), *agenda-setting*, and *passive learning*. Specifically, the hypothesis states:

> H-1: The more one uses the mass media for gathering information regarding political candidates running for the same public office, the more one will be able to discriminate between the candidates and their respective political parties.

While it cannot be assumed that everyone in the U.S. has a desire to vote, it is reasonable to assume that those individuals who do wish to vote share at least one **goal**: to gain access to information regarding the candidates and issues at hand in order to make relatively informed decisions regarding how to vote. As pointed out by Ball-Rokeach (1985), virtually everyone in the U.S. is dependent upon the mass media for attaining this goal. Since "goal attainment" is one of the building blocks of the media dependency perspective, this theoretical perspective goes a long way toward explaining this particular finding. Further,

however, of the five macrolevel and microlevel factors that the creators of the media dependency perspective argue drive this type of political decision-making behavior (Chapter 3), this finding appears to square with all five: (1) structural factors, (2) contextual factors, (3) media factors, (4) interpersonal network factors, and (5) individuals factors. Clearly, this finding supports a "media dependency" perspective.

As pointed out in Chapter 3, if goal attainment is at the base of determining one's level of media dependency, then it follows that a comprehensive explanation of one's media use patterns would, by definition, include the "agenda-setting" paradigm. In other words, if one relies upon the mass media for political information, then one's decisions regarding whether or not to vote at all, and then how to vote, will be based in some part upon the information that the gatekeepers of each respective media (e.g., television, radio, magazines, and newspapers) choose to air or publish. Further, if the gatekeepers of the respective media do not satisfy the perceived needs of these media consumers, then the members of the electorate will simply turn to another medium or resource for gaining access to this information. Therefore, admittedly to a lesser extent, the media consumers collectively influence the media's agenda. These explanations are supported by the findings reported in Chapter 3, wherein researchers found positive correlations between the amount of media exposure a candidate for public office receives and the amount of public support the candidate receives (Davidson & Parker, 1972).

Given that the above two theoretical perspectives are seen as being necessary, but not sufficient, components to a comprehensive theoretical explanation of the empirical findings in this research effort for H-1, the inclusion of passive learning seems both necessary and conclusive. If it is true

that learning takes place by the mere exposure to information via the mass media, then some portion of one's decision regarding whether or not to vote, and how to vote, clearly would be accounted for by this process. And, as was reported in Chapter 3, researchers have found compelling evidence of this link between one's use of the mass media and one's knowledge of public affairs and other politically sensitive topics (Krugmen & Hartley, 1971; Greenberg, 1975; Patterson & McClure, 1976; McCombs & Shaw, 1977; Kaid, 1981; Becker & Dunwordy, 1982; Zukin & Snyder, 1984).

Another finding reported in Chapter 5 resulted from the effort to generalize the findings of this research effort to most types of high-level political campaigns. While the above finding was replicated in both the landslide victory (1984) and in the close race (1976), the magnitude of the path coefficient in the one-sided race (.440) was nearly twice that of the respective path coefficient in the horse race (.234). Both were statistically significant at the $p<.01$ level.

It could be argued that an individual would logically rely more upon the mass media for information regarding a given campaign when he or she is having a difficult time discriminating between two candidates running for the same office, suggesting that the mass media will have a greater effect on one's final decision regarding how to vote. Upon closer reflection, however, this may not be the case. First, it is precisely during this circumstance (when one finds it difficult to discriminate between candidates) that one would be expected to turn more to his or her peers and perceived opinion leaders for input (as opposed to the mass media) who, by definition, would necessarily impact the voter's ultimate perceptions regarding the two competing candidates. This interpersonal network component was not measured in the research design being tested here, because a suitable measure was not available. Thus, empirical support for this

interpretation is not available. However, this explanation is in keeping with conventional wisdom embodied in the political communications literature reported elsewhere in this dissertation.

Further, when considering the agenda-setting paradigm, this difference between a landslide election and a horse race makes even more theoretical sense. Throughout a landslide campaign, the media would continually reinforce the inevitable outcome by reporting the results from public opinion polls, predictions from experts, making commentaries on debates, plus more. This form of on going exposure in the mass media would undoubtedly impact one's perceptions of the candidates, thus making comparisons between the two candidates (discrimination) quite easy. As reported elsewhere in this dissertation, most voters make their minds up early in a one-sided race. This means that the selective process of self-exposure to media reports, embedded in the uses and gratifications component of the media dependency perspective, will be in full force throughout the majority of a one-sided campaign. Therefore, this interesting finding makes theoretical sense when considered within the context of current political communication wisdom.

6.2 H-2: One's Ability to Discriminate Affects One's Level of Difficulty of Political Decision-making

The second hypothesis states:

> H-2: The more one discriminates between candidates running for the same public office, and their respective political parties, the less difficult it will be to decide for whom to vote.

A comprehensive theoretical explanation of the empirical findings regarding H-2 is also embedded in three theoretical perspectives (Figure 3): *media dependency* (goal attainment), *agenda-setting*, and *attitude centrality*.

As noted above, one reason for turning to the mass media for political information during a political campaign is to gather information regarding the candidates and issues on the ballot, so that one can achieve one's goal of deciding how to vote. The more difficult it is to discriminate between candidates running for the same office, obviously, the more difficult it will be to decide how to vote. If the differences remain unclear even after one has made a concerted effort to differentiate between such candidates, then the likelihood of one deciding not to vote at all is enhanced. Therefore, one's dependence upon the mass media operates in much the same way here as it does with regard to helping the voter discriminate between candidates (see 6.1). Further, agenda-setting also serves to explain this relationship, in much the same manner as it does with regard to the relationship between the mass media and one's ability to discriminate (also explained in 6.1).

By themselves, however, the media dependency and agenda-setting paradigms are not sufficient for providing a comprehensive explanation of findings regarding this hypothesized relationship. The theory of attitude centrality also plays a vital role. Once an individual is able to discriminate between two candidates running for the same public office, one's decision of which candidate to vote for will depend largely upon where each candidate stands on the issues of most concern to the voter. Of course, the voter will inherently place more weight on issues that are central to his or her own belief system compared to issues that are on the peripheral of one's central belief system. The voter's stance on these central issues are, obviously, more robust than on issues that are perceived as being less important. As Krosnick stressed (1986:140): "...High centrality attitudes are a useful basis for predicting citizens' votes, even over and above the implications of party affiliation, location in the

social structure (as defined by demographic variables), ideological principles, and assessments of (the) incumbent's performance." The combination of the above three interdisciplinary theoretical perspectives, therefore, appear to provide an instructive and comprehensive explanation of these empirical findings.

6.3 H-3: One's Ability to Discriminate Increases One's Mass Media Consumption

Empirical findings from this study also support the third hypothesis:

> H-3: The more one discriminates between candidates and their respective political parties, the more one uses the mass media.

This finding is perhaps best explained by two theoretical perspectives (Figure 3): *media dependency* (uses and gratifications) and *attitude centrality*.

Perhaps the point of most interest here is that the mass media apparently take on a different role in one's political behavior subsequent to the individual's making his or her decision regarding how to vote. Prior to making this decision, most people enlist the mass media in a goal attainment mode, thus gathering the information needed for being able to discriminate between candidates in an upcoming election. After having made one's decision regarding how to vote, however, the role the mass media play in one's political behavior changes from one of information-seeking to one of attitude reinforcement. This phenomenon might best be explained within the context of the "uses and gratifications" paradigm (Katz, 1969; Blumler & McQuail, 1969; Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1973), which is also incorporated in a media dependency perspective.

In this mode, the media consumer conducts himself in a manner that reinforces one's existing attitudes and beliefs. The mechanism employed in such behavior is one of voluntary selective exposure, selective perception, and selective

retention (Kraus & Davis, 1976; Chaffee & Hochheimer, 1985), in which the individual becomes sensitized mostly to points of view (both in and out of the media) that are in keeping with his or her earlier decision, and actually avoids exposure to messages that do not. Since these decisions more often than not coincide with one's central attitudes and belief system, a comprehensive explanation of this phenomenon must also include the theory of attitude centrality, which has already been discussed in some detail. Therefore, once one's decision regarding how to vote is made, it is unlikely that it will change unless something quite dramatic takes place prior to election day.

6.4 Differences Among Respective Media

The findings from this research effort have, to this point, indeed proven to be instructive, particularly in terms of the call from Ball-Rokeach et al. (1984) to seek out a better understanding of the media system's role in society before addressing one's dependencies on the individual media that comprise the mass media. Yet, as stated in Chapter 1, this does not detract from the need for a more enlightened understanding of the role of the respective media in one's political decision-making process. This is perhaps emphasized most in this research effort by the empirical finding reported in Chapter 5 that the reciprocal path in the structural equation model, from one's ability to discriminate between candidates and their parties to one's use of the mass media (collectively), was far weaker than was anticipated, being statistically significant at a level of $p<.10$. The explanation for this unexpected finding may well lie within the context of understanding the respective roles of each of the four medium that comprise the measure of the mass media in this research design. This section, therefore, is dedicated to providing theoretical explanations for differences among the four

respective media (television, radio, magazines, and newspapers) that were observed in this research effort. Some of these differences were hypothesized a priori and some were not.

The first hypothesis concerning differences between the four media that comprise the measure of mass media, with regard to one's voting behavior, states:

> H-4 One's use of each of the four media will affect one's ability to discriminate between candidates running for the same public office and their respective political parties.

Further, it is being argued in this research effort that each of the four medium affects one's ability to discriminate between candidates running for the same public office, even after controlling for the three traditional demographic and three political variables. Indeed, this hypothesis was empirically supported. The theoretical justification for this finding, of course, is the same as for the collective effects of the mass media discussed above with regard to the first hypothesis. However, this does not suggest that each of the four media play identical roles in the political decision-making process. In keeping with this line of thinking, specific differences were anticipated between the respective media; however, as noted in Chapter 5, these differences did not manifest themselves entirely as hypothesized. Several of these aberations are particularly noteworthy and will be incorporated into the discussion below regarding observed differences among the media that comprise the mass media variable in this study.

The first specific hypothesized difference among these media states:

> H-5: Newspapers, magazines, and the radio provide media consumers with more relevant information regarding political campaigns than does television, thus are more useful in helping individuals to discriminate between candidates running for the same public office, and their respective political parties.

While the findings in this research effort did, indeed, support the notion that **newspapers** play a more important role in one's ability to discriminate between candidates than does television; this same conclusion is not at all clear with regard to the role **radio** plays. Further, according to this study, **magazines** actually play a less important role in this decision-making process than does television.

In light of past research, it is only sensible to expect one's use of the newspaper to play a greater role in helping one to discriminate between candidates, even with one's level of political involvement and such demographic variables as level of education controlled for. This is due, in large part, to the nature of the medium itself. Television, by definition, is a passive medium; while newspaper consumption requires far more effort and involvement on the part of the consumer. As a result, very little "passive learning" takes place when one reads the newspaper, particularly compared to watching television. Further, not only has one made an aggressive decision to expose one's self to information when reading the newspaper; but the reader can actually seek out information regarding personality characteristics and/or issue positions with respect to competing candidates in an effort to identify differences between them via the newspaper, where this process is difficult (if not impossible) via television news. Finally, by nature of the medium, newspapers can provide far more depth of coverage regarding the candidates running for office compared to what television can provide. All of these characteristics combined lead one to a logical expectation that newspaper use will play a far greater role in helping a voter discriminate between candidates and their respective political parties.

One's use of the radio for helping one discriminate between candidates proved to have the same level of statistical significance as one's use of television

for this purpose ($p<.05$), but the magnitude of the path coefficient was indeed larger for radio (.467 and .305, respectively). While this difference is modest, it remains noteworthy.

Radio is a unique medium due to two factors: (1) its news format functions more as a headline service, as opposed to a news service; and (2) people are often captive (e.g., riding in their automobile) when they are listening to radio news. It is likely, therefore, that one of the unique characteristics of radio news is that it often sensitizes the listener to given topics by providing abbreviated capsules of major stories (agenda-setting). After hearing a story that turns out to be of particular interest to the listener (a function of attitude centrality), that individual may well be inclined to follow-up via the newspaper for more in-depth information (uses and gratifications). In this way, the radio functions as a special case compared to the other media, especially television. This scenario fits nicely into a media dependency perspective.

Perhaps a more curious finding (on its surface) involving one's use of the radio for political information, as noted in Chapter 5, is one that was not hypothesized a priori. The path coefficient between radio use and discrimination (.467) is more than twice that of magazine use (.198). Both are statistically significant at the $p<.05$ level. In light of the above explanation of the unique characteristics of radio use for political information, however, this finding appears sensible. The radio is undoubtedly perceived by the consumer as being more objective, and it may even sensitize the listener in such a manner as to search out more information regarding given topics of particular interest to that individual.

It was hypothesized that magazine use would play a larger role in helping one to discriminate between political candidates than would television use. This

notion simply was not supported by the data. The magnitude of the path coefficient (.198) from magazine use to discrimination was not trivial, however, and proved to be statistically significant at the $p<.05$ (the same as the path coefficient for TV use). The reasoning underlying this hypothesis was that magazines, much like newspapers, require a concerted effort to read. Further, magazines are known to be more biased than other media, which suggests that those who turn to magazines for some portion of their political information pay a great deal of attention to the viewpoints put forth through this medium. While the findings show that magazines clearly play an important role in helping one to discriminate between political candidates running for the same office, with such variables controlled for as one's level of involvement in the campaign and such demographic variables as education and income, the findings here suggest that television simply plays a greater role in the political decision-making process than does magazine use. Nonetheless, the theoretical explanation for how this phenomenon operates clearly fits nicely into a media dependency perspective.

As suggested elsewhere in the present dissertation, of particular interest are the observed differences between the respective media involving the reciprocal path from discrimination back to one's use of each medium. The hypothesis created to test this notion states:

> H-6: Television and newspapers play an important role in one's political decision-making process even after one is able to discriminate between candidates; while one's use of the radio and magazines will cease playing an important role.

As noted in Chapter 5, this hypothesis was clearly supported in this research effort. It is being argued here, therefore, that this finding accounts for the fact that this path in the original theoretical model, which incorporates the mass media as a whole, was statistically significant at a level of only $p<.10$.

Indeed, newspaper use proved statistically significant at $p<.01$ (Figure 5), and the magnitude of this path coefficient was .273. While being statistically significant at only $p<.05$, the magnitude of one's use of television was very similar at .214. Both radio and magazine use turned out not to be statistically significant, and the magnitude +55.2Hof each respective path coefficient was approximately zero.

The theoretical underpinnings of this hypothesized finding rests within the "powerful audience" notion embedded in the uses and gratifications paradigm, which is incorporated in a media dependency perspective. Herein lies a classical example of the selective process taking hold; wherein the voter simply turns off to information that does not support his or her perception of the differences between the candidates, and ultimately one's decision regarding how to vote, and becomes voluntarily sensitized to information (and even seeks out information) that supports his or her point(s) of view. Clearly, one's existing beliefs and attitudes are reinforced, which is further explained by the characteristics embedded in the theory of attitude centrality. The one mass media theoretical paradigm that takes a back seat in all this (although it remains in force to a lesser degree) is that of agenda-setting. This more comprehensive explanation than has heretofore been posited in the political communication literature clearly falls within a media dependency perspective.

6.5 The Use of the Mass Media Increases the Likelihood of Voting

The final hypothesis in this research effort states:

> H-7: The pattern of media effects within a given national election will be consistent for both a close election, and an election that is not close.

This hypothesis is intended to demonstrate that the pattern of media effects in the 1976 data set (close election) would be replicated in the 1984 data set (landslide), thus laying the ground necessary for being able to generalize the findings in this study to most types of national elections. While most of the findings regarding the hypothesized relationships among variables in the structural equation model were, indeed, replicated in both data sets, there was one finding that was not hypothesized a priori that is especially worthy of note. This finding suggests that the mass media may play a pivotal role during a close race that may actally result in an individual deciding to vote when he or she might otherwise have decided simply not to vote at all.

It has been posited elsewhere in the present dissertation that one outcome of an individual's not being able to discriminate between candidates is that one simply decides not to vote. An alternative outcome of not being able to discriminate between candidates, however, may be for one to seek out additional information regarding the candidates than one might otherwise not be inclined to seek out in an effort to find more subtle differences that may assist the voter in deciding which candidate to support. The present research effort provided empirical evidence that suggests that this latter behavior is particularly likely to take place in an election that is perceived by the voter as being a close race.

It has already been made clear in this dissertation that the political communications literature holds that most people decide how they are going to vote quite early in most campaigns. This is especially the case, of course, in a landslide condition. Further, of those who are inherently apathetic, the particular finding being discussed here will have little or no impact. These people are not likely to vote, nor are they likely to pay much attention to the mass media with

respect to either a landslide or a close race. But with regards to those individuals who do care about a given race, the following revelation can be extremely important.

As pointed out in Chapter 5, the path in the structural equation model being tested here between media use and whether or not one voted did not operate the same in the 1976 "horse race" as in the 1984 "landslide." When the race was one-sided, this path was not statistically significant, and the magnitude of the path coefficient was virtually zero. When the race was a close one, however, the path coefficient was statistically significant at the $p<.01$ level, and its magnitude was .315.

The implications of the above finding are most interesting. Instead of one becoming frustrated by not being able to discriminate between the candidates vying for the same office, and deciding simply not to vote, this finding suggests that people became more interested, chose to seek out information via the mass media; and ultimately vote. On the one hand, if this interpretation is valid, then the media played a positive role in terms of encouraging the members of the electorate to carry out their inherent right in the U.S. to participate in the political process. On the other hand, it points out the importance of such theoretical paradigms as "agenda-setting." In either case, this finding provides empirical support that the media can, indeed, play a pivotal role determining one's political decision-making process. Clearly, this lends credence to the media dependency theoretical perspective.

6.6 Interpreting the Findings from an Applied Perspective

The findings from this research effort have important implications from an applied perspective, e.g., that of a political strategist or consultant. There are

three specific findings from this research effort that perhaps have the greatest interest to the political consultant in terms of developing effective campaign strategies.

The first important finding is that the mass media play an information-seeking role for the media consumer prior to one deciding who to vote for and an attitude reinforcement role after deciding who to vote for. Combine this with the confirmation of existing political thought that most people decide early in a campaign who to vote for and these findings merit serious consideration by campaign strategists and consultants. This suggests, for example, that campaign strategists should take special care to assess the nature of the campaign at hand and incorporate its inherent characteristics into the kick-off strategy. On the one hand, for example, if a given political seat has received a great deal of attention in the press prior to the official kick off of the actual campaign, then most people will already have decided who they are going to vote for. Therefore, the timing of the kick off is not too critical. On the other hand, if the media has given little or no attention to the upcoming campaign, then when and how the campaign is introduced can have a major impact on the ultimate outcome of the election. In other words, the election may be won or lost in the first phase of the campaign. Further, this suggests that an effective "endorsement" campaign may be more relevant in the early stages of a campaign, when most people are making their decision regarding how to vote, as opposed to waiting until the final days of a campaign to launch such a campaign that is targeted at the undecided. Contemporary wisdom among political strategists holds that this latter tactic is most effective. Of course, applying conventional wisdom also gives political consultants more time to identify and secure endorsements from individuals with high, perceived credibility among large voting blocks. But then,

large voting blocks seldom remain undecided during the latter stages of any campaign. Therefore, this finding suggests that this component of developing effective political campaign strategy may be due for some amount of reassessment.

The second finding of particular note from an applied perspective is that of those who do, indeed, decide late in the campaign regarding who to vote for, many are experiencing a difficult time in: (1) discriminating between the candidates running for the same public office and, thus, (2) deciding which candidate to vote for. This points out the importance of targeting the undecided voters accurately, particularly late in a campaign, and mounting an effective last-stage push that makes the more emotion-driven differences between the candidates as salient as possible. In other words, a concerted effort should be made to identify blocks of voters who remain undecided late in the campaign. Then, find specific topics of interest within each block on which the competing candidates clearly hold opposing views. Of these, determine which issues are the most emotional within each voting block and, of these, which one(s) your candidate can best capitalize on. Finally, design and implement a short-term, high visibility campaign regarding these topics of interest that is targeted at the members of each respective voting block.

The third important finding from an applied viewpoint is that people use the mass media more for gathering their political information regarding a political campaign when it is a horse race, compared to when the campaign is one-sided. Campaign strategists, more and more, are using media other than the press (e.g., video cassettes) during the final days of a campaign to reach voting blocks regarding issues of particular concern to the voters in these respective blocks. This finding suggests that when the candidate is involved in a horse race, that

the press should be given priority. In other words, the fact that the race is close means that the voters are not able to discriminate between candidates as well as they need to in order to make their decision regarding which candidate to vote for. This results in many voters becoming more aggressive in their search for information, thus the competing candidates do not have to "kick a sleeping dog" who either isn't interested in the election or who has already made up his or her mind regarding who to vote for. While this finding does not suggest that voters limit their intake of information to the mass media, it does imply that individuals do, indeed, aggressively turn to the mass media in an effort to seek out information regarding differences between the candidates involved in a close race. Thus, the press apparently plays a more important role during the later stages of a close race compared to the same stage of a landslide. This can be particularly important to the campaign strategist who uses the press more as a house organ to "get out the vote" among known supporters during the final stages of the campaign, as opposed to conducting a media blitz focused on promoting important differences between one's candidate and his or her opponent in an attempt to influence voters.

On balance, therefore, the findings from this research effort may have important implications from the applied perspective that campaign strategists and consultants would do well to investigate further.

6.7 Future Research

The above finding (in 6.5) also highlights the need for ongoing research with regards to the role the mass media play in the political process. The present research clearly supports the notion that the mass media do, indeed, play a pivotal role in the political process in the U.S. at the higher levels of

government (specifically, with regard to the election of the President of the U.S.). Of particular interest to the author of the present dissertation, however, is the claim by contemporary mass media and political communication scholars (as pointed out in Chapter 1) that *direct* media effects are far more likely to materialize in lower-level offices (e.g. city, county, state assembly, and congress) compared to the higher-level offices (e.g., governor, state and national senate, and the president of the U.S.) [Rothschild, 1975; Becker and Whitney, 1980]. Unfortunately, very little empirical research has been conducted to date regarding political campaigns at the lower levels of government in the U.S.

There are two reasons for this void: (1) data are not readily available involving the lower-level campaigns due, in large part, to funding agencies not having made this a priority in their funding agendas; and (2) there is an acute need for a theoretical model that is conducive to testing and comparing the role of the mass media (both collectively and individually) at the higher levels of political office with the lower levels of political office.

As stressed at the outset of the present dissertation, one of the primary purposes of this research effort was to correct the second problem: to create a meaningful theoretical model, and to test that model using national data, in order to provide sound empirical findings that can be used as a baseline for testing the role of the mass media at the lower levels of the political process in future efforts. Not only is this segment of the dissertation intended to be a *call for research* expressly for this purpose; but, in fact, it is the intent of the author of the present dissertation to establish his own research agenda in the coming months and years along these lines.

6.7 Summary

It has been stressed throughout this dissertation that the primary goal of conducting this research effort is three-fold: (1) to offer a more comprehensive explanation of the role the mass media play in voting behavior than, to date, has been forthcoming; (2) to create a theoretical model for testing this more comprehensive explanation; and (3) to provide sound empirical evidence in support of this theoretical explanation.

Further, it was argued that the key to realizing such a goal was in synthesizing existing theoretical paradigms from multiple intellectual disciplines, as opposed to attempting to create new theory. This decision was made with the understanding that this tactic may well invite critics to label the results as being an "incremental" step as opposed to being a "quantum" leap. Indeed, this step is incremental in nature and it was intended to be that way. The underlying notion of this research effort is that this incremental step is, in fact, the next appropriate step to take in the quest for developing a more comprehensive body of knowledge within political communications theory.

As the title of the dissertation states, this research effort was cloaked in a **media dependency** perspective, with various complimentary theoretical paradigms being carefully ingrained in order to develop a more comprehensive and meaningful understanding of this phenomenon. These additional theoretical paradigms included: *agenda-setting*, *passive learning*, and the *theory of attitude centrality*. The *uses and gratification* paradigm was also incorporated as an integral part of media dependency.

Also taken into account in this effort was the call from mass media scholars for a better understanding of the role the "media system" (mass media) as a whole play in society, as well as the respective roles of each medium that

comprise the mass media. Of course, this research is limited to studying the role of the media system as a whole, and four specific media (television, radio, magazines, and newspapers), in one's political behavior.

Finally, this dissertation concluded with a **call for research** that focuses on the role of the mass media (both collectively and individually) in one's political decision-making process at lower levels of government including (but not limited to) such posts as city council, county supervisor, state assembly, and congress.

The author of this dissertation believes that this research effort has, indeed, provided a more comprehensive theoretical explanation regarding the role the mass media, both collectively and individually, play in one's political decision-making process. More than providing a meaningful theoretical insight into the role the mass media play in political behavior, however, the author of this dissertation also believes this research effort has achieved the goal of providing a theoretical framework and structural equation model conducive to testing media effects in voting behavior concerning important differences between the role the mass media play at the higher levels of politics compared to lower levels of politics. Considering the minimal amount of past research that is focused on these differences, the research agenda for the author of this dissertation appears both promising and pressing.

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Appendix A

Summary of Hypotheses

H-1: The more one **uses the mass media** for gathering information regarding political candidates running for the same public office, the more one will be able to **discriminate** between the candidates and their respective political parties.

H-2: The more one **discriminates** between candidates running for the same public office, and their respective political parties, the **less difficult** it will be to decide for whom to vote.

H-3: The more one **discriminates** between candidates and their respective political parties, the more one **uses the mass media**.

H-4: One's use of **each of the four** respective media will **affect** one's ability to **discriminate** between candidates running for the same public office and their respective political parties.

H-5: **Newspapers, magazines**, and the **radio** provide media consumers with more relevant information regarding political campaigns than does **television**, thus are more useful in helping individuals to discriminate between candidates running for the same public office, and their respective political parties.

H-6: **Television** and **newspapers** will continue to play an important role in one's political decision-making process even after one is able to discriminate between candidates; while one's use of the radio and magazines will cease playing an important role.

H-7: The pattern of **media effects** within a given national election will be consistent for both a **close** election and an election that is **not close**.

Appendix B

Correlation Matrix for Indicators of Political Involvement

	Interest		Influence		Meetings		Work		Contribute	
	1976	**1984**	**1976**	**1984**	**1976**	**1984**	**1976**	**1984**	**1976**	**1984**
Interest	1.000	1.000								
Influence	.3028	.2828	1.000	1.000						
Meetings	.1449	.1905	.1624	.1974	1.000	1.000				
Work	.1279	.1289	.2170	.1916	.3532	.3099	1.000	1.000		
Contribute	.1556	.1914	.2406	.1690	.2238	.1775	.2545	.1241	1.000	1.000

Appendix C

Correlation Matrix for Indicators of Media Use

	Amount TV		Amount Radio		Amount Magazines		Amount Paper	
	1976	1984	1976	1984	1976	1984	1976	1984
Amount TV	1.000	1.000						
Amount Radio	.2970	.2860	1.000	1.000				
Amount Magazines	.3284	.2692	.2371	.2029	1.000	1.000		
Amount Paper	.4451	.4587	.2749	.2589	.4963	.4118	1.000	1.000