

POST, UPDATE, AND PARTICIPATE: AN ANALYSIS OF AGE AND EDUCATION ON
SOCIAL MEDIA POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
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ABSTRACT

DANIELLE N. KOZUSNIK: Post, Update, and Participate: An Analysis of Age and Education
on Social Media Political Engagement

(Under the direction of Dr. Winston Tripp)

While social movements scholars have long looked at other types of participation, such as voting, protesting, writing letters to politicians to name a few, the relatively new use of social media for political purposes has gone largely unexamined. In this study, I consider the importance of Social Media Political Engagement (SMPE) as a form of political participation by developing a theoretical framework from two foundational social movements perspectives (Biographical Availability and Resource Mobilization Theory) to examine their effect on SMPE. I analyze the 2012 American National Election Studies (ANES) data, using a logistic regression model to examine the relationship between Biographical Availability (marital status, children, work status, and age), Resources (education and income), and the person's demographic characteristics, on SMPE. I find that there is a relationship between both Biographical Availability and the Resource factors and Social Media Political Engagement. My findings suggest that the use of social media as a form of political participation is affected by many of the same factors as traditional forms of political participation, with age and education playing a particularly important role in affecting SMPE.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, increasing attention has been paid to the role of social media usage in society (Noor Al-Deen and Hendricks 2012) due to the rapid growth in social media users (boyd and Ellison 2008). This is especially true among political participation scholars as it has become increasingly clear that the internet has changed the nature of political engagement overall. According to Boulianne (2009), there is disagreement among scholars about the effect of the internet on political participation. While some argue that civic engagement has declined (Putnam 2000), others contend that it has instead transformed into a myriad of new forms (Zukin et al. 2006), some of which have been facilitated by the internet (Norris 2002). However, while most scholars predict political engagement through social media to play an important role in overall political engagement, it is not at all clear if this form of political engagement is indeed analogous to other forms of engagement. For example, do the factors that drive a person to protest also increase the likelihood that he or she will post politically active content on Facebook or other social media platforms? As researchers have worked to catch up with this rapidly evolving digital area, they have yet to produce conclusive answers.

Using social media to engage in political activities has become increasingly important as contemporary social movements utilize this form of engagement. The use of social media for political engagement gives people the ability to reach a larger network of people, and activists now have become very effective at using social media in a wide range of political

engagement activities (Langman 2005). Many scholars continue to emphasize social media as an important new factor in mobilizing social movements (Della Porta and Mosca 2005). This growing role of social media has taken a central part in several contemporary social movements, such as the Arab Spring revolutions in 2010 (Eltantawy and Wiest 2011), the Ferguson Missouri protests (Bonilla and Rosa 2015), and the “#BlackLivesMatter” campaign (Harris 2015). As the ways social media is used in social movements proliferates, it is likely that its usage will be increasingly important in the development and success of movements.

In this research project, I seek to address this gap in the literature by examining the effect of two main social movements perspectives on an emerging form of political participation: Social Media Political Engagement. First, I review the existing research on this area, focusing on two of the main theoretical perspectives of social movements research. Next, I examine the limited research on social media use as a form of political engagement. Then, I turn to describing the data and methods used in this analysis. Finally, I present the results of this analysis and discuss the implications of the research.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Social movements and political participation scholars have long identified two main sets of factors that affect political engagement: biographical constraints and individual resources. Both of these have long been used to predict political engagement. However, until only recently social media usage has often been overlooked as a form of political engagement. In this research, I test the effect of these two main theoretical perspectives on Social Media Political Engagement as a form of political participation. To review the relevant research on these topics, I now review the research on Biographical Availability, Resources, and finally Social Media Political Engagement as a form of political participation.

Biographical Availability

McAdam (1986) argues that a person may participate in social movements more or less depending on the personal constraints that person has in her/ his life. McAdam proposes a theoretical framework, known as the Biographical Availability perspective, in which factors such as employment status, marital status, and family structure components such as the presence of children in the household, and the person's age may be constraints that can keep a person from protesting. These constraints can increase the cost and risk of protesting. For example, some scholars have argued that being free of employment constraints increases activism (McCarthy and Zald 1973). This suggests that a person who is unemployed or is retired would have fewer time constraints than someone who is employed. Additionally, being retired might increase participation since it also reduces the personal constraints in a person's life.

The effect marital status has on political engagement is frequently found to vary by each marital status category. Those who are married vote the most frequently compared to those who are divorced, separated, or widowed, who are the lightest voters (Wolfinger and Wolfinger 2008; Sandell and Plutzer 2005). There are many explanations for why there is a difference in participation among marital statuses. For example, according to Alesina and Giuliano (2011), people who are married or single have more of an interest in and more conversations about politics than those who are divorced. Additionally, those who are married have more political interest, efficacy, and knowledge of political information in general (Verba, Burns, and Schlozman 1997). Married men and women usually act jointly. If one person in the marriage votes, they usually both vote and vice versa (Glaser 1960; Stoker and Jennings 1995; Wolfinger and Wolfinger 2008).

Not only do researchers find that changes in marital status directly affect political engagement, they also find that it affects political engagement indirectly, through other factors such as residential mobility. Aside from the influence each married person has on the other, being married provides the advantage of having someone to help remember things like needing to register to vote due to a move or getting an absentee ballot if they are going to vote but plan to be out of town during an election (Wolfinger and Wolfinger 2008). This occurs when a person relocates because of a divorce, and then the residential mobility in turn lowers voter turnout (Kern 2009). Making sure to vote and registering to vote may not be high on a person's priority list after an event such as a divorce or a spouse dying (Wolfinger and Wolfinger 2008).

Parental status also has an effect on a person's political engagement regardless of their marital status. Having children is one of the constraints McAdam (1986) discusses may keep a person from being able to protest. Alesina and Giuliano (2011) theorize that single people are

more likely to get involved in demonstrations because they do not have the extra responsibilities involved with having a family, which is very similar to McAdam's conception of Biographical Availability. This constraint may also have an effect on other forms of political engagement such as voting or volunteering, as these acts require a person's time. Wolfinger and Wolfinger (2008) find support for this idea in terms of voting behavior. Specifically, they find that having children has a negative effect on voter turnout. However, according to Plutzer and Wiefek (2006), having a spouse or an extended family may help with the availability of time to be politically engaged. For example, someone else may be available to watch after the children while the parent votes or volunteers. Having family to help out with children helps to explain the higher voter turnout rate.

Not only does the presence of children in the household affect the likelihood of political engagement of the parent or parents, but the age of the child also has an important effect. As discussed, it may be difficult for parents to be politically engaged in activities like volunteering due to time constraints. With young children, this changes once the child or children become school aged. Once the children become old enough to attend school, they can act as a form of a network for the parents to become engaged and to volunteer. Parents are more likely to be asked to volunteer than people who are not parents, regardless of their marital status (Musick and Wilson 2008). Social movements scholars have found one of the most important factors in mobilizing a person to participate is to ask them (Schussman and Soule 2005). People are more likely to become involved if they are asked and this is what seems to occur with parents who have children who are school aged. However, Wilfang and McAdam (1991) state younger children require more time, while children 12 to 18 years old do not demand the same attention. Jennings (1979) finds very little impact of having children between the ages of 5 and 18 in the home on voter turnout.

There is a difference in the types of political engagement mothers become involved with as compared to fathers. Young mothers tend to become involved in school politics, while young fathers tend to be more involved in general politics (Jennings 1979). Verba and colleagues (1997) find that women tend to know more about school politics than general politics, as well. Jennings (1979) contends the reasons why women are more affected by the school politics than men may be because of traditional gender roles, assuming non-employed mothers have more time. Mothers may gain social networks from school politics. There is more motivation and opportunity structures for mothers involved in school politics than fathers.

Although many scholars do not include age in their analyses, when using the biographical availability perspective, some have argued that “perhaps no variable is as closely linked to the concept of biographical availability as age” (Wiltfang and McAdam 1991:996). Although age does not function as a constraint in a person’s life in the same way that the other measures of Biographical Availability do, it is an important factor because it is so intimately connected with these life processes. For example, being a student often occurs earlier in the life course, while being retired more commonly occurs later in the life course. This is a particularly relevant measure of Biographical Availability for this research because age is also associated with social media use.

Resources

Scholars have long argued that the resources a person has effects if he or she will participate politically. Among social movements scholars, this theoretical perspective became categorized under the umbrella of Resource Mobilization Theory (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Jenkins 1983). Resource mobilization theorists argue that people need resources such as time,

money, skills, and status (McCarthy and Zald 2002) to be able to participate in a social movement. Political scientists Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) propose a similar theoretical perspective in their “Civic Voluntarism Model” of political engagement, emphasizing the role of individual-level factors on political engagement.

Each framework accentuates the importance of education and income on political participation. Education, as a specific individual resource, is a strong predictor of political engagement (Verba et al. 1995; Barkan 2004). It has been found to have an effect on many types of political participation, including voting (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Dalton, 2008) and voluntarism (Musick and Wilson 2008). Income is also often found to predict political engagement (Brady 2004), although the effect is not always significant (McVeigh and Smith 1999).

Social Media Use as Political Engagement

There is limited research on the topic of the Internet or social media sites and political engagement. It is a new and quickly evolving area. While some scholars look specifically at Internet use, others concentrate on the use of social media sites like Facebook in combination with political engagement. There is also disagreement on what form social media takes in political engagement. Many of the scholars who research this topic look at social media as a facilitator to becoming politically engaged, while other scholars look at the Internet as a form of political engagement.

Many scholars have found the use of the Internet or social media sites can lead to political engagement (Baek 2015; Bakker and Vreese 2011; Dalton 2008; de Zúñiga, Jung, and Valenzuela 2012; Hargittai and Shaw 2013; Hyun and Kim 2015; Norris 2002; Pasek et al. 2006;

Valenzuela 2013). This is true whether it be to just voice an opinion, have political conversations, or gather the news from the Internet or different social media sites. The Internet and social media sites can act as mobilizers and increase the chances of becoming politically engaged. Valenzuela (2013) believes social media sites offer the perfect avenue to form collective action. A larger group of people are able to be reached by intertwining private and political sectors. The Internet (or social media sites) provides more opportunities to be able to gain information, create networks to be able to communicate political beliefs, and act on them (Dalton 2008; Norris 2002). Hyun and Kim (2015) find support for this in their research. They find having political conversations on social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, and political participation are related to one another. As the frequency of engagement in political conversations increases, the likelihood of being politically engaged also increases. Not only do the Internet and social media sites help mediate political engagement, they also help open up the potential for new forms of political engagement. Dalton (2008) and Norris (2002) both agree the Internet creates more political opportunity.

An alternative way researchers have studied this area is concentrating on how the Internet and social media sites can be used as a form of political engagement. Gibson and Cantijoch (2013) state that different forms of political participation that are usually conducted offline can also be replicated online. Dalton (2008:53) follows this idea when he states, “The Internet can also be a source of political activism that occurs electronically”. Someone can sign a petition, donate money, take political polls, write a letter to a politician, or voice political concerns or opinions online. Gibson and Cantijoch (2013:714) provide an example that illustrates how online forms of participation can be just as, if not more, important or instrumental as offline forms of participation by stating, “Posting one’s opinion to a blog or social network site arguably

makes a more immediate and potentially influential public statement than wearing a lapel badge". Using the Internet or social media sites for political activities provides a larger network to share political thoughts and communicate with others about political issues.

The essential difference between these perspectives is in the ordering of how social media is used for political engagement. It is either conceptualized as a final form of engagement itself, or as a facilitating factor that leads to political engagement. Although there is some disagreement in the ordering of social media engagement in the process of political participation, scholars do agree that it is an important factor on its own. Since the aim of this research is not to adjudicate between these two perspectives, but to instead examine the effect of existing social movements theories on the emerging form of participation of Social Media Political Engagement, I begin with the premise that social media engagement is in fact an important form of political engagement on its own.

Hypotheses

In this research, I seek to examine the effects of two foundational social movements theoretical perspectives (Biographical Availability and Resources) on an emerging typical form of political participation: Social Media Political Engagement. Based on this theoretical framework I propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Biographical Availability (Marital Status)

H_{1A}: A person who has never been married will be more likely than a person who is married to participate in Social Media Political Engagement, controlling for other factors.

H_{1B}: A person who is widowed will be more likely than a person who is married to participate in Social Media Political Engagement, controlling for other factors.

H_{1C}: A person who is divorced will be more likely than a person who is married to participate in Social Media Political Engagement, controlling for other factors.

Hypothesis 2: Biographical Availability (Children)

H_{2A}: A person with children 10 years old and younger will be less likely to participate in Social Media Political Engagement than a person without children 10 years old and younger, controlling for other factors.

H_{2B}: As the number of children a person has increases, the likelihood that she or he will participate in Social Media Political Engagement will decrease, controlling for other factors.

Hypothesis 3: Biographical Availability (Work Status)

H_{3A}: An unemployed person will be more likely than a person who is working to participate in Social Media Political Engagement, controlling for other factors.

H_{3B}: A retired person will be more likely than a person who is working to participate in Social Media Political Engagement, controlling for other factors.

Hypothesis 4: Biographical Availability (Age)

H₄: As age increases, a person is less likely participate in Social Media Political Engagement, controlling for other factors.

Hypothesis 5: Resource (Education)

H₄: The more education a person has the more likely he or she will be to participate in Social Media Political Engagement, controlling for other factors.

Hypothesis 6: Resource (Income)

H₅: The more income a person has the more likely he or she will be to participate in Social Media Political Engagement, controlling for other factors.

I examine these hypotheses in order to test the theoretical perspectives and situate Social Media Political Engagement as a form of political participation. Next, I turn to describing the data and methods used in this research.

DATA AND METHODS

Data

I used the 2012 American National Election Studies (ANES) Time Series data to analyze the effects Biographical Availability factor and Resources has on Social Media Political Engagement. The principle investigators were Vincent Hutchings (University of Michigan), Gary Segura (Stanford University), and Simon Jackman (Stanford University), as well as, Ted Brader (University of Michigan) as the associate principle investigator. The 2012 ANES Time Series data was conducted in a dual-mode design, which includes face-to-face and internet interviews with two separate samples. The director of the face-to-face interviews was Darrell Donakowski. The director of the internet interviews was Matthew DeBell. Each interview mode consisted of pre-election questions and post-election questions. Pre-election face-to-face interviews were conducted between September 8 and November 5, 2012 and post-election interviews were conducted from November 7, 2012 to January 13, 2013. For the internet interviews, pre-election interviews were administered between October 11 and November 6, 2012 and post-election interviews took place between November 29, 2012 and January 24, 2013. By using the dual-mode design, it provided a total sample size of 5,914.

Respondents were U.S. citizens who were 18 or older by November 6, 2012, Election Day. Only one person could be a respondent per household. The screening targeted a sufficient sample of black and Hispanics respondents. The respondents collected for the internet interviews were members of the Knowledge Panel. The Knowledge Panel is a large group of people who are asked to complete surveys each month over numerous topics. These respondents were

administered the survey in an email which included an internet link. The respondents are chosen using address-based sampling and random-digit dialing. The respondents for the face-to-face sample were collected in 125 census tracts, using address-based, stratified, multi-stage cluster sample. There was a main sample collected of 1,400 and an oversample of 300 each of the black and Hispanic respondents. For many of the questions on the survey, the interviewer used a computer-aided personal interview or CAPI, while some questions let the interviewee answer using a computer-aided self-interview or CASI.

Dependent variable

The dependent variable of this study is Social Media Political Engagement. In order to measure this form of political engagement, respondents were asked “During the past 4 years, have you ever sent a message on Facebook or Twitter about a political issue, or have you not done this in the past 4 years”. This variable is a dichotomous nominal variable coded 1 if the respondent has sent a message about political issues using social media platforms like Facebook or Twitter or coded 0 if the respondent has not.

Independent variables

The main independent variables I selected in this research to measure Biographical Availability are marital status, employment status, number of children, age of children, and age of the respondent. The respondent’s age was an interval-ratio variable, ranging from age 17 to “age 90 or older”. The marital status variable asked the respondent if he or she is married, divorced, widowed, separated, or never married. I created new variables that coded each marital status category as dichotomous nominal dummy variables, with each variable coded 1 if she or

he was in that category, and 0 if not. For example, for the marital status category of married, I created a variable that was coded 1 if the respondent was married as of now and 0 if he or she was not married as of now.

The employment status variable was separated into individual variables for each employment status variable, including working now, temporarily laid off, unemployed, retired, permanently disabled, homemaker, and student. Much like the marital status variable, each variable was coded as 1 if the respondent was in that category and 0 if he or she was not. The number of children variable asked for the total number of children in the respondent's household. The respondent could answer "No children in household" (coded as 0), "One child in household" (coded as 1), "Two children in household" (coded as 2), or "Three or more children in household" (coded as 3). The age of the children variable was separated into two variables. One variable asked how many children in the household are 10 years old or younger. The other variable asked how many children in the household were between the ages of 11 and 17. I coded each of these as dichotomous nominal dummy variables. For the 10 years old and younger variable, I coded it 1 if the respondent had a child or children 10 years or younger in their household, and 0 if they did not. I repeated the same process for the age group of children 11 to 17.

The main independent variables I use to measure resources are income and education. The income variable asked the respondents for their family income. This was an interval-ratio variable, which was split into income ranges starting from "under \$5,000" to "\$250,000 or more". The education variable was an ordinal variable and asked for the respondent's highest level of education. The respondent could choose "Less than high school credential" (coded as 1),

“High school credential” (coded as 2), “Some post-high-school, no bachelor’s degree” (coded as 3), “Bachelor’s degree” (coded as 4), or “Graduate degree” (coded as 5).

Control variables

In addition to the Biographical Availability and Resource Mobilization Theory perspectives, researchers commonly include several demographic control variables in their models (Verba et al. 1995; Schussman and Soule 2005; McAdam 1986; Wiltfang and McAdam 1991). I follow these researchers in my analysis by using the control variables of sex and race and ethnicity. The sex variable is a nominal variable and asked the respondent if she or he was male or female. The race and ethnicity variable used in this study reported the summary of the respondent’s race and ethnicity group. Each category was included as a dummy variable, coded as 1 if the person is in the category and 0 if the person is not. The race and ethnicity variables were white, non-Hispanic, black, non-Hispanic, Hispanic, and other non-Hispanic including multiple races.

Methods

In this analysis, I examine the effect of Biographical Availability and Resource Mobilization Theory on Social Media Political Engagement. Since this is a nominal dependent variable, I utilize a logistic regression model, which is more appropriate than an Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) model in cases such as this, when the dependent variable is not interval-ratio and an OLS model would provide biased estimates (Long 1997). After listwise deletion, my sample is 5,240.

I begin my analysis by including the Biographical Availability variables (with the exception of age) in the model, and then I add the Resource Mobilization Theory variables, followed by the control variables. Finally, I add age in to the last model as the final measurement of Biographical Availability. I add age to the model last both because it is a factor that is only intermittently included in with other analyses of Biographical Availability and also because it is a factor that the literature on social media usage predicts to be very related to usage patterns. This enables me to examine a complete model without and then with age included for comparison and evaluation of the importance of this factor. In the following results section, I discuss both the coefficients and odds ratios of the variables in the model.

RESULTS

I now turn to presenting the results of my analysis. First, I discuss the characteristics of the sample and then the results of the logistic regression model.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Obs	Min	Max	Mean	Median	S.D.
Social Media Political Engagement	5240	0	1	0.21		0.41
Biographical Availability						
Work Status						
<i>Working</i>	5240	0	1	0.54		0.50
<i>Temporarily laid off</i>	5240	0	1	0.01		0.12
<i>Unemployed</i>	5240	0	1	0.08		0.26
<i>Retired</i>	5240	0	1	0.23		0.42
<i>Permanently disabled</i>	5240	0	1	0.08		0.27
<i>Homemaker</i>	5240	0	1	0.10		0.30
<i>Student</i>	5240	0	1	0.07		0.26
Marital Status						
<i>Married</i>	5240	0	1	0.50		0.50
<i>Widowed</i>	5240	0	1	0.07		0.25
<i>Divorced</i>	5240	0	1	0.15		0.36
<i>Separated</i>	5240	0	1	0.03		0.18
<i>Never married</i>	5240	0	1	0.25		0.44
Number of Children	5240	0	3	0.59	0	0.96
Children 10 years old or younger	5240	0	1	0.23		0.42
Children ages 11 to 17	5240	0	1	0.17		0.38
Age	5240	17	90	49.51		16.67
Resources						
Income	5240	1	28	13.44	12	8.18
Education	5240	1	5	2.98	3	1.16
Control Variables						
Female	5240	0	1	0.51		0.50
Race and Ethnicity						
<i>White non-Hispanic</i>	5240	0	1	0.60		0.49
<i>Black non-Hispanic</i>	5240	0	1	0.17		0.38
<i>Hispanic</i>	5240	0	1	0.17		0.37
<i>Other non-Hispanic</i>	5240	0	1	0.06		0.24

Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics for the 5,240 respondents in this analysis. For the dependent variable, 21% of the respondents have used social media as a form of political engagement. For the independent variables that constitutes Biographical Availability, 54% of the respondents reported that he or she was working, 1% were temporarily laid off, 8% were unemployed, 23% were retired, 8% were permanently disabled, 10% were homemakers, and 7% were students. 50% of the respondents reported that he or she was married, 7% were widowed, 15% were divorced, 3% were separated, and 25% were never married. The median of the number of children in the household variable was zero, which indicates there are no children in the household (mean= 0.59). 23% of the respondents reported they had children in the household 10 years old or younger and 17% reported they had children in the household ages 11 to 17. The mean age was 49.5 years old. Of the Resource variables, the median¹ family income reported by the respondents (shown in Table 1) was 12 on the variable, which indicates an income of between \$35,000 and \$39,999, and the median level of highest education was three, which indicates some post-high school, no bachelor's degree (mean= 2.98). In terms of racial composition, 60% of the sample reported being white non-Hispanic, 17% black non-Hispanic, 17% Hispanic, and 6% "other non-Hispanic race". 51% of the sample was female.

¹ The mean =13.4, indicating a value of the ordinal variable between the categories of 13 (\$40,000-\$44,999) and 14 (\$45,000-\$49,999).

Table 2: Regression Model on Social Media Political Engagement

VARIABLES	Model 1 β	Model 2 β	Model 3 β	Model 4 β	O.R. e^{β}
Biographical Availability					
Employment Status					
<i>Temporarily laid off</i>	-0.433 (0.422)	-0.218 (0.421)	-0.173 (0.419)	-0.0829 (0.422)	0.920
<i>Unemployed</i>	0.106 (0.168)	0.265 (0.172)	0.301 (0.172)	0.309 (0.170)	1.362
<i>Retired</i>	-0.633*** (0.135)	-0.555*** (0.137)	-0.564*** (0.137)	0.0589 (0.164)	1.061
<i>Permanently disabled</i>	-0.0896 (0.192)	0.190 (0.200)	0.206 (0.199)	0.432* (0.202)	1.540*
<i>Homemaker</i>	0.176 (0.159)	0.278 (0.160)	0.227 (0.170)	0.271 (0.172)	1.312
<i>Student</i>	0.437** (0.166)	0.479** (0.169)	0.496** (0.169)	0.168 (0.177)	1.183
Marital Status					
<i>Widowed</i>	-0.480* (0.217)	-0.311 (0.221)	-0.325 (0.224)	0.00587 (0.227)	1.006
<i>Divorced</i>	-0.0300 (0.147)	0.0302 (0.150)	0.0359 (0.151)	0.0857 (0.151)	1.090
<i>Separated</i>	-0.0727 (0.246)	0.00161 (0.253)	0.0540 (0.255)	0.00332 (0.263)	1.003
<i>Never married</i>	0.128 (0.122)	0.230 (0.131)	0.267* (0.132)	-0.119 (0.138)	0.888
Number of Children	-0.141 (0.108)	-0.155 (0.111)	-0.150 (0.111)	-0.210 (0.113)	0.811
Children 10 years old or younger	0.410* (0.202)	0.440* (0.205)	0.457* (0.205)	0.222 (0.209)	1.249
Children ages 11 to17	0.0425 (0.176)	0.133 (0.182)	0.143 (0.181)	0.213 (0.183)	1.238
Age				-0.0319*** (0.00455)	0.969***
Resources					
Income		0.00554 (0.00761)	0.00432 (0.00761)	0.00539 (0.00747)	1.005
Education		0.272*** (0.0443)	0.267*** (0.0450)	0.280*** (0.0453)	1.323***
Control Variables					
Female			0.0712 (0.0966)	0.0582 (0.0979)	1.060
Race and Ethnicity					
<i>White non-Hispanic</i>			0.324 (0.196)	0.398* (0.197)	1.489*
<i>Black non-Hispanic</i>			0.0312 (0.233)	0.127 (0.235)	1.136
<i>Hispanic</i>			0.147 (0.239)	0.152 (0.238)	1.164
Constant	-1.292*** (0.0845)	-2.309*** (0.181)	-2.587*** (0.273)	-1.183*** (0.343)	0.306***
r-squared	0.02	0.04	0.04	0.05	
log-likelihood	-2643.868	-2597.1	-2593.894	-2560.115	
Observations	5,240	5,240	5,240	5,240	5,240

Notes: Standard Errors in Parentheses; *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

Table 2 presents the results of the logistic regression analysis of the effects of the Biographical Availability and the Resource variables on Social Media Political Engagement. The table is separated into three sections: Biographical Availability, Resources, and Control Variables. In the first model, I include all of the variables I identify as Biographical Availability. Model 2 includes the Biographical Availability variables and as well as the Resource variables. In Model 3, both Biographical Availability variables and Resource variables are included, as well as the control variables of race and ethnicity and sex. Model 4, the final model, I include all of the variables mentioned, along with the final Biographical Availability variable of the respondent's age. The final column on this table displays the odds ratio for the final model.

Of the Biographical Availability variables, displayed in Table 2, being retired compared to being employed, being a student compared to being employed, and having children in the home ten years old or younger, compared to not having children in the home ten years old or younger are all significant in the first three models. However, these variables lose significance once the Biographical Availability variable of a person's age is added in model four. Being retired has a negative effect on Social Media Political Engagement in the first three models, but becomes nonsignificant in Model 4. Similarly, the magnitude of the effect of having children in the home ten years old or younger, compared to not of having children in the home ten years old or younger, increases positively across each of the first three models. There is also a significant effect of a person being widowed, compared to being married on Social Media Political Engagement in Model 1, but not in other models. In Model 3, never being married compared to being married becomes significant. Being permanently disabled compared to working becomes significant in Model 3, as well.

The Resource block of variables in Table 2 presents mixed results. The income variable is not significant in any of the four models. However, the education variable is significant in all four models, even when the age variable is added to the model. The coefficient ($\beta = 0.280$) for the education variable is displayed in the fourth column of Table 2, with the odds ratio (the exponentiated coefficient) displayed in column 5. Interpreting the odds ratio from the final column indicates that for every additional level of subsequently higher degree completed, the odds that a person will use social media for political engagement increases by 32.3%, controlling for all other factors.

Of the control variables, only one of the race and ethnicity dummy variables has a significant effect in the final model. Being white non-Hispanic, compared to being another non-Hispanic race, has a significant positive effect on the dependent variable, but only after age has been included in the model. This factor, increases the odds ratio of using social media for political engagement by 48.9%, controlling for all other factors.

In the final model of Table 2, I include the final Biographical Availability indicator of the respondent's age in order to test Hypothesis 4. The age variable significantly changes the analysis. Despite the fact that both the Biographical Availability and Resource blocks of variables have at least some significant factors, as would be expected by existing research on social movements and political engagement, all of these variables with the exception of education lose significance once the age variable is added to the model. For each additional year of age, the odds ratio decreases by 3.1% that a person will use social media for political engagement, controlling for all other factors.

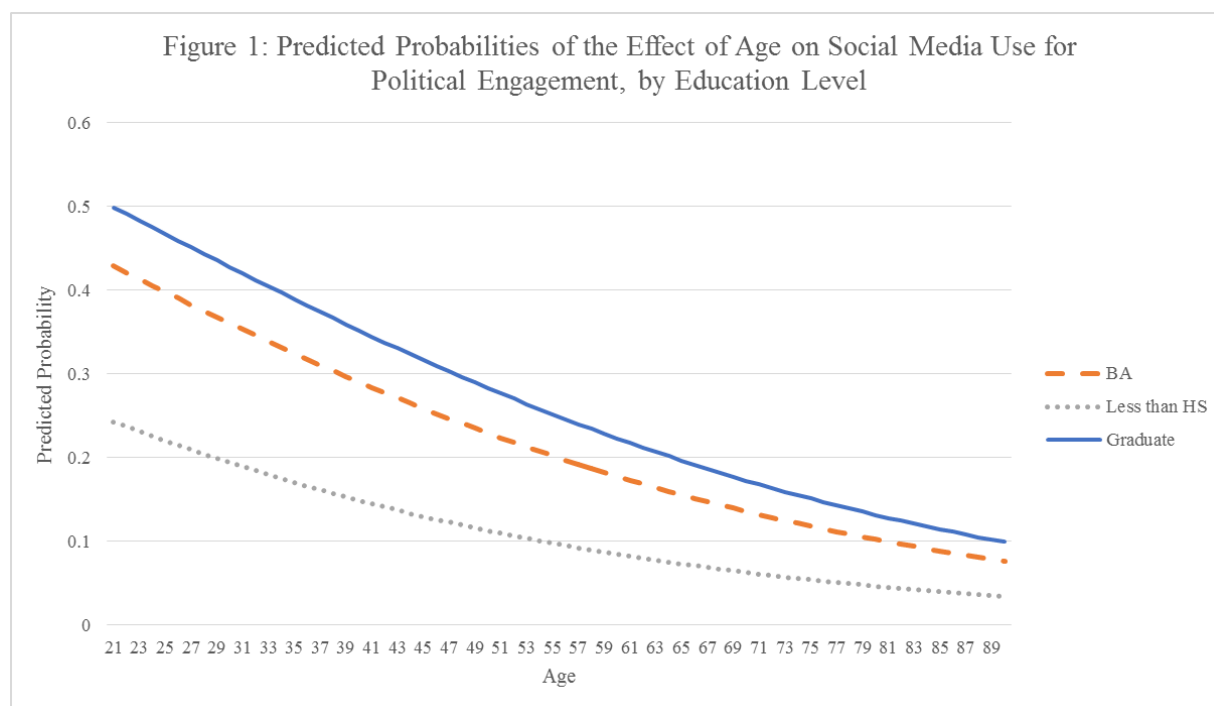


Figure 1 presents a graph of the predicted probabilities of the effect of age on Social Media Political Engagement by education levels. The predicted probability of using social media for political engagement declines in all groups for older people compared to younger. It is worth noting that because I am using cross-sectional data, I am unable to observe the effects of the process of aging on the dependent variable, but rather the effect on different ages of people at the same point in time. The solid line represents the probabilities at each age for people with a graduate-level degree, the dashed line represents people with a Bachelor's degree, and the dotted line represents those with less than a High School degree. The decrease in probability as age increases is constant across all of the education groups. Older people use social media for political engagement less than younger people. However, Figure 1 also shows the importance of education in this relationship, because the probabilities of each group differ from one another significantly.

The difference in predicted probabilities of each education group is much greater for younger people than for older. For example, the difference between a person with a graduate degree and a person with less than a high school degree at 26 years old is 0.24 (0.46 and 0.21, respectively), while the difference between the same two education groups for an 86 year old is only 0.10 (0.15 and 0.05, respectively). The difference in education's effect on Social Media Political Engagement is less for older people than it is for younger. This suggests that the importance of resources is actually greater for younger people who use social media for political engagement.

Once age is added to the model in Table 2, the effects for many of the other independent variables become non-significant. However, this should not imply that age is the most important factor for a person using social media for political engagement. As Figure 1 shows, education is also an important factor in this relationship, in some cases more so than age. Even though the predicted probabilities for all education groups is lower in older people than in younger, those with a higher levels of education continue to have a higher predicted probability even among older age groups than those people with lower levels of education. For example, a 26 year old with less than a high school education only has a predicted probability of 0.21, yet this value is lower than all people with a graduate degree who are younger than 62, highlighting the important role of education for any age of person.

In the preceding section, I presented the results of my analyses finding support in general for my education hypothesis (Hypothesis 5), but not my income hypothesis (Hypothesis 6) and mixed support for my Biographical Availability hypotheses, with the first three (working status, marital status, children) not being significant, with the exception of being permanently disabled, and the fourth one (age) being significant. Once age is added to the model, only the education

variable (from the Resources group) remains significant. This suggests that, while Social Media Political Engagement does seem to have a similar relationship to resources and individual biographical factors as other types of political engagement (as most research predicts), it is related highly to the age of the participant. This is likely due to social media being a very new technological development and its use as an avenue for political engagement clearly has not been adopted equally by all age groups. Overall the main finding of this research is that Social Media Political Engagement decreases with age and increases with education. This is particularly important for this type of participation, since the research on social media usage is clear that it is highly linked to the person's age.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The goal of this research was to locate Social Media Political Engagement in the spectrum of other forms of political participation by testing it against the major independent variables. In this analysis, I tested the effect of two main social movements perspectives on an emerging form of political participation: Social Media Political Engagement. I found mixed support for both the Biographical Availability and the Resource hypotheses, with only the person's education and age primarily having an effect in the final model². This indicates that while Social Media Political Engagement is very similar to more well-known forms of political participation, the age of the person plays a particularly important role.

Due to this research utilizing cross-sectional data, I am not able to make causal claims. All of my variables are from the same time point, so I cannot say one variable caused something to happen. I can only assess the correlation between the variables. Even though I am not able to claim any causation, based on the existing research, it is likely that education, race, and age all have an effect on Social Media Political Engagement. Race is an ascribed attribute. A person is ascribed a race at birth. It is a demographic characteristic that cannot change. For example, in the case of this research, someone cannot change their race because they used social media for

² Being permanently disabled was significant in the final model, but it was not significant in the preceding models without age. Additionally, the control variable of being white non-Hispanic compared to being another non-Hispanic was significant in the final model including age, but not in the previous model.

political engagement. Age is a demographic characteristic that only changes as time passes. To follow my example, someone cannot become younger or older because they used social media for political engagement. The direction of the effect of education is not as clear and can potentially be reciprocal. It is possible that a person could use social media for political engagement and then later decide to obtain more education. Alternately, it is possible that the more education someone has, the more she or he would also use social media for political engagement. Based on the existing research, it seems likely that higher levels of education increasing the use of social media for political engagement is the more plausible direction, at least for the majority of the effect. However, in this analysis, I have been cautious as to the causal claims I make.

An additional factor with using cross-sectional data is that I am unable to discern the process of aging itself. I am using a sample of people who range in age from 17 to 90, but this does not indicate that Social Media Political Engagement decreases as a person ages. Instead, I propose that different age groups use social media for political engagement at differential rates. Additional studies using panel data could further tease out this relationship. Because of this fact, I am also cautious in my interpretation of the effect of age on Social Media Political Engagement. I do not suggest that any of my findings include the aging process itself. Future research could focus on using multiple cross-sections of the ANES to model Age, Period, and Cohort effects.

Even though the ANES data does not include information about the nature of the issues that people are using social media as a form of political engagement for, many scholars have identified social media use as a catalyst for contemporary social movements. For example, in the Arab Spring revolutions, the use of social media helped to speed up the process, connect to more

people including outside of Egypt, and disseminate information (Eltantawy and Wiest 2011). In the Ferguson Missouri protests, social media and the use of hashtags was able to be used to provide up to date information about what happened to Michael Brown to large groups of people (Bonilla and Rosa 2015). The “#BlackLivesMatter” campaign used social media to bring attention to the issue of race and police brutality (Harris 2015). The campaign brought attention to the issues that have been happening for years, but ignored. Additionally, activism that occurred in the 60’s and 70’s and activism that occurs today using social media, both address issues that affect the participants. Both time periods of activism also use the media to grow their cause. Although the types of media available are different, the underlying motivations are still the same (Teruelle 2012). These findings align with the contemporary understanding of the changing nature of political engagement. While despite Putnam’s (2000) argument that civic engagement has been declining, others have continued to find that it has instead taken on new forms (Norris 2002). This form of political engagement is likely to continue to increase in importance to the extent that new social movements continue using this form of engagement.

This research makes two main contributions. First, it adds to the theoretical understanding of social media usage as an act of political participation. Second, it has important implications for activists who are trying to mobilize political participants. For example, age and education are especially important mobilizing factors for this type of engagement. As social movements continue to use the emerging tactic of Social Media Political Engagement, understanding how this resonates with younger, more highly-educated people is important. Movement organizers will be more effective using Social Media Political Engagement as a tactic by targeting younger, more highly-educated people. This was seen in the Arab Spring movement,

when social media usage was an important tool in mobilizing a young, educated group of people to participate politically.

Social media has continually gained more and more attention and has been used for many different purposes. This research concentrates on the use of social media sites, like Facebook and Twitter, as a form of political engagement. I examine the relationships between Biographical Availability factors (work status, marital status, children, and age) and Resources (education and income) with Social Media Political Engagement. I find that Social Media Political Engagement acts much like other forms of political participation in several important ways. This suggests that Social Media Political Engagement is related to other forms of political engagement, particularly in terms of a person's age and education.

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