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**EXPLICATING THE CENTRAL ROLE OF NEWS MEDIA USE IN
THE PROCESS OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION**

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THE PROCESS OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION**

by

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Dedication

For my parents

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EXPLICATING THE CENTRAL ROLE OF NEWS MEDIA USE IN THE PROCESS OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

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In order to fully explicate the role of news media in individuals' political participation, this dissertation aims at establishing an integrative structural model that specifies relationships among news media use, its antecedents and mediators and political participation. The proposed model is comprised of key factors of political participation that previous research has identified. The relational structure is based on models and theories relevant to prediction of political behaviors. Specifically, the model integrates (a) communication mediation model, which posits that communication behaviors (i.e., news media use and interpersonal discussion) mediate the effects of socio-demographic variables (i.e., income, education, age, gender, and race) and political dispositions (i.e., political interest, partisanship and ideology) on political outcomes; (b) agenda-setting theory, which posits that frequent exposure to news media increases the salience of news objects in audiences' minds; (c) cognitive mediation model, which posits that elaborative and collective thinking is a prerequisite to produce political outcomes of news exposure; (d) theory of planned behavior, which posits that human behavior can be best predicted

vii

by three proximal variables (i.e., attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control); (e) O-S-R-O-R (orientations-stimulus-reasoning-orientations-response) model of communication effects, which provides a parsimonious framework of effect process. Using the structural equation modeling (SEM) method, this dissertation analyzes the 2008 American National Election Studies data set to test the validity of the proposed structural model.

Results indicate that frequent exposure to news media stimulate attentive news use as well as intra- and interpersonal reasoning, which produce a wide range of political outcomes. Two reasoning behaviors (i.e., self-reflection and interpersonal political discussion) are critical mechanisms that link news media use to various political outcomes including political participation. Personal-psychological mediators, such as strength in affects, personal traits, opinions about political issues, campaign interest, political knowledge, attitude strength, perceived ability of political parties and political efficacy all significantly mediate the influence of news media use on political participation. News media use mediates significant portion of effects that a set of preexisting variables have on political participation as well as various types of political orientations.

Table of Contents

List of Tables.....	xi
List of Figures	xii
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
Chapter 2 News media use as a mediator.....	8
Conceptualizing political participation	8
Socio-demographic variables and political participation.....	9
Political dispositions and political participation	11
Theoretical links between preexisting variables and participation	13
Chapter 3 The effects of news media use on political participation	17
The effects of news media use on political outcomes.....	17
Indirect effect paradigm	18
Chapter 4 Mediators between news media use and political participation	20
Reasoning.....	20
Affect and perceived traits of candidates	25
Opinion formation.....	27
Political knowledge.....	27
Campaign interest.....	29
Attitude strength.....	30
Perceived ability of political parties.....	34
Political efficacy.....	35
The O-S-R-O-R framework	36
Chapter 5 Modeling the process of political participation	39
Chapter 6 Method.....	44
Data	44
Analysis.....	44
Measures.....	45

Chapter 7 Results	52
Chapter 8 Discussion and conclusion.....	62
Discussion	62
Conclusion.....	77
Appendix A Mediating effects of news exposure, attention and discussion.....	83
References	86
Vita	99

List of Tables

Table 1:	Model summary.....	53
Table 2:	Direct and indirect effects of communication on participation.....	55
Table 3:	Total indirect effects of news media use through reasoning.....	56
Table 4:	Total indirect effects through personal-psychological variables.....	57
Table 5:	Mediating effects of communication variables between preexisting variables and political participation	60

List of Figures

Figure 1:	Integrative structural model of political participation.....	53
Figure 2:	Integrative structural model with preexisting variables included	61
Figure 3:	Theories and models incorporated in the model	79

Chapter 1: Introduction

At the heart of democracy is the principle that people govern. Because citizen participation is considered a core element of a healthy democracy (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944; McLeod, Kosicki, & McLeod, 2002), what facilitates citizens' political activities has long been a central interest for political behaviorists and scholars. Many studies from various academic disciplines have identified important predictors of political participation. For example, studies with a sociological approach have investigated the influence of structural-objective variables (i.e., socio-demographic variables, culture, etc.) on political engagement (Cohen, Vigoda, & Samorly, 2001; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). Research with a psychological approach has focused on a number of personal-psychological determinants of political engagement, such as political efficacy, knowledge and partisanship (Krampen, 1991; Pollock, 1983; Semetko & Valkenburg, 1998; Valentino, Gregorowicz, & Groenendyk, 2009). In the realm of journalism and mass communication, the theoretical development of political participation has centered on the normative outcomes of news media use in politics (Cho et al., 2009; McLeod, Scheufele, & Moy, 1999; Moy et al., 2005; Shah et al., 2005; Scheufele & Nisbet, 2002).

In individuals' political participation process, news consumption functions as a critical behavior in citizens' political activities and thus has received considerable scholarly attention (Kim, Scheufele, & Shanahan, 2002; McLeod et al., 1999). In an indirect and representative democratic system, news media are basically the primary source of political information. News media cover news stories using their networks and deliver them to the public. Individuals' accessibility to news has dramatically increased as new news channels (e.g., online news) emerge along with the development of new

communication technology. In this structure, people rely heavily on news media for inspecting government performance, acquiring political information, and understanding the political world (Chaffee & Martinelli, 1995; Delli Carpini, 2004; McCombs, 2004). Further, the political information obtained from news media functions as a basis of individuals' political knowledge, attitudes and behaviors: based on the news information, people discuss politics (Cho et al., 2009; Eveland, 2004; Shah et al., 2005), develop political perceptions (e.g., Krosnick & Kinder, 1990; McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Neuman, Just, & Crigler, 1992), learn political facts (e.g., Eveland, 2001; Moy & Gastil, 2006; Scheufele & Nisbet, 2002), form attitudes (e.g., Page & Shapiro, 1992; Scheufele, 1999; Zaller, 1992), and engage in political activities (e.g., Cho et al., 2009; McLeod et al., 1999; Moy et al., 2005). These outcomes of news media use are facilitators of individuals' participatory activities in politics. In this sense, it is suggested that individuals' inclination to political participation is undeniably a function of news media use. In addition, research in communication suggests that news media use, to some extent, mediates the effects of preexisting variables (e.g., socio-demographic and political dispositional variables) on political outcomes (McLeod et al., 2001; Sotirovic & McLeod, 2001; Shah et al., 2007). According to this argument, the disparities in political engagement among people with different socio-demographic and political dispositions originate from the varied use of news media. In this sense, news media use provides a theoretical link for the relationship between preexisting personal factors and political engagement that are somewhat vague.

Therefore, research on the process of individuals' political participation should treat news media use as an initial stimulus and other factors of participation should be explored in terms of their relationships with news media use. Some of them may be antecedents (e.g., socio-demographic and political dispositional variables) of news

exposure, while others may be mediators (e.g., political discussion and personal-psychological variables) between news media use and political participation (see Cho et al., 2009; McLeod et al., 1999; Shah et al., 2005; 2007). Predictors of individuals' political participation, such as structural-objective variables, media use, reasoning behaviors and personal-psychological variables are better seen as hierarchically related functioning antecedents or outcomes of one another rather than as competing concepts. In this sense, modeling political engagement at the individual level requires an integrative structural model in which news media use is treated as an initial stimulus and other constructs as antecedents or outcomes of news media use. Therefore, this dissertation aims at establishing an integrative structural model in order to explicate the role of news media use in individuals' political engagement.

The integrative structural model proposed in this dissertation brings several advantages to researchers. First, the integrative structural model allows researchers to identify indirect effects of news media use on political participation. Statistically, the total effects of variable X on Y is calculated by summing the direct effects of X on Y and the indirect effects of X and Y through one or more intervening variables (or mediators). As suggested earlier, in many cases, the effect of news media use on political outcomes is transmitted by various mediators. Thus, identifying indirect effects is an essential process in media effects research (Hayes, 2009; Holbert & Stephenson, 2002; 2003). However, the theoretical framework of extant empirical studies often fails to search for anything beyond direct effects (Holbert & Stephenson, 2003). If those mediators are equally treated as independent stimuli along with the news use variable (as in a multiple regression model), indirect effects cannot be identified. In other words, these studies tend to end up with a negligible effect of news media because the effect of news use on participation is taken up by its mediators. Statistically, when intervening variables

mediate a significant portion of the effects of an independent variable, the direct effect of that independent variable on a criterion variable controlling for the intervening variables becomes minimal. Considering that news articles are informational in nature and may not contain persuasive messages promoting political participation and that, as behavioral literature suggests, human behaviors are in most cases spurred by attitudes and motivation favorable to those particular behaviors, it makes more sense that the relationship between news media use and political participation should be explored in a structural model that incorporates indirect pathways of effects. Recognizing this, research that analyzes media effects with their potential mediators (i.e., interpersonal political discussion, political efficacy, political knowledge, attitudes, campaign interest, etc.) is improperly administered because such a method cannot detect indirect effects.

Second, a structural model enables investigators to examine the mechanisms that explain how news exposure influences political participation. Examining “how” rather than “whether or not” news media use influences political participation is a key question for media effects research. The “how” pertains to examining (a) causal sequences through which news use exercises its effect on participation, and (b) the role of news media use in transmitting the effects of other preexisting variables.

A structural model also can show specific indirect effects that operate in the opposite directions. Although it is generally suggested that news media use elicits positive predictors of political engagement, such as political efficacy, knowledge and interest, some empirical studies found that news media use can discourage people from political participation. For example, research blamed the news media as the culprit of political indifference or political cynicism, especially during campaign seasons (Pinkleton, Austin, & Fortman, 1998) It suggests that news media tend to be preoccupied with the game, the strategy of politics and negative-attack campaign messages, which all

lead to political disinterest. It also is plausible that the balanced consideration of various aspects of political reality as a result of exposure to political news with various political perspectives regarding political figures and issues may produce ambivalent attitudes toward those objects. Thus, it is suggested that researchers incorporate negative pathways between news media use and political participation into the structural model in order to comprehensively examine which path is strongest and the final effect of news media use on political participation.

Finally, an integrative structural model provides a comprehensive theoretical understanding by combining various key constructs that have been identified in past studies from different academic concentrations. Studies from alternative perspectives explain political participation with discrete constructs sometimes resulting in conflicting findings and interpretations. This lack of clarity is largely attributable to the absence of integrative research that incorporates key predictors of political participation that can demonstrate a comprehensive theoretical mechanism. Because those predictors account for the same construct, political participation, they are inevitably interrelated, and these constructs collaboratively function as theoretical links for one another. For instance, research findings about gender disparity in political participation can become theoretically tighter by being linked to other research findings about the influence of political efficacy on political engagement. Likewise, research focusing on the effects of news media use on political participation can incorporate other studies that identified political knowledge as a significant predictor of participation. Therefore, research explicating how those constructs interplay in the prediction of political participation provides a more comprehensive map delineating a theoretical mechanism behind individuals' political engagement.

Theoretically, the model proposed in this dissertation incorporates several relevant models and theories for prediction of political participation. The model assimilates the resource approach by focusing on the role of socio-economic status (SES) (Bennett & Bennett, 1986; Brady, Verba, & Schlozman, 1995; Verba & Nie, 1972; Verba et al., 1995); agenda-setting theory, which posits that frequent exposure to news media increases the salience of news objects in audiences' minds and the salience further instigates elaborative thinking on those objects; the communication mediation model (McLeod et al., 2001), which emphasizes the mediating role of communication behaviors (i.e., news media use and interpersonal communication) in the relationship between structural-objective variables and individuals' political engagement; the cognitive mediation model (Eveland, 2001; 2004), which recognizes the critical role of elaboration in news media effects on political outcomes; the O-S-R-O-R (Orientation-Stimulus-Reasoning-Orientation-Response) model of communication effects (Cho et al., 2009; Shah et al., 2007), which provides a theoretical framework in establishing a process model of news media effects on political participation; and the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1985), which identified three important proximal variables (i.e., attitudes, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control) in predicting human behavior.

Based on these theoretical guides, the present research establishes a hierarchical structure among the key factors of political participation that extant empirical studies have identified including socio-demographic variables (i.e., age, gender, education, income) and political dispositions (i.e., political interest, partisanship, and ideology), frequency of news media use (i.e., television, newspaper, radio, and Internet news) and attention to news, political discussion and elaboration on the campaign, affective and cognitive salience in major presidential candidates (i.e., Barack Obama and John

McCain), general political knowledge, knowledge about candidates' issue stances and ideology, campaign interest, strength in attitudes toward major political parties (i.e., Democratic and Republican) and candidates, perceived ability of political parties, internal political efficacy, and political participation.

In summation, within an integrative structural model, the present research investigates (a) the mediating effects of news media use between socio-demographic and political dispositional variables and political participation, (b) intervening variables that link news media use to political participation and (c) measuring indirect effects of news media use. The important contribution of this study mainly lies in the clarification of the role of news media use in individuals' political participation. Specifically, this study clarifies the ongoing controversies regarding the effects of news consumption on participation by employing a more appropriate analytical method. Second, the study contributes to a better understanding of dynamic mechanisms through which news exposure enhances political participation. It also allows comparisons among pathways in size and direction. Third, pertaining to the second point, this study answers what normative outcomes (e.g., political discussion, political knowledge, internal and external political efficacy, and political activities) news media produce. Finally, the expansive structural model, which integrates multiple key factors of political participation, connects previous research and provides a holistic map of political participation.

The integrative model not only helps understand the theoretical mechanisms of media effects on individuals' political behaviors but also shows the normative implications of news media use in democratic political systems.

Chapter 2: News media use as a mediator

CONCEPTUALIZING POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Literature reveals that previous studies have measured political participation largely in two ways. In a broad sense, some studies included political-psychological variables, such as political efficacy, political interest and political sophistication in the measure of political participation (Cohen et al., 2001; Verba et al., 1995; Verba, Burns, & Schlozman, 1997). Because these variables represent psychological orientations rather than behaviors themselves, the aggregate index of political participation with these measurement items is often called “passive political participation” or “psychological political involvement.” Other studies with a narrow perspective confined political participation to active behaviors in an attempt to influence political decision making, such as donating money and writing letters to politicians or parties, voting and attending political meetings, rallies and demonstrations (McLeod et al., 1999; Scheufele & Nisbet, 2002; Shah et al., 2005; 2007). The utility of these operationalizations depends on the purpose of research. However, political participation in its original implicative sense should be defined as the actual behaviors to influence politics because the “actual participation” in politics takes place when there are chances that policymakers know citizens’ opinions about political issues and reflect them in the process of political decision making.

For this reason, personal and psychological proclivity to politics cannot be equated with participation itself, although it may be a necessary condition for participatory activities. Therefore, the measure containing personal-psychological variables may be termed “psychological-political engagement or involvement.” These psychological factors should be understood as antecedents of political participation or

mediators between some stimuli and political participation (Cho et al., 2009; Jung et al., forthcoming).

Following this logic, the present research conceptualizes political participation as performing the behaviors that are aimed at influencing politics, such as attending a protest, rally or demonstration, signing a petition about a political issue, donating money to politicians or political organizations, political campaign-related activities, and voting.

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The sociological approach – which has focused on the influence of structural-objective factors on individuals' political engagement – is one approach that has dominated the literature on political participation. In this framework, socio-economic status (SES; typically operationalized as formal education and income) has consistently been shown to be a powerful predictor of political participation (Cohen et al., 2001; Parry, Moyser, & Day, 1992; Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993; Verba et al., 1995). In its simplest form, the SES model revealed that political participation is a function of one or more components of socio-economic status, such as income or education. The SES model has received strong empirical support. In general, individuals high on SES tend to be more knowledgeable about politics, efficacious in dealing with politics, and willing to engage in participatory activities (Brady et al., 1995; Cohen et al., 2001; Peterson, 1990; Verba et al., 1995; Wolsfeld, 1986).

In addition to SES, research has found that other demographic variables such as gender, age, and race have a significant association with political participation. Contrary to SES, which exerts its impact in a consistent pattern, the influence of gender, age, and race on participation is rather complicated. Generally, men participate in the political

process more than women (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 2000; Mondak & Anderson, 2004), older people participate in the political process more than their younger counterparts, (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Norris, 2002; Han, 2008), and Whites participate more in the political process than Blacks (Verba & Nie, 1972). However, literature also suggests that these inequalities may no longer be consistent. For instance, researchers have noted that the gender gap in political engagement has narrowed, or even reversed, in terms of various forms of political activities (Dalton, 2002; Micheletti, Follesdal, & Stolle, 2004; Norris, 2002). This may be especially true in the 2008 presidential election, which featured a female candidate from a major political party.

The impact of age on political participation may depend on the behavioral domains. For instance, older individuals tend to donate more money than younger people because they've built up larger financial resources. Conversely, younger people dominate political behaviors that require some degree of physical effort (i.e., political demonstrations).

Contrary to the general belief that Whites participate in politics more than Blacks, empirical studies have documented that Blacks, compared to Whites, engage in politics more when socio-economic factors are taken into account (Leighley & Veditz, 1999; Milbrath & Goel, 1977; Verba & Nie, 1972). Two psychological theories have been advanced to explain this pattern. Compensatory theory posits that Blacks tend to be politically active to an exaggerated degree in order to overcome exclusion and feelings of inferiority forced on them by society (Babchuk & Thompson, 1962; Orum, 1966). A second theory – the ethnic community approach – holds that people in a minority group develop strong feelings of group identity and attachment, which makes them sensitive to group norms that call for political actions to improve the social status of the group

(Antunes & Gaitz, 1975; Millter et al., 1981; Verba & Nie, 1972). These two mechanisms operate together to stimulate Blacks' political participation.

It should be also noted that the level of political engagement by different races can be contingent on situational factors. There are political circumstances in which political agendas are of high relevance and interest to a particular race. For example, during the 2008 presidential election, Barack Obama's candidacy for president sharply enhanced political engagement by Blacks. Blacks were following the election more intensely and were more apt to contribute money or time to political campaigns than other Americans, and voter registration by Blacks significantly increased compared to elections in the last several decades (Philpot, Shaw, & McGowen, 2009; ABCnews, 2008). This circumstance facilitates group-based political mobilization.

Research has produced robust and consistent findings regarding the relationship between socio-economic status and political participation. However, the level of political engagement may still differ by gender, age and race, while the pattern of influence may not be as consistent or as prominent as previously identified. Further research is necessary for a more general conclusion.

POLITICAL DISPOSITIONS AND PARTICIPATION

Aside from structural-objective variables, individuals' previously formed political orientations can affect subsequent political engagement. Numerous empirical studies have provided evidence that preexisting political orientations are directly connected to subsequent political orientations. For example, individuals who possess a strong party identification are more likely to engage in political behavior in support of the advocated party's electoral success than those with weak or nonexistent party attachments

(Campbell et al., 1960; Conway, 1985; Dalton, 1988; Verba, Nie, & Kim, 1978). The effect of party identification on political participation is clear and consistent, especially in election settings (Finkel & Opp, 1990). Research also indicates that people who show strong political ideology are more likely to participate in subsequent political activities than those who were not (Krampen, 1991). Possession of party identification and ideology represents individuals' psychological involvement in politics and concern over election outcomes, thus encouraging electoral participation (Finkel & Opp, 1991).

Past experiences are another important set of factors that foster political engagement. Many empirical studies have found past behavior to be directly and strongly related to later behavior (Ajzen, 1991). When it comes to the logic underlying the direct influence, research suggests that behavior at a later time occurs, at least in part, habitually without the mediation of other variables (Bentler & Speckart, 1979; Dillon & Kumar, 1985; Fredricks & Dossett, 1983). Other literature suggests the influence of past experiences on later behavior can be explained because past behavior reflects all factors that determine the behavior of interest (Ajzen, 1991). That is, past behavior indicates a sufficient degree of attitudes and intentions that triggered the past behavior and the remaining effects of those predictors produce later behavior. While the former explanation of habituation is as an automatic process, the latter is based on the reasoned-action approach. Among the many types of political behaviors, voting is the most common and representative political activity. Thus, the present dissertation measures individuals' frequency of past voting in examining the influence of past participatory behavior on engagement in later participation.

THEORETICAL LINKS BETWEEN PREEXISTING VARIABLES AND PARTICIPATION

Despite a significant number of studies examining the influence of preexisting variables (i.e., socio-demographic variables, political dispositions, and past participation) on political engagement, less research has focused on explaining why and how such disparities occur depending on different demographic characteristics. Although preexisting factors may work well as useful predictors of political participation, the theoretical links between the relationships are weak (Cohen et al., 2001). In the same vein, research suggests that the relationship between those predictors and political participation is indirect through other intervening mechanisms, such as news media use and psychological involvement in politics (Cohen et al., 2001; Verba et al., 1995).

When it comes to the mechanisms that produce the varied degrees of political participation by preexisting factors (i.e., demographic factors and political dispositions), extant research shows several different approaches. Some research explains that the different levels of political engagement mainly derive from the discrepancy in the acquisition of resources (e.g., money, time, and social skills) required for political participation (Parry et al., 1992; Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993; Verba et al., 1995). This logic underpins many explanations of the effects of structural-objective factors on political engagement (Clarke et al., 2004).

The third approach focuses on personal-psychological variables, such as political knowledge, interest, and efficacy (e.g., Cohen et al., 2001; Wolsfeld, 1986; Verba & Nie, 1972; Verba et al., 1997). Numerous studies have documented personal-psychological variables representing political orientations (e.g., political knowledge, interest, efficacy, attitude strength, opinion strength, etc.) are important proximal predictors of individuals' political participation (Cohen et al., 2001; McLeod et al., 1999; Moy et al., 2005;

Scheufele & Nisbet, 2002). The extent of these political orientations has been found to vary with individuals' demographic characteristics and the strength of their political disposition. For example, men, Whites, and educated individuals are more likely to be informed about, interested in, and efficacious about politics (Cohen et al., 2001; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Milbrath, 1981; Norris, 2002; Verba et al., 1995; 1997; Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980). This indicates personal-psychological orientations in the political arena serve as useful mechanisms in explaining why such preexisting variables influence political engagement.

More importantly, research suggests that the influence of preexisting variables on political participation can be understood in light of the degree of exposure and attention to political information. The communication mediation model (McLeod et al., 2001; Sotirovic & McLeod, 2001; see also Shah et al., 2007) posits the effects of socio-demographic and political dispositions on political outcomes are largely a function of communication behaviors. Much empirical evidence has supported this notion. For example, Verba, Burns and Scholzman (1997), analyzing the gender gap on a number of types of political involvement, found significant differences in the frequency and attention in news media use. Research also has found that age differences in political participation derive from the varied use of news media (McLeod et al., 1996). Additionally, the extent of news media use has been shown to be positively associated with socio-economic status (Eveland & Scheufele, 2000; Robinson & Levy, 1986; McCombs, 2004; Poindexter & McCombs, 2001). Similarly, research indicates that those with strong political dispositions (e.g., strong party identification and political ideology) show high personal relevance to politics. This represents a high need for orientation, which in turn increases exposure and attention to news media (McCombs, 2004; Weaver, 1980).

Research on the knowledge gap hypothesis also provides some insights about the role of news media use in mediating the influence of preexisting variables on political outcomes (Eveland & Scheufele, 2000). The knowledge gap hypothesis posits that as the mass media infuses information into a society, segments of the population with a high cognitive capacity and motivation to process the information (typically indicated by socio-economic status) tend to acquire the information more efficiently than other segments of the population. This in turn exacerbates the existing knowledge gap (Tichenor, Donohue, & Olien, 1970).

The knowledge gap hypothesis implies three logical ideas underlying the existence of the disparity. The first pertains to the extent of mass communication use that is varied with preexisting cognitive skills and motivation to process information. Second, given the same extent of information received, those with high cognitive abilities and motivations – which are the indicators of cognitive capacity – are likely to engage in elaborative information processing (see Petty et al., 2002; Todorov, Chaiken, Henderson, 2002). According to information processing literature, elaborative thinking yields stronger and more persistent effects on cognitive (e.g., political knowledge) and attitudinal outcomes. Finally, given the same amount of exposure to political information, those high in cognitive capacity and motivation process information at a faster rate. As a result, a stronger correlation can be observed between communication variables and their outcomes for the high-resource group than the low-resource group. In the context of this dissertation, it also can be interpreted that behind the faster rate of learning for the high resource group is its high probability to engage in reasoning about the information received from news media (i.e., a strong correlation between news exposure and reasoning behaviors for the high group). Although not focusing on the moderating effects of cognitive capacity and motivation, this dissertation predicts that those who show high

cognitive capacity and motivation in politics are more likely to engage in political communication and reasoning behaviors than those with low capacity and motivation.

As stated, individuals' political orientations can be seen as outcomes of news media use. Literature suggests that individuals' attitudes and behaviors with respect to particular political events or figures are generated and developed in response to the relevant messages dealing with those objects (Petty et al., 2002). Thus, the amount of messages received and the way in which they are processed should be considered as central factors that produce psychological as well as behavioral outcomes (McLeod et al., 1999; Moy et al., 2005; Pfau, Houson, & Semmler, 2005; Scheufele & Nisbet, 2002). However, little research has empirically tested the role of news media use in mediating preexisting political factors (i.e., socio-demographic variables and political participation) and various political outcomes. Thus, this dissertation incorporates and tests the mediating role of news media use.

Chapter 3: The effects of news media use on political participation

THE EFFECTS OF NEWS MEDIA USE ON POLITICAL OUTCOMES

For many people, mass media are the initial source of information about politics and public affairs. News organizations exclusively gather news and disseminate it to a large audience by virtue of a wide information network and broadcasting system. Regarding the important role of mass media as an original source of political information, Graber (1988) noted, “When people know about current happenings that are remote from their daily experiences, there normally is no likely source, other than the mass media, that could have supplied the information” (p.1). Audiences’ access to news becomes even easier as news channels are diversified along with innovations of Internet technology and mobile devices. The political information gained from news media serves as a basis of individuals’ political orientations and decisions. In this sense, Denton and Woodward (1998) stated that politics and mass media are in an inevitable relationship. Conclusively, research suggests individuals’ political outcomes such as political attitudes and behaviors originally are the consequences of consuming political information obtained from mass media.

Research on news media effects in political contexts is important not only because it influences election results, but also because it leaves normative implications in the process of democracy (Pfau et al., 2005). Normative issues concern whether campaign communication contributes to increasing citizens’ political involvement and their likelihood of participation in the political process, which represent core democratic values. Research has shown mass media use creates normative political outcomes that facilitate a healthy democratic society. Geer and Lau (1998) noted that campaign communication in particular “matters to the practice of democracy ... because they affect the course of government” (p.1).

It should be noted that some researchers argue that general use of mass media may harm participatory democracy. For instance, Putnam (2000) pointed out that television use substituted for cooperative activities in individuals' leisure time, undermining social capital. It also was reported that television use formed perception of prevalent violence in reality, which in turn led to social withdrawal (Gerbner et al., 1980). In addition, many empirical studies that explored the effects of general media use on political outcomes found no significant influence (Moy, Scheufele, & Holbert, 1999; Putnam, 2000). Researchers charge a dramatic growth in soft news (Patterson, 2002) and a negative portrayal of politics (Capella & Jamieson, 1997; Moy & Pfau, 2000) with demobilizing citizens' political engagement. Contrary to these claims, empirical studies that focused on informational media use have generally found a positive association between media use and political participation (Cho et al., 2009; McLeod & McDonald, 1985; McLeod et al., 1999; Shah et al., 2005; 2007; Smith, 2001; Chaffee & Schleuder, 1986). Thus, it is suggested that informational media use, such as news consumption, yields the normative outcomes while sheer use of mass media may not. For this reason, media effects research should manifest finer nuances of media use and focus on specific content. This study will discuss the role of news media use.

INDIRECT EFFECT PARADIGM

While it is generally agreed that news media use has a positive influence on political participation, how it facilitates individuals' political engagement has yet to be explored. Research suggests that the mechanisms of news media effects are rather complicated. Recent communication research on political participation turns to the indirect effects paradigm, which holds that media effects on political engagement are

strong but largely indirect through their impact on reflective behaviors and political orientations (Cho et al., 2009; McLeod et al., 1999; Shah et al., 2005; 2007). This indirect effects paradigm is different from the minimal effects paradigm, which postulates “powerful,” not “minimal,” total effects of media. It is possible that news exposure can directly lead to political behaviors when individuals obtain procedural information about how to participate in political activities. However, in most cases, the influence of news media on political participation takes place through enhancing psychological engagement in politics, such as political knowledge, efficacy, interest, attitudes, and so forth (Cho et al., 2009; Moy et al., 2005; Scheufele et al., 2003; Shah & Scheufele, 2006; Wang, 2007). In other words, the pieces of information about politics gathered from the news media serve as a basis of individuals’ opinions, attitudes, and behaviors regarding political events and figures. For example, while exposed to news media, people perceive political issues that are prominent in news media, which in turn serve as a criteria for forming evaluative attitudes toward politicians (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). Their opinions and attitudes toward objects (e.g., political issues and figures) become crystallized as they think about political issues that are activated as a result of frequent news exposure (Kiousis & McCombs, 2004). News media use stimulates political discussion, which significantly increases political knowledge (Eveland, 2004) and participation (Cho et al., 2009). The increased political knowledge enhances political efficacy, which in turn facilitates political participation (Scheufele et al., 2003). In this sense, news media, as a dominant source of political orientation, play a central role in forming individuals’ political orientations by indirectly influencing the process of individuals’ political participation.

Chapter 4: Mediators between news media use and political participation

REASONING

As noted, news media play a fundamental role in the democratic political process for the general public and are the primary source of political information. This, in turn, produces psychological and behavioral political outcomes. It has been assumed that frequent exposure to news produces various political outcomes, such as political knowledge, interest, efficacy, and participation (Drew & Weaver, 1990; Robinson & Levy, 1996). However, it has been observed that the effects of news exposure are not as strong as thought (Graber, 1997; Neuman, 1976; Price & Zaller, 1993). Some empirical studies have failed to find significant cognitive outcomes (i.e., political knowledge), which were deemed to be a robust consequence of news media use (Eveland, 2004; Eveland & Hively, 2009). Research has highlighted the role of elaboration followed by exposure to news information in order to address this issue. For example, proposing a cognitive mediation model, Eveland (2001) stressed that elaborative information processing prompted by individuals' motivations to process information (e.g., surveillance motivation) is a critical step for news exposure to elicit cognitive political outcomes. In this model, elaboration refers to the mental process in which people exert significant mental effort in an endeavor to associate new pieces of information with prior knowledge or experience and integrate them into their cognitive structure (Eveland, 2001). This idea stems from theories of information processing. Human information processing theories (e.g., elaboration likelihood model and heuristic and systematic information processing model) suggests that (a) those with high a cognitive capacity and motivation for information processing tend to adopt elaborative information processing, and (b) cognitive beliefs and attitudes that are formed through elaboration tend to be

strong, persistent, and thus highly predictive of relevant behaviors (Anderson, 1980; Petty et al., 2002; Todorov et al., 2002). Consistent with this logic, empirical research found that elaboration followed by news exposure exerted significant positive influence on political knowledge, while general frequency of television news and newspaper use did not (Eveland, 2004). Because the cognitive mediation model suggests that media effects are contingent on (moderated by) individuals' motivations that spark elaboration, the role of media is somewhat limited in the model.

However, research suggests that mere exposure to news to some extent can trigger elaboration. For instance, agenda-setting theory conceives that individual's increased exposure to news media makes current news objects salient in their minds (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Subsequently, the salient news components become primed in individuals' cognitive systems, which lead people to retrieve and "think about" them (Kiousis & McCombs, 2004; McCombs, 2004; McCombs & Reynolds, 2002). From this logic, it is assumed that frequent use of news media inherently leads to elaboration on the objects that are contemporarily prominent in the news. In the same vein, other researchers put forward general models in which news media use stimulates elaborative behaviors. For example, Shah et al. (2007) and Cho et al. (2009) proposed an O-S-R-O-R model of communication effects, which postulates that individuals' reasoning processes that refers to elaborative and collective thinking operates as a causal mechanism between news exposure and political outcomes. Their model is different from the cognitive mediation model in that it does not necessitate motivational antecedents of elaboration: it notes that informational media use fosters reasoning behaviors, such as intra-reflection and interpersonal elaboration (Chaffee & Schleuder, 1986; Cho et al., 2009; Shah et al., 2007). In the sense that exposure to news content stimulates subsequent reflection and collective thinking, even in the absence of motivation, this can be considered a more

general model of media effects. In the same line, this study predicts that repeated use of news media subsequently fosters reasoning of news content.

Relevant literature suggests two types of reasoning (elaboration): intrapersonal and interpersonal. Intrapersonal reasoning refers to self-reflection or mental elaboration over the information gained from news media use. The number of thoughts, depth or frequency of thinking regarding the topic of interest generally indicates the degree of mental elaboration (Petty et al., 2002). It is assumed that such reasoning behaviors take place when individuals retrieve and revisit the information following news exposure as a function of the information accessibility. To some extent reasoning can occur simultaneously with news exposure (Eveland, 2001). This at-sight reasoning takes place when individuals pay sufficient attention to news content during the exposure. As individuals pay more attention to political news, they tend to generate more thoughts on political events, which in turn produces cognitive and attitudinal political outcomes that are strong and persistent (Moy et al., 2005; Kioussis & McCombs, 2004). Eveland (2001) also found that news attention was positively associated with degree of elaboration on news content, and it significantly mediated the influence of surveillance motivation on learning of news content. For this reason, the amount of attention paid to news produces substantial political effects (Chaffee, Zhao, & Leshner, 1994; Drew & Weaver, 1990). Consequently, although attention may not be equated with elaboration, the likelihood of elaboration and the level of attention to news are closely associated with each other. This study treats news attention both as an information stimulus and a reasoning behavior because it features both a news media use and a reasoning process.

Elaborative information processing also can occur in the course of interpersonal discussion. Recently, research turned to the deliberative nature of interpersonal discussion as the origin of its strong effects on attitudinal and behavioral political

outcomes (Cho et al., 2009; McLeod et al., 1999; Eveland, 2004; Eveland & Hively, 2009; Moy & Gastil, 2006). Although individuals may acquire new political information during political discussion, more importantly, they recount and elaborate political issues they encountered during the course of discussion (Eveland, 2004; McLeod et al., 1999). When engaged in discussion, individuals exert significant efforts to comprehend the topics of discussion, organizing their thoughts into articulate expressions, and weighing the pros and cons of arguments provided by diverse discussion partners (Benhabib, 1996). As a sign of elaboration, individuals who are engaged in interpersonal discussion are able to use complex concepts, make deep logical connections among them, and create consistent and reasoned arguments (Cappella, Price, & Nir, 2002; Kim, Wyatt, & Katz, 1999). Consistent with theories in information processing, this elaborative and collective thinking produces strong political outcomes, such as political knowledge (Eveland et al., 2005) and efficacy (Min, 2007; Moy & Gastil, 2006), which subsequently leads to political participation (Eveland, 2004; McLeod et al., 1999). Acknowledging that political discussion inherently entails mental elaboration and collective consideration, Shah et al. (2007) and Cho et al., (2009) expanded the previous O-S-O-R model into an O-S-R-O-R model of communication effects by inserting political discussion as a reasoning process (as indicated by the first R), not as a stimulus (S).

Research has documented a high correspondence between interpersonal political discussion and news media use. Ever since the classic studies advocated the two-step flow of media effects (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955), the role of interpersonal communication in relation to the effects of mass communication has been examined. The two types of communication are in a reciprocal and complementary relationship and are equally important in producing political behaviors (Chaffee, 1982). However, there is substantial evidence that news media use (i.e., news exposure and news attention) during a campaign

triggers interpersonal political discussion (McLeod et al., 1979; 2002). In examining media effects, interpersonal discussion is better understood as a causal mechanism of media effects rather than an independently co-varying construct (Cho et al., 2009; Shah et al., 2007). Research suggests that media effects on political participation are strong, but that impact is significantly mediated by political discussion (Shah et al., 2005; 2007; Sotirovic & McLeod, 2001). This does not imply that media effects are inferior to the impact of interpersonal communication. The news media use fosters political discussion by disseminating discussion sources (McLeod et al., 2002). However, cumulative empirical evidence has demonstrated political discussion mediates the effects of news media on political outcome variables, such as political knowledge and political participation (Cho et al., 2009; Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995; Shah et al., 2005; 2007; Sotirovic & McLeod, 2001). In this sense, interpersonal discussion is a critical component for media use to produce a wide range of political consequences (Kim et al., 1999; Lee, 2009).

Notably, research suggests that the direction of discussion effects on political outcomes such as political knowledge, efficacy, and participation may be contingent on the characteristics of discussion partners. Their opinions, demographic traits, perceived knowledge, etc. may play key roles. Many recent studies deal with the presumably varied political consequences of different aspects of discussion (Eveland & Hively, 2009; Hively & Eveland, 2009; Mutz, 2006; Scheufele et al., 2004). For example, Hardy and Scheufele (2009) found a negative correlation between the frequency of political discussion and accurate recall of candidate issue stances, especially during election season. They argue that major campaign events, such as political debates among candidates and party conventions in election circumstances generate many “seasonal discussants” about election, and that political discussion with those momentary

discussants can attenuate the levels of expertise. Mutz (2006) also raised a question regarding the normative outcomes of political discussion. Mutz found that political discussion between individuals with competing political views attenuated levels of political participation. From this finding, Mutz concluded that deliberative democracy, which is realized by political discussion with heterogeneous others, might not coexist with participatory democracy. Nevertheless, it is suggested that the discussion measure, which only taps into similar others, is still a useful predictor of political participation because people are inherently prone to engage in a political conversation with homogenous others, such as friends and family (Mutz, 2006; Schudson, 1995). Thus, the present dissertation focuses on the frequency of discussion with friends and family, whom people are most likely to contact and discuss politics with in their everyday life.

AFFECT AND PERCEIVED TRAITS OF CANDIDATES

Research suggests that one of the fundamental consequences of news media use is the acquisition of a political agenda (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Agenda-setting stresses the role of news media in picturing and constructing individuals' cognitive map of the political world. It posits that objects and their attributes that receive much attention from news media become salient in the public's minds. The public understands the political world through these components and learns what to think about in the contemporary political environment (McCombs, 2004). In an election context, news reports are filled with portrayals about the characteristics and traits of political candidates. Therefore, as people consume more election coverage, the attributes of political candidates become salient in the public's minds (McCombs, Lopez-Escobar, & Llamas, 2000).

The salient perceptions about political candidates can yield attitudinal and behavioral consequences with respect to those candidates. When candidates' attributes become salient for individuals, people tend to repeatedly think about them (McCombs, 2004, Kioussis & McCombs, 2004). As the news media reinforce these attributes, people form a valence about the political candidates, which in turn strengthens attitudes toward and stimulates political activities with regard to political candidates (Erber, Hodges, & Wilson, 1995; Petty et al., 1995; Sapiro & Soss, 1999; Weaver, 1991).

The theoretical linkage between agenda-setting and its evaluative consequences can be found in the priming literature (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; McCombs & Reynolds, 2002) and attribute priming (Kim et al., 2002). The basic assumption of the priming effect is that individuals shape opinions, attitudes, and behaviors regarding an object based on the political issues that are salient and activated at the present time (Fazio, Powell, & Williams, 1989; Fazio & Williams, 1986). In the context of political communication research, the priming effect is generally understood as a consequence of agenda-setting – people evaluate political leaders by the political issues that become salient as a function of repeated news exposure (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). Expanding this idea, attribute priming further suggests that the primed attributes of candidates also work as important criteria for evaluation (Kim et al., 2002). The evaluative outcomes may take attitudinal (e.g., favorability) and behavioral forms (e.g., supportive political activities and voting). This study predicts that individuals' frequent exposure to campaign news strengthens their perceptions (i.e., affects and characteristics) about political candidates, which in turn fortifies attitudes toward and facilitates political activities regarding those candidates.

OPINION FORMATION

Another consequence of news media use in an election is individuals' opinion formation about political issues. In a campaign, news stories cover various campaign agendas that are of top concern among political candidates and the public. Again, as audiences are increasingly exposed to news media, they encounter a variety of campaign issues. Subsequently, those issues most covered become salient in audiences' minds, and audiences form opinions on those political issues as they repeatedly think about them (Kim & Han, 2005; Kioussis & McCombs, 2004; Kioussis & McDevitt, 2008). Research has found that opinionated citizens are more willing to participate in the political process than those who possessed neutral or moderate opinions (Campbell et al., 1964; Scheufele & Eveland, 2001). This indicates that strength in personal opinion about political issues serves as an important mediator between news media use and political engagement.

POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE

Many people rely on the news media to acquire political information, so it is certain that news media use enhances political knowledge (Moy & Gastil, 2006). Considerable empirical evidence exists for the significant and positive effects of news consumption on political knowledge for television and print news media (e.g., Chaffee & Frank, 1996; Delli Carpini, & Keeter, 1996; Eveland, 2001; McLeod et al., 1999; Moy & Gastil, 2006; Scheufele et al., 2003) as well as Internet news media (e.g., Cho et al., 2009; Dalrymple & Scheufele, 2007; Kenski & Stroud, 2006). This cognitive consequence of news consumption can lead to political engagement (Jennings, 1996; Junn, 1991; Kaid, McKinney, & Tedesco, 2007; Klingemann, 1979; Neuman, 1986; Rosenstone & Hanson, 1993; Sotirovic & McLeod, 2001; Verba et al., 1995).

Although political knowledge has been considered an important construct in the research of political communication and political science, surprisingly little is known about whether political knowledge facilitates political participation and if so, how knowledge is linked to participation. Some empirical research has detected no significant impact of knowledge on participation (e.g., McLeod et al., 1999; Scheufele & Nisbet, 2002). Other research assumed no causal relationship between the two constructs, only hypothesizing them to co-vary (e.g., Cho et al., 2009). Studies tended to focus on identifying the association between political knowledge and participation rather than explicating why and how knowledge influences political participation (e.g., Moy et al., 2005; Scheufele et al., 2004).

There are at least two possible reasons for the insignificant effects of political knowledge on participation. The first plausible reason is that previous research disregarded the indirect process of knowledge effects on participation. Many empirical studies show that political knowledge facilitates participation indirectly through political efficacy (Kaid, et al., 2007; Jung, Kim, & Zuniga, forthcoming; McLeod et al., 1999; Scheufele & Nisbet, 2002). The internal political efficacy construct taps into self-perception about the level of understanding about politics and ability to deal with politics, which is a strong predictor of political participation (Hoffman & Thompson, 2009; Pollock, 1983; Scheufele et al., 2003; Scheufele & Nisbet, 2002; Semetko & Valkenburg, 1998). Thus, when political efficacy is controlled for, the unique impact of knowledge on participation necessarily becomes trivial.

The second source of the mixed findings about the relationship between political knowledge and participation comes from the varying conceptualization and measurement of political knowledge among studies. Significant debates surround the conceptualization and measurement of political knowledge (Eveland & Hively, 2009; Graber, 2001).

Measurement items of political knowledge vary largely by studies: they measure political knowledge with different items asking about public affairs (e.g., Eveland, 2001), factual knowledge about local and national politics (e.g., Scheufele, 2002; Scheufele & Nisbet, 2002) and knowledge about candidates' issue stances (e.g., Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1993; Eveland et al., 2005; Eveland & Scheufele, 2000; Holbert et al., 2002). Because prominent news content differs by political circumstances, the magnitude of the influence news exposure exerts on the acquisition of political knowledge is different by political context.

Finally, audiences' motivations at the time of news exposure may not be sufficient enough to trigger subsequent elaboration on news content. Individuals' interest and attention vary by political circumstances. They tend to show high interest in major political events, such as presidential elections. In political circumstances that draw high public attention, news exposure is closely related to elaboration, which increases levels of political knowledge. On the other hand, exposure to news media may not produce a significant influence on political learning in the context of low-public relevance because of the lack of public motivation leading to elaboration. Because this study investigates news media effects in the context of the 2008 presidential election, it is expected that frequent news exposure instigates a substantial degree of elaboration on political issues and candidates relevant to the election.

CAMPAIGN INTEREST

Political interest is an internal motivational force that can exert a strong influence on political involvement. Research has documented a significant and positive relationship between campaign interest and participation (Verba et al, 1995; Zhongshi & Moy, 1998).

Interest in a political campaign is generated as a function of news media use especially in the election seasons (McLeod et al., 1978; Robinson & Davis, 1990; Weaver & Drew, 1995; Zhongshi & Moy, 1998). Although news exposure and political interest are in a reciprocal relationship, “of these two effects, the influence of news exposure on political interest is most powerful” (Patterson, 1980, p. 75). Campaign interest obtained from news media use in turn leads to electoral activities (Weaver & Drew, 1995). For campaign interest is a product of news use and an antecedent of political participation, it is hypothesized by this study to be one of the important variables that mediates news exposure and political participation.

ATTITUDE STRENGTH

Attitude has been a central construct in human behavior research. Attitude in general indicates evaluative psychological states of a favorable or unfavorable orientation toward an object (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2000; Krosnick & Petty, 1995). Despite the general agreement regarding the conceptualization of attitude, certain ambiguities remain due to the lack of a clear distinction between overall evaluation (attitude) and affect. Adopting Thurstone’s (1931) definition of attitude as affect for or against a psychological object, many social psychologists employed affect and attitude interchangeably (e.g., Chen & Bargh, 1999; Murphy & Zajonc, 1993). However, most researchers propose to apply the term affect to denote mood, emotion and arousal (see Giner-Sorolla, 1999; Schwarz & Clore, 1983, 1996). To avoid confusion in the conceptualization of attitude, Ajzen and Fishbein (2000) suggested to use the term “attitude” to refer to “the evaluation of an object, concept, or behavior along with a dimension of favor or disfavor, good or bad, like or dislike,” and “affect” to refer to “a separate response system with a somatic

component characterized by some degree of arousal” (p.3). Accordingly, affect includes generalized mood states such as happiness, anger, fear, and pride (Crites, Fabrigar, & Petty, 1994; Giner-Socolla, 1999; Greenwald, 1968). Research suggests that attitudes are better understood as being influenced by moods and emotions (affect) (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2000). For instance, emotional responses such as fear and anger with regard to a particular political figure can generate negative evaluation about that person. In this sense, Crano et al. (2006) noted that “attitudes are the judgments that integrate and summarize the cognitive and affective reactions” to the attitude object (p. 347).

The important role of attitude strength in the prediction of human behaviors has been widely documented (Ajzen, 1991; Bargh, Chen, & Burrows, 1996; Fazio 1990; Albarracin et al., 2003). The theory of planned behavior (TPB) – one of the renowned theories of behavior prediction (Ajzen, 1985, 1991) – highlights the role of attitude toward behavior, which refers to the degree of favorability or unfavorability with regard to the actual behavior because it has strong predictive power for the human behavior. Although the relative importance of attitude in the prediction of behavior varies as a function of the behavior and the population under investigation, attitude construct in general has been found as the strongest predictor of behaviors (Kim & Hunter, 1993; Sheeran & Taylor, 1999; Godin & Kok, 1996). When attitude toward the behavior is positive and strong, the behavior is likely to be performed.

As noted, whether a person likes or dislikes an object is important information in the prediction of favorable behaviors regarding the object. However, attitudes have varied qualities that determine the predictive power in behaviors. To the degree to which attitude is stable, resistant to change, and affects cognition and behavior, the attitude is considered strong (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2000; Crano et al., 2005; Glasman & Albarracín, 2006). There are a number of dimensions of attitude strength including extremity, certainty,

importance, intensity, accessibility, and so forth (Crano et al., 2005; Kioussis & McCombs, 2004; Krosnick & Petty, 1995). Although these attributes of attitude are conceptually and operationally distinct, literature about attitude has treated them as interchangeable with one another because they represent a common construct of crystallization or strength of attitude. Among these attributes, however, attitude extremity, which refers to the extent to which an individual likes or dislikes an object, has been widely used as a measure of attitude strength (Krosnick & Petty, 1995). Attitude extremity is generally indicated by how much further individual's favor of an object extends beyond neutrality (Krosnick & Petty, 1995). Attitude extremity has been operationalized as the deviation of an individual's rating from the midpoint of a dimension ranging from highly favorable to highly unfavorable.

Regarding the components of individuals' attitudes, literature stresses the role of both cognitions and affect. It should be noted that while the role of affect in attitude formation only recently became a focus of attention, the role of cognitions as antecedents of attitude has been widely recognized for many years (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2000). Many attitude and behavior theorists have adopted the expectancy-value model (see Feather, 1959, 1982; see also Fishbein, 1963, 1967). It postulates that individuals' attitudes (or evaluations) are determined by their beliefs about the object of interest. Each belief associates the object with a certain attribute. According to the expectancy-value model, individuals' overall attitudes toward an object is determined by subjective evaluations of the attributes associated with the object and by the strength of these associations. Applying this logic to the prediction of individuals' political participation in election context, it is suggested that individuals' salient beliefs about candidates' personal characteristics function as antecedents of their attitudes toward those candidates. In addition to the cognitions, affects (i.e., fear, anger, happiness and pride) with regard to

the candidates also function as important antecedents of attitudes toward those candidates. Thus, this study modeled that strength in affects and cognitions about political candidates predicted attitude strength.

People can have attitude toward an object in various ways, but mass communication is an important stimulus of attitude formation (Petty et al., 2002). Empirical studies have demonstrated the positive relationship between the frequency of exposure to messages and strength in attitudes toward the message objects (Kiousis & McCombs, 2004; Petty, Haugtvedt, & Smith, 1995; Tesser, Martin, & Mendolia, 1995; Zaller, 1992). In the context of research examining the influence of news media on attitude formation and strength in election periods, individuals' frequent exposure to news media enhances the accessibility of political candidates' attributes, which in turn fortifies or strengthens individuals' attitudes toward those candidates (Erber, et al., 1995; Kiousis & McCombs, 2004; Sapiro & Soss, 1999; Weaver, 1991). In this sense, it can be suggested that the relationship between the news exposure and attitude formation (or strength) is a function of agenda-setting effect of mass media. When individuals are increasingly exposed to a particular object in media, as agenda-setting theory suggests, the degree of salience regarding the attributes of the object increases, which in turn fosters elaboration and a strong attitude toward that object (Kiousis & McCombs, 2004). Kiousis and McCombs (2004) found that individuals' attitudes toward political figures are more deviated from the neutral point as news media more covered them. Tesser et al. (1995) also noted that "thought, then tends to make evaluations more extreme more accessible, and more enduring" (p.75). From the same logic, interpersonal discussion, which entails deliberative thinking about the topics discussed, can also produce dispersed attitudes toward the topics discussed. Literature in social psychology has well documented the positive association between strength of attitudes toward an object and

the likelihood of engaging in behaviors regarding the object (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005; Petty et al., 2002; Todorov et al., 2002).

Ajzen (1991) emphasized the importance of consistency between attitude and attitude-object, coining “principle of compatibility.” The principle of compatibility holds that attitudes toward performing specific behaviors, not toward an object, are useful predictors of a behavior. Applying this logic to the prediction of political participation, attitudes construct should be measured with regard to participating behaviors instead of political candidates. Nevertheless, Ajzen and Fishbein (2005) noted that when the behavioral criterion is broadly representative of the behavior, a high correlation between attitudes toward objects and multiple-acts criteria can be obtained. Ajzen and Fishbein (2005) called this phenomenon the “principle of aggregation.” Following this principle, as individuals form strong attitudes toward a particular political candidate, they are likely to engage in political activities for or against that candidate. According to the principle of aggregation, it is particularly true that the index of attitude strength with regard to major political candidates is highly predictive of aggregative measure of multiple participatory behaviors in the election context.

PERCEIVED ABILITY OF POLITICAL PARTIES

According to the priming theory, important public issues often become criteria with which citizens evaluate politicians (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). This suggests that conspicuous objects in campaign season, regardless of whether they are attributes of political candidates or issues, provide a basis of individuals’ perceptions about the ability of political parties to resolve imminent political problems. Subsequently, individuals who

hold a particular political party to best deal with confronted political issues are more likely to engage in political activities.

POLITICAL EFFICACY

Political efficacy may be the other mechanism behind the relationship between news exposure and political participation. Among the various factors influencing political behaviors, political efficacy has been considered one of the most important psychological constructs closely related to political participation (Delli Carpni, 2004; Cohen et al., 2001; Gans, 1967; Kenski & Stroud, 2006; Pomper & Sernekos, 1991). Findings from empirical studies suggest that political efficacy is closely related to political campaigning, contacting political officials, and voting (Pollock, 1983). Political efficacy is defined as “the feeling that individual political action does have, or can have, an impact upon the political process” (Campbell et al., 1954, p.187).

Political efficacy is comprised of two dimensions: internal and external efficacy. Internal political efficacy concerns feelings of self-competence and the ability to understand and to participate effectively in politics. External efficacy refers to the perception of the responsiveness of political officials to citizens’ demands (Craig, et al., 1990; Hoffman & Thompson, 2009; Morrell, 2003). Research generally suggests that internal political efficacy is more relevant concept than external efficacy in the model of individuals’ participation in political process (Pollock, 1983). Since the focus of this dissertation is prediction individuals’ process of political participation, internal political efficacy is used in this study’s model.

The perceived self-ability to influence politics (internal political efficacy) can be obtained by various means of political communication. Numerous empirical studies have

shown that news media use significantly increases levels of individuals' political efficacy (McLeod et al., 1999; Semetko and Valkenburg, 1998). Although it is possible that people become political efficacious in the course of political communication (e.g., news media use and interpersonal discussion), research suggests indirect influence of communication on political efficacy through self-perception about their political involvement. Many empirical studies have shown that news media use stimulated individuals' perception that they are cognizant of political affairs, politically knowledgeable and interested in political process, which renders efficacious feelings toward politics (Delli Carpini, 2004; Hoffman & Thompson, 2009; Kaid et al., 2007). Taken together, research has hypothesized that news media use produces individuals' political efficacy through political knowledge and interest, and that it positively predicts political participation. Since this study concerns individuals' processes of political participation, it incorporates solely the internal political efficacy in the model.

THE O-S-R-O-R FRAMEWORK

Recently, communication researchers examined a process of media effects within the O-S-R-O-R (Orientation-Stimulus-Reasoning-Orientation-Response) framework. In earlier research, media effects were examined in a simple "Stimulus-Response (S-R)" framework. The "Orientation-Stimulus-Orientation-Response (O-S-O-R)" model then substituted the overly direct and universal effect framework of S-R, as researchers began to acknowledge the role of pre-existing orientations (first O), outcome orientations (second O), in conditioning media use (S), and ultimate effects of media use (R) respectively. Subsequently, acknowledging the critical role of interpersonal communication in moderating and mediating media effects, McLeod and his colleagues

(2001) and Sotirovic and McLeod (2001) incorporated interpersonal communication as another stimulus, along with media use, within the O-S-O-R framework, coining a communication mediation model. Although the model categorized both mass and interpersonal communication as a stimulus, it theorizes that the effects of news media on political behaviors are largely indirect and mediated by interpersonal discussion. Later researchers (Cho et al., 2009; Shah et al., 2007) developed an O-S-R-O-R model of communication effects by adding an additional step called the “reasoning” process (R) between stimulus (S) and second orientations (second O). The reasoning process, in this model, refers to mental elaboration and collective consideration of the topic (Cho et al., 2009; Shah et al., 2007). The inclusion of reasoning as a critical process in producing media effects, as well as the operationalization of political discussion (e.g., interpersonal political discussion and interactive online political messaging) as an attribute of reasoning in parallel with intra-reflection make this model unique from the previous O-S-O-R model of communication effects. The new model assumes that the political discussion inherently entails mental elaboration and collective consideration and theorizes these reasoning behaviors along with intra-reflection largely channel the effects of media use on encouraging political behaviors (Cho et al., 2009; Shah et al., 2007).

Due to theoretical parsimony, many empirical studies on political participation have been conducted within this O-S-R-O-R framework, and findings have been accumulated to supplement one another to reach an overarching conclusion about the process of news media effects on political participation (e.g., Cho et al., 2009; McLeod et al., 1999; Shah et al., 2005; 2007). They have established the relationships among media use (stimulus), overall frequency of political discussion (reasoning), and political participation (response). However, research has yet to identify what, if anything, mediates news consumption and political participation. With this regard, Cho and his

colleagues (2009) suggested that future studies should identify constructs relevant to the O-S-R-O-R model of political participation, especially the variables categorized in the second orientation. Accordingly, the present study attempts to identify important personal-psychological mediators between news media use and participation and demonstrate different pathways through which news exposure facilitates political engagement.

Chapter 5: Modeling the process of political participation

This study proposes and tests an integrative structural model of news media effects on political participation in order to explicate the role of news media use in individuals' processes of political engagement. Particularly, the research focuses on (a) the mediating role of news media use between preexisting variables (i.e., socio-demographic and political dispositional variables) and political engagement, (b) the mechanisms behind the effects of news exposure on political participation in light of reasoning behaviors (i.e., attention to news, interpersonal political discussion and elaboration on campaign) and key personal-psychological factors (i.e., strength in perceptions about political candidates, opinion strength, campaign interest, political knowledge, attitude strength, perceived ability of political parties and internal political efficacy), and (c) identifying individual indirect effects of news exposure on political participation.

The effect hierarchy among the key predictors of political participation is based on relevant theories and models such as communication mediation model, cognitive mediation model, and theory of planned behavior. The integrative model is structured within the O-S-R-O-R steps, and variables in the model will be categorized under one of those steps. Specifically, the model specifies that socio-demographic variables (i.e., education, income, age, gender) and political predispositions (i.e., political interest, partisanship and ideology) serve as the "first orientation"; exposure to television, newspaper, radio and Internet news as stimuli; attention to news, political discussion and degree of elaboration as a reasoning process; strength in affects and perceived characteristics about political candidates, strength in opinions about political issues, general political knowledge, issue stance knowledge, and campaign interest as initial

political orientations; attitudes dispersion toward political candidates, perceived ability of political parties and internal political efficacy as proximal political orientations; and political participation as a response.

Accordingly, the first hypothesis is proposed regarding the influence of news media use on political participation. Although it is possible that the frequency of news exposure exerts a direct influence on political participation, based on the literature, this study hypothesizes that news exposure is indirectly related to political participation through many pathways.

Hypothesis 1. The frequency of news exposure will influence political participation largely indirectly through various pathways.

Applying cognitive mediation model (Eveland, 2001) and Cho et al's (2009) O-S-R-O-R framework, this study hypothesizes that elaboration-generative behaviors, such as attentive news exposure, elaboration on campaign, and interpersonal discussion about political campaigns will significantly mediate news exposure and a series of political variables.

Hypothesis 2. Reasoning behaviors, such as attentive news exposure, elaboration on campaign and interpersonal discussion about political campaign, will significantly mediate news exposure and political outcomes.

A number of studies with different perspectives have identified several key political variables that represent individuals' political engagement. Some of them were initially found to be consequences of news media use that are likely to be predictors of

political participation (e.g., political knowledge and strength in perception about candidates' attributes). Others were identified as antecedents of political behaviors that are possibly outcomes of news consumption (e.g., political efficacy and attitude strength). Taken together, the present study tests the mediating role of those variables between news media use and political participation.

The hierarchical effects theory holds that message exposure first produces cognition effects, followed by attitudinal or motivational outcomes, and finally behavioral outcomes (e.g., Kioussis & McCombs, 2004; Kioussis & McDevitt, 2008; Ki & Hon, 2007). Following this logic, the cognitive outcomes, such as strength in perceived attributes about political candidates and political knowledge are likely to serve as antecedents of attitudinal and behavioral political outcomes. Thus, it is hypothesized that strength in perceived attributes and political knowledge will influence political participation directly, as well as indirectly, through attitudinal variables (i.e., attitudes strength, perceived ability of political parties, and political efficacy). Specifically, this study hypothesizes that perceptual and cognitive variables (i.e., strength in affects and personal traits about political candidates, strength in opinion about political issues, campaign interest and political knowledge) are the initial outcomes of news media use, which in turn can directly or indirectly lead to political participation.

Hypothesis 3. Strength in affects and personal traits, strength in opinions about political issues, campaign interest, general political knowledge, and knowledge about candidates' issue stance will significantly mediate news media use and political participation.

Based on the literature, this dissertation poses three proximal predictors of political participation – attitude strength, perceived ability of major political parties, and internal political efficacy. It should be noted that, as stated earlier, the theory stresses the principle of compatibility, which posits that attitude that is measured with regard to performing the particular behavior of interest, instead of behavior object, functions as a strong predictor of that behavior. To apply this principle to the context of this dissertation, “attitudes toward political participation” rather than “attitudes toward political candidates” should be the appropriate predictor of individuals’ engagement in politics. However, this dissertation employs “attitudes toward political candidates” in prediction of political participation for two reasons. First, it is deemed that attitudes toward presidential candidates in election seasons and political activities for or against those candidates are quite compatible because supportive (or unsupportive) activities for (or against) political candidates are, in general, the only consequence that strong attitudes toward those candidates can result from. Second, according to the principle of aggregation, it is assumed that aggregate measure of attitudes toward multiple political candidates, and aggregate measure of multiple political activities are well matched.

Hypothesis 4. Strength in attitude toward candidates, perceived ability of political parties, and internal political efficacy will significantly mediate initial outcomes of news media use and reasoning behaviors (i.e., perceptions about candidates, political issues, interest in campaign, general political knowledge and knowledge about candidates’ issue stance), and political participation.

Finally, this study examines the role of news media use in transmitting the effects of demographic and political dispositions on political behaviors.

Hypothesis 5. News media use will mediate significant effects of socio-demographic such as gender, age, education, income and race and political disposition variables, such as partisanship, ideology and past voting on a series of political variables including strength in affective perception, personal traits and opinions about political issues, campaign interest, general political knowledge, knowledge about candidates' issue stance, attitude strength, perceived ability of political parties, and internal political efficacy.

Chapter 6: Method

DATA

To test the proposed model, this dissertation analyzed 2008-2009 National Election Survey (NES) data collected during the 2008 presidential election campaign. The sample consisted of a new cross-section of respondents that yielded 2,323 face-to-face interviews in the pre-election study; 2,102 of which later provided a face-to-face interview in the post-election study. As for the response rate, 59.5% is what AAPOR calls Response Rate 1 (RR1) for the survey, which is the minimum response rate. It is referred to as the "minimum" because it assumes that in all households at which the eligibility of residents was not determined, at least one eligible adult lived there. AAPOR Response Rate 3 (RR3) assumes that in households at which eligibility was not determined, the proportion of households containing an eligible adult was the same as that proportion among households at which eligibility was determined. That response rate is 63.7%. The maximum response rate, AAPOR's RR5, is 78.2% and is computed by assuming that no eligible adult lived in any of the households in which eligibility was not determined. For the post-election survey, the minimum rate (AAPOR RR1) is 53.9 percent; the estimated rate (AAPOR RR3) is 57.7 percent; the maximum rate (AAPOR RR5) is 70.8 percent. The re-interview rate is 90.5.

ANALYSIS

Structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis using Mplus 5.0 was conducted to test the validity of the entire model as well as the individual hypotheses. SEM is a multivariate analytical method that combines multiple regression and path analysis. As an

analytical method, SEM is a powerful statistical method to test process models, detect indirect mechanisms, and to identify significant mediators (Hayes, 2009).

A structural equation model shows a standardized path coefficient between variables, which enables investigators to calculate a total effect of an independent variable on a dependent variable by summing up direct and indirect effects. It also allows researchers to determine how well a process model, in which exogenous variables are linked to the focal dependent variables through one or more mediating pathways fits the observed data. Thus, SEM is an appropriate method for this study.

To investigate indirect effects of news media use on political participation, a residualized covariance matrix among the main variables was created with a partial correlation matrix controlling for demographic and political disposition variables (i.e., age, gender, education, income, race, partisanship, political ideology and past voting). Through this procedure, all of the relationships among variables were free from the influence of the control variables in this study.

MEASURES

Socio-demographic variable. Education was measured with an item asking, “What is the highest grade of school or year of college you have completed?” It ranged, in this study, from 0 to 17 ($M = 13.07$, $SD = 2.59$). Income was also measured with a single item asking respondents to indicate “the letter of the income group that includes the income you had in 2007 before taxes.” It ranged from 1 (none or less than \$2,999) to 25 (\$135,000 above; $M = 10.51$, $SD = 6.20$). Respondent age was asked with an open-ended question, “What is the month, day and year of your birth?” The youngest respondent was 18; the oldest was 93 ($M = 47.36$, $SD = 17.37$). Gender was measured as

a dichotomous variable with 1 indicating male, 2 female. Of the total respondents, 57% were males and 43% were females. Race was recoded dichotomously with 1 indicating “Black” (29%) and 2 representing “White” (71%) with other races treated as system-missing (N = 290, 12% out of total).

Political disposition. To measure strength of partisanship, respondents were first asked whether they had a party identification. Those who indicated partisanship were subsequently asked what they would like to call themselves – strong or not very strong partisan (Range: 0 – 3, M = 1.83, SD = 1.05). For the ideology variable, respondents were asked where they would place themselves on a 7-point scale ranging from “extremely liberal” to “extremely conservative.” To create an index of strength for political ideology, “extreme” ideology was recoded into 3 regardless of whether it was liberal or conservative. Likewise, “liberal” or “conservative,” “slightly liberal,” or “slightly conservative” were assigned with 2 and 1, respectively. Respondents who provided “moderate” or “don’t know” were labeled with “0.” (M = .90, SD = 1.00). The frequency of past voting was measured with a single item asking respondents, “How often would you say you vote? Always, nearly always, part of the time, or seldomly?” (Range: 1 – 4, M = 2.68, SD = 1.20).

News exposure. A composite variable of news exposure was created by averaging six items, including frequency of using national network TV news, early and late evening local news, daily newspaper, radio news and online news. Each item was assigned a 7-point scale response for use, ranging from “none” to “seven days” ($\alpha = .71$, M = 2.67, SD = 1.46).

Attention to news. Similar to the news exposure variable, news attention was created by averaging four items, including attention to national network news, newspaper, radio news, and internet news. Each item measuring news attention was

placed on a 5-point scale ranging from “none” to “a great deal” ($\alpha = .80$, $M = 6.95$, $SD = 3.97$).

Political discussion. Political discussion was measured with a single item asking, “During a typical week, how many days do you discuss politics with your family or friends?” Responses ranged from “none” to “seven days” ($M = 2.43$, $SD = 2.33$).

Elaboration on campaign. Respondents were asked a single item tapping into the amount of thought they had about the upcoming presidential election with options of “quite a lot” and “only a little” ($M = 1.73$, $SD = 0.44$).

Strength in affect. This variable was created by combining items measuring degree of valence about affect (i.e., angry, afraid, hopeful, and proud) for or against two major presidential candidates (i.e., Barack Obama and John McCain) and for two major political parties (i.e., Democratic and Republican). Regarding each candidate and party, respondents were asked questions, “How often has Barack Obama (John McCain, Democratic party, Republican party) made you feel angry (afraid, hopeful, proud)?” Each question’s response was measured a 4-point scale ranging from “rarely” to “very often.” An index of affective strength for each of the four election subjects was created by combining the scores from those four affective items (i.e., angry, afraid, hopeful, and proud). The composite variable of affective strength was created by adding the scores of the four index variables ($\alpha = .85$, $M = 5.25$, $SD = 3.64$).

Strength in perceived characteristics. This variable was created by combining seven items measuring the degree of valence about perceived characteristics of two major presidential candidates (i.e., Barack Obama and John McCain). Those seven items asked respondents to rate their opinions about the candidates’ morality, leadership, caring public, knowledge, intelligence, honesty, and optimism on a 4-point scale ranging from “not well at all” to “extremely well.” Respondents who chose “extremely well” and “not

well at all” were assigned a 1 and those who responded with other options were assigned with 0. An index of strength in perceived characteristics was created by averaging the scores of seven items for the two candidates ($\alpha = .82$, $M = 1.22$, $SD = 0.32$).

Strength in opinions about political issues. Respondents’ opinion strength was measured with 10 items asking how much respondents “favor (agree) or oppose (disagree)” regarding a variety of political and public issues, such as the “withdrawal of Iraqi troops,” “increasing government service,” “increasing defense spending,” the “government insurance plan,” “protecting the environment over job creation,” “reducing the federal budget deficit,” “cutting the budget deficit by increasing tax,” “cutting the budget deficit by less military spending,” “government outsourcing,” and “social security in stocks and bonds.” Each item’s response was placed on a 7-point scale ranging from “favor (agree or encourage) a great deal (or strongly)” to “oppose (disagree or discourage) a great deal (strongly).” Respondents’ opinion strength regarding each issue was indicated by recoding “strongly favor or oppose” into 3, “favor or oppose a little” into 2, “lean toward favor or oppose” into 1 and “neither favor nor oppose” into 0. The final index of opinion strength was created by averaging scores of 10 items ($\alpha = .65$, $M = 1.94$, $SD = .517$).

General political knowledge. Using 12 questions, each with a definitive answer, an index of general political knowledge was formulated. Each question asked respondents about the political party that has the most members in U.S. House of Representatives and in U.S. Senate in Washington, ideology placement about two major parties (Democratic versus Republican Party), and two presidential candidates (i.e., McCain versus Obama), job recognition for Nancy Pelosi, Dick Cheney, Gordon Brown and John Roberts. Respondents were given a 1 for each correct answer, and a final score of general political knowledge was created by adding each score of those items ($\alpha = .78$, $M = 3.03$, SD

=2.12). Notably, assessing the accuracy of ideology placement is difficult if not impossible. Thus, a relative accuracy criterion was used following previous research (Eveland, 2004; Eveland & Scheufele, 2000). Relevant items were paired in two: one of the pairs includes items asking about respondents' perceived ideology of Barack Obama and John McCain, and the other asked about perceived ideology of Democratic and Republican Party. Each item was placed on a 10-point scale from "left" to "right." Respondents who rated Obama as more liberal than McCain, regardless of the specific placement of the individual candidates, were considered to have accurate knowledge of the ideological placement of candidates and thus were given a score of 1. Those who rated the candidates in the same category or rated McCain as more liberal than Obama were considered erroneous and thus were given a zero. Likewise, those who rated the Democratic Party to be more liberal than the Republican Party were correct, and were given a score of 1.

Knowledge about candidates' issue stance. An index of respondents' knowledge about candidates' issue position was created using six items that tapped into perceived issue position of Barack Obama and John McCain. Those items were about increasing government service, defense spending, budget cuts to national defense, immigration, health insurance reform, and abortion. Respondents who provided correct answers to each question were given a score of 1 and each score of six items was added up to create the index of political knowledge about candidates' issue stance ($\alpha = .70$, $M = 3.04$, $SD = 1.64$).

Campaign interest. Campaign interest was measured with a single question asking, "Would you say that you have been very much interested, somewhat interested, or not much interested in the political campaigns so far this year?" (Range: 1 – 5, $M = 3.53$, $SD = 1.26$).

Attitude strength. The attitude strength variable was created using six items measured with a feeling thermometer on four political figures, including Barack Obama, John McCain, Sarah Palin, Joe Biden, and two major political parties, Democratic and Republican Party. Respondents rated each of the four political figures and two political parties on a 100-point scale with 0 indicating “extremely unfavorable,” 100 extremely favorable, and 50 “neutral.” Because this study sought the degree of strength (i.e., neither like nor dislike), rather than direction of attitudes, each of the four items were recoded with values from “zero to nine” and “91 to 100” into 5, “10 to 19” and “81 to 90” into 4... and “50” into zero. Those four recoded items were combined to create the attitude strength variable with a maximum value of 25 and a minimum value of zero. The final index score of attitude strength was created by adding the value of those six items ($\alpha = .76$, $M = 3.45$, $SD = 1.09$).

Perceived ability of political parties. This variable was created using two items asking whether respondents believed in the ability of each political party to resolve two important public issues facing the country ($M = 1.62$, $SD = 0.73$).

Internal political efficacy. Internal political efficacy was created by combining two items of “I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country,” and “Sometimes, politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can’t really understand what’s going on.” Each item’s response was five-point scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” ($\alpha = .86$, $M = 3.02$, $SD = 0.79$).

Political participation. Political participation was created using eight items asking about whether respondents did the following during the campaign: persuading others to vote for or against one of the parties or candidates, going to a political meeting, wearing a campaign button, putting a campaign sticker on a car or placing a sign in front of an

individual's house, doing any work for political parties or candidates, donating money to candidates, parties or any other groups supporting candidates, and voting in the presidential election. After assigning a score of 1 to those who answered "yes" and 0 to those who answered "no," scores from eight items were combined to create an index of political participation ($\alpha = .78$, $M = 2.74$, $SD = 1.46$).

Chapter 7: Results

The first hypothesis concerned the overall hierarchical structure that specified mechanisms with respect to the effects of news media use on political participation through a series of reasoning behaviors and personal-psychological variables. For the sake of brevity, demographic and political dispositions were excluded from the structural model depicted in Figure 1 in order to concisely present the mechanisms of news effects on political participation. Instead, the model was tested using a partial correlation metrics in which all the preexisting variables were residualized from the relationships among the main variables included in the model. This procedure ensured that all the relationships found in the model were completely free from the effects of those controlled variables.

Several analytical steps were undertaken to reach the best model that fit the data. First, within the structural model proposed by this research, all relational paths were set free to be estimated (a saturated model). That is, variables in a prior hierarchical step were set to exert an influence on variables in the next hierarchical steps. For example, the saturated model stipulated that news exposure exerted a direct influence on each of the reasoning behaviors, personal-psychological variables, and political participation. Likewise, reasoning variables were set to have direct influence on personal-psychological variables and political participation. Then, the saturated model was trimmed by removing non-significant paths from news exposure to various personal-psychological constructs and political participation to examine any indirect influences on those political outcomes through reasoning behaviors. Ultimately, a final model in which all non-significant paths were removed and two direct paths (from news exposure to campaign interest and issue stance knowledge) were added following an LM test was presented as shown in Figure 1.

As indicated in Table 1, the goodness-of-fit for the final model was best and explained the same amount of variance in the political participation as saturated and trimmed models while providing the most parsimonious solutions.

<Table 1> Model Summary

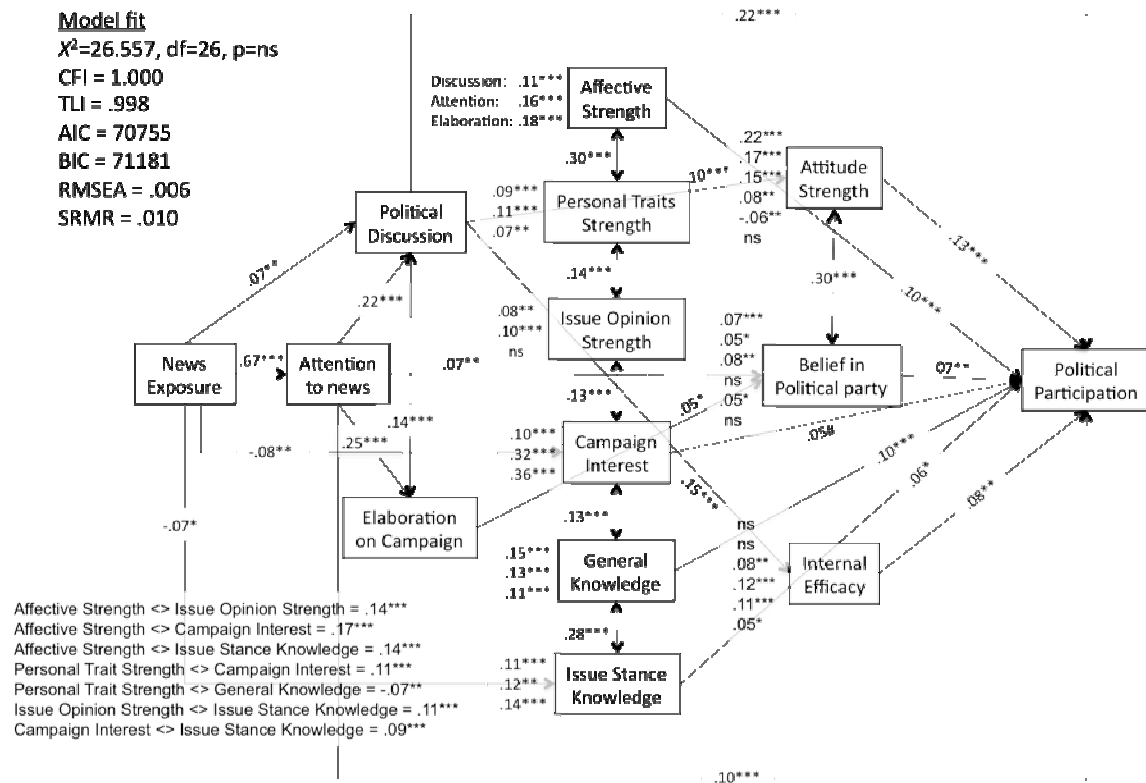
	χ^2/df	CFI	TLI	AIC	BIC	RMSEA	SRMR	R ² (%)
Saturated ¹	-	-	-	70778	71340	-	-	20
Trimmed ²	28.145/10	.995	.953	70786	71294	.033	.010	20
Final ³	26.557/26	1.000	.998	70755	71181	.000	.010	20

¹ This is the fully saturated model with all structural paths freed to be estimated.

² This is the trimmed model with non-significant direct effects of news exposure on political outcome variables removed.

³ This is the final model with all non-significant paths removed.

<Figure 1> Integrative structural model of political participation: mechanisms of news media effects on political participation



* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Figure 1 presents the Mplus estimates of the structural relationships among news exposure, reasoning behaviors, a set of personal-psychological variables, and political participation. Overall, this model fits the data very well ($\chi^2 = 26.557$, $df = 26$, $p = ns$; CFI = 1.000; TLI = .998; RMSEA = .006; SRMR = .010). In general, non-significant chi-square indicates a good model fit. The RMSEA is also a widely used criterion since it is a parsimony adjusted index (Kline, 1998). RMSEA's values of less than .05 represent good fits, values between .05 and .08 indicate a reasonable error of approximation, and values greater than .10 represent poor fit (Brown & Cudeck, 1993). As for the TLI and CFI, values higher than .90 represent adequate fit of the model to the data (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Finally, an SRMR index less than .05 is considered as a good fit. The excellent model fit, combined with solid theoretical basis in the model, support the idea that news media use leads to reasoning behaviors and a series of personal-psychological political outcomes, which, in turn, stimulate political participation.

As the first hypothesis predicted, no significant direct influence of news exposure on participation was detected in the structural model. Instead, the frequency of sheer exposure to news enhanced participation through its positive relationship with news attention ($\beta = .64$, $p < .001$) and political discussion ($\beta = .07$, $p < .01$). The attentive news use directly fostered political participation ($\beta = .22$, $p < .001$) as well as various political outcomes, such as strengthened perceptions about affects ($\beta = .16$, $p < .001$), personal traits about candidates ($\beta = .11$, $p < .001$) and opinions about political issues ($\beta = .10$, $p < .001$), interest in campaign ($\beta = .32$, $p < .001$), general political knowledge ($\beta = .08$, $p < .001$), knowledge about candidates' issue stance ($\beta = .12$, $p < .001$) and perceived ability of political parties ($\beta = .07$, $p < .01$). News attention also generated those political outcomes indirectly through stimulating political discussion ($\beta = .22$, $p < .001$) and self-reflection on campaign ($\beta = .25$, $p < .001$). In turn, the frequency of interpersonal

discussion strengthened individuals' perceptions about affects ($\beta = .11, p < .001$) and personal traits about candidates ($\beta = .09, p < .001$), opinions about political issues ($\beta = .08, p < .001$), interest in campaign ($\beta = .10, p < .001$), general political knowledge ($\beta = .15, p < .001$), knowledge about candidates' issue stance ($\beta = .11, p < .001$), attitude toward candidates ($\beta = .10, p < .001$), and internal political efficacy ($\beta = .15, p < .001$). The degree of elaboration on campaign was positively associated with affective strength ($\beta = .18, p < .001$), personal trait strength ($\beta = .07, p < .01$), campaign interest ($\beta = .36, p < .001$), general political knowledge ($\beta = .11, p < .001$), knowledge about candidates' issue stance ($\beta = .14, p < .001$), and perceived ability of political parties ($\beta = .05, p < .05$).

Notably, simply being exposed to news had no positive-direct influence on any of the political constructs that subsequently promoted political engagement. However, it was found that the non-attentive news exposure disinterested people from campaign process ($\beta = -.08, p < .01$) and lowered knowledge about candidates' issue stance ($\beta = -.07, p < .05$). With all the indirect pathways taken into account, the total indirect effects of news exposure on political participation were statistically significant and relatively strong ($\beta = .16, p < .001$; see Table 2). When the extent of news attention was treated as a stimulus, it also exerted strong direct and indirect effects on political participation (total effects: $\beta = .275, p < .001$; direct effects: $\beta = .10, p < .001$; indirect effects: $\beta = .175, p < .001$).

<Table 2> Direct and indirect effects of communication on political participation

	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effects
News Exposure	-	.160	.160
News Attention	.100	.175	.275
Political Discussion	.220	.055	.275

Note: Figures are standardized coefficients. All coefficients are statistically significant at the alpha level of .001.

Taken together, the findings yielded a conclusion that the news media use variables (i.e., frequency of news exposure and degree of attention paid to news)

exercised substantial influence on political participation (total effects: $\beta = .43$, $p < .001$). Specifically, mere news exposure increased individuals' engagement in a political campaign because it stimulated attentive news use and political discussion, which in turn produced various political outcomes that promoted political participation. News exposure with a significant degree of attention exerted a strong influence on political outcomes directly or indirectly through elaborative behaviors (i.e., political discussion and campaign elaboration).

<Table 3> Total indirect effects of news media use mediated through reasoning behaviors

	News Exposure → Participation	News Attention → Participation	Total
News Attention	.143	-	.143
Political Discussion	.063	.067	.130
Campaign Elaboration	.010	.026	.036

Note: Figures are standardized coefficients. All coefficients are statistically significant at the alpha level of .001.

The next hypotheses pertained to exploring mediating effects of reasoning and psychological constructs between news media use and political participation. As the second hypothesis predicted, reasoning behaviors (i.e., political discussion and campaign elaboration) mediated significant amount of influence that news media use (i.e., news exposure and attention to news) had on political participation as well as various personal-psychological political outcomes (see Table 3). As stated above, news attention, a bridge connecting news exposure to reasoning, transmitted the greatest portion of the influence of news exposure on political participation (total mediated effects: $\beta = .143$, $p < .001$). The total indirect effects that political discussion mediated were .063 ($p < .001$) for the effects of the sheer frequency of news exposure and .067 ($p < .001$) for the effects of attention paid to news on political participation. Campaign elaboration also significantly mediated news media use and political participation (total mediating effects: $\beta = .010$, $p < .001$ for

the effects of news exposure; $\beta = .026$, $p < .001$ for the effects of news attention). Taken together, reasoning behaviors (i.e., interpersonal political discussion and elaboration on campaign) mediated a significant portion of influence of news media use on political behaviors and other psychological political engagement.

Hypothesis 3 was proposed to identify intervening variables between news media use and political participation. All of the variables included in the analysis mediated the effects of news consumption on political participation to some extent (see Table 4). Specifically, the effects of news use (i.e., news exposure and news attention) were significantly mediated by affective strength ($\beta = .060$, $p < .001$), strength in perceived traits ($\beta = .010$, $p < .001$), opinion strength ($\beta = .010$, $p < .001$), general political knowledge ($\beta = .053$, $p < .001$), issue stance knowledge ($\beta = .034$, $p < .001$), campaign interest ($\beta = .027$, $p < .001$), attitude strength ($\beta = .120$, $p < .001$), perceived ability of political party ($\beta = .019$, $p < .001$), and internal political efficacy ($\beta = .069$, $p < .001$).

<Table 4> Total indirect effects mediated by personal-psychological constructs

	News Exposure → Participation	News Attention → Participation	Total
Strength in Affects	.022	.038	.060
Strength in Traits	.003	.004	.007
Strength in Opinion	.002	.004	.006
Campaign Interest	.030	.045	.075
General Knowledge	.011	.015	.026
Issue Stance Knowledge	.008	.011	.019
Strength in Attitudes	.010	.017	.027
Perceived Party Ability	.005	.010	.015
Internal Efficacy	.008	.010	.018
Total	.113	.127	.240

Note 1: Figures are standardized coefficients. All coefficients are statistically significant at the alpha level of .001.

Note 2: Some effects of news media use are mediated by multiple variables simultaneously. For this reason, the individual figures in the columns do not add up to the total effects.

The final hypothesis predicted the mediating role of news media use between a series of preexisting variables and various political outcomes. As Table 5 shows, news media use produced significant indirect effects by transmitting the impact of most of demographic and political disposition variables on various political variables. The total indirect effects of those antecedents variables on various political outcomes that news media use (i.e., frequency of news exposure and attended news use) mediated were notably significant for campaign participation ($\beta = .210, p < .001$), attitude strength ($\beta = .104, p < .001$), perceived ability of political parties ($\beta = .135, p < .001$), internal political efficacy ($\beta = .156, p < .001$), strength in affects ($\beta = .213, p < .001$), strength in perceived personal traits ($\beta = .154, p < .001$), strength in issue opinion ($\beta = .139, p < .001$), campaign interest ($\beta = .350, p < .001$), general political knowledge ($\beta = .198, p < .001$), and knowledge about candidates' issue stance ($\beta = .142, p < .001$). Thus, the hypothesis that demographic and political disposition variables are related to political engagement as a function of news media use was substantially supported by the results.

Interpersonal political discussion transmitted a significant extent of effects from demographic and political dispositional variables to various psychological or behavioral outcomes representing political involvement. The total indirect effects that interpersonal political discussion mediated, independently or in association with news media variables, between those antecedents and each of the political outcomes was .166 ($p < .001$) for campaign participation, .106 ($p < .001$) for attitude strength, .049 ($p < .001$) for perceived ability of political parties, .131 ($p < .001$) for internal political efficacy, .064 ($p < .001$) for strength in affects, .055 ($p < .001$) for strength in perceived personal traits, .073 ($p < .001$) for strength in issue opinion, .073 ($p < .001$) for campaign interest, .136 ($p < .001$) for general political knowledge, and .079 ($p < .001$) for knowledge about candidates' issue stance. The results substantiated the communication mediation model, which posits that

communication behaviors (e.g., mass and interpersonal communication) generated strong indirect effects between preexisting personal factors and political constructs. However, a close examination of the output models revealed that while some exogenous factors were only indirectly associated with political constructs through a function of communication, others had a direct relationship with the political variables without being mediated by communication. For example, individuals' party identification and political ideology that were previously established exerted significant influence on most of the political outcome variables incorporated in the model with communication behaviors controlled for. Level of education and voting behaviors in the national elections were also important predictors for some variables indicating the level of individuals' involvement in political process. Also noteworthy, gender and age were not associated with political variables, neither directly or indirectly via communication. This may imply that the gender disparity in various criteria of political involvement reported by a number of previous studies is not quite so large. The unvaried extent in political involvement by age seems to derive from the counter-operating associations between age and the frequency of news exposure ($\beta = .102, p < .001$) and the extent of attention paid to news ($\beta = -.101, p < .001$).

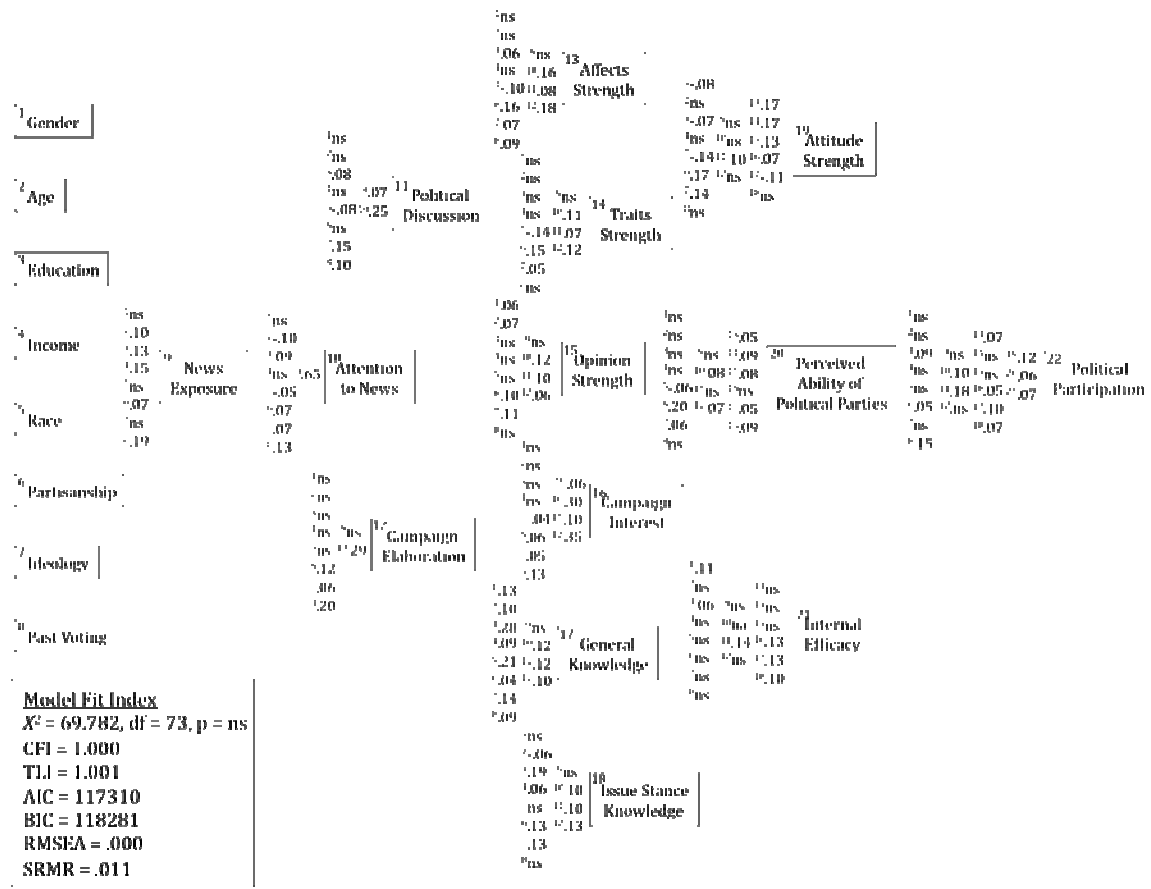
<Table 5> Mediating effects of communication variables between preexisting variables and political participation

	Exposure	Attention	Total (News)	Discussion	Total (Comm.)
Strength in Affects	.121	.248	.213	.064	.249
Strength in Traits	.081	.124	.154	.055	.183
Strength in Opinion	.075	.146	.139	.073	.185
Campaign Interest	.182	.314	.350	.073	.395
General Knowledge	.138	.181	.198	.136	.250
Issue Stance Knowledge	.082	.127	.142	.124	.187
Strength in Attitudes	.064	.095	.104	.106	.165
Perceived Party Ability	.073	.120	.135	.049	.159
Internal Efficacy	.091	.136	.156	.131	.232
Political participation	.129	.196	.210	.166	.308

Note 1: Figures are standardized coefficients. All coefficients are statistically significant at the alpha level of .001.

Note 2: Some effects of exogenous variables are mediated by multiple communication variables simultaneously. For this reason, the individual figures in the rows do not add up to the total effects.

<Figure 2> The integrative structural model of political participation with demographic and political disposition variables



Note: All the figures in the model are standardized coefficients that are statistically significant at the alpha level of .05.

Chapter 8: Discussion and conclusion

DISCUSSION

Because of normative implications of citizens' participation in the political process for a sound democracy, numerous studies from various academic disciplines have investigated which individuals are prone to engage in political activities and through what psychological processes they participate in politics. Research has identified a number of significant predictors of individuals' political participation such as socio-economic status, mass communication, interpersonal communication, political knowledge, political efficacy and attitudes toward political figures and parties, and so forth. However, simply identifying significant predictors cannot reveal the underlying mechanisms that explain how individuals come to participate in the political process. Explicating individuals' processes of political participation requires a structural model that specifies hierarchical relationships among the structural-objective variables, stimulus variables, cognitive, attitudinal and motivational outcomes of the stimuli.

In modeling individuals' political participation, research should incorporate news media use as a central variable. News media use, as manifested theoretically and heuristically, plays a central role in the process of individuals' political participation. It functions as a primary source of political information which subsequently evolves into individuals' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors with respect to political objects (e.g., political issues and figures). However, significant numbers of empirical studies have indicated only trivial effects of news media use on political participation compared to socio-demographic and personal-psychological variables. Thus, the role of news media use in individuals' political engagement has been downgraded by some research. The relatively weak effects of news media use found in previous research are largely due to a research practice that focuses on direct effects in a multiple regression analysis

disregarding structural relationships among variables. Because news media use functions as an input, and it is connected to the output (i.e., political participation) via mediating constructs, the simultaneous regression techniques controlling for those mediators should yield weak effects of news media use.

The structural model takes into account hierarchical relationships among variables and allows researchers to identify indirect effects. In this context, this study aimed to explicate the role of news media use in individuals' political engagement. Specifically, it investigated how news media use influences political participation by identifying significant mediators between them, as well as how it mediates between preexisting personal factors (i.e., demographic and political disposition variables) and political participation. Practically, this dissertation proposed and tested an integrative structural model, in which a set of preexisting variables (i.e., socio-demographic and political disposition variables) are the antecedents of news media use, and reasoning behaviors (i.e., attentive news exposure, political discussion and campaign elaboration) and personal-psychological variables (i.e., strength in affects and personal characteristics about political candidates, campaign interest, attitude strength, political knowledge and efficacy) are outcomes of news media use, which in turn lead to political participation.

As expected, results showed that the influence of news exposure on political participation was not direct but mostly indirect: the political information obtained from news media evolved into political behaviors through stimulating reasoning behaviors (i.e., attention to news, interpersonal discussion and campaign elaboration) and then subsequently engendering psychological political outcomes (i.e., strength in affects, personal traits of political candidates and opinions about political issue, campaign interest, political knowledge, attitude strength, perceived ability of political parties and internal political efficacy). Because news stories are mostly informational and do not

directly and persuasively encourage participatory activities, the impact of news media use on political participation is inherently likely to be indirect through its political byproducts (e.g., political knowledge and efficacy). Conclusively, the substantial magnitude of the total indirect effects represents the crucial role of news media in the formation of individuals' political attitudes and behaviors. As stated earlier, the indirect effects are an important part of a total effect that an independent variable has on a dependent variable. Again, the substantial indirect effects of news media could have been overlooked if those intervening variables were controlled for in a simultaneous analysis. Thus, research on media effects on political participation should be conducted within an indirect effects framework incorporating the intermediate outcomes of news consumption that can potentially lead to political participation.

Most importantly, the reasoning process that involves elaboration and collective thinking on subjects are the critical mechanisms for the political effects of news media use. In other words, significant news effects on individuals' political-psychological orientations and behaviors in the election season are a result of frequent exposure to news media, which increases audience attention and subsequently encourages self-reflection and interpersonal discussion about campaign stories. This finding echoes the famous quote from McCombs and Shaw (1972) that news media tell us "what to think about." As agenda-setting theory posits, repeated exposure to news media provides people with political agendas to think about. Practically, it can be further modified into "what to talk about" or "what to elaborate on."

The integrative structural model in this study expands the cognitive mediation model in political communication research. The original notion of the cognitive mediation model stresses the role of surveillance motivation as an antecedent of mental elaboration, and only focuses on cognitive outcomes of news consumption (i.e., political

knowledge). However, the integrative model in this dissertation suggests more generally that regardless of whether individuals have surveillance motivation or not, frequent news exposure encourages attentive news use and elaborative thinking. This reasoning behavior produces various dimensions of political outcomes. Future research should apply this expanded model in examining various political consequences of news media use.

Although the model does not specify deliberative aspects of interpersonal discussion, the strong mediating role of discussion between news media use and a wide range of political outcomes indicates the deliberative nature of interpersonal political discussion. When talking about politics, people tend to retrieve campaign information obtained from news media, listen to others' opinions about campaign issues and candidates, generate and develop their own thoughts on them, reflect their opinions against others', incorporate different aspects of agendas, and constitute a new meaning with a greater assurance. This series of interactive reasoning produces a wide range of political outcomes.

It should be noted, however, that the direct effect of discussion on political participation was quite strong in this study. Because it is assumed that the role of reasoning behaviors is mediating the influence of information reception on its outcomes rather than exerting direct effects, the direct effect observed in this research may indicate that there are other aspects of interpersonal discussion that lead directly to political participation. One possible aspect of interpersonal political discussion may be its behavioral properties. Political discussion is an interactive behavior in which discussion partners expect active and cooperative participation from one another in the course of opinion exchange. It is likely that people practice participatory and associational activities during the discussion. The behavioral practice provides settings in which

individuals develop skills necessary for conventional participation in a political system (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993; Verba & Nie, 1972; McMiller, 1999), and these associational experiences influence political activity independently of the effects exerted by social status and political orientations (Milbrath and Goel, 1977). It is also possible that the behavioral aspect of discussion directly influences political participation as a function of a habituation. For this reason, some researchers include political discussion as an index of political participation in a larger sense. However, exactly what aspects of political discussion are responsible for the direct influence is yet to be explored. Of course, the strong direct influence of discussion may be due to unidentified mediators other than those identified in this model. Future research should clarify the locus of the effects of political discussion on political participation.

Taken together, political discussion that produces a set of positive political outcomes is an essential component to construct a healthy democracy and news media use exercises a significant portion of effects on political outcomes by stimulating interpersonal discussion. As modeled in this study, news media use and political discussion should not be treated as competing communication behaviors, at least when media effects are sought. Whereas the primary function of news media is to provide information, interpersonal political discussion entails elaboration and collective thinking as reflected by the strong political effects of interpersonal discussion. If political discussion only functions as another source of information like news media do, it may not have produced such strong effects in this study. In this sense, the influence of interpersonal political discussion should be examined in light of its deliberative nature rather than as a source of political information. This interpersonal reasoning practice is a function of news media use. It transmits the influence of news media use on political products. Of course, political discussion also leads to news media use and news media

use is partly a function of political discussion. In most cases, though, news media are origins of political information and discussion about it follows. The causal sequence from news media to discussion is especially relevant in research on the effects process of news exposure on political participation.

There are two suggestions for future research regarding the role of political discussion. First, researchers should clarify various aspects of political discussion. As stated above, political discussion has multiple functions such as information providing, reasoning, and participation practicing. Although many empirical studies have discovered a strong influence of interpersonal discussion, few have explored the different aspects of political discussion that may produce distinct effects on political outcomes. Uncovering this will clarify why and how political discussion exerts such a strong influence on various political outcomes. Second, future research should investigate the political influence of political discussion differentiating the characteristics of discussion partners. Recently, research began to take into account the impact of discussion heterogeneity, but the results have been mixed. Research has produced the same results over the role of heterogeneous discussion in enhancing political knowledge and facilitating possession of multi-faceted perspectives on political issues. With respect to the effect on political participation, some suggest a positive relationship while others predict a negative association arguing that deliberative and participatory democracy may not be achieved simultaneously (Mutz, 2002). Future research should clarify this point.

The present study has identified a wide range of significant personal-psychological mediators between news media use and political participation. This section will first focus on the mediating effects of (a) strength in affect and personal traits about political candidates and strength in issue opinions, then discuss the role of (b) political knowledge and campaign interest and (c) finally tap into the three proximal predictors of

political participation, such as attitudes toward political candidates, perceived ability of political parties, and political efficacy.

First, results suggest that frequent news exposure, via the reasoning process, strengthens the perceptions about political candidates and personal opinions about political issues, which in turn increase political engagement. In an election season, candidates' portrayals and political agendas are affluent in the news stories. As agenda-setting theory suggests, political objects prominent in news coverage (e.g., attributes of political candidates and political issues) become salient in voters' cognitive systems along with increments of the news exposure and the availability of information to elaborate (cf. reasoning). As stated earlier, individuals tend to form a valenced attitude toward the salient perceptions about political candidates and issues as they go through reasoning process. Research suggests that once people have a valenced opinion about certain objects, they tend to process information in ways to reinforce it through selective attention and biased processing (Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009). This biased processing explains how individuals' perceptions and attitudes become fortified as they are exposed to news stories that contain various aspects of political candidates.

This finding is in line with priming and attribute priming, which respectively posit that individuals develop their evaluations about politicians based on political issues (priming) and perceived attributes of candidates (attribute priming) that are prominent in their minds. In summation, frequent news exposure during an election campaign increases the level of attention paid to and elaboration about candidates' attributes and political issues presumably as a result of increased salience of those attributes and issues as suggested by agenda-setting theory. The reasoning results in strengthened valence about political objects. As suggested by attribute priming, the solidified valence contributes to overall attitudes toward the candidates and their affiliated political parties.

Strengthened perceptions in affect and personal traits of political candidates, however, had nothing to do with individuals' efficacious feeling about political participation, according to this study. Contrarily, individuals who held firm opinions about political issues were apt to have strong efficacious feeling that they are qualified enough to participate in political activities. It may be that individuals are aware that their perceptions about affect and characteristics of political candidates, compared to their opinion strength regarding political issues, are rather subjective or biased according to preexisting political orientation, and thus these perceptions do not increase individuals' positive self-evaluations about their qualification for political participation.

Second, the model identified that the level of general political knowledge and specific knowledge about candidates' issue stance functioned as another important linkage between media use and political participation: attentive news media use and the two types of reasoning behaviors (i.e., interpersonal discussion and self-reflection) enhanced both general and campaign-specific political knowledge, which in turn fostered political participation. This finding sheds light on previously mixed findings about the relationship between political knowledge and participation. While the positive effect of political knowledge on participation can be generally assumed, some studies have treated knowledge and participation as causally discrete variables with no effect hierarchy predicted (Eveland, 2001, 2004, 2005; Cho et al., 2009). In stark contrast to their view, the present research found that political knowledge was an important mediator between news media use and political participation, and it exerted both direct and indirect influence (through political efficacy) on political participation. Although the positive relationship between individuals' levels of political knowledge, and participation may not necessarily imply that individuals engage in policy-based participation. It may suggest

that individuals' political behaviors are somewhat based on accurate political information, which is ideal for a healthy participatory democracy.

Interestingly, a negative relationship was found between the level of general political knowledge and attitude strength. This is somewhat surprising because research has generally shown that opinions and attitudes of knowledgeable people tend to be strong. However, knowledge itself, controlling for other related variables, may produce the opposite phenomenon as found by this study. For example, individuals who are cognizant of various aspects of a political figure are inclined to evaluate him or her in a balanced way taking into account as much information as possible, which prevents them from forming an extreme attitude. It also may be that erudite people avoid showing extreme attitudes that may be seen as unreasonably emotional rather than rational. To make a conclusion based on the findings of this study, knowledge itself somewhat precludes subjective evaluations from becoming excessive and makes people pursue rather neutral attitudes toward candidates. However, since the coefficient found in this study is fairly small, additional evidence is required for more generalizable conclusions.

Meanwhile, knowing about candidates' positions on political issues did not increase strength in attitude toward political candidates or belief in the ability of a political party to resolve important problems facing the country. In other words, whether individuals like or dislike political figures and parties does not necessarily rely on an accurate understanding of candidates' standing on issues. Two different interpretations are possible regarding this phenomenon. First, it may be that individuals' perceptions about candidates' issue stance are important factors in attitudes toward those candidates and parties, but the accuracy of those perceptions (cf. issue stance knowledge) is not relevant to the relationship. It is plausible that attitudes can be shaped based on subjective information regardless of accuracy. If this is the case, self-rated knowledge about

candidates' issue positions may operate as a better predictor than the accuracy measure of knowledge. Second, candidates' issue positions may not be influential over the perceptions about affects and characteristics about those candidates. If this is the case, individuals' attitudes toward candidates and beliefs in the ability of political parties are determined somewhat by emotional and subjective impressions rather than accurate and objective criteria. Future research should clarify this.

As hypothesized, attitude strength, perceived ability of political parties, and internal political efficacy significantly mediated news media use and political participation. Theories of attitude formation explain that attitudes toward an object are comprised of accessible beliefs about an object. The cognitive and affective attributes of a candidate are the primary components of news coverage in election season. Consistent with the literature, this study found attitude strength linked political discussion, perceptions about candidates' affects, and traits and opinions about political issues to political participation. It should be noted that in prediction of a behavior, attitudes should be measured with respect to that particular behavior of interest. In the context of this study, attitudes toward political participation were the appropriate measure as a proximal predictor of political participation. However, research suggests that general attitudes toward an object can be a useful predictor of an aggregate measure of multiple behaviors that are relevant to the object (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005). For example, although attitudes toward a church may not work as a significant predictor of donating money to that church, that measure is likely to be highly correlated with an aggregate measure of behaviors regarding the church (i.e., frequency of attending mass, quality of relationships with congregates, etc.). Similarly, the finding of this study showed that attitudes toward political candidates operated as a strong predictor for the aggregate measure of various activities in support of those political candidates.

Internal political efficacy also was found to be a significant mediator between communication and political behavior. Although political efficacy has previously been identified as one of the important political variables in political behavior research, little has elucidated the processes through which individuals feel politically efficacious about themselves. The model in this study shows that news consumption enhances internal efficacy by increasing opinion strength about political issues, political interest, and political knowledge. Contrary to attitude strength, internal political efficacy had nothing to do with strength in evaluative perceptions about candidates. This finding implies that individuals' positive perceptions about their abilities to efficiently deal with politics derives from their knowledge and opinions about political issues rather than their perceptions about political candidates. Additionally interpersonal discussion about politics also boosted political efficacy.

Contrary to the past research findings, men and women in this study were equally exposed to political information with no difference in attention paid to the information and thus no mediation occurred through news media use. In addition, no evidence of gender disparities was found regarding the frequency of political discussion, campaign interest and the level of political participation. However, a gender gap manifested in three political constructs, such as political knowledge, internal political efficacy and degree of attitude strength. While men were more knowledgeable about politics and more likely to feel politically efficacious than women, women tended to possess stronger attitudes toward political candidates than men. Individuals who were well informed about political circumstances were less likely to have polarized political attitudes. Men with higher levels of political knowledge tended to have neutral attitudes toward politicians compared to women. As these two opposite directions of effects canceled each other out, no difference in the extent of participation between sexes stood out.

These findings lead to a general conclusion that no gender disparity exists in contemporary politics. Considering the equal extent of media use between genders, it also is suggested that the need for political orientation is no different between men and women. As media use plays a pivotal role in individuals' political orientation, the equivalent use of news media and political discussion between two genders continues to lessen the gender gap in degree of various indicators of political engagement. However, the knowledge gap between genders may subsequently produce differences in some political orientations. Research suggests that the disparate level of political knowledge represent differences in cognitive capacity and those with higher cognitive capacity process information at faster rates (Chaiken, Liberman, & Eagly, 1989; Petty et al., 2002). Because men are persistently better informed about politics than women, understanding new political information and incorporating it into the cognitive system should be easier for men than women.

However, the alternative explanation may be that the knowledge gap manifested in gender is a result of a methodological artifact. Based on a review of extant literature, Mondak and Anderson (2004) observed that women are disproportionately more likely to answer "don't know" on knowledge items than men even though they know as much as or more than do men. This tendency accounts for significant portion of knowledge gap. Since the present study coded the "don't know" response to be "no knowledge," the knowledge gap observed in this study may be a tangential consequence of how survey questions are asked and answered. In any case, this study is unable to answer questions about the sources of the knowledge gap. Future research should further investigate the origins of the gender disparities in various political dimensions. Nevertheless, the disparities between men and women were not observed in most of the political constructs

including participation. It is suggested that politics is no longer a masculine game, if it ever used to be.

Contrary to the findings of previous research, age was not directly related to most of the political constructs. The level of political participation, internal political efficacy, attitude strength, affect, and perceived traits did not significantly differ by age with other demographic and preexisting political orientation controlled for. Interestingly, two phenomena were noteworthy: (a) general political knowledge significantly increased along with age, while campaign-specific knowledge was higher for the young, and (b) age had a positive association with frequency of news exposure while showing a negative relationship to degree of attention paid to campaign news. Perhaps since older people have used news media significantly longer than the young, and presumably on a regular basis, their knowledge about general political facts exceeded that of the young. On the other hand, because young people paid greater attention to campaign-specific news, their campaign-specific knowledge exceeded that of the old. Due to the opposite directions of influence in similar magnitudes that age exerted on news exposure and news attention, the mediating effects of news media use were cancelled out.

News media use mediated a significant portion of effects that education had on various political constructs. Education was significantly and positively associated with communication behaviors: the educated are prone to seek political information, pay greater attention to campaign news and engage in political discussion. Consonant with previous research findings, the level of education exerted a strong direct influence over political knowledge and participation. The high cognitive capacity of educated people may make it easier for political learning. It may be that the perceived civic duty to be politically informed and participate in politics that is acquired in the course of education

operates as a mechanism that explains the positive influence of education on participation.

Interestingly, Blacks were found to pay greater attention to campaign news and engage in political discussion more often than Whites in the 2008 election campaign. This finding is consistent with previous research findings. However, the relatively high involvement in politics for Blacks may derive from the fact that there was the highest-ever possibility of the first Black president in US history. Thus, the relevance of the presidential election to Blacks seemed to be particularly high. However, the role of news media in transmitting the impact of race on various political outcomes was rather minimal compared to the direct effects that race exerted on those constructs. Taken together, the findings regarding the role of race in 2008 election may indicate that Blacks' impressions of political candidates and parties in the 2008 presidential election were a result of a direct influence of the vested interest aroused from race-related aspects than information from communication.

Meanwhile, the relationship between race and the level of political participation during the election season did not follow the pattern that previous research has found: there was no significant race difference in campaign participation, political interest and internal political efficacy. Surprisingly, the degree of attitude strength, strength in affect, and perceived traits regarding political candidates was quite large for Blacks. Blacks tended to form somewhat extreme impressions about political candidates particularly in the 2008 presidential election setting. On the other hand, general knowledge level was still substantially higher for Whites than Blacks. This follows the pattern found in the model of this study. The level of general political knowledge and the degree of attitude strength were negatively associated. The opposite directions of the indirect effects on

participation through knowledge and attitude strength by those two races counteracted to make the total effects trivial.

Whether there are inequalities in political participation among different socio-demographical characteristics is a classic question in political science, and there are numerous studies tapping into it. However, it is necessary to constantly examine the pattern of the relationship because of the social changes that may have enlarged or reduced the gaps. Conclusively, given that the inequalities were noticeable in the past, the findings of this study lead to a conclusion that social changes have narrowed those inequalities in political engagement. This may imply that social changes contributed to equivalent distribution of political resources across different genders, ages and races. Based on the findings of this study, it can be also interpreted that the communication technology that has extended audience accessibility to news has blurred divergence. Of course, the lessened discrepancy may be particular to the 2008 presidential election.

On the other hand, it is suggested that the political inequalities among people with different demographic characteristics do not show a consistent pattern. Nevertheless, people with high socio-economic status are still politically advantaged, and it is expected that their orientations to politics influences subsequent political activities, creating a vicious circle.

Three political dispositions included in the model of this dissertation, such as partisanship, political ideology, and past voting, exerted direct influence on various political outcomes, and news media use variables (i.e., news exposure and news attention) partially mediated those relationships. Specifically, strength of partisanship exerted comparatively strong direct influence on strength in affect, personal traits about political candidates, strength in opinions about political issues, issue stance knowledge and attitude strength; political ideology was closely linked to general political knowledge

and attitude strength; past voting behavior functioned as a significant predictor of strength in affect, campaign interest, and general political knowledge. Individuals with strong political dispositions also tended to engage in elaboration on the campaign.

Although news media use mediated a significant portion of influence between those three variables and various political outcomes, the indirect effects that past voting had on political participation, as well as various political outcomes through news media use, were comparatively larger than those effects that partisanship and political ideology exerted on political outcomes. This may be because the frequency of past voting indicates the degree of individuals' inclination to political engagement whereas partisanship and political ideology represent individuals' disposed orientations toward politics. Thus, while experience of past voting indicates political interest leads to news media use, individuals who possess strong partisanship and political ideology are likely to already possess adamant political dispositions and thus the contribution of news media use to the formation of those political orientations should be relatively small, though significant.

CONCLUSION

The complexity of contemporary society, the specialized network for news gathering and broadcasting of news media, and people's high reliance on news media for political information all support the central role of news media in individuals' political orientations. The effects of demographic and political disposition variables on personal-psychological political outcomes as well as political participation are partly a function of news media use. News media are the primary source of informational ingredients that are turned into cognitive, attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. In the context of a presidential election, frequent exposure to campaign news enhances the degree of attention paid to

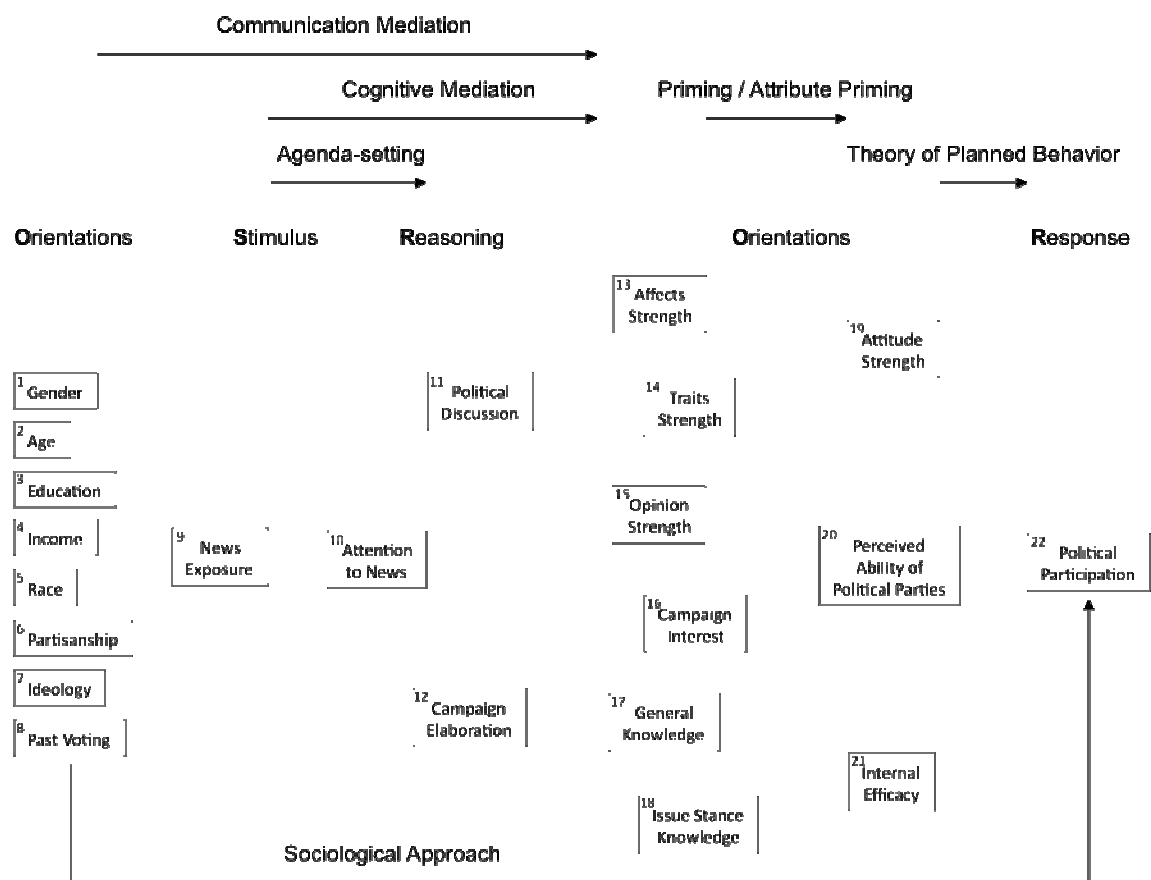
news, which increases the salience of news objects in audiences' minds. Salient campaign news objects (e.g., attributes of political candidates and political issues) encourage individuals to think about (cf. elaboration) those items, which in turn produces various psychological and behavioral political outcomes. The influence of news media use on political participation is largely indirect, though attentive news use exerts direct influence on participation to some extent. Thus, research that investigates media effects should be conducted within a structural model that integrates various indirect pathways that explicate the mechanisms of news media effects on political outcomes.

Compared to prior research, this study made several theoretical and methodological contributions to research and theory about media effects on political participation. First, it illuminated the important role of news media use in individuals' process of political participation by revealing its relationships with a set of key variables of political engagement. Most past research examined independently the influence of demographic variables (sociological approach), mass media use (communication approach), and personal-psychological variables (psychological approach) on political participation. Very little research has attempted to integrate and test these key variables simultaneously. The expansive model proposed and tested in this study contributes to fully explicating how news media use influences individuals' political engagement.

Second, this study incorporated relevant theories and models in establishing an integrative structural model of political participation. Specifically, the model integrated SES model, communication mediation model that provided a theoretical bridge between demographic variables and participation, the cognitive mediation model that emphasizes the role of reasoning behaviors in the effects of news exposure on participation, O-S-O-R process model presenting parsimonious framework, and theory of planned behavior based on which proximal predictors of participation were hypothesized. There were many

theories and models that dealt with different processes of political participation. Those theoretical models explained discrete parts of the process of individuals' political participation. Thus, they should be put together to draw a whole map of the phenomenon. By establishing a comprehensive model, this study showed how different theories and models were related and operated together in explaining the mechanisms behind individuals' political engagement.

<Figure 3> Theories and models incorporated in the model



Further, this study focused on the indirect mechanisms through which news exposure influenced political participation. Exploring mechanisms focusing on indirect

pathways between an independent and criterion variable is quite an important task to fully understand their relationship. The various pathways identified provided theoretical explanations about why and how an effect took place. Notably, the path model also showed why an effect was not found when it was likely to be. It is quite possible that significant indirect effects exist when an independent variable is not correlated with a dependent variable. Because the total effect is the sum of many different paths of influence, an independent variable can exert an indirect effect on a dependent variable if the directions of those indirect effects are the opposite, resulting in canceling out the total effects.

In order to depict these indirect pathways and how news media use and other factors interplayed with one another in predicting political participation, the present study employed structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis. The SEM technique is a statistical technique that analyzes the relationships among multiple independent and dependent variables simultaneously. Before the SEM analytical method was developed, the most widely-used approach for indirect effect analysis was the causal steps approach. Popularized by Baron and Kenny (1986), this analytical technique requires researchers to estimate each of the paths in the model and then ensure whether a variable operates as a mediator based on certain statistical criteria: (a) three correlations between independent variable and dependent variable, between independent variable and presumed mediator and between the presumed mediator and dependent variable should be statistically significant and (b) when the presumed mediator is controlled, the relationship between independent and dependent variable should be significantly reduced (partial mediator) or disappear (full mediator). Despite its simple execution, researchers have raised caution in using the causal steps approach because it involves multiple hypothesis tests, which are subject to decision errors (Hayes, 2009). Additionally, this technique is only useful in

inferring the existence of significant indirect effects rather than quantifying them. Contrarily, the SEM tests both the existence of significant paths and quantifies indirect effects controlling for measurement error and provides greater flexibility in model design.

Finally, this study concerned the effects of news media use on the degree or strength in perceptions about political candidates rather than perceptual valence. The research design of this study included the premise that influence or effect may not ensure directional change in the perception about candidates. Instead, the model presented the consequences of news media use regardless of individuals' predispositions. Some of the effects might be a result of reinforcement or change in cognition or attitude. Whatever the reason, the present study demonstrated that news media use is a vital act in individuals' participation in politics.

As with all research, this study had several limitations. First, although the study delineated various indirect pathways of statistical significance, the magnitude of direct path coefficients for political participation, and thus the mediating effects of individual variables, were somewhat small. This was mainly due to the inclusion of a number of factors that were simultaneously regressed on political participation. It may limit the importance of individual variables in predicting political participation. Nevertheless, the significance of the coefficient, though weak, indicates that the variable exerts its unique influence on political participation even with the presence of many other key predictors. From the perspective of media effects, it suggests that the positive influence of news exposure on participation is not explained solely by one or two outcomes but by many outcomes operating together. When it comes to the question about how news consumption influences political participation, diverse mechanisms are involved in the effects process.

The attitude measure only reflects the degree of dispersion or extremity from the neutral point. However, there are other attributes or dimensions that differentiate strong attitudes from weak ones including intensity, importance, accessibility and so forth. Although these attributes are associated with one another to construct strong attitudes toward an object, future research should investigate what attributes are direct or indirect consequences of news media use and how those varied attributes exercise different influences on political participation. Further, future research should develop a more refined measure of attitude strength by testing various attributes and then incorporating those manifestations of quality attitude.

Because this study proposed and tested an integrative model in prediction of political participation, it is necessary to discuss sufficiency of the model. A model that is sufficient contains all of the important variables in the set of determinants, which accounts for all non-error variance in the behavior (Ajzen, 1991). For a sufficient model, the addition of a variable will not improve the prediction of the criterion variable.

Appendix

<Appendix> Mediating effects of news exposure, attention and political discussion

Criterion Variable: Strength in Affect

	Total (Comm.)	Total (News)	Atten.	Dis.	Expo. Atten.	Expo. Dis.	Expo. Elabor.	Atten. Dis.	Atten. Elabor.	Expo. Atten, Dis.	Expo. Atten. Elabor.
Gender	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Age	-0.006	-0.006	-.019	-	.013	.001	-	-.002	-.005	.002	.004
Edu.,	.054	.047	.017	.007	.015	.001	-	.002	.005	.002	.005
Income	.030	.030	-	-	.020	.001	-	-	-	.003	.006
Race	-.019	-.012	-.008	-.007	-	-	-	-.001	-.003	-	-
Partisan.	.033	.033	.013	-	.009	.001	-	.002	.004	.001	.003
Ideology	.031	.018	.012	.013	-	-	--	.002	.004	-	-
P. Vote	.076	.067	.023	.009	.023	.001	-	.003	.007	.003	.007
Total	.249	.213	.092	.036	.080	.005	-	.012	.028	.011	.025

Criterion Variable: Strength in Personal Traits

	Total (Comm.)	Total (News)	Atten.	Dis.	Expo. Atten.	Expo. Dis.	Expo. Elabor.	Atten. Dis.	Atten. Elabor.	Expo. Atten, Dis.	Expo. Atten. Elabor.
Gender	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Age	-0.006	-0.006	-.012	-	.008	.001	-	-.002	-.005	.001	.003
Edu.	.039	.033	.011	.006	.009	.001	-	.002	.005	.001	.004
Income	.020	.020	-	-	.012	.001	-	-	-	.002	.005
Race	-.015	-.009	-.005	-.006	-	-	-	-.001	-.003	-	-
Partisan.	.024	.024	.008	-	.006	.001	-	.002	.004	.001	.002
Ideology	.024	.013	.007	.011	-	-	-	.002	.004	-	-
P. Vote	.055	.047	.014	.008	.014	.001	-	.003	.007	.002	.006
Total	.183	.154	.057	.031	.049	.005	-	.012	.028	.007	.020

Criterion Variable: Strength in Issue Opinion

	Total (Comm.)	Total (News)	Atten.	Dis.	Expo. Atten.	Expo. Dis.	Expo. Elabor.	Atten. Dis.	Atten. Elabor.	Expo. Atten, Dis.	Expo. Atten. Elabor.
Gender	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Age	-0.006	-0.006	-.013	-	.009	.001	-	-.003	-.002	.001	.001
Edu.,	.039	.030	.012	.009	.010	.001	-	.003	.002	.001	.001
Income	.019	.019	-	-	.013	.002	-	-	-	.002	.002
Race	-.017	-.008	-.006	-.009	-	-	-	-.001	-.001	-	-
Partisan.	.021	.021	.009	-	.006	.001	-	.002	.001	.001	.001
Ideology	.027	.011	.008	.016	-	-	--	.002	.001	-	-
P. Vote	.056	.044	.016	.011	.015	.002	-	.003	.003	.002	.003
Total	.185	.139	.064	.045	.053	.007	-	.014	.010	.007	.008

Criterion Variable: Campaign Interest

	Total (Comm.)	Total (News)	Atten.	Dis.	Expo. Atten.	Expo. Dis.	Expo. Elabor.	Atten. Dis.	Atten. Elabor.	Expo. Atten, Dis.	Expo. Atten. Elabor.
Gender	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Age	-.014	-.014	-.030	-	.021	.001	-	-.003	-.011	.001	.007
Edu.,	.087	.078	.029	.009	.025	.001	-	.003	.010	.001	.009
Income	.047	.047	-	-	.032	.002	-	-	-	.002	.011
Race	-.028	-.019	-.013	-.009	-	-	-	-.001	-.005	-	-
Partisan.	.053	.053	.022	-	.014	.001	-	.002	.008	.001	.005
Ideology	.045	.029	.020	.016	-	-	--	.002	.007	-	-
P. Vote	.121	.110	.039	.011	.038	.002	-	.003	.013	.002	.013
Total	.395	.350	.153	.045	.130	.007	-	.014	.054	.007	.045

Criterion Variable: General Political Knowledge

	Total (Comm.)	Total (News)	Atten.	Dis.	Expo. Atten.	Expo. Dis.	Expo. Elabor.	Atten. Dis.	Atten. Elabor.	Expo. Atten, Dis.	Expo. Atten. Elabor.
Gender	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Age	.002	.002	-.014	-	.009	.009	-	-.003	-.003	.002	.002
Edu.,	.055	.045	.013	.010	.011	.011	-	.003	.003	.002	.002
Income	.034	.034	-	-	.014	.014	-	-	-	.003	.003
Race	-.020	-.010	-.006	-.010	-	-	-	-.002	-.002	-	-
Partisan.	.030	.030	.010	-	.006	.006	-	.002	.002	.002	.002
Ideology	.032	.013	.009	.019	-	-	-	.002	.002	-	-
P. Vote	.077	.064	.017	.013	.017	.017	-	.003	.004	.003	.003
Total	.250	.198	.069	.052	.057	.057	-	.015	.016	.012	.012

Criterion Variable: Knowledge about Candidates' Issue Stance

	Total (Comm.)	Total (News)	Atten.	Dis.	Expo. Atten.	Expo. Dis.	Expo. Elabor.	Atten. Dis.	Atten. Elabor.	Expo. Atten, Dis.	Expo. Atten. Elabor.
Gender	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Age	-.004	-.004	-.010	-	.007	.001	-	-.003	-.004	.002	.003
Edu.,	.041	.032	.010	.009	.009	.001	-	.003	.004	.002	.003
Income	.020	.020	-	-	.011	.002	-	-	-	.003	.004
Race	-.018	-.009	-.005	-.009	-	-	-	-.002	-.002	-	-
Partisan.	.023	.023	.008	-	.005	.001	-	.002	.002	.002	.003
Ideology	.027	.011	.007	.016	-	-	-	.002	.002	-	-
P. Vote	.054	.043	.013	.011	.013	.002	-	.003	.004	.003	.005
Total	.187	.142	.053	.045	.045	.007	-	.015	.018	.012	.018

Criterion Variable: Attitude Strength

	Total (Comm.)	Total (News)	Atten.	Dis.	Expo. Atten.	Expo. Dis.	Expo. Elabor.	Atten. Dis.	Atten. Elabor.	Expo. Atten, Dis.	Expo. Atten. Elabor.
Gender	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Age	-.001	-.001	-.006	-	.005	.001	-	-.004	-.002	.003	.002
Edu.,	.035	.023	.006	.012	.005	.001	-	.004	.002	.003	.002
Income	.016	.016	-	-	.007	.002	-	-	-	.004	.003
Race	-.019	-.007	-.003	-.012	-	-	-	-.003	-.001	-	-
Partisan.	.018	.018	.005	-	.003	.001	-	.003	.001	.003	.002
Ideology	.030	.008	.004	.022	-	-	-	.003	.001	-	-
P. Vote	.046	.031	.007	.015	.008	.002	-	.004	.003	.004	.003
Total	.165	.104	.031	.061	.028	.007	-	.021	.010	.017	.012

Criterion Variable: Perceived Ability of Political Parties

	Total (Comm.)	Total (News)	Atten.	Dis.	Expo. Atten.	Expo. Dis.	Expo. Elabor.	Atten. Dis.	Atten. Elabor.	Expo. Atten, Dis.	Expo. Atten. Elabor.
Gender	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Age	-.005	-.005	-.012	-	.008	.001	-	-.002	-.003	.001	.002
Edu,	.034	.029	.011	.005	.009	.001	-	.002	.003	.001	.002
Income	.018	.018	-	-	.012	.001	-	-	-	.002	.003
Race	-.014	-.009	-.005	-.005	-	-	-	-.002	-.002	-	-
Partisan.	.022	.022	.008	-	.006	.001	-	.002	.002	.001	.002
Ideology	.019	.011	.007	.008	-	-	-	.002	.002	-	-
P. Vote	.047	.041	.014	.006	.014	.001	-	.003	.004	.002	.003
Total	.159	.135	.057	.024	.049	.005	-	.013	.016	.007	.012

Criterion Variable: Internal Political Efficacy

	Total (Comm.)	Total (News)	Atten.	Dis.	Expo. Atten.	Expo. Dis.	Expo. Elabor.	Atten. Dis.	Atten. Elabor.	Expo. Atten, Dis.	Expo. Atten. Elabor.
Gender	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Age	-.004	-.004	-.012	-	.008	.002	-	-.005	-.002	.003	.002
Edu,	.049	.035	.011	.015	.009	.002	-	.005	.002	.003	.002
Income	.022	.022	-	-	.012	.002	-	-	-	.005	.003
Race	-.023	-.008	-.005	-.015	-	-	-	-.002	-.001	-	-
Partisan.	.025	.025	.008	-	.006	.002	-	.003	.002	.002	.002
Ideology	.040	.012	.007	.028	-	-	-	.003	.002	-	-
P. Vote	.069	.050	.014	.019	.014	.003	-	.006	.004	.006	.003
Total	.232	.156	.057	.077	.049	.011	-	.024	.013	.019	.012

Criterion Variable: Political Participation

	Total (Comm.)	Total (News)	Atten.	Dis.	Expo. Atten.	Expo. Dis.	Expo. Elabor.	Atten. Dis.	Atten. Elabor.	Expo. Atten, Dis.	Expo. Atten. Elabor.
Gender	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Age	-.007	-.007	-.019	-	.013	.002	-	-.006	-.003	.004	.002
Edu,	.069	.050	.017	.019	.015	.003	-	.006	.003	.004	.002
Income	.031	.031	-	-	.019	.003	-	-	-	.006	.003
Race	-.031	-.012	-.008	-.019	-	-	-	-.003	-.001	-	-
Partisan.	.022	.022	.013	-	.009	.002	-	.004	.002	.003	.002
Ideology	.054	.018	.012	.036	-	-	-	.004	.002	-	-
P. Vote	.094	.070	.023	.024	.023	.004	-	.007	.003	.007	.003
Total	.308	.210	.092	.098	.079	.014	-	.030	.015	.024	.012

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