MASS MEDIA AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION:

DOES NEWS SOURCE MATTER?

by

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A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

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Research has demonstrated a positive relationship between consumption of traditional news media and engaging in mainstream political participation including voting, donating money to a political campaign and volunteering for a political campaign. Significantly less attention has been directed toward understanding how new media, including websites, social networking sites and blogs, may affect political participation. Data from the 2008 Pew Internet and American Life Project is used to analyze the relationship between traditional news media, radio and new news media and different forms of political participation, including traditional participation, unconventional or protest participation and those who engage in both, called heavy participators. Results suggest the importance of new media for political participation. Although traditional media had no significant relationship with any form of political participation, those who reported new media as a more important source of political information were more likely to engage in traditional participation relative to non-participation and heavy participation relative to non-participation, mainstream-only and unconventional-only participation.

DEDICATION

For Mom, Mam and Bop. Thank you.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Over the last forty years, participation in unconventional politics, such as protest, has become increasingly common in the United States (Schussman and Soule 2005). The vast majority of participation research has focused on mainstream political activities, such as voting and donating money to political campaigns, to the exclusion of other types of participatory activities. However, as the increase in protest participation attests, not all citizens engage in mainstream ways. Some engage in both mainstream and unconventional ways, while others bypass the institutional aspects of politics entirely and instead focus exclusively on unconventional means to convey their political interests. Still others, labeled heavy participators, engage in both mainstream and unconventional ways. This raises several questions: why do some citizens choose to participate in a variety of forms of participation, while others engage solely in mainstream or unconventional ways? What distinguishes those who engage in unconventional ways to the exclusion of mainstream means of participation, and those who engage in both? For example, what distinguishes the Tea Party activist who votes, calls his Senator and takes part in Tea Party rallies from his neighbor who only engages in party-based politics?

Normatively, these questions are important since participation is seen not only as a way to ensure adequate representation by communicating the needs and interests of the citizenry to their representatives (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995), but also by some as an indicator of the health of a democracy (Rimmerman 1997). Furthermore, the type of participation citizens engage in is also important, since not all forms of participation

are equally effective in conveying citizen preferences or producing the desired results (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995).

It may be that despite similar demographics people are led to different forms of participation in part based on differential news information environments. One possibility is that patterns of media consumption may reflect differences in participation. Recently, scholars have begun to distinguish between two forms of news media: traditional media, which include television and print newspapers, and new and alternative media, including blogs and websites (Hamilton 2001). Previous research has found a positive relationship between consumption of traditional news media, specifically newspapers and television news, and mainstream participation. For example, Zhang and Chia (2006) found that respondents who reported greater attention to newspapers and television news were more likely to engage in several forms of mainstream political participation including public meeting attendance, writing to a public official or newspaper, and circulating a petition. Similarly, people who report reading newspapers and watching television news have also been found to be more likely to report membership in a political party, be registered to vote, participate in community forums and vote in national and local elections (Wilkins 2000; McLeod, Scheufele, and Moy 1999; McLeod, et al. 1996).

News media is theorized to act as a link between government and citizens by providing political information that may educate and mobilize citizens (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995; Eveland and Scheufele 2000; Schussman and Soule 2005). However, if different forms of news media cover modes of participation differently or at different rates, as research suggests (Boyle and Schmierbach 2009; Woodley 2008), then

it is possible that those who consume one form of news media may be mobilized to participate differently than those who consume another form of news media. Recent research suggests that the type of media individuals receive news from may indeed play an important role in the type of participation they engage in (Boyle and Schmierbach 2009). In contrast to the well-established positive correlation between mainstream participation and traditional news media, the connection between traditional news media and unconventional or heavy participation is not well understood. In one of the few studies to address this, Boyle and Schmierbach (2009) found that consumption of newspapers or television news were not significantly related to participants' likelihood of protest participation. Depending on what mobilizing information one receives, distinct patterns of political engagement may develop or be reinforced. Traditional and alternative news sources may provide distinct types and amounts of political information and, thus, different mobilizing information. Variation in media exposure may raise citizens' awareness of different types of political participation and may point to opportunities for citizens to engage. Using data from the 2008 Pew Internet and American Life Project, I address how consumption of different news sources may be related to engagement in different forms of political participation.

CHAPTER 2

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Research on political participation often distinguishes between two forms of participation, mainstream and unconventional. Mainstream participation, also described as traditional or institutionalized participation (Boyle and Schmierbach 2009; McVeigh and Smith 1999), includes activities that are directed at electoral politics, including donating money to a political candidate or party, attending a party meeting, volunteering on a campaign, writing a letter to a public official or voting (Delli Carpini 2004). Unconventional participation, also called non-traditional participation (Boyle and Schmierbach 2009), includes less dominant tactics such as protesting. Recent work has demonstrated the importance of considering a third category of participators, heavy participators, who appear to be qualitatively distinct from both mainstream and protest-oriented participators. Heavy participators are those who engage in both mainstream and unconventional forms of political participation (Boyle and Schmierbach 2009). These participators, while demographically more similar to traditional participators, in terms of having greater educational attainment, higher income levels, and gender, report the media habits of protest-only participators.

A large body of research suggests that several factors are important predictors of traditional forms of participation including political interest, efficacy, trust, and political knowledge, as well as the availability of resources such as having free time, higher levels of education and income (Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995; Delli Carpini 2004). Specifically, traditional participators tend to be more educated, have a higher income, and male (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995).

While those who participate in unconventional ways have also been shown to be more educated and maintain high levels of political interest, they also tend to be younger than mainstream participators (Schussman and Soule 2005; Petrie 2004). Earlier research on protest participation in the Civil Rights and Student Movements of the 1960s suggests that protesters were more often urban residents and male (Sherkat and Blocker 1994). However, the relationship between gender and protest participation was largely mitigated by gender differences in educational attainment, reports of conservatism and political efficacy (Sherkat and Blocker 1994). Research on subsequent periods of activism, including Petrie's (2004) investigation into the determinants of protest participation in the late 1980s, failed to find gender differences in rates of participation. Recent work found that women were actually more likely to participate in protests than men (Boyle and Schmierbach 2009).

Although heavy participators are often more demographically similar to mainstream participators, they also engage in unconventional participatory activities and tend to be more similar to unconventional participators in terms of their news media consumption (Boyle and Schmierbach 2009). The Tea Party movement, whose activities have included both protests and efforts to influence elections,[1] provides an illustrative example of heavy participators. According to an April 2010 New York Times/CBS News poll,[2]

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[1] The goals and activities of the Tea Party are available on their website: teapartypatriots.org.

[2] This was a national telephone poll conducted April 5-12, 2010 and included 1,580 adults. Article accessed via New York Times website June 18, 2010: http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/15/us/politics/15poll.html?ref=politics

respondents who identified as Tea Party supporters were more educated and wealthier than the average respondent. They were also more likely to be male. Demographic characteristics and traditional indicators fail to explain why some individuals engage solely in mainstream ways, others engage solely in protest, while still others engage in both protest and in mainstream ways.

In recent years unconventional participation, including social protest, has been characterized by some scholars as a now-institutionalized form of political participation in the United States (Boykoff 2006), in that it is an increasingly common and, as Shussman and Soule (2005) point out, a taken-for-granted political tactic. The fact that participation in protest activities is on the rise makes it an important phenomenon to understand, particularly as some lament a perceived decline in mainstream participatory activities including voting (Rimmerman 1997; Lijphart 1997; Lee 2008). Insofar as participation provides the link between citizens and their representatives, increased participation is normatively good because it provides citizens more opportunities to convey their preferences. Therefore, if citizens have begun to engage more often in ways that we have yet to understand, it is important for us to place greater emphasis on understanding these ways of participating. Yet, the focus of participation research is often on traditional modes of political participation to exclusion of non-traditional participation including protest or solely unconventional forms of participation (Boyle and Schmierbach 2009; McVeigh and Smith 1999). In order to better understand different patterns of participation, this research explicitly conceptualizes unconventional, mainstream and heavy forms of participation as distinct.

CHAPTER 3

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND NEWS MEDIA

Theoretically, news media are thought to affect participation by both the amount and type of coverage they offer. Mainstream political activities, such as voting, are likely to receive traditional news media attention that can help to mobilize citizens to participate by, for example, providing information on political candidates or the time and location of a town-hall meeting, as well as how and when to vote in a particular election. However, those taking part in unconventional forms of participation are less likely to get coverage from mainstream media unless they engage in more disruptive tactics (Boyle, McLuskey, McLeod, and Stein 2005; Boykoff 2006). If newspapers and television news are less likely to cover unconventional forms of participation, then consumers of that media may receive less educational and mobilizing information regarding those forms of participation and the issues they address.

When protestors do capture the attention of the media, coverage is often framed in what has been called the "protest paradigm". This is "typified by coverage that depicts protesters as deviants and a threat to community stability" (McCluskey, Stein, Boyle and McLeod 2009, p. 355), which may also decrease the likelihood of mobilizing citizens. For example, in work by Boyle and colleagues, (2004, 2005) newspaper headlines of protest coverage were consistently rated by trained coders as negative and tending to focus less on the substance of protesters' claims and more on disruptive tactics and physical characteristics of protesters. Specifically, coverage often focused on oddities of the protesters themselves such as their clothing, as opposed to the substantive issues

brought up by protesters, in ways that researchers claimed functioned to delegitimize protestors' complaints. Similarly, in an analysis of national newspaper and major television news network coverage of the 1999 WTO protests in Seattle, Washington, Boykoff (2006) found that over half of the coverage employed a frame emphasizing violence or the potential for violence, and nearly 40% employed a frame that emphasized the physical appearance of protesters as outside of the status quo. Furthermore, 86% of those newspaper articles that used a violence frame reported fewer than five sentences on the substantive reasons for the protest itself.

If, as research suggests, unconventional participation is covered by the media in unfavorable ways, which function to delegitimize their actions and issues, then it is likely that even when the mainstream news media cover stories of unconventional participation, it may have little impact or even depress participation (McLeod and Detenber 1999). Also, research on media and participation suggests that, "media coverage of activities that takes place outside of or threatens the system is often particularly lacking in mobilizing information" (Boyle and Schmitter 2009, p. 6). Thus, if traditional media offer a more narrow range of messages and cover protest less often, it is possible that this may have a negative impact on unconventional forms of participation. Even among traditional media, scholars have shown that the type of media could have varying effects on participation. Talk radio, labeled by some as a non-traditional alterative to mainstream media (Johnson and Kaye 2004), which tends to be more negative and conservative than mainstream media, has been correlated with decreased traditional political participation for those who only listen to it, but increased participation for those who both listen and call in to talk radio programs (Hollander 1996). Depending on the type of political and

mobilizing information provided by the media and how the media presents this information, those who consume it are likely to have different perceptions regarding the desirability of, and opportunities for, participation.

Due in part to its relatively recent arrival, significantly less attention has been devoted to the relationship between new, alternative media and political participation (Boyle and Schmierbach 2009; Haas 2004). Newer news mediums such as websites and blogs may provide different types and greater amounts of political information, as well as more non-elite perspectives than do traditional news sources (Woodly 2008; Haas 2004). If this is indeed the case, it is possible that consumption of new media may affect political participation in different ways than do traditional media. For example, even some traditional news sources offer more opportunities for alternative views and coverage on their website. Features such as CNN's i-report enable greater public participation by allowing citizens who are not in fact journalists to create and share their own news stories and display them on an established news website.[3] Not only do such features offer the potential for a greater range of views, new media that allow citizens to upload their own stories or information may be a lower cost means of spreading information than through traditional media (McKenna and Pole 2004), which could require citizens to either pay for the space needed to convey their message or require them to engage in more extreme behavior to capture the attention of news media. Furthermore, as Hamilton (2004) points out, even when the cost of producing a news story is equivalent for print news and

[3] According to www.ireport.com/about.jspa (accessed June 16, 2010), CNN's i-report feature enables citizens to shape "how and what is covered in the news with CNN". Importantly, these stories are "not edited, fact-checked or screened before they post.

Internet news sources, the cost of distributing the news is significantly lower on the Internet.

Although much less research has been done on the Internet as a news source as opposed to traditional media, Hwang and colleagues (2006) found that dissenters of the Iraq War were more likely to use the Internet for acquiring political information. Specifically, the more dissenters felt their views differed from traditional media, the more likely they were to go to the Internet for political information. Thus, it is likely that by providing a larger range of viewpoints, Internet sources of political information, such as blogs, will be more highly correlated with unconventional participation than are traditional media, such as television news and newspapers.

Similarly, Boyle and Schmierbach (2009) found that attention to alternative media sources was significantly correlated with greater protest participation. In this study, participants reported how often they were exposed to both traditional and alternative news media, specifically activist or protest-based websites and newspapers, as well as their involvement in both mainstream and unconventional forms of political participation. Traditional media was not significantly related to unconventional participation. However, exposure to alternative media was significantly related to increased unconventional and heavy participation. This suggests that when the notion of participation is enlarged to include unconventional forms of participation including protest, it is also important to examine more than traditional television news and newspapers. Interestingly, in a survey of political bloggers, McKenna and Pole (2004) found that political bloggers overwhelmingly thought of blogging itself as a form of political participation and blog consumption has also been correlated with increased

engagement in local political issues and political talk (Kavanaugh, Kim, Perez-Quinones, Schmitz, and Isenhour 2008).

Although Boyle and Schmierbach's (2009) research represents an important step in understanding the relation between the type of media citizens consume and the form of political participation they take part in, the findings were derived from a relatively small sample taken from a single community in a conservative Midwestern state. In this study, I address the shortcoming of previous work by using a much larger dataset that employs a national random sample. Additionally, Boyle and Schmierbach explicitly ask about exposure to protest and activist websites, but neglect to examine other online sources, such as blogs, social networking sites, and online news sources. The current study examines respondents' reports of the importance of various news sources, including blogs, social networking sites, and online news sources. It is likely that by providing a larger range of viewpoints, Internet sources of political information will be more highly correlated with unconventional participation than are traditional media such as television news and newspapers, which previous work suggests should be correlated with increased mainstream participation.

CHAPTER 4

HYPOTHESES

Previous research suggests that those who watch traditional television news or read newspapers are more likely to participate in mainstream forms of participation (Zhang and Chia 2006). By supplying information on the context and relevant political debates, traditional mediums including newspapers and television news may help provide potential participators the information necessary for informed participation (Eveland and Scheufele 2000; Schussman and Soule 2005). Similarly, newspapers and television news may help prompt participation by providing mobilizing information on when and how to participate. For example, by providing the times and location to vote, newspapers may lead some citizens to participate who might not otherwise. However, prior research also suggests that traditional news media are less likely to cover unconventional forms of participation and that when it is covered it is less likely to be covered favorably, which may inhibit this form of participation (Boyle, McLuskey, McLeod, and Stein 2005; Boykoff 2006). If information on unconventional forms of participation and potentially mobilizing information is less available or less favorably presented on these news mediums, it is likely that attention to such news venues will not impact these forms of participation or will function to depress participation.

H1- Those who report traditional news sources as more important sources of political information will be:

a) more likely to engage in mainstream participation relative to non-participation, unconventional participation and heavy participation.

b) less likely to engage in heavy participation relative to non-participation and mainstream participation.

c) less likely to engage in unconventional participation relative to mainstream participation.

Although radio has been negatively correlated with political participation in the past (Lee 2005), such research has not always included unconventional forms of political participation. While political radio may not prompt mainstream participation, it may be correlated with unconventional forms of participation.

H2- Those who report the radio as an important source of political information will be more likely to engage in unconventional participation relative to non-participation and mainstream participation.

Relatively little research has been conducted on the impact of new media on participation. Insofar as blogs, Internet news sites, and social networking sites provide an alternative media outlet that may be used by a variety of political actors and reporters who are not subject to the same restrictions as traditional news sources, they may be more likely to have a mobilizing effect on unconventional and heavy participators (Boyle and Schmierbach 2009). Additionally, those who are predisposed to participate in unconventional ways may be more likely to seek out alternative information sources in order to find political information.

H3- Those who report new media, including blogs, social networking sites, and Internet news sites, as an important source of political information will be:

a) more likely to engage in unconventional participation relative to mainstream participation and non-participation

b) more likely engage in heavy participation relative to mainstream participation and non-participation.

Table 1:

Hypothesized Directional Relationship between Media Type and Form of Participation Relative to Non-participation

	Mainstream Participation	Heavy Participation	Unconventional Participation
Traditional Media	+	-	-
New Media	-	+	+
Radio	-	+	+

CHAPTER 5

DATA AND METHODS

To examine the relationship between type of political participation and news media usage, I use data from the 2008 Pew Internet and American Life Project.[4] The dependent variable 'type of participation' was created in order to capture the fact that different forms of participation are not conceptualized as different degrees of the same underlying phenomena. Following the theoretical expectations derived from previous findings,

[4] Data downloaded November 1, 2009 from the Pew Data Website. Participants were 2,251 adults, aged 18 and older (51.62% women and 48.38% men) contacted between August 12 and August 31, 2008 through random digit dialing of telephone numbers in the United States, excluding Alaska and Hawaii. Only respondents who have access to the Internet and who responded to all relevant questions are used in this analysis, resulting in an overall sample size of 1,258. Although the Internet has become more accessible with time and locations such as libraries offering free Internet access, it is still possible that those using the Internet may be different than those without access. Therefore, generalizations based on Internet respondents should be more narrowly generalized to others with Internet access. Similarly, while random digit dialing does allow a large sample to be generated, as the number of cell phone-only households has increased, it may be the case that such techniques using land lines only may be less representative. In particular, younger respondents may be more likely to have cell phones and not land-lines. Insofar as younger people are less likely to engage in mainstream forms of participation, this may make it more difficult to find significant results for unconventional participators.

forms of participation are treated as qualitatively different aspects of political participation. Type of participation has four possible outcomes: non-participation, mainstream, unconventional and heavy participation.[5] Four questions were used to make a single category of mainstream political participation, which asked respondents if in the past 12 months they had contributed money to a political candidate, party, political organization or cause; if they had contacted a national, state or local government official in any capacity about an issue; if they had attended a political meeting on local, town or school affairs; or worked or volunteered for a political party or candidate. Respondents who reported engaging in any of these activities were coded as mainstream political participators.[6]

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[5] See Appendix II for the specific questions asked by Pew.

[6] Although ideally voting would be included in this dataset, other forms of participation actually provide more opportunities for participation, unlike voting, which is something citizens can only do once at designated times (Verba, Schlozman, Brady, and Nie 1993). While certain constraints certainly exist, such as the need for free time or money, other forms of participation offer more opportunities for participation. For example, excluding time constraints, while all citizens only have a single vote per election, citizens may write as many letters, send as many emails, or make as calls to their representatives as they wish. Similarly, McVeigh and Smith (1999) chose not to use voting as a measure of traditional participation. Thus, while not ideal, not using voting as a measure of traditional participation is by no means unprecedented.

An unconventional participation category was created using two questions, which asked if the respondent had attended an organized protest or made a speech about a community or political issue. Respondents who reported engaging in either of these activities were coded as unconventional political participators.

The final category of heavy participation was generated using those respondents who reported engaging in both mainstream and unconventional forms of political participation. Those who engaged in both were not included in the categories of mainstream or unconventional but instead were made into the third category of heavy participators. Finally, those who did not report participating in either mainstream or unconventional forms of participation were categorized as non-participators and are used as the base-outcome in the model.

The main independent variables employed consist of six questions asking respondents to report how important each media outlet was for them as a source of political information. I use questions regarding television, newspaper, radio, blogs, social networking sites, and Internet news as sources of political information and information about public affairs. The importance of television and newspapers were combined to create the 'Traditional Media' category and all Internet-related categories, including blogs, social networking sites and Internet news sites were combined to create a 'New Media' category. Radio was kept in its own category.

I control for several variables that have repeatedly been demonstrated to be important factors in political participation. Although sex is less of a determining factor than it once was for some forms of political participation, for example voting rates, I include it as a dummy variable (male = 0 and female = 1) since men and women do not engage in all

forms of political participation at the same level and this relationship has changed over time (Verba, Burns, and Shlozman 1997; Mondak and Anderson 2004; Petrie 2004). Income has been positively correlated with a variety of political activities including voting, campaign work, contributing to a campaign, and affiliation with a political organization (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Previous work has also demonstrated that age may be a factor in the type of participation citizens engage in. Specifically, Older Americans have also been demonstrated to be more politically active, in terms of conventional participation while those who engage in unconventional ways tend to be younger (Petrie 2004). Living in a rural or urban setting may also shape the type of participation (Sherkat and Blocker 1994) and is therefore controlled for. I also control for political efficacy and attention paid to politics. Finally, I control for membership in a political party by including two dummy variables: Independent (0 = respondent did not identify as an Independent and 1 = respondent identified as an Independent) and no party (0 = respondent identified party affiliation and 1 = respondent identified as associating with no political party).

In order to understand the relationship between different sources of political information and political participation, I estimate a multinomial logistic regression model. The multinomial logit assesses the odds of engaging in each type of participation independently as distinct forms of participation, which corresponds to the theoretical understanding of participation employed by this project. Robust standard errors were used in estimating the model due to the small number of unconventional participators.[7]

[7] Multicollinearity was assessed by estimating bivariate correlations and auxiliary regressions and found only marginal correlation between the variables.

CHAPTER 6

RESULTS

A multinomial logit model was estimated using non-participators as the base-outcome from which the other outcomes are assessed.[8] Because coefficients are not directly interpretable in a multinomial logit model, the percent change in the odds of the dependent variable was estimated in relation to each of the possible combinations.[9]

Hypothesis one predicted that those who report traditional media as more important sources of political information will be more likely to engage in mainstream participation relative to non-participation, less likely to engage in heavy participation relative to non-participation and mainstream participation, and less likely to engage in unconventional participation relative to mainstream participation. Hypothesis one was not supported.[10] The importance of traditional media as a source of political information is not significant using any of the categories of type as the base outcome. This suggests that the importance of traditional media as a source of political information does not differ between those who participate in mainstream ways, unconventional ways, heavily, or not at all.

Hypothesis two predicted that those who report radio as an important source of political information will be more likely to engage in unconventional participation relative to non-participation and mainstream participation. This was also not supported.[11]

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[8] See Appendix I, Figure 1 and Table 2.

[9] See Appendix I, Figures 1-4 and Table 3.

[10] See Appendix I, figures 1 and 3 and tables 2 and 3.

[11] See Appendix I, figures 1 and 4 and tables 2 and 3.

However, respondents who report radio as an important source of political news are more likely to engage in heavy participation relative to non-participation. On average, holding all other variables at their mean, a one-unit increase in the reported importance of radio as a source of political information leads to a 30.5% increase in the odds of engaging in heavy participation relative to non-participation. Although hypothesis two was not supported, in that there was no statistically significant relation between exclusively unconventional participation and the importance of radio, a significant relationship between heavy participation and radio importance relative to non-participation does emerge.

Hypothesis three predicted that those who report new media as a more important source of political information would be more likely to engage in unconventional participation relative to mainstream participation and non-participation, and more likely to engage in heavy participation relative to mainstream participation and non-participation. This was partially supported. Those who report new media as a more important source of political information are also more likely to engage in heavy participation relative to unconventional participation, mainstream participation and non-participation, which partially supports hypothesis three.[12] On average, holding all other variables at their mean, a one-unit increase in the reported importance of new media as a source of political information corresponds with a 20.5% increase in the odds of engaging in heavy participation relative to mainstream participation, a 22.9% increase in the odds of engaging in heavy participation relative to unconventional participation, and a 38% increase in the odds of engaging in heavy participation relative to non-participation.

[12] See figures 1 and 2 and tables 2 and 3.

However, respondents who report new media (blogs, social networking sites, and Internet news sites) as a more important source of political information are also more likely to engage in mainstream participation relative to non-participation. On average, holding all other variables at their mean, a one-unit increase in reporting new media as an important source of political information corresponds with a 14.5% increase in the odd of engaging in mainstream political participation relative to non-participation. Thus, those who are heavy participators appear to be more likely to see new media as an important source of political information than do those who engage in any other form of participation and those who engage in no participation at all.

In relation to mainstream participation control variables perform as expected,[13] with higher levels of educational attainment, higher income, efficacy, attention to politics and age corresponding to increased odds of participating in mainstream ways relative non-participation. Higher levels of reported educational attainment, greater efficacy, and attention to politics all correspond to increased odds of engaging in heavy participation relative to non-participation. Higher levels of efficacy also corresponded to increased odds of engaging in heavy participation relative to mainstream participation. Finally, reporting no party affiliation corresponds with increased odds of engaging in mainstream participation relative to unconventional participation, heavy participation relative to unconventional participation, and non-participation relative to traditional, unconventional, and heavy participation. Except for heavy participators who were more likely to be male, gender of the respondent was not significantly related to the odds of

[13] See Appendix I, Tables 2 and 3.

engaging in mainstream or unconventional participation, relative to each other or to non-participation.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS

These findings indicate that media usage is important for political participation and that not all media have the same impact. Contrary to expectations, traditional media showed no significant relationship with any form of participation. It is possible that if newspaper readership continues to decline (Lee and Wei 2008) and as newer media becomes increasingly available, the results of older research that found a relationship between television news and newspapers and mainstream participation (Chia 2006; Wilkins 2000; McLeod, Scheufele, and Moy 1999; McLeod, et al. 1996) will need to be reconfirmed.

While new media corresponded to an increase in the odds of traditional participation relative to non-participation, it had the greatest impact on the odds of engaging in heavy participation relative to any other form of participation or non-participation. Thus, those who appear to be more politically engaged report new media as an important source of political information.

This research has several limitations. First, more detailed measures of both participation and news media would help illuminate the relationship between the two. Although this survey asked several questions about different forms of political participation, these questions did not assess the amount of participation respondents actually engaged in and asked relatively few questions regarding protest participation, resulting in a very small number of unconventional-only participators to analyze. For example, a person who was heavily involved in multiple protests would be coded the same as a respondent who participated in a single protest. Similarly, while respondents

were asked how important each news source was to them, they were not asked to provide the amount of time they used each source, nor were the particular news sources identified. Thus, while we have a sense of how important respondents' perceived new media to be, we know nothing about the content of the blogs, social networking or news sites they were thinking of, or whether they watch local or national television news. We also know little about respondent's motivation for choice of media, what types of articles or blogs they seek out or the extent to which they engage it beyond reading articles. For example, we know little about whether and how participants may have used interactive features of websites such as comments sections. As the number of potential news sources increase, particularly sources that encourage informal citizen journalism, it will be important to see whether certain types of participators look to these sources to the exclusion of traditional news media.

Heavy and mainstream participators are quite similar in terms of their reported importance of education, efficacy, and attention to politics. However, those who report greater efficacy have increased odds of engaging in heavy relative to mainstream participation. Similarly, those who report new media as an important source of political information have increased odds of engaging in heavy participation relative to all other forms of participation including mainstream participation. Thus, it appears that perceived political efficacy and the importance of new media do play a role in differentiating mainstream and heavy participators. Future work should more closely examine the content of new media, how citizens engage with the content, as well as their reasons for searching out the content that they do, in relation to the type of participation citizens engage in and its relationship to political efficacy.

Despite the similar impact of new media on both mainstream and heavy participation relative to non-participation, new media also increases the likelihood of engaging in heavy participation relative to all other forms. This pattern complicates the findings of Boyle and Schmierbach (2009) and points to the importance of further work examining these forms of media. If participation is fundamental to the health of a democracy, as much normative theory asserts, further investigation into the antecedents of participation including different patterns of media usage and its content is crucial, particularly as technology re-shapes the content and the way we get our news.

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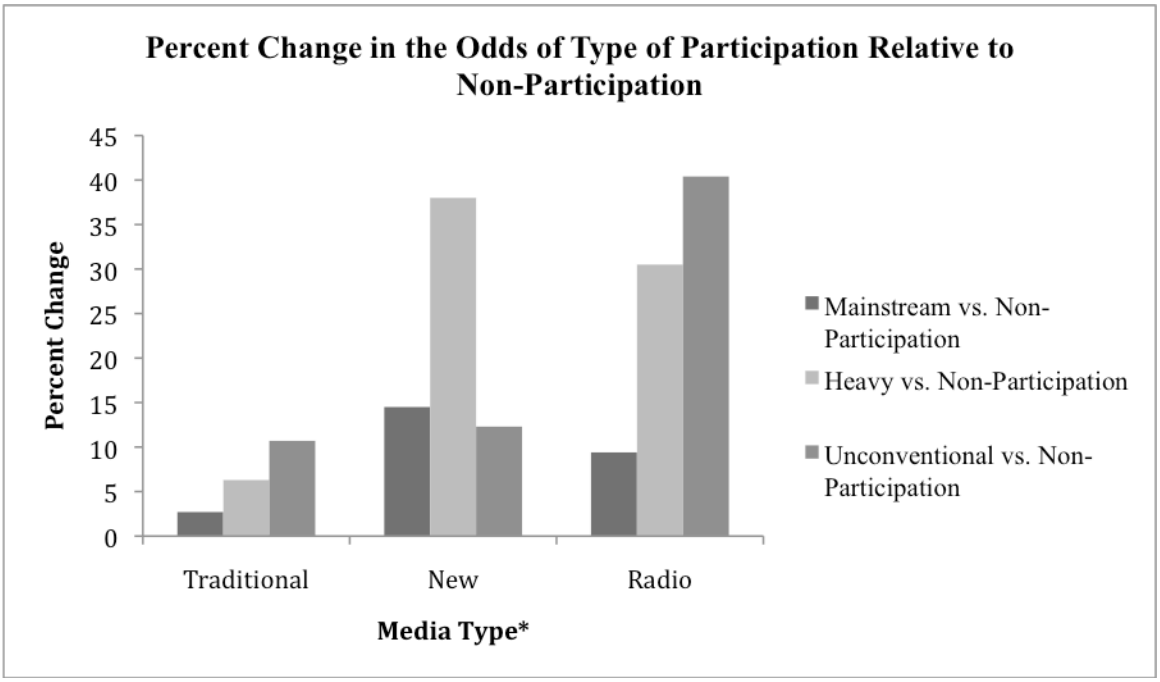
APPENDICES

TABLES AND FIGURES

APPENDIX I

Figure 1:

Multinomial Logit Estimates for Change in the Odds of Type of Participation Relative to Non-Participation

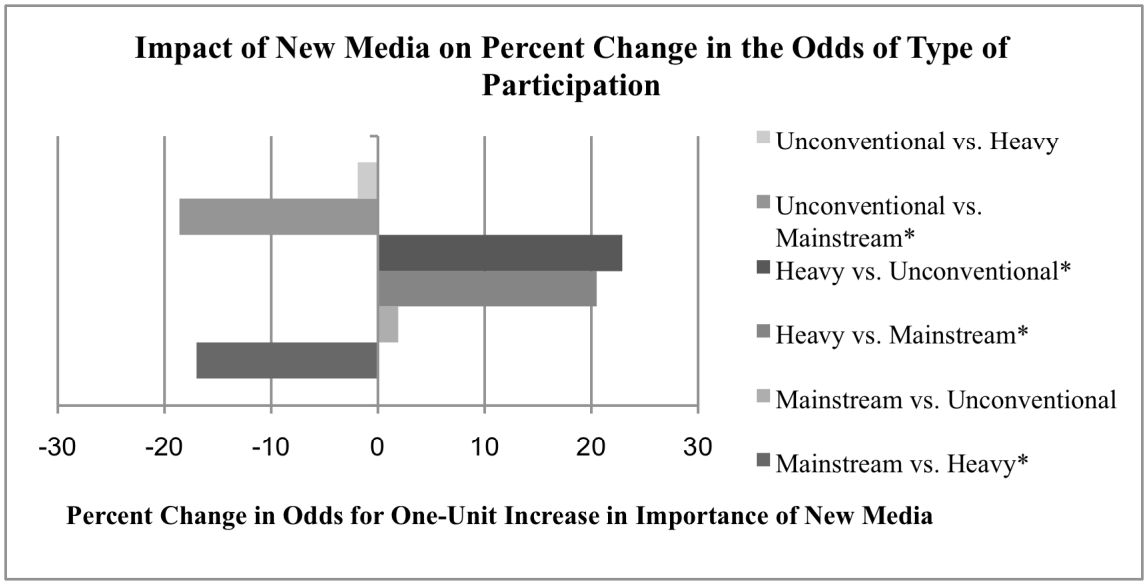


Percent Change in odds of participation for every one-unit increase in the independent variable.

* Statistically significant relationships ($p < .05$) exist for New Media (Mainstream vs. Non-Participation; Heavy Participation vs. Non-Participation) and Radio (Heavy vs. Non-Participation).

Figure 2:

Multinomial Logit Estimates for Percent Change in the Odds of Type of Participation for New Media

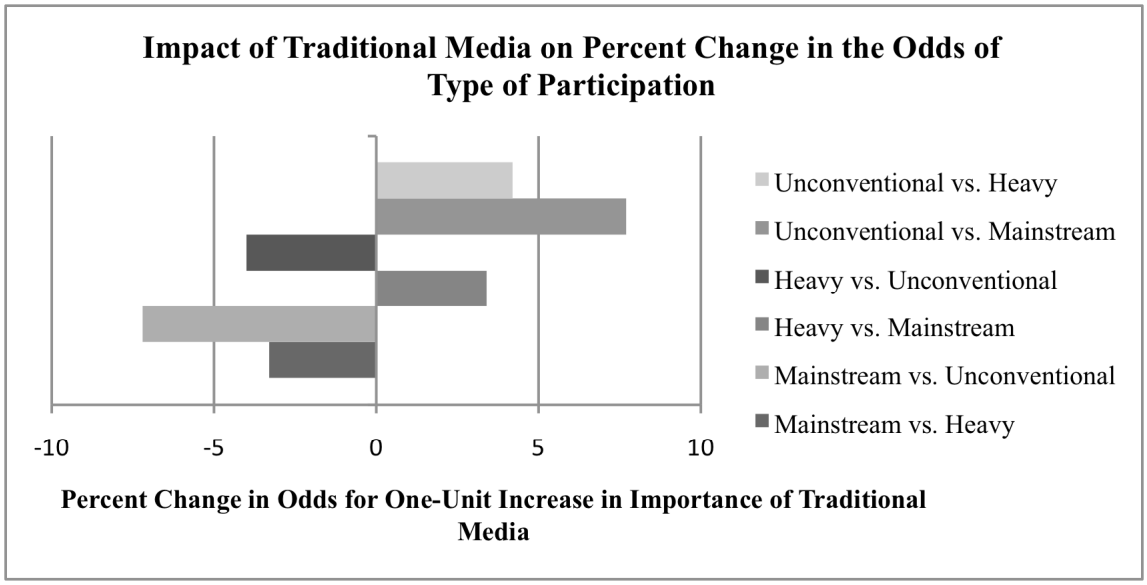


Percent Change in odds of participation for every one-unit increase in the importance of new media as a source of political information.

* = $p < .05$

Figure 3:

Multinomial Logit Estimates for Percent Change in the Odds of Type of Participation for Traditional Media

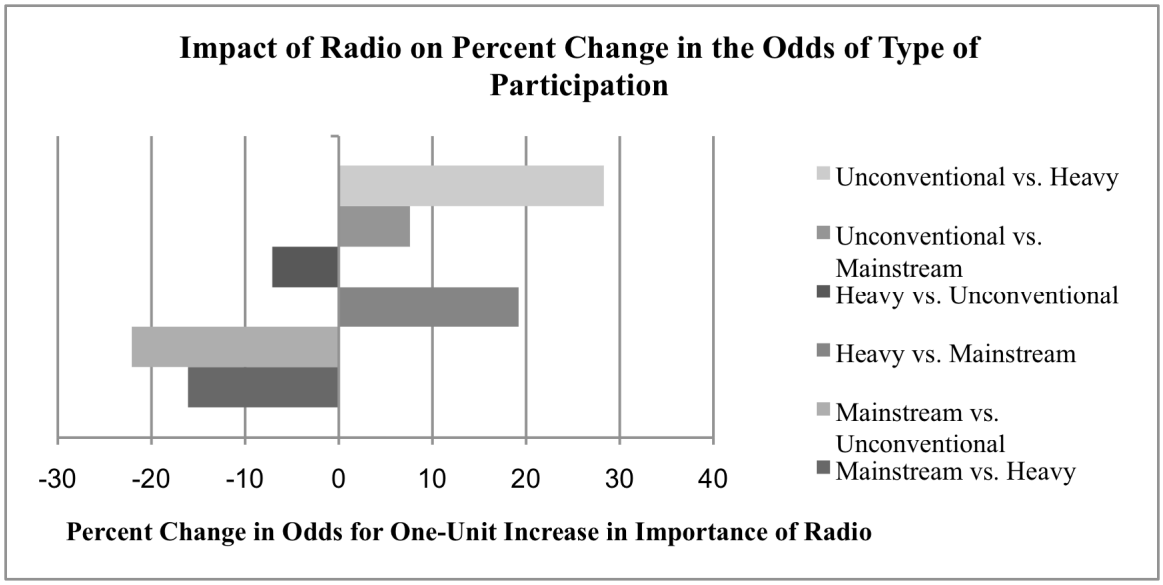


Percent Change in odds of participation for every one-unit increase in the importance of traditional media as a source of political information.

* = $p < .05$

Figure 4:

Multinomial Logit Estimates for Percent Change in the Odds of Type of Participation for Radio



Percent Change in odds of participation for every one-unit increase in the importance of radio as a source of political information.

* = $p < .05$

Table 2: The Impact of Media Type on Political Participation

	Multinomial Logit Estimates[1]			Change in Predicted Probabilities[2]		
Independent Variables	Mainstream	Heavy	Unconventional	Mainstream	Heavy	Unconventional
Traditional Media	.03 (.05)	.06 (.09)	.10 (.15)	2.7	6.3	10.7
New Media	.14* (.04)	.32* (.06)	.12 (.07)	14.5*	38.0*	12.3
Radio	.09 (.06)	.27* (.12)	.34 (.25)	9.4	30.5*	40.4
Efficacy	.23* (.08)	.58* (.16)	.37 (.25)	26.3*	79.2*	45.4
Attention	.53* (.08)	.75* (.20)	.65* (.30)	70.2*	111.7*	91.6*
Urban	-.31† (.17)	.08 (.32)	-.69 (.49)	-26.4†	8.6	-50.0
No Party	-1.1 (.47)	-.34 (.76)	-31.46* (.52)	-66.7*	-28.9*	-100.0*
Independent	-.25† (.14)	-.03 (.25)	-.05 (.46)	-22.1†	-3.4	-4.7
Age	.02* (.004)	.02† (.01)	-.02 (.02)	2.2*	-1.6†	-2.0*
Income	.07* (.03)	.07 (.06)	-.22† (.11)	7.3*	6.8	-19.4†
Gender	-.13 (.13)	-.55* (.24)	.07 (.43)	-12.3	6.9	-42.5†
Education	.17* (.05)	.19* (.10)	.14 (.17)	18.2*	21.3*	-15.3
N= 1258						

Multinomial logit estimates and predicted probabilities are estimated in relation to non-participation. * = p<.05; †p<.10

[1] The top number is the multinomial logit coefficient and robust standard errors are in parentheses.

[2] Change in predicted probabilities is the percent change in odds for one unit increase in the independent variable.

Table 3: Estimates for Percent Change in Odds of Type of Participation

	Mainstream vs.		Heavy vs.		Unconventional vs.	
Independent Variables	Heavy	Unconventional	Mainstream	Unconventional	Heavy	Mainstream
Traditional Media	-3.3	-7.2	3.4	-4.0	4.2	7.7
New Media	-17.0*	1.9	20.5*	22.9*	-1.9	-18.6*
Radio	-16.1	-22.1	19.2	-7.1	7.6	28.3
Efficacy	-29.5*	-13.2	41.9*	23.2	-18.8	15.2
Attention	-19.6	-11.2	24.4	10.5	-9.5	12.6
Urban	-32.2	47.3	47.6	117.4	-54.0	-32.1
No Party	-53.2	19.0*	113.6	23.9*	-100.0*	-100.0*
Independent	-19.3	-18.2	23.9	1.3	-1.3	22.3
Age	.6	4.3*	-2.1*	3.7†	-3.5†	-4.1*
Income	.5	33.1†	-.5	32.5*	-24.5*	-24.9†
Gender	52.4†	-18.0	-34.4†	-46.2	85.9	21.9
Education	-2.5	2.5	2.6	5.2	-4.9	-2.5
N= 1258						

Percent change in odds for one unit increase in the independent variable.

* = p<.05; †p<.10

QUESTION WORDING AND VARIABLE CONSTRUCTION

APPENDIX II

Mainstream Participation:

Respondents were coded as engaging in mainstream if they answered affirmative to engaging in any of the following activities, regardless of the amount of participation.

- In the past 12 months have you contacted a national, state or local government official in person, by phone or by letter about an issue that is important to you?
- In the past 12 months have you attended a political meeting on local, town, or school affairs?
- In the past 12 months have you contributed money to a political candidate, party, political organization or cause?
- In the past 12 months have you worked or volunteered for a political party or candidate?

  1 = Yes, did this.

  0 = No, did not.

Unconventional Participation:

Respondents were coded as engaging in unconventional participation if they answered affirmative to engaging in either of the following activities, regardless of the amount of participation.

- In the past 12 months have you attended an organized protest?
- In the past 12 months have you made a speech about a community or political issue?

  1 = Yes, did this.

  0 = No, did not.

Heavy Participation:

Respondents were coded as engaging in heavy participation if they answered affirmative to engaging in at least one of the mainstream activities and one of the unconventional activities, regardless of the amount of participation.

Traditional Media Sources:

I would like to ask you about where you get your information about politics and public affairs. How important is each of the following for you as a source of information about politics:

- What about Television?
- What about Newspapers?

  1 = Not at all important

  2 = Not too important

  3 = Somewhat important

  4 = Very important

New Media Sources:

I would like to ask you about where you get your information about politics and public affairs. How important is each of the following for you as a source of information about politics:

- What about news sites on the Internet?
- What about blogs?
- What about social networking sites?

  1 = Not at all important

2 = Not too important

3 = Somewhat important

4 = Very important

Radio as a Political News Source:

I would like to ask you about where you get your information about politics and public affairs. How important is each of the following for you as a source of information about politics? What about radio?

1 = Not at all important

2 = Not too important

3 = Somewhat important

4 = Very important

Attention to Politics:

How much thought have you given to the presidential election this year?

1 = None

2 = Little

3 = Some

4 = Quite a lot

Efficacy:

Overall, how much impact do you think people like you can have in making your community a better place to live- a big impact, a moderate impact, a small impact or no impact at all?

1 = No impact at all

2 = A small impact

3 = A moderate impact

4 = A big impact

Political Party:

In order to determine whether respondents were affiliated with a political party, considered themselves an Independent or claimed no party, two dummy variables were created using the following question:

In politics today, do you consider yourself a Republic, Democrat or Independent?

- Independent Party

  1 = Independent

  0 = No party

  0 = Republican

  0 = Democrat

- No party

  1 = No party

  0 = Independent

  0 = Republican

  0 = Democrat

Sex:

0 = Male

1 = Female

Respondent's Community Type:

0 = Rural

1 = Urban or Suburban

Education:

What is the last grade or class you completed in school?

1 = None, or grades 1 – 8

2 = High school incomplete (grades 9 – 11)

3 = High school graduate (grade 12 or GED)

4 = Technical, trade or vocational school, Associate's degree

5 = Some college, no 4-year degree

6 = College gradate (Bachelor's degree)

7 = Post-graduate training/professional school

Income:

Last year, that is in 2007, what was your total family income from all sources?

1 = <$10,000

2 = $10,000 - < $20,000

3 = $20,000 - < $30,000

4 = $30,000 - < $40,000

5 = $40,000 - < $50,000

6 = $50,000 - < $75,000

7 = $75,000 - < $100,000

8 = $ 100,000 - < $150,000

9 = $150,000 or more

Age:

18 – 96 years

VITA

Graduate School
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Gordon Pitz Research Award for Best Psychology Undergraduate Thesis, 2005
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Major Professor: Philip Habel

Publications:

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