AN EXAMINATION OF POLITICAL BLOGS' POTENTIAL TO INCREASE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

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By

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to contribute to our understanding of politics and new media by examining potential of political news blog usage to have a direct and indirect impact on political participation. The indirect impact was hypothesized to be through such three variables as political discussion, political knowledge, and news use. The three-wave panel data gathered in the state of Ohio around the 2006 mid-term election was used to test the hypotheses. A model was proposed where blog usage, along with three other variables (political discussion, knowledge, and news use) came from wave 2 and political participation came from wave 3. Baron and Kenny's method was used to test mediation; lagged variables were used whenever possible in construction of regression equations. The results showed that blog usage had marginally significant direct relationship with political participation, where people who read blogs tended to participate in politics more. Also, the data was consistent with the hypothesized indirect impact of blogs on political participation through political discussion. However, neither political knowledge, nor news use mediated relationship between blog usage and political participation. The study extended the literature on political participation and communication by showing a marginally significant relationship between blog use and participation, as well as
showing blog reading to be linked to political discussion. Particular electoral context of the 2006 Ohio campaign and political news-production practices explained why hypotheses about indirect impact of reading blogs on participation through political knowledge and news use were not supported. Implications for the communication field, as well as for democracy were discussed. Several future research directions were suggested.
Dedicated to my wife
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Despite the fact that presidential hopeful Howard Dean did not win the democratic nomination in 2004, much less the presidency, the ability of this previously unknown politician to energize politically disaffected people, particularly youth, by using many Internet-based tools, including blogs, was remarkable. As Dean’s campaign manager Joe Trippi describes in his book (Trippi, 2004), their campaign was devastated by the “old” media (negative television ads), while, his temporary, but notable success as a candidate was largely attributable to a “new” medium, the Internet. In this study I will examine the potential of one of the Internet’s many tools – blogs, specifically political news blogs – to mobilize citizens for political action.

To accomplish that task, I start by examining political participation dynamics in the U.S. during the last quarter century to determine whether there indeed is a decline in political participation as some argue (Putnam, 2000), especially in regards to young people, who are known to be notoriously politically apathetic in general (Delli Carpini, 2000). The special attention to young people in this manuscript is attributable to prior research showing blog readers to be slightly younger than non-readers, thus increasing
the probability of younger people becoming more politically involved, if blog reading is found to positively affect political participation.

I then examine factors that have been empirically demonstrated to influence political participation, specifically focusing on four: political interest, hard news use, political discussion, and political knowledge. These factors were chosen because of some indication that they are (directly and indirectly) related to both central elements of this project - political participation and political news blog use.

After that, I turn to examination of the mobilizing potential demonstrated by the Internet and political news blogs. I start with a general discussion of the Internet’s implications for democracy. I then examine the social phenomenon of political news blogs by describing their history and quantitative indicators of their current popularity. Finally, I turn to the key interest of this manuscript – mobilizing potential of political news blogs. In that section, I discuss the content (specifically focusing on mobilizing information) and the uses of political news blogs.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

It is necessary to specify exactly what is meant by political participation. Here, I talk about the political participation, in a manner similar to that of Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995), where political participation is conceptualized as multifaceted construct manifest through a set of rather diverse activities carried out by citizenry and aimed at influencing policymaking with a goal of obtaining some tangible results, such as electing a desired candidate to a political office, or putting some political issue on the fore of legislative agenda, or ensuring electoral success of some political party, or combination of these and other outcomes. Throughout this manuscript political participation, political engagement, and involvement in politics will be used interchangeably to refer to the same phenomenon.

Decline in Political Participation

Should the current levels of participation be a cause for concern or optimism? Some scholars, most notably Putnam (2000), argue that recent history was marked by a general trend of decline in political and civic participation. One of the examples illustrating this trend is a decline of participation of about a quarter in presidential elections over the last 36 years caused by “growing distrust of government, declining
party mobilization, fraying social bonds, political dealignment” (p. 33), as well as other developments. This trend is exacerbated among 18-24-year olds, of whom only 28% voted in 1996, compared to 42% in 1972 (Delli Carpini, 2000, p. 342).

Some other declining forms of political participation are: working for political party (declined from slightly more than 5% in 1975 to less than 3% in the early ‘90s), attending political rallies or speeches (declined from 10% in 1975 to less 6% in the early ‘90s), signing petitions (declined from 35% in 1975 to under 30% in the early ‘90s), writing congressional representatives or senators and writing articles or letters for newspapers or magazines, which experienced a smaller decline over the last quarter century (Putnam, 2000). Again, young people fare worse than older ones, as approximately 50% of 18-29-year-olds reported engaging in at least one political activity beyond voting in 1997, compared to more than 70% of 30-69-year-olds (Schlozman, Verba, Brady & Erulkwater, 1998). As Putnam suggests, several decades ago election campaigning

...was something we did, not something we merely witnessed. Now for almost all Americans, an election campaign is something that happens around us, a grating element in the background noise of everyday life, a fleeting image on a TV screen. (p. 41)

Several factors contribute to the existing decline in political participation, one of which may be a decline of interest in politics and public affairs news among the general public during the last quarter century. Putnam argues that “Scandals and wars can still rouse our attention, but generally speaking, fewer Americans follow public affairs now than did a quarter century ago” (p. 36). Younger people also display particularly low interest in public affairs (Delli Carpini, 2000).
A second possible cause is a decline in political knowledge, especially among today’s youth, as compared to younger people of several decades ago (Putnam, 2000). From 1941 to 1975 young people were no less knowledgeable in many issues than older people. However, starting in the 1970’s young people started exhibiting lower levels of political knowledge than older people (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). However, the scholars acknowledge that for some issues, the younger cohort are no less knowledgeable, and for issues related to constitutional rights, younger people display more knowledge than older people. The third possible cause is the intergenerational decline in political efficacy in recent history (Miller & Shanks, 1996, p. 107).

Specifically, for young people, the roots of political participation decline may be more fundamental and institutionally-based, than for older people. Delli Carpini (2000) sums up the discussion on this point by noting:

Never having experienced a period in which their own participation has affected meaningful change on an issue that mattered to them, and raised in an environment that regularly tells them such action is unlikely to succeed, it is hardly surprising that they are disinclined to participate in public life. Young Americans are not disengaged because they are satisfied with the current state of affairs, because they are apathetic, or because they do not care about their fellow citizens. Rather, they are disengaged because they are alienated from the institutions and processes of civic life and lack the motivation, opportunity, and ability to overcome this alienation. (p. 345)

Looking at young people is particularly important because they are known to be the most politically inactive segments of society (Delli Carpini, 2000). In addition, they are early adaptors of new communication technologies that, for reasons delineated later, may increase political participation.
However, some recent events, most notably presidential bid by Howard Dean in 2004 may provide reasons for optimism. In their content analysis of Dean’s campaign weblog – *Blog for America*, Kerbel and Bloom (2005) found that many people reported getting involved in politics for the first time in their lives to support the previously unknown governor of Vermont in his presidential run, by writing letters to undecided voters, organizing campaign events, reporting on Dean’s ‘meetups,’ or canvassing and handing out flyers. Dean’s campaign manager, Joe Trippi, offered many examples of how people, especially those lower in SES, got excited about politics and got involved in the political process during 2003 and 2004, in part due to Dean’s campaign (Trippi, 2004). One of the most publicized illustrations of this, as described by Trippi, were the “3,500 committed volunteers, mostly people driven by our incredible Internet support all over the country, [who] came to Iowa to knock on 200,000 doors and spread Dean’s message of empowerment” (p. 183). However, as with any anecdotal evidence, such examples add little to systemic understanding of participation dynamics during the 2004 electoral season.

Despite the fact that growing levels of education, eliminations of voting barriers, and development of communication technologies did not produce an expected boost in political engagement among general public, there is some evidence that the political participation problem is not as dire as it is often portrayed, or may even be non-existent. First, Putnam acknowledges that not all forms of (or types of activities related to) political participation are declining. For example, during the national elections of the 1990s and 1950s the same proportion of people reported talking about politics or trying
to persuade someone else how to vote; also the percentage of people who reported holding or running for political office did not undergo much change between 1975 and the 1990s (Putnam 2000). Second, depending on which starting and ending points we select from the timeline spanning from 1950 to 2000, we can argue that attending political meetings, working for a party, and even voting in presidential elections has remained the same or even increased over time (see Ladd, 1996); this can be seen on the very graphs offered by Putnam (2000) to illustrate trends for all three activities, which have a jigsaw pattern, rather than a smooth and steady downward slope (see p. 32, 39).

*Factors Affecting Political Participation*

Even if levels of involvement in politics are not dangerously low, it is still important to understand what factors drive political participation up or down. The empirical knowledge in that domain is extensive. One of the most systematic attempts at theorizing about political participation was made by Verba et al. (1995), who developed the Civic Volunteerism Model as a powerful, yet parsimonious way to explain causes of political participation. Verba et al. (1995) analyzed political participation trends and arrived at a conclusion that citizens do not participate in civics “because they can’t; because they don’t want to; or because nobody asked” (p. 269). Their model, designed to address all three of these engagement (or disengagement) mechanisms, conceptually consists of three parts: resources, engagement, and recruitment. As described by Verba and colleagues, resources are the most important in explaining participation and they include time, money, and civic skills. “Indeed, when inputs of time and money are coupled to civic skills, citizens become not only more likely to participate but also more
likely to be effective when they do” (p. 271). Engagement is the second factor, representing such psychological predispositions as political interest, political efficacy, civic values, and others. Finally, researchers emphasize networks of recruitment, which serve to engage individuals in politics by exposing them to requests for participation from friends, relatives, co-workers, acquaintances, and others.

It is impossible to fully understand all the causes of political participation (Verba et al., 1995), and no such attempt will be made in this manuscript. Instead, I will focus on several variables, some of which fall into one of the three broad categories suggested by Verba and colleagues, as well as variables that go beyond their Civic Volunteerism Model. I will specifically focus on the following variables that are known to be related (causally or correlationally) to both political news blog use and political participation: political interest, use of news media, political discussion, and political knowledge.¹

In order to examine mechanisms through which these variables influence political participation, it is helpful to think of such influence as being direct and indirect, as illustrated in Figure 2.1. In this section I first examine direct effects of these four variables on political participation, and then briefly discuss indirect effects.

Direct effect. All four variables analyzed here have been demonstrated to be strong positive predictors of political participation. Hard news use was shown by several researchers to directly and positively predict political participation (Eveland & Dylko, 2007; Scheufele et al., 2004). Scheufele et al. (2004) theorized that some of the explanations of impact of hard news use on political participation are increases in social
ties, sense of community integration, and mobilizing information offered to readers by news media.

The second variable is perhaps one of the most intuitive predictors of political participation - political interest. The positive relationship between political interest and political participation has been thoroughly documented by many scholars (Bimber, 2001; Eveland & Scheufele, 2000; Kim, Wyatt & Katz, 1999; Verba et al., 1995). In this country political participation is a voluntary activity that citizens may choose to engage in or to refrain from. Thus, it makes sense to expect that citizens need to have some interest in order to get involved - be it interest for career promotion, interest for betterment of society at large, interest in some narrow issue or cause, intellectual interest, etc.

The third variable is political knowledge, which was found to be a positive and direct predictor of political participation, even after controlling for efficacy (McLeod et al., 1999; Scheufele et al., 2003; Scheufele et al., 2004). However, none of the researchers clearly explicate the mechanism through which that happens. It can be hypothesized that understanding of political process, insight into the political issues being publicly debated, and awareness of how deeply such issues may affect different social groups may make individuals more motivated to participate in politics.

The last variable is political discussion. McLeod et al. (1999) have found evidence of such discussion to positively and directly impact political participation – a finding that was replicated by other researchers (Kim et al., 1999). One pathway through which it may positively and directly influence political participation is similar to
networks of recruitment - a primary element of Civic Volunteerism Model (Verba et al., 1995). As discussion frequency increases, the chances of individuals being asked to get involved in politics or "recruited," may also increase.

**Indirect effect.** There is also some evidence that all of these four variables can indirectly influence political participation. For example, scholars showed that news media use affects participation through increases in political knowledge (McLeod et al., 1999; Scheufele & Nisbet, 2002) and knowledge in turn, is known to lead to greater political participation – directly, as well as through increases in efficacy (McLeod et al., 1999; Scheufele et al., 2003). Political interest also was shown to influence political participation indirectly by increasing news consumption (McLeod et al., 1999). As a result of increased news consumption, political knowledge levels increase, and political knowledge increases lead to increases in the levels of political efficacy and consequently in political participation (McLeod et al., 1999; Scheufele et al., 2003). In addition, political discussion also may influence political participation through increases in political knowledge and increase in hard news consumption (McLeod et al., 1999).

Newspaper hard news consumption stands out as one of the greatest predictors of participation from general "hard news use" group (e.g., McLeod et al., 1996; McLeod et al., 1999; Scheufele, 2002). To understand how some specific medium (such as political news blogs) may influence political participation, it may be instructive to explore exactly why newspaper reading positively and so consistently predicts political participation.

It seems that the influence of newspaper reading on political participation can be explained on at least two levels: characteristics of newspapers and uses of the newspapers.
by their readers. On the one hand, it seems logical that if newspapers offer relatively substantive information that is organized in a manner conducive for comprehension and recall (Eveland & Scheufele, 2000), our reader may well develop a better knowledge of different issues, including politics. Also, if the readers consume relatively large amounts of information (in terms of frequency of reading and time spent with the newspaper), if they read newspapers for informational purposes (Chaffee & Frank, 1996), and if newspapers have relatively high amount of the mobilizing information (MI), then reading newspapers may have a positive effect on political participation. On the other hand, if newspapers lack informational content and readers use them mostly for entertainment, it is not too far fetched to suggest that their knowledge of politics will not increase and there will be no positive effect on political participation.²

Scholars have also identified numerous other variables that affect political participation, particularly such socioeconomic characteristics as education, income, age, and gender (Bimber, 2001; McLeod, Daily, Guo, Eveland, Bayer, Yang & Wang, 1996; Verba et al., 1995).

It should be noted that there is a lack of studies that come anywhere near establishing causation in regards to political participation and its predictors.³ This is in part due to an almost universal reliance on survey-based research designs in political participation studies and in part due to utilization of cross-sectional survey data gathered at one point in time – both factors substantially limit the inferences that can be made from the data (Bimber, 2001; Eveland & Dylko, 2007; Kim et al., 1999; McLeod et al., 1996; Scheufele et al., 2003). Such studies can only address one causality condition –
correlation, while leaving time sequence and control for other variables in the dark. The study undertaken here comes closer to establishing causation, because a three-wave panel data used here makes it possible to address two causality conditions – correlation and time sequence.

*Internet and Democracy*

Before addressing political news blogs specifically, it is necessary to understand the overarching cyber-landscape in which blogs are situated by examining how the Internet can impact political participation. A discussion on whether the Internet’s gross effect on democracy is positive or negative seems to be overly simplistic, because, like with any technological invention, the gross impact depends on many factors, such as the specific content, features, uses, users, contexts in which this technology is utilized, etc. Besides, future technological breakthroughs and governmental regulation may render any such discussion obsolete and irrelevant in matter of months. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that research into the Internet’s impact on democracy produced mixed or even contradictory findings (DiMaggio, Hargittai, Neuman & Robinson, 2001; Tolbert & McNeal, 2003). For example, DiMaggio et al. (2001) argued that the “the Internet has no intrinsic effect on social interaction and civic participation” (p. 319). In contrast, Tolbert and McNeal (2003) concluded that “the Internet may nevertheless represent an important new venue for political information and communication, and counter declining civic engagement in America” (p. 184).

Nisbet and Scheufele (2004) confirmed results of their previous study (Scheufele & Nisbet, 2002) that found only modest positive impact of the Internet on political
participation. The researchers showed that Internet campaign information exposure had a positive impact on political efficacy and political knowledge, but this effect was moderated by political discussion. Bimber (2001) analyzed effects of getting news information from the Internet on political engagement and found that Internet news information positively influenced donating money to a candidate, party or some other group, but none of the other types of political participation. However, it should be noted that there is a lack of studies looking at what impact specific uses and elements of the Internet have on political participation.

Political News Blogs

Political news blogs are characterized by interactivity, meritocracy, accessibility, and other features (Dylko & Kosicki, 2006). Throughout this manuscript, political news blogs or simply political blogs will refer to the same phenomenon. Before starting to examine political news blogs, it is worth noting a striking similarity between political news blogs and another mass medium - political talk radio (Eveland & Dylko, 2007; Johnson & Kaye, 2004). Researchers noted that both of these “new” media are characterized by highly opinionated content, thorough analysis and scathing criticism of mainstream media, ideologically extreme audiences, and relatively high degree of involvement of the audience members either through calling in to the shows or leaving comments to posts (Dylko & Kosicki, 2006; Eveland & Dylko, 2007). Such similarities warrant considering implications of talk radio for political participation, especially because political talk radio has been extensively studied in the past. The mere fact of listening to a political radio talk show brings listeners closer to such established and
frequently used in research form of political participation as contacting mass media and
calling in talk shows. Research on political talk radio and political participation shows
that listeners of political talk radio shows are not an alienated and discouraged group of
citizens, but rather an active and politically attuned group that is more likely to participate
in politics than the non-listeners (Hofstetter, Donovan, Klauber, Cole, Huie, & Yuasa,
1994; Hollander, 1996; Pan & Kosicki, 1997).

Hofstetter et al. (1994) quite bluntly concluded that:
Frequent listeners to political talk radio are more interested in politics, pay more
attention to politics in mass media, vote more, and participate more than others in
a variety of political activities. (p. 477)

However, some scholars also acknowledge that political talk radio listeners and
callers are more cynical about government officials (Hollander, 1996). This fact,
however, may mobilize such listeners and callers for political action more than non-
listeners, because the listeners see a greater need for some sort of “intervention” in the
political process. Based on this discussion, it is worth considering how blog usage may
influence political participation. The political talk radio, as was mentioned, is very
similar political news blogs, which is the main interest of this study.

History. When the first blogs emerged in the mid 1990s (e.g., Jensen, 2003) they
were primarily web pages that contained many links and offered mostly “personal
information” (Dearstyne, 2005, p. 39). One of the first online diarists was Justin Hall, who
in 1994 created a personal web page that quickly became popular because Hall frequently
updated it with extremely intimate details of his life. He helped start the personal web
publishing movement before it even got its official name - “weblogging.”
The first powerful manifestation of the influence of blogs came in 2002, during a political scandal involving Trent Lott, a conservative Senator from Mississippi. The then-Senate majority leader Lott gave a speech at Senator Strom Thurmond’s 100th birthday party, in which he praised the Dixiecrat platform of Thurmond’s 1948 presidential campaign (Williams & Delli Carpini, 2004). The remarks of the Mississippian went largely unnoticed by the mainstream media (MSM); however, the situation was different in the blogosphere (Kahn & Kellner, 2004). Spearheaded by Josh Marshall, who blogs on www.talkingpointsmemo.com, numerous blogs (especially liberal ones) vehemently condemned the remarks, contributing to an unusually intense public outcry. Lott subsequently resigned from the Speaker’s position.

Since the Lott scandal, there were at least seven other major events that further elevated political news blogs’ profile. They include the 2003 war in Iraq, Republican and Democratic national conventions in summer 2004, “memogate” at CBS in September 2004, the resignation of Easton Jordan in September 2004, a fight against a controversial film about John Kerry in fall 2004, the “unmasking” of Jeff Gannon in January 2005, Harriet Miers’ nomination to the position of U.S. Supreme Court Justice, and several others. An intense media spotlight contributed to the exponential growth of the blogosphere’s popularity.

By a conservative estimate, there are currently more than sixty-three million blogs and they stay very active creating approximately 1.6 million posts daily (Technorati, 2006). Blogs are becoming more and more mainstream as shown by several surveys. A recent Gallup poll found that in 2005 about 20% of online Americans used blogs
frequently or occasionally and another 13% used blogs rarely, while the remaining 66% never used them (Gallup Poll, 2006). A different survey showed that of all Internet users, about one-fourth used alternative sources, such as blogs, to get campaign news in 2004 (Pew Internet and American Life: Project, 2005a). Pew (2005b) reported that 27% of American Internet users have read blogs by the end of 2004, with 9% saying they read political blogs “frequently” or “sometimes” (Pew, 2005b). Besides passively reading a blog, 12% of online Americans posted on the blogs and 7% created a blog (Pew, 2005b). However, in 2004 the majority of Internet users (62%) still did not know what the word “blog” means (Pew, 2005b).

Content of political news blogs. It is a rather complex task to determine whether, and particularly why, use of some medium may have an independent causal relationship with political participation. The reason is that causality claims like that can be authoritatively made only with controlled experiments, because only such experiments can isolate different characteristics of a medium and demonstrate the presence or absence of a causal link between characteristics of a medium and different outcomes, such as political participation (Eveland, 2003). However, available survey research, content analyses, and uses and gratifications literature on blog usage can still provide some useful clues into whether we should investigate the relationship between political blog usage and political participation.

Several points can be made from a qualitative content analysis of several prominent national and Ohio political news blogs. In their 2006 election coverage, such political news blogs as Right Angle Blog, Daily Kos, Talking Points Memo, Buckeye State
Blog, and Instapundit contained a lot of content that was characterized by insults, innuendos, assertions, and resembled shouting match, especially in the comments section. For example, Right Angle Blog made a post titled: “Ted Supports Pedophiles and Hires Pervs” (Right Angle Blog, 2006b). Similarly, the comment made on Buckeye State Blog by a reader in response to a post about The Cincinnati Inquirer endorsing Rep. Jean Schmidt showed lack of substance: “That paper is so unintelligent that along with the Dispatch it ranks as one of the saddest jokes in this state. Fifty cents for nothing” (Buckeye State Blog, 2006b). Another example is accusing President George W. Bush of making untruthful claims about the war in Iraq by liberal Talking Points Memo without providing any supporting evidence:

Gotta love the subtext of President Bush's excuse-making on 'the war'. Every earlier war was easy. Only mine is really tough. Gimme a break. (Talking Points Memo, 2006)

However, the blogs also contain factual information and substantiated arguments presented in professional and engaging manner. A cursory examination of Ohio and nationwide political news blogs clearly illustrates that during 2006 electoral campaign both types heavily relied on mainstream news media content. For example, blogs on numerous occasions extensively quoted parts of news stories from The Columbus Dispatch, Wall Street Journal, The Canton Repository, The Cleveland Plain Dealer and other news outlets, sometimes posting articles in their entirety, such as a post on Right Angle Blog containing an entire story on the debate between Ken Blackwell and Ted Strickland that was published in The Columbus Dispatch on October 15, 2006. In another instance, Buckeye State Blog made a post on October 22, 2006 in which it quoted three
paragraphs from the Associated Press report on Blackwell's campaign strategy as well as some commentary:

That's the lede in the weekend Blackwell campaign road report from the Associated Press:

BELLEFONTE, Ohio - Ken Blackwell is campaigning backward. In the two weeks leading up to the Nov. 7 election, the Republican candidate for governor is concentrating on his base after weeks of trying to cut into Democratic leads in Ohio's urban counties. The move comes amid reports that conservatives have grown weary of the GOP in light of scandals in Washington and Columbus.

... Blackwell gave a motivational speech to Logan County Republicans on Saturday, telling his troops that polls have been wrong before. Indeed, in a late October poll in 1994, when he ran his first statewide campaign for treasurer, Blackwell trailed his opponent by 5 percentage points. He won that election with 54 percent of the vote.

To see why Blackwell's tale of 1994 is misleading (Some would say, a lie, be sure to read this story I posted on earlier.) (Buckeye State Blog, 2006a)

Many of the blog posts also contained mobilizing information, which was defined as "any information that allows people to act on the attitudes they already have" (Lemert & Ashman, 1983), such as the post on Right Angle Blog, specifying a detailed schedule of Ken Blackwell for October 25, 2066 (Right Angle Blog, 2006a). Trying to engage more supporters in the campaign, blogs often contained posts and comments that explicitly called for some political action and resembled an interpersonal discussion, in which individuals exchanged information or tried to motivate one another. For example, in its reaction to a post on Buckeye State Blog about negative media coverage of Mike Devine, a reader named "AmberCat" posted the following comment, representative of many others:

Stop cowering in awe of their might and cunning and go do some canvassing or phone-banking. Call your nearest Strickland or coordinated campaign headquarters and find out if there's a canvassing team for any of the candidates
going out this afternoon. I just saw a team for Sherrod Brown leaving from
the East Side Cleveland office about an hour and a half ago. Jennifer Brunner
teams are going out today. There are probably others. I'll bet there's a phone bank
going on too. I'm heading out soon to distribute yard signs. (Buckeye State Blog, 2006c)
To which another reader responded:
You can also sign up here and we will have plenty for you to do. Don't forget all
of the General Assembly races along with the statewides. Democrats don't win
with dollars, they win with footsteps. :) And we need to keep it up even after the
election... (Buckeye State Blog, 2006c)

The above discussion illustrates that Ohio and national political news blogs have
a potential to positively affect political participation through increases in news media
consumption, increases in political discussion, offering of mobilizing information, and
appeals to get involved often made in the posts and comments. It should be noted
however, that any inferences from the above examples should be made with caution,
since the examples were drawn unsystematically. Examples and examination of several
quantitative content analyses of political news blogs will be offered below.

If we talk about news content, blogs are different from traditional media, but such
difference lies not in fundamental “qualitative” distinctions, but rather in “quantity” of
some elements present in blogs, as compared to traditional media. In other words, most of
the media have similar or even the same elements and features, however, some of these
elements and features are more utilized in one medium than in another. For example,
blogs like any other online-based mass medium contain hyperlinks, however, it seems as
though blogs utilize such hyperlinking much more extensively than online newspapers.
Also, many mainstream media sites now offer readers an opportunity to comment on the
articles, however, this “conversation-like” characteristic seems to have much more
extensive presence in the blogosphere than anywhere else. Also, this “difference in
degree” is exemplified by the following: blogs adhere much less to the notions of objectivity or even civility, they are less susceptible to advertiser pressures, and are less bound by geographic constraints (at least in comparison to local television and press) than MSM (Dylko & Kosicki, 2006). Also, often maintained by a single person from his or her living room, blogs are not characterized by bureaucracy and operational procedures inherent in traditional media.

How do these characteristics impact the content of political news blogs? Some evidence suggests that fundamentally the content of blogs and the content of traditional media are not that different. Lee (2006) examined agendas of prominent conservative and liberal political blogs and found that in comparison to mainstream media, the content (operationalized as the presence of coverage of certain issues) in both blogs and MSM was fundamentally the same. Correlations of issues covered by such blogs as Little Green Footballs, Captain’s Quarters, PoliPundit, Wizbang, Washington Monthly, One Good Move, The Left Coaster, and Swing State Project and issues covered by The New York Times, CNN, Associated Press, and Time were very high, +.93 (p. 18). From such findings we can conclude that political news blogs emphasize similar issues as elite media, and therefore, may be as effective at educating citizens about those issues. Such scenario was examined by Eveland and Dylko (2007), who found no relationship between political knowledge and reading of political blogs, however they acknowledged that such null funding could be the result of their specific operationalization of knowledge (factual political knowledge as conceptualized and operationalized by Delli Carpini and Keeter (1993)).
One of the key ways mass media can facilitate greater political participation is by offering audiences more mobilizing information. Some initial studies of MI online are not very supportive of the utopian perspective on Internet-based media. Hoffman (2006) compared amounts of MI in traditional newspapers and their online versions and found no significant difference, concluding that online newspapers simply contain "shovelware" content that is not much different from what is available in traditional printed format.

In regards to blogs, Yamamoto (2006) hypothesized that because blogs were a somewhat different type of mass media, unrestrained by space limitations or obligations to appear "objective," they should be able to provide more MI than traditional newspapers. In his comparative analysis of MI content in newspapers and weblogs, the researcher analyzed MI related to Hurricane Katrina in two Louisiana newspapers and two hurricane-focused weblogs, and found mixed results that showed blogs as containing more of the so-called tactical MI, while newspapers containing more of identificational MI. No significant difference was found in locational MI.5

The mixed results may have a two-pronged explanation. First, as the author pointed out, examining just two blogs out of a universe of dozens of millions (Technorati, 2006) may not produce generalizable findings. Second, the news context was very unique, in the sense that Hurricane Katrina was a major disaster that destroyed several coastal cities in Louisiana and Mississippi, as well as put New Orleans under water, killing thousands of people. The disaster mobilized the nation, as well as the media, which could have resulted in unrepresentative amounts of MI content in traditional press.
Due to such limitations, it is still plausible to expect blogs, particularly political news blogs, to contain more MI than other forms of mass media (Yamamoto, 2006).

*Blog uses.* What are the motivations of people who turn to the political blogosphere for news? Currently available data on political blog uses and gratifications is very limited. Johnson and Kaye (2004) found that blog readers use blogs perhaps because they find them more credible than any other sources of news information. One study specifically examined uses and gratifications of blog users, operationalized as people who both read and maintain blogs (Seltzer & Mitrook, 2006). The study, based on an unrepresentative survey of college students, found that blog use (general blogs, not political news blogs in particular) by students correlated with such motives of Internet use as interacting with people and also finding people with similar interests. The study did not find high correlations between blog usage and such Internet use motivations as staying informed about events. Such a finding is not entirely unexpected, because political blogs are read by a small percentage of all blog users (Pew, 2005b), and therefore it is expected that informational use of blogs on an aggregate level is not a major motivation for using blogs. Also, combining people who read blogs and people who maintain blogs into one category could further depress reported informational uses of the blogs, because individuals who maintain blogs are not doing it to learn about news (Pew, 2006), while individuals who read political news blogs should be more likely to do so for informational purposes.

In contrast, a study by Kaye (2005) that relied upon a convenience sample of Internet users, showed that weblog use was predicted by political surveillance and
information seeking and media checking, among several others. Therefore, it is plausible to suggest that blogs, especially political news blogs, are indeed used for informational purposes.

Hypotheses. As the above discussion illustrates, reading political news blogs does have some promise for increasing levels of political participation primarily because of high levels of MI in blogs (at least comparable to MI level in newspapers), which makes it practically easier to get involved in concrete political activities, and because blogs are read at least in part because of their informational component. Therefore, as depicted in Figure 2.2, it is hypothesized that:

H1: Reading political news blogs will directly and positively affect political participation.

However, reading political news blogs may also have an indirect impact on participation. As was thoroughly demonstrated above, political knowledge and discussion are both powerful predictors of political participation. Eveland and Dylko (2007) found that blog reading is closely linked to “blog discussion” that occurs when a user posts comments on the blogs and when user engages in discussions by email or other means. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H2: Positive effect of reading political news blogs on political participation will be mediated by political discussion.

The researchers (Eveland & Dylko, 2007) found no evidence that blog reading leads to increased levels of political knowledge, however, they pointed out that such a finding may be due to their particular operationalization of knowledge. Also, as was
described earlier, research by Lee (2006) showed that the content of several prominent blogs is similar to that of elite news media, which makes it at least possible that blogs may produce similar effects in regards to political knowledge as the elite media (this, of course, is based on the assumption that the content of news media is important to changes in levels of knowledge).

Finally, Kaye (2005) showed that political surveillance and information seeking and media checking were among motivations that predicted blog usage. Therefore, it is plausible that political news blogs are indeed used for informational purposes, which makes it even more plausible to expect increases of political knowledge as a result of increasing blog use.

Based on the above analysis and based on a finding (replicated by many studies, e.g., McLeod et al., 1999; Scheufele et al., 2003; Scheufele et al., 2004) that political knowledge predicts political participation it is hypothesized that:

H3: Positive effect of reading political news blogs on political participation will be mediated by political knowledge.

Finally, as mentioned above, blog users were shown to consume more news online than nonreaders, making it plausible that there is something about blog reading that may produce greater news consumption. As suggested by Eveland and Dylko (2007) blogs and MSM have a symbiotic relationship, because blogs often utilize material from MSM by commenting, criticizing, and hyperlinking to it. Such symbiosis may create a situation where exposure to blog content may increase news media consumption, assuming that hyperlinks present in blog posts are utilized by blog readers. This increase
in news media consumption may be contrary to some bloggers’ original intentions, because these bloggers often severely criticize mainstream media’s content. However, despite the intention, the final outcome may be that blog reading leads to greater news media exposure.

Also, as demonstrated above, news use is a well-known predictor of political participation (Eveland & Dylko, 2007) due to availability of MI in news content, due to increases in social ties, and increases in sense of community integration resulting from news exposure (Scheufele et al., 2004). Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H4: Positive effect of reading political news blogs on political participation will be mediated by hard news consumption.
CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Data Collection

A random-digit-dial three-wave panel survey of Ohio residents was conducted with wave 1 taking place in September, wave 2 in October, and wave 3 right after the election in November 2006. Wave 1 consisted of 603 complete interviews; wave 2 consisted of 387 complete interviews that were obtained among respondents from the first wave. Finally, for the wave 3, 270 complete interviews were obtained among respondents from the first and second waves.

Respondents were asked to name a city, which they were from and of all the respondents during wave 1, 6.5% were from Cincinnati, 5.7% were from Columbus, 3.6% were from Cleveland, 2.4% from Dayton, 2.3% from Toledo, 2.1% from Akron, 1.3% from Westerville, 1.1% from Dublin, less than one percent from Lima, Loveland, Medina, North Royalton, Sylvania, Warren, Wooster, and 66.1% of the respondents were from some other cities or towns. These locales were not mentioned here because only 3 or less individuals mentioned each one of them as the town or city that they were from.
Finally, during wave 1, 29.8% of respondents indicated that they think of themselves as Republicans, 33.5% as Democrats, 28.8% as Independents, 3.4% said they did not have any preference, and 1.5% said that they belonged to some other party.

The response rate was designed to conform to the American Association of Public Opinion Research's (AAPOR) Standard Definitions: Final Dispositions of Case Codes and Outcome Rates for Surveys (2004 edition). Wave 1 AAPOR Response Rate 4: Using the 2,951 known eligible households as the comparison, the 612 completed and partially completed interviews represent a 20.7% response rate. If a portion of the telephone numbers that were classified as "unknown eligibility" is included in the response rate, the rate becomes 15.0%. Wave 2 AAPOR Response Rate 4: Using the 612 known eligible households as the comparison, the 389 completed interviews represent a 63.5% response rate. Wave 3 AAPOR Response Rate 4: Using the 389 known eligible households as the comparison, the 273 completed and partially completed interviews represent a 70.2% response rate.

The first wave of this study used a random telephone sample of residents living in the state of Ohio. This sample was purchased from Survey Sampling, Inc. and was screened of many non-residential numbers (such as businesses and non-working telephone numbers) by Survey Sampling, Inc. The second and third wave of this study used the completed and some of the partially completed interviews as the sample. Twelve dialing attempts were made to reach eligible households to complete interviews in the first wave and up to 22 dialing attempts were made for subsequent waves.
Variables

This study focused on six central political and communication variables.

Political news blog use. Political news blog usage was an indicator of how often an individual utilized Ohio political news blogs in the last week (see Appendix for the exact wording). The mean of this variable was 0.10 (SD = 0.69) in Wave 1 and 0.14 (SD = 0.81) in Wave 2, with median and mode of 0 for both waves. Due to such skewness, the variable was converted into a dichotomy with people who read blogs (coded 1) and those who did not read blogs (coded 0) in the previous week. After recoding, the mean of the new variable for wave 1 respondents was 0.04 (SD = 0.19), and for wave 2 respondents it was 0.04 (SD = 0.19).

News use. News use is the frequency of using print news media and it was operationalized as newspaper news use during the prior week. For wave 1 the mean number of days that respondents read newspaper was 3.69 (SD = 2.95); for wave 2 the mean was 3.59 (SD = 3.03).

Political knowledge. Political knowledge was conceptualized in this study as knowledge of local political candidates’ positions on different issues. One sample question for this measure was: “Where would you place Ken Blackwell’s position on gay and lesbian couples? Does he believe that...,” with three response options: “they should be allowed to legally marry,” “they should be allowed to legally form civil unions, but not marry,” and “there should be no legal recognition of their relationships” (see Appendix for other items). The correct answers were coded as 1s and incorrect as 0s. The cumulative knowledge index was created by adding up the correct responses. The mean
score on the political knowledge index during wave 1 was 2.29 ($a = 0.68$; $SD = 1.94$), and during wave 2 it was 3.02 ($a = 0.66$; $SD = 1.98$).

**Political discussion.** Political discussion was an indicator of how frequently an individual engaged in discussions on political topics. For the wave 1 the average respondent engaged in political discussion about 2.34 times in the previous week ($SD = 2.14$); for the wave 2 the average was 2.77 ($SD = 2.32$).

**Political participation.** Political participation was conceptualized here as an involvement in different facets of political sphere and aimed at influencing political process or public policy. It was a five-item measure, created by summing up “yes” responses to the standard five “yes or no” questions, such as whether individual voted in last elections or volunteered to work for a campaign. Combining all five items into a single measure is warranted here because all of the items, though perhaps tapping slightly different aspects of the “political participation” construct, seem to be normatively desirable behaviors in a democracy, because all are aimed at influencing political process or public policy (as conceptualized in this paper), and because combining self-reports of voting with self-reports of other types of political involvement into a single index is a standard practice in communication research (Eveland & Dylko, 2007; Kim et al., 1999; McLeod et al., 1996; McLeod et al., 1999; Moy et al., 2004; Scheufele et al., 2004). Political participation was measured only on the wave 3, and the mean was 1.44 ($a = 0.65$; $SD = 1.11$).

**Control variables.** Socio-demographic variables and campaign interest are known to be strong predictors of political participation (McLeod et al., 1999; Verba et al., 1995).
Therefore, the following variables will be controlled in all multivariate analyses: gender, income, education, age, and political interest. Political interest was a one-item measure of interest in Ohio political campaigns, measured on a 3-point scale, with higher scores indicating more interest. For the wave 1 respondents the mean political interest score was 2.31 (SD = 0.95), and for the wave 2 respondents it was 2.43 (SD = 0.90). In this study, as shown in Table 3.1, among respondents who completed just the wave 1, there were 45.37 percent males, and the average respondent was 50.60 (SD = 16.09) years of age, having education of between “some college” and “college graduate” (M = 4.11, SD = 1.24), and earning $59,394.61 (SD = 77,488.30) per year. Among respondents who completed wave 1 and 2, there were 34.17 percent males, and the average respondent was 47.34 (SD = 14.76) years of age, having education of between “some college” and “college graduate” (M = 4.16, SD = 1.21), and earning $65,495.37 (SD = 79,548.08) per year. Finally, based on the wave 1 responses, among the group of individuals who completed all 3 waves, there were 41.95 percent males, with a mean age of 55.61 (SD = 15.22), having education of between “some college” and “college graduate” (M=4.40, SD = 1.26), and earning $68,485.83 (SD = 86,249.02) per year.

Plan of Analysis

It is important to determine whether time lags between waves of data coincide with time lags required for actual hypothesized causal mechanisms to manifest themselves. Theoretically, one-month lags between waves do not seem to be perfect lags to detect how (some of) our independent variables may influence dependent variables. For example, it seems that one-month lag may not coincide with the actual period it takes
for blog usage to influence political knowledge, discussion, and news use. It seems that it should take short period of time (days or even hours) for people to start discussing something interesting that they may have read on blogs – as opposed to weeks or months. Also, it should take literally minutes or seconds for people to learn new material after they have read it on blogs. Finally, news use should increase almost synchronously with increases in blog reading, assuming that blog users click on the hyperlinks. For these reasons, as suggested by Finkel (1995), I predict dependent variables from wave 2 with independent variables from the same wave. These tests may more accurately represent the short time lags that it takes for blogs to influence political knowledge, discussion, and news use.

The one-month lag necessary for direct effect of blog usage on political participation to occur also seems plausible, since becoming more participant in politics takes a little more time and effort than for example engaging in more political discussion or news media use. Especially, in regards to our operationalization of political participation, it seems reasonable to expect several weeks or even months to elapse before people can increase their rate of buying and displaying bumper stickers or buttons with political messages, for citizens to participate in more rallies, volunteer more for candidates or parties, and of course, vote in November elections, which occurred two months after the first wave of data collection. Therefore, predicting political participation from data gathered one and two months ago seems to reflect the underlying real-life processes.
Finally, if we want to move closer to establishing causality in regards to mediated effects, conceptually it would be ideal to have some variable from wave 1 (blog use) to influence some mediator variable in wave 2 (for example political knowledge), and this mediator variable to influence outcome variable in wave 3 (political participation), while controlling for variable from wave 1 (blog use), thus following the logical time sequence. However, as the above discussion on time lags suggests, theoretically mediator variables (knowledge, discussion, and news use) and blog use should all come from the same wave, preferably wave 2 (so that their prior values can be controlled). In this paper, I chose to use the latter, “theoretically correct,” way of testing mediation effects, primarily in order to maximize chances to accurately describe any effect of blog reading on participation.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses

To see what impact attrition rate may have had on the quality of the data, I start analysis by looking at differences between respondents who completed just the first wave, waves 1 and 2, and waves 1, 2, and 3. The Games-Howell Post hoc procedure was used to identify possible differences between respondents completing different waves on such variables as gender, age, education, income, political interest, and blog use. The Games-Howell method was used because it is known to be powerful and robust, even when samples sizes and sample variances are unequal (Hayes, 2005; Field, 2005), as is the case here.

As can be seen from Table 3.1, there was a significant difference in age in two pairs of groups of individuals, $F(2, 580) = 13.21, p < .001$. The Games-Howell test revealed that there was a significant difference between the mean age of respondents who completed only the first wave and all the three waves, with differences between the means of the two groups equal to 5.01, $p < .01$. There was also a significant difference between the mean age of respondents who completed only two waves, and those who
completed all of the waves. This difference between the means of the two groups was equal to 8.27, \( p < .001 \).

There was a significant difference in education in one pair of groups of individuals, \( F(2, 574) = 3.57, p < .05 \). The Games-Howell test revealed that there was a significant difference only between the mean education of respondents completing just the first wave and all three waves, with the difference between the means equal to 0.29, \( p < .05 \).

Also, levels of interest were significantly different across the two pairs of groups of respondents, where more interested individuals completed more waves, Welch\(^8 \) \( F(2, 178) = 8.74, p < .001 \). Respondents to just the first wave differed by 0.43 from respondents to all three waves on their political interest, \( p < .001 \). Also, respondents to the first and the second waves differed from respondents to all the three waves by 0.36 on political interest scale, \( p < .05 \).

Finally, there was a significant difference in blog usage across two pairs of groups of individuals, Welch \( F(2, 398) = 4.25, p < .05 \). The Games-Howell test showed that the group of individuals responding to just the first wave had a mean blog usage score different by 0.04 from the mean of the group of individuals who completed waves 1 and 2. This difference was marginally significant, \( p = .06 \). There was also a statistically significant difference of 0.04 between the means of group completing two waves and the group completing three waves, \( p < .05 \). Table 4.2 presents results similar to those in Table 1, but it uses wave 2 data as a baseline.
Because the above analysis showed that the differences were not consistent across most of the examined variables, and in order to utilize as many cases as possible (for statistical power purposes), analyses were based on data from all of the individuals, regardless of whether they have completed just the wave 1, just the waves 1 and 2, or all three waves.

In order to assess the general pattern of the data, several correlation analyses were run on data from waves 1 and 2 (see Tables 3 and 4). The data are characterized by patterns generally consistent with the previous research on political participation and political communication (Verba et al., 1995). For example, political participation positively and significantly correlated with gender (where males participated more than females), age, education level, income, political interest (waves 1 and 2), political discussion (waves 1 and 2), and political knowledge (waves 1 and 2). However, news use did not positively correlate with political participation in either wave.

Political news blog use was also correlated with political discussion (within-wave correlation for waves 1 and 2) and political knowledge (within-wave correlation for the wave 1 only). Blog use was not correlated with political interest, news use, and political knowledge in either wave. It was correlated with participation in wave 1, but was not correlated with participation in wave 2.

Due to the fact that blogs are only about ten years old, and because political news blogs are even younger, it is important to understand who uses them, and how such individuals differ from the rest of the population. As can be seen from Table 4.5, blog readers and nonreaders from Wave 1 of the survey differed on several demographic and
political variables. First, there was a marginally statistically significant difference between blog readers and nonreaders on the level of education, with blog readers having completed more years of formal schooling. No differences were found between the two groups on income, gender, and age.

Now, moving to political communication variables (measured in wave 1), the data shows that blog readers are more politically interested than the nonreaders. They also discuss and know more about politics than the nonreaders (see Table 4.5). Based on a OLS regression analysis, where blog use from wave 2 was a predictor of political participation in wave 3 (reported in Table 4.9) and T-test of differences between wave 1 blog readers and nonreaders (reported in Table 4.5), political blog readers were also marginally more participant in politics than their non-reading counterparts. No difference between the two groups was found in news use.

_Hypotheses Testing_

Ordinary Least Squares multiple regression analyses were utilized to determine whether blogs had direct or indirect positive effects on political participation. In 3 regression models (see Tables 5, 6, and 7), several variables (political knowledge, political discussion, and hard news consumption) were used as dependent variables in some regressions and independent variables in others. This was not done to investigate, or even imply reverse causality. Such procedure was necessary because these variables are theoretically highly correlated and included in each equation purely for control purposes.
Multiple regression analysis indicates that the first hypothesis, which predicted that blog reading from wave 2 will directly and positively impact political participation in wave 3, was marginally supported (see Figure 4.1). Blog reading positively and directly (although marginally) affected political participation, even after controls for demographic and political communication variables (see Table 4.9), $b = 1.097, t(79) = 1.837, p = .07$.

The second hypothesis was also marginally supported - positive effect of reading political news blogs during wave 2 on political participation at wave 3 was partially mediated by political discussion during wave 2. A widely cited and used approach to test for mediation, suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986), was utilized for all of the mediation analyses. This method, although criticized for low statistical power (MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West & Sheets, 2002), provides an elegant and straightforward test of mediation that is used by an overwhelming number of psychology researchers (Shrout & Bolger, 2002). Second hypothesis is supported, because all of the conditions necessary to claim mediation were present (Hayes, 2005). First, Table 4.9 shows evidence for direct and positive (but only marginal) effect of blog reading on political participation, after controlling for demographic and political communication variables. Second, as can be seen in Table 4.6, blog reading positively affected political discussion, even after controlling for demographic variables, news use, political knowledge, political interest, and prior levels of political discussion (wave 1), $b = 1.919, t(115) = 2.285, p < .05$.

Third, as Table 4.9 shows, our mediator (political discussion), marginally, but positively affected political participation, while controlling for demographic
characteristics, blog reading, news use, political knowledge, and political interest, \( b = .107, t(79) = 1.906, p = .06. \) Fourth, partial mediation is evidenced by the finding that direct effect is smaller than the total effect, but is not zero (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Hayes, 2005).9

Hypothesis 3 was not supported. Positive effect of reading political news blogs on political participation was not mediated by political knowledge, because two essential mediation conditions, as outlined by Baron and Kenny (1986), were not met. First, as shown in Table 4.8, blog reading did not affect political knowledge. Second, as Table 4.9 shows, political knowledge did not have any positive effect on political participation.

Hypothesis 4 was also rejected. Positive effect of reading political news blogs on political participation was not mediated by hard news consumption. Again, as was the case with political knowledge above, several of the key conditions for establishing mediations were absent. First, as Table 4.7 shows, reading political news blogs did not predict news consumption. Second, as Table 4.9 shows, news use did not affect political participation.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This study sought to understand the phenomenon of political news blogs and probe their ability to engage citizens in politics. As was described above, blogs positively and directly influenced political participation, however, such influence was only marginally significant. Also, three out of four mediation mechanisms by which blog reading was hypothesized to indirectly affect political participation were rejected, while only one, where political discussion mediated positive impact of blogs on participation, received marginal support. Why were so many expectations not met?

It is worth discussing why during wave 1 blog reading was correlated with wave 1 political knowledge, while the wave 2 blog reading (used for the majority of the analyses) was not correlated with wave 2 political knowledge. It is possible that blog reading during wave 1 was related to political knowledge because in the beginning of the campaign there was a need to inform the public about where the candidates stood on major issues. As, time went on, however, such need decreased, as public became familiar with candidates' issue stances.

The common practice in traditional political journalism is to focus on the "horse-race" aspect of the political campaigns, rather than on the coverage of the "issues"
(Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). One of the reasons for such practice is that reporters believe that “issues” are “old news,” something that everyone already knows, and therefore, something not worth rehashing. In regards to blogs, the individuals who read blogs are highly interested and knowledgeable about politics. Therefore, blog reading by itself may not increase political knowledge, because blog writers may believe that such an “elite” group of citizens as blog readers, may already have high levels of knowledge and understanding of the political world, and thus it is not worth rehashing the hard facts that the audience presumably already knows – all of which results in content that lacks factual substance.

An alternative scenario is that such belief may lead to content characterized by a very detailed and perhaps esoteric factual information that is much more complicated than the mere statements of where candidates stand on different issues. For example, blog writers may be discussing how candidates changed their positions on some arcane issues in the past, and this may lead to an actual increase of political knowledge. However, in order to detect such an increase the knowledge should be operationalized differently than it is in the present study.

Yet, another explanation for there being no statistically significant path from blog use to political knowledge during wave 2 is that as the campaign went on, blog content was characterized more by scandalous content that reflected the highly contentious campaign, marked by accusations of condoning corruption and pedophilia, rather than the civilized political discourse that was also taking place in 2006. Such focus may have
shifted the content of the blogs in favor of excessive negativity and unsubstantiated accusations, thus preventing individuals from learning about candidates’ issue stances.

For news use, individuals who used Ohio blogs may have become turned off from consuming more hard news due to frequent practice of blogs to criticize mainstream media. *Post hoc* multiple regression analyses was conducted to probe for possibility that blog reading may lead to more negative evaluation of one’s newspaper. Marginal support for such claim was found, with people who read blogs during wave 2 tending to have a more negative opinion about the daily newspaper they read most often during wave 3, than people who did not read blogs, even after controlling for age, gender, income, education, political discussion, political knowledge, political interest, and hard news consumption, \(^{10} b = 2.012, t(21) = 1.870, p = .08.\) However, it can also be argued, that people who initially did not think highly of their newspaper, may have tended to turn to alternative news outlets, such as blogs. However, such scenario cannot be tested with this data, due to lack of appropriate newspaper fairness assessment variables during waves 1 and 2.

Finally, it is possible that wave 2 blog use did not affect wave 2 political knowledge and wave 2 news use because the last two variable may have been very stable over time. Indeed, as can be seen in Tables 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 political knowledge and news use at wave 2 were predicted by political knowledge and news use at wave 1, respectively, while displaying the larger regression coefficients than any other variables. In other words, for this sample political knowledge and news use may have remained roughly unchanged throughout the campaign, regardless of blog reading.
Other paths that were expected to be positive and significant and that were not confirmed were the influence of news use on political participation and the influence of political knowledge on political participation. One possible explanation for such null finding is that as campaigns grew more negative and scandalous, people started being disillusioned with politics. In other words, the more Ohioans used traditional media and learned more about political candidates, the more pessimistic they became about the political process and the political figures involved in such a process. Such increasing disillusionment and pessimism may have cancelled out the positive impact of traditional news use on political participation. It is quite plausible that news use not leading to greater political participation was not simply a fluke, but rather a reflection of objective reality in the unique context of the 2006 Ohio election. It is possible that, perhaps, news content during this specific election was not characterized by high levels of MI, or that the news information was more scandal-oriented than factual and issue-oriented. Both of these conditions would prevent news use from positively predicting political participation. One possible scenario may contradict such reasoning - as people become more exposed to scandalous and negative information, they may in fact become more energized and intent to change the status quo. However, this scenario seems plausible primarily in situations where only one side in a political contest is portrayed negatively. When both sides are portraying each other negatively, it is likely that people become disillusioned with the entire process and with all of the actors involved, thus choosing not to engage in it.
Despite the mixed conclusions that are warranted from this study about the impact of blogs on political participation, several findings do shed important light on who the blog readers are. This study found blog users during wave 1 to be generally more educated, and to be what can be thought of as an “elite” and a desirable group of citizens from a normative standpoint – more interested in politics, more knowledgeable about politics, more participatory in politics, and talking more about politics. Such findings (with the exception of political knowledge) are consistent with the previous research on blog users (Eveland & Dylko, 2007).

Such findings warrant a closer examination of relationship between blog reading and other communication and political variables. It may be argued that blog reading may not necessarily produce greater news consumption, or political interest, or political knowledge, but rather be caused by those factors. It is plausible to suggest that individuals who are more knowledgeable about politics, who tend to talk more about politics, who are more interested in politics, and who consume more of general news media content to start with, are more likely to turn to such narrow and specialized medium as political news blogs. Indeed, the choices of where and what information to obtain are numerous in the cyberspace, and one has to select what he or she wants to expose oneself to. Such speculations are indirectly supported by previous research (Eveland & Dylko, 2007), as well as results in Table 4.5 that show blog readers to be a more educated, more politically attuned, more knowledgeable, and more participant group than the nonreaders.
Additionally, *Post hoc* logistic regression analyses (see Table 5.1) were conducted, and it was found that people who discussed politics more during wave 1, were more likely to read blogs during wave 1, while controlling for gender, age, income, education, political knowledge, political discussion, and hard news consumption. The same findings were replicated during wave 2. What this may mean is that individuals who are more inclined to discuss politics face-to-face are also more likely to read political news blogs, thus making reciprocal causality claim in regards to blog reading and political discussion plausible. However, as the Table 5.1 and Table 5.2 show, data do not warrant any reverse causality claims in regards to political interest and hard news consumption. No firm conclusions about reverse causal relationship between knowledge and blog reading can be made either, because results in Table 5.1 show that during wave 2 more knowledgeable individuals were less likely to read blogs, while Table 4.3 shows a positive correlation between blog reading and knowledge during wave 1, thus contradicting results from Table 5.1, at least at the first glance.

However, if we go back to the previous analyses of why blogs do not predict knowledge in wave 2, the fact that during wave 2 more knowledgeable individuals were less likely to read blogs and the fact that there is a positive correlation between blog reading and knowledge during wave 1 do not seem so paradoxical. As was previously suggested, individuals may have learned more from blogs earlier in the campaign when bloggers, along with mainstream media, tried to inform the public about the fundamental facts about the candidates (i.e., candidates’ issues stances). As campaign went on and number of unsubstantiated negative accusations in the blogosphere went up, people
knowledgeable about politics may have moved to other sources of information to satisfy their political news appetite.

**Strengths and Weaknesses**

One of the limitations of this study is the measurement of political participation, which was operationalized by combining five different items together. Operationalization employed in this project ignored several important ways one can get involved in politics. One is making donations and another one is contacting news media or public officials. Inclusion of these two items would make the index more reflective of such complex phenomenon as political participation.

Second limitation is the low response rate during the first wave of this study. The state of Ohio is known to be a “battleground” state during many political campaigns, and its residents are weary of political studies. This creates a possibility of the sample being composed of individuals with abnormally high levels of political interest. However, lack of Ohio Census data on political interest makes any comparisons or generalizability claims in that regard problematic.

Another weakness of this project is that like any other survey-based study, it does not come very close to establishing causality, because alternative explanations cannot be ruled out. Only experimental research can establish causality (Hayes, 2005). However, due to reliance on 3 waves of panel data, this study meets an additional “time-sequence” requirement necessary to claim causality, and therefore, can be judged as more authoritative (in terms of causality argument) than other cross-sectional studies of political blogosphere.
Also, this study makes many assumptions about political blog content. These assumptions can be verified only through systematic content analyses that would describe what the political blogosphere actually is like. However, political blogosphere is a very diverse and rich part of cyberspace that is constantly evolving due to technological changes and its dramatic growth over the last several years, as was described earlier. Therefore, systematic content analyses of political blogs would be extremely hard to conduct (such an analysis could be easier to conduct on a local level than on a national level).

Finally, the research center that collected the data for this study (University of Oklahoma Public Opinion Learning Laboratory) made an error in the placement of one of the question “jumps,” which prevented me from using the national blog use item to construct a general blog use index. As a result, I had to rely on the local blog use variable and this may have influenced the results reported in this study. For example, individuals reading Ohio political blogs may differ from individuals who read both Ohio blogs and national political blogs. The latter group may be broader and more representative in its composition, since national political blogs are much more popular and focus on topics that are more widely covered by national mainstream media than the local Ohio blogs. Also, Ohio-based political blogs may differ from national political blogs in content or structure, which may have an effect on the variables analyzed here. However, this limitation does not seem to be particularly severe, since some of the key variables dealt with Ohio politics as well (participation and knowledge).
Implications for the Field of Communications and Democracy

Several broader points should be made in regards to the media environment and the blogosphere. It is plausible that blogs have a clear potential to engage audiences into consumption of information much more effectively than any traditional media format. By communicating vertically (blog readers with blogger) as well as horizontally (readers with readers) during information consumption, as well as by co-creating content in a highly collaborative and interactive virtual environment, blog readers become much more active and engaged “consumers” of news. In fact, they become an essential part of online dialogue or discussion.

This new reality is currently spilling over into the traditional media world, as mainstream media are constantly adopting features pioneered by blogosphere and cyberspace enthusiasts. Examples of this transformation are not hard to find; several years ago all major news organizations embraced hypertextuality (Li, 1998), many started to incorporate media feeds (e.g., Palser, 2005), podcasting, RSS (e.g., Romano, 2005), online discussion forums (e.g., The New York Times, 2006), and options for individual customization of news content (The Los Angeles Times, 2006). Some evidence also indicates that such transformation may cause several important changes in how news media operate and what content they produce (Dylko & Kosicki, 2006). For example, the popularization and increasingly high profile of news gathered and shared online may lead to mainstream news media organizations trying to compete with low-brow news outlets, resulting in further tabloidization of mainstream news content. Additionally, the inclination to compete with various websites for scoops may shrink the news cycle and
produce what may be called as “journalism of speculation,” where news is not properly vetted first, but rather is rushed into the public domain, and only then verified. Such a trend may not seem to be very desirable from the traditional journalistic norms perspective. Some may argue that such an “old” perspective may have become irrelevant because despite the possibility of the news cycle becoming much shorter and innuendos and allegations abounding in the public domain, it has become increasingly easy to verify any information. The CBS scandal briefly mentioned above illustrates the ability of blogs to correct substantive errors made in real time very effectively and promptly.

All of the changes outlined above make blogs highly attractive to produce, consume, and study. Not only scholars and news media professionals are paying increasingly more attention to blogs. Politicians and narrow-issue experts are also embracing this form of communication more and more. This increasing popularity of the blogosphere makes it a powerful force in the democratic process. As this study demonstrates, blogs directly and positively influence political participation. Blogs also positively predict political discussion, which, as demonstrated by prior research, increases many normatively desirable outcomes, such as news consumption, political knowledge, and political participation. Also, as was mentioned above, reading blogs may increasingly promote political participation because more and more of such participation is done over the Internet.

However, blog enthusiasts should be somewhat cautious in regards to the overall effects of blogs on democracy. As prior research shows, blogs attract ideologically extreme segments of population (Eveland & Dylko, 2007) and bloggers tend to link to the
blogs that are ideologically similar to them (Adamic & Glance, 2005). All of this can lead to an increasingly selective exposure of individuals to just the information that they agree with. Such selective exposure may not improve political knowledge, but rather undermine it by perpetuating subjectivity, as well as by promoting closed-mindedness and political extremism, which can be harmful to democracy.

Results of this study have implications beyond just the blogs. This study confirmed the well-known trends in political communication research by showing positive correlations between political participation and age, education, income, political discussion, political interest, political knowledge, and being male. It was somewhat surprising to learn that in this sample, conservative ideology negatively correlated with political participation? One explanation for this is that perhaps because of the bad situation in Iraq and recent (national and statewide) political scandals within the Republican Party, conservatives were disheartened and less willing to participate in politics than liberals.

Directions for Future Research

Results of this study suggest that the influence of political news blogs on important political outcomes is ambiguous. Previous research by Eveland and Dylko (2007) showed that blog reading is inextricably intertwined with political discussion online. This study found that blog reading leads to greater levels of political discussion, but Post hoc analysis revealed that the opposite may also be true – political discussion may predict blog reading. Structural equation modeling techniques could be utilized in
the future research to sort out what models would be more consistent with the data – models where discussion leads to blog reading, or vice versa.

Blogs that invite readers to post their thoughts in the comments section are very similar to talk radio’s practice to allow listeners to call in the shows. Both activities engage readers to a greater extent and by their very nature bring audiences closer to such political participation activities as contacting politicians or writing for the news media, which is empirically confirmed (Pan & Kosicki, 1997). All this points to the fact that blogs are a “conversation-based” medium that is much less formal and much more participatory than any of the traditional news media, as was suggested by Dylko and Kosicki (2006).

What implications does this have for political participation? One is that blog reading may function as a surrogate political discussion and engage people in politics interpersonally. This study supports such conclusion by findings that blog reading leads to greater levels of political participation directly, as well as through political discussion. Such heavy discussion orientation may also promote those political participation activities that are reliant on interpersonal connections, as opposed to something else (i.e. MI). For example, it is plausible to suggest that political discussion may affect such “high-involvement” political activities as donating money or contacting officials more than it affects voting or signing petitions. This may be the case because individuals are exposed to requests for involvement during these conversations and personal requests were shown to be more effective at mobilizing individuals for political action than were
 impersonal requests (Gerber & Green, 2000). Exploring these issues may be useful if one wants to develop a more nuanced understanding of political participation.

Also, calling in talk-radio shows and posting comments on blogs may be thought of as actual political participation acts, as opposed to just the extensions of media use. This, combined with technological developments have spawned many non-traditional forms of political participation (linking to politically-oriented material from one’s websites; connecting, organizing, and participating in “virtual” political meetings; displaying political messages on a personal computer’s desktop, etc.), may call for updating of political participation operationalization to better reflect today’s political communication environment.

Finally, despite the effectiveness of the panel survey method employed here to get highly generalizable results and understand the population-wide dynamics of blog popularity, other methods should be employed to look at the phenomenon of blogs from a different perspective. Content analysis of political news blogs would be a very effective way to eliminate the need for assumptions about blogosphere’s content. Knowing what content blog users are actually exposed to would significantly advance our understanding of blogs’ potential to affect political process. Similarly, analyzing the structure and the “mix of attributes” (Eveland, 2003) found on news blogs would also serve the purpose of advancing our understanding of the true nature of blogs and their potential to influence political outcomes. Experimental studies would be ideal for this purpose.

Experimental studies would also help us move closer to establishing causality in regards to political participation and blog usage. While this study did go further in
establishing causality than most previous survey-based studies, only preliminary causality conclusions can be drawn from results reported here because this study did not address one key causality condition – elimination of alternative explanations.

Experimental studies on blogs and political participation can do it with great internal validity, and increasingly, with improving external validity since many of the traditional political participation activities are done online – a setting easily recreated in a laboratory environment.

The future of communications research into the blogosphere seems challenging, yet extraordinarily promising. The major challenge is that blogs are constantly evolving with new technological improvements being added very quickly, which means that the blogs of today may be completely transformed several years into the future. For example, today’s blogs have just started incorporating such technological possibilities as “diggs” or video/audio embedding on a massive scale. The first feature allows for blog entries to be read, discussed, and voted upon outside of that particular blog context. The second feature allows one to listen or watch multimedia content on the blog without the need for the video or audio content to be actually stored on the blog space provider’s server.

The possibilities of research directions into the blogosphere also seem impressive. One of the directions that interest this author in particular is using experiment-based methodology to look at how different attributes of blogs (or other similar conversational and interactive media) influence different political and social outcomes. For example, blogosphere is a complex media environment that is characterized by peculiar content, technological sophistication, presentational structure, graphics, and other elements. If we
take content, it will be extremely interesting to see how very personal and humorous tone that characterizes many blogs may influence political knowledge and political engagement, or how favoring such tone may correlate with different uses and gratifications for blog usage. We can also examine how criticism of content (mainstream news articles), as opposed to just neutral presentation of this content, may predict political learning or interest.

We can also look at the impact of different technological capabilities of a blog. For example, we can see how credible or effective at mobilizing a blog is if it has just the text, text with comments section, text with comments section and podcast availability, all of the above and video embedding, or any combination of the these and other technological characteristics.

Blogs are also characterized by unique journal-style presentation format where entries or posts are organized in reverse chronological order. Some of the interesting questions that can be asked by the political learning researchers are: How does such presentation format affect learning? What type of learning - factual vs. knowledge structure density (Eveland, Cortese, Park & Dunwoody, 2004) is more affected by this format? Also, does such format have any impact on trust or credibility perceptions? Finally, is it more engaging (in terms of keeping the level of reader’s attention and interest in the content high) than the standard section-based website organization?

Second direction of interest to this author is using content analyses and case studies to look at the dynamics of communication within and across blogs. One of the negative trends in today’s journalism, as was mentioned above, is the ever-shrinking
news cycle, which leads to less time that journalists can afford to research, vet, write, and follow up to their stories. They increasingly turn to superficial and easy to dig up material, which is easy to put together on a short notice. The quality of such work suffers. Blogs and other online news outlets are often blamed for contributing to such reduction of the news cycle, because they can break news much faster, due to their particular operational procedures. However, another thing that such media can do is make the news cycle more intense in terms of what type of research and writing can be done. For example, when several prominent blogs are analyzing some story or issue, as was the case with the CBS scandal, and if such blogs allow readers to participate in this analysis by contributing their thoughts or advice, the ultimate result may be that there are hundreds and hundreds of volunteer researchers, some of whom have highly expert and specialized knowledge, are working on the news narrative at the same time. Such collaborative research and writing, at its best may produce the journalistic product of much higher quality than that produced by even highly experienced reporters. However, at its worst such collaboration may perpetuate misinformation and baseless assertions. Looking at how blogs approach the research, analysis, and narrative construction during scandals, as well as during routine slow news days may offer many insights into what we can expect in the future.

Finally, the last promising research direction is the use of surveys and in-depth interviews to analyze how blogs and similar interactive media influence sociology of news. For example, Dylko and Kosicki (2006) demonstrated how blogs are capable of competing with mainstream news organizations for breaking and spreading news, as well
as capable of influencing public opinion. In their analysis of how blogs led the research and news dissemination push during the Memogate scandal at CBS, researchers showed that journalists frequently rely on blogs for cues as part of new intermedia agenda-setting process where blogosphere is recognized as an important player.

Examination of how journalists utilize these information outlets for various parts of their job (gathering news tips, verifying information, looking for alternative sources/angles, pilot-testing the possible angles for their own stories, etc.) will be informative. Some of the specific questions that need to be answered are: Why journalists use blogs? What types of blogs they use most often? What types of blogs do they recognize as most credible, or valuable, or insightful, etc.? How do they use blogs (anonymously vs. openly, posting vs. lurking)? What do they consider blogs to be – an unavoidable and legitimate form of new journalism or temporary and damaging deviation from journalistic norms? How do their organizations view blogs (do they allow journalists to blog as private individuals or employees; do their organizations have their voice in blogosphere)? Answering these and other questions will be an important update to the voluminous, but a somewhat outdated research on sociology of news.
ENDNOTES

1. Certain variables may not just cause participation, but also be caused by it. For an insightful discussion on reciprocal causality of several variables related to political participation, see Verba et al., 1995 (p. 276). Also see Finkel (1985).

2. Another important issue to consider is that even if newspapers possess all necessary informational attributes and their readers use newspapers exclusively for informational purposes - the overall impact of newspapers on political participation may be negligible if only a small percentage of citizens read the newspapers or they read newspapers very infrequently (perhaps, because purely informational content may be perceived as too “dry” and not particularly interesting.

3. One of very few studies that examined causal relationships involving political participation was study by Gerber and Green (2000), in which the authors relied on randomized field experiment to examine how canvassing leads to greater voter turnout. They found that face-to-face canvassing increased turnout more than any other form of canvassing. Also, see Eveland, Hayes, Shah and Kwak (2005), a study that compared several models to tackle the question of reciprocal causality between communication and political knowledge. The researchers found the unidirectional causal path that runs from interpersonal and mediated communication to political knowledge, to be the most empirically supported. Another study (Eveland & Thompson, 2006) also utilized a panel data and showed that even after numerous controls, frequency of discussion had a causal relationship with political knowledge.

4. Blogs are easy-to-use web-based tools that help create journal-style web pages that are typically arranged chronologically, personal in nature, and updated frequently. Some blogs are maintained by single individual, others have several authors, each of whom can add and edit content. Blog creators have the option of allowing readers to comment on material already there, often facilitating interaction not only between blogger and readers, but also between fellow readers as well. Thus, blogs are a kind of highly flexible and collaborative group writing project.

5. Yamamoto (2006) adopted definitions of Lemert (1984), who conceptualized locational MI as information describing time and place for some activity; identificational MI as information providing names of people and entities; and tactical MI as information containing behavioral models and suggestions.
6. Kaye (2005) conceptualized “political surveillance” as “keeping an eye on the political landscape, including reports on politicians’ stances and actions” (p. 84). She conceptualized “information seeking and media checking” as “actively searching out information about current issues” (p. 84) and comparatively analyzing weblog content and traditional media content.

7. However, despite a seemingly common-sense proposition that knowledge of how one can get involved should make it easier for one to get involved, research produced only inconclusive findings on the actual contribution of MI to political participation (Bybee, 1982).

8. Welch F is “a version of the F-ratio designed to be accurate when the assumption of homogeneity of variance has been violated” (Field, 2005, p. 749).

9. Direct effect ($b = 1.097$) is the regression coefficient that indicates effect of blog reading on political participation. The total effect the sum of the direct effect and indirect effect, which is calculated by multiplying effect of blog reading on political discussion ($b = 1.919$) and effect of political discussion on political participation ($b = .107$). Therefore, the total effect is $1.097 + (1.919 \times 0.107) = 1.302$.

Therefore, the direct effect (1.097) is smaller than the total effect (1.302), but is not equal to zero, which justifies the claim of partial mediation.

10. Fairness assessment of the newspaper one reads most often during wave 2 could not be controlled, because this variable was available only during wave 3.
LIST OF REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

OVERVIEW OF MEASURES USED
Political News Blog Use (Waves 1 and 2)

1. How many days last week did you get news or information from online blogs that discuss Ohio politics, such as Buckeye State Blog or Right Angle Blog?

News Use (Waves 1 and 2)

1. How many days last week did you read a print newspaper?

Political Knowledge (Waves 1 and 2)

1. Where would you place Ken Blackwell’s position on the minimum wage? Does he feel it should be (1) Increased, (2) Left as is, or (3) Abolished altogether?

2. Where would you place Ted Strickland on the minimum wage? Does he feel it should be (1) Increased, (2) Left as is, or (3) Abolished altogether?

3. Where would you place Ken Blackwell’s position on abortion? Does he believe that abortion should (1) Never be permitted, (2) Be permitted, but with many restrictions, (3) Kept as is, (4) Be permitted with just a few restrictions, or (5) Always permitted?

4. Where would you place Ted Strickland’s position on abortion? Does he believe that abortion should (1) Never be permitted, (2) Be permitted, but with many restrictions, (3) Kept as is, (4) Be permitted with just a few restrictions, or (5) Always permitted?

5. Where would you place Ken Blackwell’s position on gay and lesbian couples? Does he believe that (1) They should be allowed to legally marry, (2) They should
be allowed to legally form civil unions, but not marry, (3) There should be no legal recognition of their relationships?

6. Where would you place Ted Strickland’s position on gay and lesbian couples?
   Does he believe that (1) They should be allowed to legally marry, (2) They should be allowed to legally form civil unions, but not marry, (3) There should be no legal recognition of their relationships?

7. Where would you place Mike DeWine’s position on American troops in Iraq?
   Does he believe that (1) American troops should be brought home from Iraq immediately, (2) They should be brought home from Iraq in the next 2 years, or (3) They should stay in Iraq as long as they are needed?

8. Where would you place Sherrod Brown’s position on American troops in Iraq?
   Does he believe that (1) American troops should be brought home from Iraq immediately, (2) They should be brought home from Iraq in the next 2 years, or (3) They should stay in Iraq as long as they are needed?

Political Interest (Waves 1 and 2)

Would you say that you have been very much interested, somewhat interested or not much interested in the political campaigns in Ohio this year? ((1) very much interested – (3) not much interested).

Political Discussion (Waves 1 and 2)

How many days last week did you talk to someone – including friends, family, neighbors, and co-workers – about Ohio politics?

Political Participation (Wave 3)
1. Did you get a chance to vote in the election that took place on November?

2. During the recent Ohio election campaign, did you ever attend a rally for a party, candidate or issue?

3. During the recent Ohio election campaign, did you ever volunteer time to work for a party, candidate or issue?

4. Did you ever wear a button or shirt supporting a party, candidate, or issue?

5. Did you ever display a bumper sticker or yard sign supporting a party, candidate, or issue?
APPENDIX B

TABLES AND FIGURES
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>State of Ohio&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Mean for All Respondents (SD)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Mean for Respondents to Wave 1 Only (SD)</th>
<th>Mean for Respondents to Waves 1 and 2 (SD)</th>
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*Note: The scores for the waves 2 and 3 were calculated by relying on the answers given by all the respondents during wave 1 answers (N = 603). Wave 2 (N = 387) answers were calculated by using all responses during wave 1 as a baseline and removing the scores of the respondents who dropped out before the wave 2. The adjusted sample. Similar procedure was followed to calculate the scores for wave 3 (N = 270).*  
<sup>a</sup> Demographic characteristics for the state of Ohio were obtained from U.S. Census Bureau for 2000-2005 (http://factfinder.census.gov).  
<sup>b</sup> Answers of all respondents measured during wave 1.  
<sup>c</sup> Census reports median age for the *entire* Ohio population. The panel data, however, shows mean values and covers only individuals of *18 years of age and older*.  
<sup>d</sup> Percentage of Ohioans with Bachelor’s degree or higher.  
<sup>e</sup> Census reports median household income.

*Table 3.1. Sample Differences Across the State of Ohio and Waves 1-3.*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean for All Wave 2 Respondents (SD)</th>
<th>Mean for Respondents to Wave 2 Only (SD)</th>
<th>Mean for Respondents to Waves 2 and 3 (SD)</th>
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*Note:* The scores for the wave 3 (N = 270) were calculated by relying on the wave 2 answers (N = 387). The scores were calculated by using wave 2 as a baseline and removing the scores of the respondents who dropped out before the wave 3 from any analyses. The adjusted sample, based on the wave 2 answers, was used to calculate scores for the wave 3.

*Table 4.2. Sample Differences Across Waves 2 and 3.*
<table>
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<td>(267)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.054</td>
<td>.235**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(580)</td>
<td>(263)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.077+</td>
<td>.131*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(574)</td>
<td>(257)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>.019</td>
<td>.176*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(331)</td>
<td>(150)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Interest</td>
<td>.094+</td>
<td>.353*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(360)</td>
<td>(162)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Discussion</td>
<td>.086*</td>
<td>.329**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(593)</td>
<td>(263)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News Use</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(608)</td>
<td>(267)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Knowledge</td>
<td>.118**</td>
<td>.236**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(602)</td>
<td>(268)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Ideology</td>
<td>-.059</td>
<td>-.163**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(greater values –</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more conservative)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(571)</td>
<td>(255)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Participation</td>
<td>.108+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(267)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: The 2-tailed Pearson Correlations.

* Political participation was available only on Wave 3

+= p < .10; *= p < .05; **= p < .01

Table 4.3. Correlations Between Blog Reading, Political Participation and Other Variables – Wave 1.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Blog Reading (N)</th>
<th>Political Participation (N)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender (1 - males)c</td>
<td>.042</td>
<td>.127*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(385)</td>
<td>(267)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.076</td>
<td>.235**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(376)</td>
<td>(263)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.021</td>
<td>.131*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(369)</td>
<td>(257)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>-.060</td>
<td>.176*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(217)</td>
<td>(150)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Interest</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>.399**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(236)</td>
<td>(168)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Discussion</td>
<td>.123*</td>
<td>.278**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(381)</td>
<td>(263)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News Use</td>
<td>-.047</td>
<td>.111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(386)</td>
<td>(268)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Knowledge</td>
<td>-.023</td>
<td>.224**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(384)</td>
<td>(268)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Participation</td>
<td>.079</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(265)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blog Reading</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: The 2-tailed Pearson Correlations.*

*Political participation was available only on Wave 3*

*Political ideology question was not asked during wave 2*

*Gender, age, education, and income were measured on Wave 1*

*+ = p < .10; * = p < .05; ** = p < .01*

*Table 4.4. Correlations Between Blog Reading, Political Participation* and Other Variables – Wave 2.*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Blog Readers(^a) (SD)</th>
<th>Nonreaders(^b) (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender (% males)</td>
<td>47.83 (0.51)</td>
<td>41.59 (9.49)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>47.91 (14.97)</td>
<td>52.39 (15.81)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>4.73 (1.24)</td>
<td>4.23+ (1.25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>71,857.14 (26,872.51)</td>
<td>63,991.94 (83,199.50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Interest</td>
<td>2.73 (0.70)</td>
<td>2.29* (0.96)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Discussion</td>
<td>3.26 (2.47)</td>
<td>2.30* (2.13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News Use</td>
<td>3.74 (3.09)</td>
<td>3.69 (2.94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Knowledge</td>
<td>3.43 (1.80)</td>
<td>2.24** (1.93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Participation</td>
<td>2.00 (1.13)</td>
<td>1.42+ (1.10)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* The comparison was conducted based on the wave 1 sample in order to capitalize on the larger sample size.
\(^a\) N ranged from 12 to 23.
\(^b\) N ranged from 317 to 285.
+ = p < .10; * = p < .05; ** = p < .01

*Table 4.5. Differences Between Respondents Reading and Not Reading Blogs – Independent Samples T-test – Wave 1.*

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unstandardized Beta Controlling All Variables</th>
<th>Standardized Beta Controlling All Variables</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender (1 - males)a</td>
<td>.181</td>
<td>.038</td>
<td>.360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td>.016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.113</td>
<td>.060</td>
<td>.165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>-2.462</td>
<td>-.097</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blog Reading</td>
<td>1.919*</td>
<td>.173</td>
<td>.840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Interest</td>
<td>.443</td>
<td>.156</td>
<td>.269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Discussionb</td>
<td>.422***</td>
<td>.420</td>
<td>.081</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News Use</td>
<td>.023</td>
<td>.029</td>
<td>.068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Knowledge</td>
<td>.200+</td>
<td>.158</td>
<td>.109</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a Gender, age, education, and income were measured on Wave 1
b Political discussion from wave 1
+ = p < .10; * = p < .05; ** = p < .01; *** = p < .001

Table 4.6. Multiple Linear OLS Regression Predicting Political Discussion - Wave 2.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unstandardized Beta Controlling All Variables</th>
<th>Standardized Beta Controlling All Variables</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender (1 - males)^a</td>
<td>-.171</td>
<td>-.029</td>
<td>.293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.038***</td>
<td>.182</td>
<td>.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.100</td>
<td>.043</td>
<td>.134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>8.254</td>
<td>.026</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blog Reading</td>
<td>.558</td>
<td>.040</td>
<td>.701</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Interest</td>
<td>-.033</td>
<td>-.009</td>
<td>.221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Discussion</td>
<td>-.070</td>
<td>-.056</td>
<td>.069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News Use^b</td>
<td>.774***</td>
<td>.774</td>
<td>.053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Knowledge</td>
<td>.091</td>
<td>.057</td>
<td>.090</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

^a Gender, age, education, and income were measured on Wave 1
^b News use from wave 1
+ = p < .10; * = p < .05; ** = p < .01; *** = p < .001

Table 4.7. Multiple Linear OLS Regression Predicting News Use - Wave 2.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Unstandardized Beta Controlling All Variables</th>
<th>Standardized Beta Controlling All Variables</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender (1 - males)(^a)</td>
<td>.084</td>
<td>.022</td>
<td>.249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td>-.007</td>
<td>.011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.159</td>
<td>.108</td>
<td>.113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>-2.078</td>
<td>-.104</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blog Reading</td>
<td>-.953</td>
<td>-.108</td>
<td>.588</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Interest</td>
<td>.508(^**)</td>
<td>.226</td>
<td>.181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Discussion</td>
<td>.038</td>
<td>.048</td>
<td>.058</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News Use</td>
<td>.024</td>
<td>.038</td>
<td>.047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Knowledge(^b)</td>
<td>.521(^***)</td>
<td>.547</td>
<td>.069</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) Gender, age, education, and income were measured on Wave 1

\(^b\) Political knowledge from wave 1

\(+ = p < .10; ~* = p < .05; ~** = p < .01; ~*** = p < .001\)

*Table 4.8. Multiple Linear OLS Regression Predicting Political Knowledge - Wave 2.*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unstandardized Beta Controlling All Variables</th>
<th>Standardized Beta Controlling All Variables</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender (1 - males)(^b)</td>
<td>.085</td>
<td>.035</td>
<td>.245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>.042</td>
<td>.011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-.121</td>
<td>-.135</td>
<td>.115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>2.500+</td>
<td>.197</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blog Reading</td>
<td>1.097+</td>
<td>.189</td>
<td>.597</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Interest</td>
<td>.184</td>
<td>.118</td>
<td>.186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Discussion</td>
<td>.107+</td>
<td>.212</td>
<td>.056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News Use</td>
<td>.029</td>
<td>.071</td>
<td>.047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Knowledge</td>
<td>.128</td>
<td>.186</td>
<td>.077</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) Political participation was available only on Wave 3  
\(^b\) Gender, age, education, and income were measured on Wave 1  
+ = p < .10; * = p < .05

*Table 4.9. Multiple Linear OLS Regression Predicting Political Participation\(^a\) - Wave 2.*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Odds Ratio Unstandardized Beta</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Odds Ratio Unstandardized Beta</th>
<th>SE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Controlling All Variables for Wave 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Controlling All Variables for Wave 2(^a)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (males)</td>
<td>1.762</td>
<td>.566</td>
<td>.642</td>
<td>1.203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.995</td>
<td>-.005</td>
<td>.028</td>
<td>.957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>1.607+</td>
<td>.474</td>
<td>.266</td>
<td>1.264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Interest</td>
<td>1.636</td>
<td>.492</td>
<td>.582</td>
<td>2.692</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Discussion</td>
<td>1.345*</td>
<td>.296</td>
<td>.148</td>
<td>1.599*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News Use</td>
<td>.868</td>
<td>-.141</td>
<td>.118</td>
<td>1.045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Knowledge</td>
<td>1.131</td>
<td>.124</td>
<td>.191</td>
<td>.465*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blog Use</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3.664</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) All variables, except demographics, were from wave 2

\(+ = p < .10; * = p < .05\)

*Table 5.1. Logistic Regression Predicting Blog Reading During Waves 1 - 2.*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Odds Ratio</th>
<th>Unstandardized Beta</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender (1 - males)</td>
<td>.743</td>
<td>-.297</td>
<td>.770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.970</td>
<td>-.031</td>
<td>.032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.985</td>
<td>-.016</td>
<td>.358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Interest</td>
<td>2.705</td>
<td>.995</td>
<td>.647</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Discussion</td>
<td>1.183</td>
<td>.168</td>
<td>.160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News Use</td>
<td>.830</td>
<td>-.186</td>
<td>.145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Knowledge</td>
<td>.812</td>
<td>-.209</td>
<td>.216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blog Use</td>
<td>2.195</td>
<td>.786</td>
<td>1.319</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[+ = p < .10; * = p < .05\]

*Table 5.2. Logistic Regression Predicting Blog Reading During Wave 2 with Variables from Wave 1.*
Figure 2.1. Hypothesized direct and indirect positive influence of political news blog reading on political participation.
Figure 2.2. Predicted path model, where all coefficients are hypothesized to be statistically significant and positive.
Figure 4.1. A multiple mediator model where news media use, political knowledge, and political discussion are tested as mediators between blog reading and political participation by using Baron and Kenny’s (1986) method. Coefficients are taken from Tables 4.6-4.9.

\[ + = p < .10; \ast = p < .05. \]