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網路公民和政治參與：
社群媒體和行動科技在民主化和自由化的角色
Online Citizens and Political Participation:
The Democratising and Liberalising Role
of Social Media and Mobile Technology

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Abstract

This research uses the 2010-post election survey by Pew Internet and American Life project and traces the direct and indirect paths of online political information use, Facebook political information use, and mobile phones political information use to political participation to online and offline political participation. Indirect paths are traced through the paths of wider view exposure and the credibility to online and offline political participation. The theoretical framework of the O-S-O-R model is used to guide the path analyses for this research.

This research finds that both online political information use and Facebook political information use expose respondents to a wider diversity of views, but that it does not lead to political participation. Furthermore, all three mediums are found to be credible sources of information leading to online political participation with different strengths, while Facebook political information use also leads to offline political participation. Thus, credibility is an important factor and even suggests the possible need for an opinion leader. This is especially so for the use of Facebook, which has the best balanced information dissemination structure its friend network of identifiable people, organisations, and institutions. Facebook also provides the best platform for critical debate and engaging potential voters. Mobile phone political use is also supportive of political participation, but is more questioned in terms of whether the participation it brings is able to lead to critical debate.

Keywords: Political participation, Facebook, social media, mobile phones, online political information, wider view exposure, credibility.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Along comes this campaign to take back the country for ordinary human beings, and the best way you can do that is through the Net. We listen. We pay attention. If I give a speech and the blog people don't like it, next time I change the speech. (p1)

In 2004, during his political candidacy campaign in the United States, Howard Dean (Wolf, 2004) made the first historical political use of social media. Even though in practice his campaign failed to use all these media rich features that make social media so successful in gaining the attention and support of a wider audience, he succeeded in arguing the point for its continued relevance in the process of political participation. He had identified the potential of social media to open a direct channel of communication with potential voters, and promoted independent political participation where minimal input was required by the political party.

Expansive use of new online mediums continued in 2008 when Barack Obama became the first black president of the United States. His campaign was praised for using a combination of social media and other online mediums platforms, and their features, to engage an increasingly online American public (Metzgar & Maruggi, 2009; Strait, 2008; Vaccari, 2010). The 2010 campaign saw a further continuation of online mediums use, with the increasing political use of mobile phones indicating an increasingly mobile nature to US political participation (Lenhart, 2010; Smith, 2010; Smith, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c).

The case for the political potential of online mediums, social media, and mobile technology had been made, but was it overstated? Do they provide wider view exposure? And are they credible information sources? By applying the Orientation-Stimulus-Orientation-Response (O-S-O-R) model to the 2010-post election survey (November 2010 Post-Election Tracking Survey, 2010) by Pew Internet and American Life project, this research investigates this topic.

This path model is defined in the literature as a stimulus response model where a set of orientations (O1), structural, cultural, cognitive, and motivational characteristics brought by the audience is expected to influence how people experience a medium stimulus (S) (Cho et al., 2009; McLeod & Perse, 1994). This in turn produces a second set of orientations (O2), from which potential mediators emerge that are expected to have an impact on the behavioural response (R) (Cho et al., 2009; Feldman & Price, 2007; McLeod & Perse, 1994).

This O-S-O-R model serves as a good fit to test for the important issues surrounding the increasing popularity of online mediums in US politics for not only raising the hope of an increasingly interactive debate between candidates and citizens (Zube, Lampe, & Lin, 2009), but also raising questions and alarms about the impact of wider view exposure through the unchecked reach, potentially false, and emotionally charged content available through these mediums (Roux, 2012). While previous research has dealt extensively with direct effects of online mediums on political participation (Harb, 2011; Metzgar & Maruggi, 2009), Roux (2012) raises a case for these indirect effects through the legitimate concern about whether wider view exposure actually contributes to democracy, or whether it is counterproductive. It then becomes equally important to check whether credibility assessments are done prior to political participation, or whether information is acted upon on face value (Shah et al., 2007; Zube et al., 2009). These two variables emerge from online mediums through the online friend network, where a weaker friend network is more conducive to information dissemination and a stronger network more conducive to political participation (Ellison et al., 2007; Steinfield et al., 2008).

In addition to direct effects mentioned above, some researchers also looked at indirect paths. Some examples include McLeod et al. (1999) who tested for the mediation effects of political knowledge between newspaper hard news, interpersonal discussion, and TV hard news and political participation. In addition Shah et al. (2007) investigated the mediating

effects of interactive political messaging and interpersonal political discussion between online hard news and traditional hard news on political and civic participation. While Cho et al. (2009) tested for the potential mediators of political messaging, political talk, and interpersonal reflection between online and traditional news use and political participation and knowledge. Although this is not an exhaustive list, it provides a clear research gap identifying firstly the lack of research on the indirect effects of social media and mobile phones, and secondly on the mediating variables of wider view exposure and credibility originating from these. This research contributes then to the body of scientific knowledge by emphasising these aspects.

Organisational Section

This research is divided into 7 chapters. Chapter two provides a brief background of existing uses of online mediums, social media, and mobile phones in the US setting. A brief is made of its democratisation use during the Arab-Spring and its role in US policies.

Chapter three will introduce the theoretical framework used in this research, namely the O-S-O-R model and the variables that make up its different parts in this research. This section will also identify the key features of online mediums and social media that are relevant to the formation of second level orientations, and this research.

Chapter four will introduce the methodology section, which will include the source of the secondary data, as well as the operationalization of all variables.

Chapter five indicated the results of the three path analyses models that are run for the three online mediums. This section will compare differences between online and offline political participation, as well as between mediums.

Chapter six develops a discussion and conclusion based on research results, arguing for the roles and benefits of different online mediums and draws a conclusion for findings. Here mention will also be made of some limitations and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2: Background- Online Mediums and Political Participation

In 1981, Joel Chaseman (1981) captured the revolutionary contribution that each new mass medium brings to the public, their role to inform, to educate, and mobilise, but most importantly its contribution to establishing a society capable of reacting together as a people:

What a week this has been for America! Most of us have spent many extra hours watching television just to keep up with it – the inauguration, the hostages, the Super Bowl. The week's events helped me understand how much we take for granted, most of all that we can react to events together, as a people (p.374).

Fourteen years later, in his book *Bowling Alone*, Putnam (1995) argues that the civic capital of society, core to the American democratic system, is disappearing. This civic capital, he argues, is what results in Americans forming into associations and organisations that increase their ability and willingness to cooperate and, when needed, face up to government and hold it accountable. He argues that civic participation, when actively practiced, results in cooperation, reciprocity, trust, and solidarity, which develops a society that grows faster economically and cultivates better schools and individual productivity. It is this civic capital that Chaseman (1981) argued to be spread by mass media.

By the 1990's voter turnout had declined by about a quarter of the population, reducing the level of political participation to a fraction from that of the previous generation (Chaseman, 1981). These signs extended to other aspects of civic engagement, including that of church groups, by 7% between the 1950's and '70's, and labour unions, from 32.5% in the 1953 to 15.8% in 1992 (Putnam, 1995). People had seemingly begun to lose interest, the result of reduced social interaction amongst a more dispersed people (Chaseman, 1981).

However, he noted a counter-development. Putnam (1995) identifies a surge in a new type of civic capital, associations with mass subscribers whose only real participation seemed to be the paying of a membership fee. He found that these associations were based on common ideals, but not to each other. In other words, while the members belonged to some

form of organisation, there was no certain level of real social capital as there was no discussion, or interaction beyond being a potential mailing list for influential lobbyists. The results were ‘communities’ who did not have long lasting or strong ties.

This mass-public resurgence, although low in civic capital by appearance, was found to hold great persuasive weight when used by influential lobbyists. What is more, it began to show an online variant that has a greater reach and provides a set of immediacy tools that increased interaction capacity over time, especially through the accessing and sharing information (Smith, 2011b, 2011c). Online mediums showed the potential of managing a mass-public into a manageable space for potentially meaningful participation by online communities. This has gone quite counter to Putnam’s (1995) prediction that newer mediums will lead to increased isolation, defined as an increased lack of personal interaction.

Online political information use in Political Participation

Civic capital has then arguably resurged in an online capacity. It has moved from its traditional foundation to online equivalents and more. This mobilisation power of mediums was already visible in 1835, when Alexandre De Toqueville (1981[1835]) (as quoted in Chaseman, 1981) emphasises this power of a newspaper to create the feeling for a person to be part of a larger group in society:

Only a newspaper can put the same thought at the same time before a thousand readers... in democratic countries it often happens that a great many men who both want and need to get together cannot do so, for all being very small and lost in the crowd they do not see one another at all and do not know where to find one another. Then a newspaper gives publicity to the feeling or idea that had occurred to them all simultaneously but separate. They all at once aim towards that light, and these wandering spirits, long seeking each other in the dark, at last meet and unite. (p.438)

A century later Chaseman (1981) argues that the above quotation will still hold valid if the word “newspapers” is substituted for “television”. Television had become the new carrier of information to a potentially greater audience. This removed the strict direct association between mediums and physical transportation, but large physical devices and

buildings were still needed. However, the role of television, as Putman (1995) argues, took on the role of an entertainment medium, making it less useful, a notion seconded by Caparini (2004). The information it provided was now either too short or not in-depth enough.

More recently online mediums have been identified as being the reinvigorating source for Toqueville's statement. By substituting newspapers with the various types of online mediums, such as Facebook, online news, and even mobile phone information use, the statement regains its stature. 2010 statistics show that 75% of Americans are active internet users (Smith, 2011a). Of these, 54% accessed online news sources or participated online during the 2010 elections, while 23% used social media to connect to the election (Smith, 2011a, 2011b). Mobile phones add an additional new dimension with statistics indicating that 26% of Americans used their mobile phones to connect to 2010 US elections (Smith, 2010), from a mobile phones owning population of 83%, of which 35% of adults are smart phone users (Smith, 2011c) with mobile internet access (Miladi, 2011).

Social Media in US Politics

Social media made its US-campaign debut with the wide usage of social networking site "meeting.com" during the Howard Dean political candidacy campaign in 2004 (Wolf, 2004). A voter created a social media page for Howard Dean in order to garner support and funding. As the campaign progressed, the platform began to grow as more and more supporters began to organise their own promotional and fund raising activities, which the Dean party decided to allow by minimising their direct role and so permitting direct political participation by the individual supported (Wolf, 2004).

Participation activities were also extended offline in a variety of ways. Volunteers went door-to-door, wrote and disseminated personal letters, organised and hosted meetings, and distributed flyers, all of this without ever being asked or ordered (Wolf, 2004), which suggests that social media inspired increasing levels of the social capital that Putnam (1995)

found to be so distinctly lacking in traditional mediums, and by extension political participation that was in decline.

Critics, however, still found that this use of social media was insufficient and limited in its intent to merely garner funding, while neglecting to use the more interactive capabilities to more actively engage the audience (Hindman, 2005), which may have been the cause of the eventual campaign failure. These limitations were largely addressed by the 2008 Obama campaign, where communication links were opened directly with potential voters to encourage feedback and direct communication. Obama used common internet platforms such as email, as well as social media such as YouTube, Twitter, and other online mediums such as podcasts, and webpages. All communication attempts were aimed to inspire direct participation with the audience, even allowing them to submit questions, to which the party responded in great explanatory detail. His campaign moved well beyond just using social media for fundraising. Steinfield, Ellison, and Lampe (2008) ventures as far as to argue that social media begin to bridge the civic divide. This, they argue, is a result of the online friend network, which will be discussed in more detail below.

Following the success of this campaign, companies like 'Blue State Digital' was found on the principle of designing interactive web2.0 applications catered for political parties (D'Aprile, 2009). This resulted in other online mediums use spreading to political parties in other parts of the world, including Israel and South Africa. This popularity persisted into the 2010 US election campaign, where research findings indicate that internet usage in general has an increased user-base who access online politics, with social media also being directly linked to political use (Smith, 2011b). The use was even found to have extended to include the use of mobile phones and mobile internet (Smith, 2011c).

The Arab Spring

A more recent example, the Arab Spring, showed that social media can also unite people against an abusive political authority. This democratisation role indicated the raw power of a communication mediums that is either difficult or impossible to censor. Events of the Arab Spring shows how mobile phones and social media collaborated to film and upload a current news event, which led to mass participation (Alterman, 2011; Harb, 2011; Hounshell, 2011; Miladi, 2011; Tunisian, 2011; Van Niekerk, Pillay, & Maharaj, 2011).

On the 4th of January 2011, 26-year old university graduate Mohamed Bouazizi had had enough of ill treatment suffered at the hands of police and set himself on fire in a public marketplace in protest. A bystander filmed the event with a mobile phones camera, uploading it directly to YouTube from where the event went through the fast dissemination process of social media. The result was the triggering of repressed tensions that sparked country-wide violent protests, quickly gaining additional support locally and internationally. In response, the Tunisian president began to make a series of reform promises, sacking ministers, and making job creation promises, none of which succeeded in calming down the population. His final resolution was to flee the country, marking the end of his rule with minimal bloodshed (Harb, 2011, Hounshell, 2011, Miladi, 2011, Tunisian, 2011).

However, this is not where it ended. The governments of Egypt, Yemen, Libya, and Syria were quick to shut down all mediums to stop the spread of the uprising across their borders, but shutting down the internet failed, and information of the uprising and its success crossed the borders and the uprisings spread (Gandelman, 2011). This resulted in regime changes in Egypt, where the president resigned, and parliament dissolved, and also in Yemen. However, Libya and Syria dissented into full-out civil war (Abouzeid, 2011, Harb, 2011).

Throughout social media continued to be a source of information for the local and international communities, with Twitter indicated as a major information source. Battles and

atrocities were filmed on mobile devices, tweets and comments were used to disseminate information, and information was shared unchecked. Social media became the voice of the people who were deprived of all traditional outlets, and mobile phones became the mobile centres for civic journalism (Alterman, 2011; Harb, 2011; Tunisian, 2011), as well as to supply traditional journalism (Hounshell, 2011). This was also the primary source of information that informed the international community of what events were transpiring. Arguably, this was also the cause of the pressure that led to the eventual involvement of foreign military forces and the United Nations Security Council (Van Niekerk et al., 2011). Van Niekerk et al., (2011) argues that social media served as a command and control platform to conduct coordinated anti-government activities, while also serving in a diplomatic capacity. Social media had become more than an information source.

US Federal State Use and Policies

Social media then understandably inspires mixed feelings in any government, even democratic ones. At the same time, it shows the capacity to peacefully support a democratic election, while also violently supporting anti-government movements. Regardless, the US federal government understands the worth and need of social media in supplying information to the public, while also permitting direct interaction. The Hawaii State Senate social media use policy (2012) identifies the importance of providing timely information, and states that social media performs this duty best:

The Hawaii State Senate supports the use of social media for authorized Senate committees to enable Senate members and committees, Senate staff, and citizens, to communicate and obtain information online in the timeliest manner in the performance of legislative functions. (p1)

The Washington State Senate, however, takes a cautionary approach. While recognising the advantages, the policy also recognises that just open access to all cannot be

allowed. Their policy thus employs limitations of use based on their own ethical standards

(Policies Related to Legislative Use of Social Media, 2012):

The Senate recognizes that such technology should be made available to both its members and the public, and opportunities for public communication through emerging media should be explored and utilized. With this in mind, the Senate generally recognizes that the technology or medium being utilized for communications should not be the sole controlling factor in determining the propriety of a communication, instead, the nature and content of the communication, itself, should be used to determine whether it is appropriate under applicable ethics and Senate guidelines. (p1)

Such limitations of use indicate awareness of the mass consciousness element of social media, where ethical standard try to limit the spread of a false consciousness. Justin Roux (2012), senior vice president of Communications at Luvata, comments that social media hold the capacity to do more than just post random photos and events of a ‘soft news’ nature: “the audience have become authors, and they are the strictest of critics.” He identifies that there is an inherent risk in an audience that produces content. His biggest fear is that a mass audience will base decisions on stereotypes, and form a false mass consciousness based on an overtly sensationalistic approach, far removed from educated and critical thinking. He asks whether this is truly the elements of a preferred democracy and whether we should “... trust the Twitter generation to measure right from wrong?”

From this perspective, the US governments and politicians have good reason fear the complete freedom of expression associated with online mediums, which are protected by the 1st Amendment that has already resulted in the failure of all past legislative attempts to regulate internet content (Rappaport, 1997). The most recent policy attempt in the US is the Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA), which is by intention a policy written to stop online piracy. However, critics note that this would give unprecedented power to government to “shut down whole web domains on the basis that it believes them to be associated with piracy -- without a trial or even a traditional hearing (SOPA: Washington Vs. The Web, 2012).” The policy is

found to put at risk free speech and job security of online mediums, simply by association of the website at risk of violation. For a social media website, where content is uploaded and distributed by the individual, such legislation places its very existence at risk, simply because it's inevitable (SOPA: Washington Vs. The Web, 2012).



Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework- The O-S-O-R Model

This research implements the O-S-O-R-model to guide hypotheses and research questions and to provide a clear theoretical framework for this research. Previous research using the O-S-O-R model did so mostly within a traditional media environment (Cho et al., 2009, McLeod & Perse, 1994; McLeod et al., 1996; McLeod & Scheufele, 1999), within the broad and general context of the internet (Shah, Cho, et al., 2007), and also in the context of online news consumption (Shah & McLeod, et al., 2007). This research will extend a new use to this model with the inclusion of social media and the mobile phone communication variables, as well as two second level orientations, namely a wider view exposure and credibility that arises from online mediums' use.

The O-S-O-R model is essentially a mediated stimulus response model that permits for possible mediation through a second set of orientations that originate from the medium stimulus use (Cho et al., 2009). (O1) Is a set of structural, cultural, cognitive, and motivational characteristics the audience brings, like the strength of political ideology, and is expected to influence how people experience a medium stimulus, such as Facebook political information use (S) (Cho et al., 2009; McLeod & Perse, 1994). This in turn produces a second set of orientations, namely wider view exposure and credibility (O2) that occurs between the reception of the message and the behavioural response (R) (Cho et al., 2009; Feldman & Price, 2007; McLeod & Perse, 1994). This communication mediation model has been cited as a model where information-providing mediums provide the basis for political discussion that indicates the hidden behaviour and orientations of citizens in learning and participating in political engagement (Cho et al., 2009).

Furthermore, this model specifies similarities and difference between online communication and direct interpersonal conversation (Cho et al., 2009; McLeod & Perse, 1994). Finding that this changes how citizens form their behaviours. As will be argued

below information flows differently across the mediums used in this research, using what will be defined as a friend network (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Steinfield, Ellison, & Lampe, 2008; Zube, Lampe, & Lin, 2009).

O1: Ideology

Steinberger (1984) identifies demographics as being essential to the identification of any political participation, a position that is also supported by McLeod and Scheufele (1999), who find that they establish the community orientation and thus the basis of political participation. However, these findings are based on communal and local politics, where the community is argued to have a physical context as their point of departure. Putnam (1995) however found that the other form of participation, one that lacks in real civic capital and meaningful interaction, is a highly dispersed community where such common characteristics are not expected role players.

When moving this community online this dispersal is only further enhanced, even though there is now arguably increased interaction and civic capital. Demographic variables of an online community (Lenhart, 2010) are expected to be vastly different from the traditional physical community (McLeod et al., 1996; McLeod et al., 1999). Lenhart (2010) indicates that more adults are beginning to use social media, while also remaining constant in their blogging habits, while youth are becoming more dispersed and likely to perform micro blogging¹ instead of blogging as before. These differences become further dispersed across different online communication platforms (Lenhart, 2010).

In short, demographic variables become potentially redundant indicators when looking at online mediums. This research will therefore only include them as control variables, while expecting the strength of political ideology to be more accurate indicator political information consumption. Political ideology strength has previously been found to

¹ Micro blogging, and increasingly popular activity, are defined as status updates on social media while also being equitable to leaving comments on online news reports.

be a consistent and strong indicator of political information consumption (Cho et al., 2009; Shah, Cho, et al., 2007; Shah, McLeod, et al., 2007), being an indicator of the likelihood of an audience to participate in political activities. A stronger political ideology would then arguable lead to a stronger consumption of political information on social media.

S: Communication Variables

The second part of the O-S-O-R model deals with those mediums that are used to access political information leading up to political participation. This research investigates online political information use, Facebook political information use, and mobile phones political information use, while controlling for traditional media. Since these mediums have secondary orientations, in accordance with the O-S-O-R-model, this section tests for their indirect effects through the mediator variables that will be identified below.

At present the two most used and fastest growing social media in the United States are Facebook and Twitter (Lenhart, 2010; Smith, 2011a). While both are labelled as social media, they are distinguishable by several technical factors. The popularity of social media², as the most used web2.0 application-type, gains its strength from its interactive and immediacy features (Kluver & Soon, 2005; Soon & Kluver, 2007), where interaction can be instantaneous or delayed, private or public, or available to a selection of specified people (O'Brien, 2009). Similarly, mobile phones bring its own unique nature as medium being able to support both offline and online realms of information seeking (Haspels, 2007; Nisbet & Scheufele, 2004; Wattal, Schuff, Mandviwalla, & Williams, 2010).

Online political information use. Online information use is a more general variable that includes such sources as the use of search engines, political advertising, and online news sites. Smith (2011b) finds this form of information use has also increased during the 2010

² Social media are also referred to as social networking sites in the literature (Zube, Lampe, & Lin, 2009).

elections. With access to this information achieved, other forms of participation become more likely (Haspels, 2007; Heiberger & Harper, 2008) such as sharing information, which in turn inspires meaningful online political discussion, as Nisbet and Scheufele (2004) found that people are participated if they are being listened to, so the information sharer becomes the mobilised. Such information exposure thus depends on deliberate searching or through chance exposure through ads or through a friend network other than that established through social media (Cho et al., 2009; Shah, Cho, et al., 2007; Shah, McLeod, et al., 2007). How the information is then accessed, differs significantly from that of social media.

Such political information use then inevitably includes main stream sources online. Cho et al. (2009) points out that a lot of controversy exists with certain mediums such as television eroding political engagement, also supported by Putnam (2000). Furthermore, Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995) add political advertising and the internet to this list. Traditional print mediums have then been listed as the exception to this rule. However, contradicting results are found in the literature, which leads Cho et al. (2009) to argue that this assumption is not true and perhaps the result of crude research methods by previous authors, and the limitation of existing research to being contextualised to direct effects, giving little regard to potential mediators. They themselves also find support for political advertising and the internet as being a prime provider of political knowledge leading up to political participation (Cho et al., 2009).

Facebook. Of the two most used social media in the United States, Facebook has thus far been the most successful in serving a growing online community through the provision of rich media content, and has also shown remarkable success in satisfying information needs. 2010 statistics indicate that social media usage for political information use has reached 22.5% (Meyers, 2011), with Facebook also having the most loyal client base,

with 93% being highly unlikely to switch to another social media platform (Lenhart, 2010, Shah, McLeod, et al., 2007).

In general, social media originates from a large and growing family of web2.0 applications, which are defined as a body of online applications that provide media rich content and high interactivity (Christopher, 2007; De Hertogh, Viaene, & Dedene, 2011; Donston, 2008). Heiberger and Harper (2008), provide a more precise definition of Facebook, highlighting its interactive capabilities:

Previously an individual would have to design and host a Web site, join a chat group, upload pictures to a separate site, form an online group, use instant messaging and email services, join listservs, and create a blog just to rival all of the features Facebook offers. (p: 20).

It is precisely this media rich nature that adds to the simplification and quick dissemination of complicated messages, potentially increasing not just the reach, but the involvement of a previously neglected audience (Daft & Lengel, 1983, Ellison et al., 2007). This dissemination occurs through a complex friend network, where information diffuses through a list of friends identified in the literature as a 'weak' and a 'strong' friend network.

A weak friend network are those friend with whom one rarely interacts and is seen as being more facilitative to information dissemination (Ellison et al., 2007; Gaines & Mondak, 2009). Posting a comment on Facebook will thus not just reach these 'friends', but also their friends, leading to a diversification of information available to an audience who otherwise not actively search for this information.

By contrast, the strong friend network are those friends with whom one more frequently interacts, and may also be those friends with whom relations extend offline, and that is more facilitative to political participation itself (Ellison et al., 2007; Gaines & Mondak, 2009). These friends are thus the ones likely to reply to a comment, further diversifying the

views by potentially disagreeing or adding to the discussion and establishing a sense of credibility for the information.

The exact size of this friend network varies and depends on the different user. Such a 'friend' may also be an institution, a non-governmental organisation, a political candidate, a political party, or even a government organisation or department (Haspels, 2007; Zube et al., 2009). Thus, such a friend may eventually have the potential to play the role of an opinion leader and increase credibility, however Zube et al., (2009) found that social media did not show during his research. Counter evidence does exist outside the United States, as is seen in the example of the Arab Spring discussed in the background chapter above (Abouzeid, 2011; Cottle, 2011; Hounshell, 2011) where at least one researcher makes a clear argument that an opinion leader role is visible to some extent, where it was used as a "command and control platform" (Van Niekerk, Pillay, & Maharaj, 2011, p. 1).

Mobile devices. During the pew 2010 post-election survey, Smith (2010) found that 83% of Americans have a mobile phone. From that population, 36% of American adults have a smartphone, 39% use them to access the internet, and 26% used them to participate in political activities during the 2010 election campaign, mostly information seeking and dissemination activities.

Furthermore, mobile phones were found to have surpassed all other mobile devices in ownership, being present across demographics with 82% of white people owning a mobile phone, 84% of black people, and 84% of Hispanics. Access also largely overcomes age and income barriers with more than 80% of the middle class and 75% of the lower class owning mobile phones (Lenhart, 2010), making it a strong supporter for providing necessary information across ethnic and demographic boundaries.

Internet access has decidedly gone mobile and wireless, as mobile phones even overcame personal computers and laptops in terms of access (Lenhart, 2010). However,

internet access is not the only contribution. Mobile phones have been identified as mobile newsrooms capable of making anyone a provider of up to date events filmed on a mobile phones and directly uploaded to the internet and social media (Vaccari, 2010, 2011) with an immediate, potentially global, audience that disseminates information even further through reposts. A recent example comes from the Arab Spring discussed above (Abouzeid, 2011, Cottle, 2011, Harb, 2011).

A mobile phone platform then has the technical ability to be a sharer of information to a friend network both on and offline. In other words, such a friend network can be interpersonal or by extension through a web2.0 application, located the mobile phone and that can link email contacts as well as social media contacts together (Lenhart, 2010). It can therefore be argued that the spread of information using a mobile phone would show similar characteristics than does Facebook concerning a weak and a strong friend network. In other words, where a weaker friend network dominates there will be a wide view exposure, while a stronger friend network will lead to political participation.

O2: Potential Mediators

Previous research using the O-S-O-R model hypothesises potential secondary orientations include political efficacy, and political knowledge, as well as political discussion (McLeod & Scheufele, 1999). This research takes the position of identifying two new possible mediators that derive from online mediums use, namely wider view exposure and credibility.

First, is the view of being exposed to a wider set of views online, and can be argued to derive from such features as a variety of news sources, and different opinions flowing through a social media friend network. The second the perception of credibility of the information source, both potentially originating from the information dissemination process as identified above (Ellison et al., 2007; Steinfield et al., 2008). The important of testing

indirect effects, is because of the need to establish whether participation occurs based on more than just exposure to an information source and a mass of information.

Wider range of views. For traditional media, wider view exposure is dependent on variety of factors, including the choice of the user, the ideological orientation of the newspaper or television station, its news editor, and the advertising sources that causes the paper to focus on a particular audience in the first place (Fourie, 2008; Fourie, 2010). A traditional news source then goes through a process of news identification by listing such elements identified as ‘newsworthiness’, which guides the views that are eventually displayed (Fourie, 2010). Such a process is often accused of being biased, or framing news in a particular light, thus limiting wider view exposure (Entman, 2007; Gross & D'Ambrosio, 2004). In the offline arena, the audience can overcome this by changing to another source, thus diversifying their exposure. However, they often find such news sources are conglomerated with a single organisation owning large shares of the market (Caparini, 2004), which extends to the online version of mainstream media (Brundidge, 2009).

An alternative then seems to be to seek information and news online. Those who go online find it easier to obtain a news source that is different from the one they usually use, but in the same light, this also makes it easier to find an information source that suits their exact needs (Kim, 2007, Lee & Leung, 2008) and so limit their view exposure instead of widening it. The internet dimension thus brings forth a conflicting alternative, the existence of wider views, but only if the audience wishes to do so. Nevertheless a vast number of online news sources now includes comment sections, creation of avatars or user profiles, and by extension the creation of a ‘friend’ network other than that of Facebook. This encourages a diversity of views on what would traditionally have been a platform with a limited ideological exposure (Bente, Roggenberg, Kromer, & Eschenburg, 2008, Pena & Hancock, 2008, Yee, Bailenson, & Ducheneaut, 2009).

Social media provides another specific alternative to general online information seeking, often acting as a disseminator for news, opinions, and general information in a supplementary nature to online news media (Vaccari, 2010; Vaccari, 2011). Exposure to information using social media platforms also mean that people no longer have to actively search for news or information online, as one is provided due to chance encounter of a friend posting a link on his social media profile (Ellison et al., 2007). The reach of the friend network then extends access to a weak network of friends that are unlikely to share the same political views, which Ellison et al. (2007) finds is a convenient environment to spread information and encourage online political discussion. Social media then provides a very high potential to encourage a wider view exposure, even to those disinterested in the process of political participation.

Mobile phones also become supplementary in nature, which combines the above functions into a single mobile device with a wireless internet connection (Lenhart, 2010; Smith, 2010; Smith, 2011b; Smith, 2011c). In addition, it also retains its original function of working in an offline capacity, which essentially means that it provides access to a strong friend network, and a weaker online friend network. Its role becomes diverse and intricate (Lenhart, 2010). Such a friend network would then be quite diverse, extending diverse view points across the online and offline friend network.

Credibility. While diversity of an information source is a subtle event that the respondent may not even notice, the credibility of an information source is essential to the audience in their decision making process on whether or not to act. If they do not trust the information source, it is unlikely to inspire any form of political participation. Traditional mediums have learned this lesson repeatedly, losing audiences and trust, as audiences perceive them to be sympathetic and biased to one cause or another (Caparini, 2004). War-time reporting versus post-war time reporting has provided the best examples of the

importance of mainstream media credibility (Pfau et al., 2005; Spencer, 2006; Waller, 2003), which naturally extends to online 'official' information sources, while non-official sources would likely be subject to credibility perception of the gatekeeper or opinion leader. An online information source will therefore have a significant number of checks through which it has to pass to be credible, which will be largely depended on the source. As an example, a government website and mainstream media website will be perceived as more credible than an anonymous website. The gatekeeper or opinion leader will be seen to play a large role in the assessment of credibility.

For the case of social media, the Howard Dean campaign showed the mobilisation effect that occurs when the information source is considered credible (Wolf, 2004). In the same breath, it can also be argued that potentially the Howard Dean campaign was ultimately unsuccessful, not just because of inadequate use of immediacy features as critics argue (Hindman, 2005), but because too much freedom was granted to the audience to organize activities by themselves. Taking this into consideration, and the looking more specifically at Dean Campaign's use of social media, it is noted that the responsible party did not exercise enough direct authority over to maintain the needed physical presence that the audience ultimately needed to be convinced enough to vote. It was seen as enough to give the power to the people to organise themselves in support of the party, but being asked to vote by Howard Dean is not the same as being asked to so by John Doe, who is doing what he can to support his chosen candidate. A central flaw seems to be the lack of a central opinion leader to sustain credibility over the long term (Zube et al., 2009). Here diversity of views becomes a problem for credibility as too many unknown sources become a part of the equation. A weak friend network was allowed to form, which was great for disseminating information, but was ultimately too dispersed to have the needed credibility and to lead to political participation.

This then warrants a look at the mobile phone, which has already been identified above as having the ability to combine online and offline friend networks. An obvious argument can be extended here, in that the source of the information would be the mobile phone owner, as opposed to the profile owner on Facebook (Lenhart, 2010). Credibility in such a source would be necessarily higher as there is an increased likelihood that the mobile phone owner is known to the audience in most cases, except for example through text message advertising. Again, this platform can also extend into both mediums identified above, which increases the likelihood that this platform is perceived as a credible source.

R: Political Participation

The last section of the O-S-O-R model deals with the response of the audience, and thus the effects of the mediums and the potential mediators. Political participation is defined as a more specific form of civic capital (Putnam, 1995), and are those actions deemed to be democratically necessary to hold the government accountable for their actions. Fukuyama (1995) identifies participation as the building blocks of a democracy an essential to hold the government accountable.

Traditionally offline participation is the one with the most impact on a democracy, however politics is increasingly online, like with the Howard Dean campaign (Wolf, 2004), the 2008 Obama election campaign (Metzgar & Maruggi, 2009; Wattal et al., 2010) and again the 2010 US elections (Smith, 2011a). The online participation dimension becomes as essential to persuade people to choose a political candidate, inspire, and interest people to debate issues of public concern.

According to Verba and Nie (1987) political participation refers to activities that directly influence the process of politics. Hardy and Scheufele (2005) offers such a list: written a letter to a newspaper editor; calling into a public affairs radio talk show; circulating a petition for a candidate or an issue; voting for an elected official; working for a political

campaign; contacting a public official; calling other people to raise funds for a political organisation; and contributing money to a political organisation or candidate. From this list, Fukuyama (1995) argues that voting is potentially the strongest indicator in a democracy, having the potential to enforce accountability of those in power.

Gibson, Lusoli, and Ward (2005) argue that online political participation is a continuation of the above definition on the online arena. While their definition includes also actions of political information seeking and discussion, this research will focus on the online continuation of the above definition (Hardy & Scheufele, 2005; Verba & Nie, 1987). Their definition includes: signing up for an e-news bulletin; sending an e-postcard from a political organisations' website; downloading software from a political organisation's website; signing an online petition; sending an email to a politician, a political organisation, or government; donating funds online to a political cause; volunteering online to help with a political cause; joining a political organisation online; and participating in an online question and answer session with a political official.

Then based on the above elaborations, this paper takes the approach of posing a single general research question to explore the relationship in the proposed model. Thus, research question one will attempt to explore the direct and indirect relationship of the different variables in this model.

Research Question 1: What are the indirect associations of ideology and online political information use, through the paths of wider view exposure and credibility, and their direct effects on online political participation?

Following this, research question two is interested in determining the differences between online and offline political participation, as defined above.

Research question 2: What differences are distinguishable between online and offline political participation?

Lastly, this paper uses three different mediums able to spread information online. This paper wishes to determine the differences between these in order to clarify which has the strongest direct and indirect association within the context of the O-S-O-R model.

Research question 3: What differences are visible between online political information use, Facebook political information use, and mobile phone political information use for direct and indirect association on political participation?



Chapter 4: Methodology

This research will run a total of six models to contend with the mediums and two variants of political participation, using path analyses. Associations are tested for using path analyses.

Sampling and Data Collection

This research makes use of a dataset collected by Pew Internet & American life project (November 2010 Post-Election Tracking Survey, 2010), conducted by the Princeton Survey Associates International, and collected between November 3, 2010 and November 24, 2010 via a telephone and mobile phones nationwide survey. The survey was based on a sample of 2, 257 of ages 18 and older, which includes 755 mobile phones interviews, with the total margin of error within plus or minus 2.4% percentage points.

The sample was drawn via a combination of telephone and cellular phone random digital dialling (RDD) to represent the American population (Smith, 2011b). Samples were obtained from Survey Sampling International, LLC (SSI) according to PSRAI specifications and phone numbers were selected calculating for the probabilities of their share of active blocks. The cellular sample was drawn through a systematic sampling of dedicated and shared wireless blocks (Smith, 2011b). All samples were made available daily and kept active for 5 days. Each number was called at least 7 times during different times of the day and week. Half the time interviewers asked to speak to the youngest adult male, if not available then to the youngest adult female. For the other half of the time the opposite strategy was followed. In the case of the cellular phone sample, the person who answered was the respondent. Landline numbers had a 13.7% response rate and cellular phone numbers has a 15% response rate (Smith, 2011b).

Due to the intent of this research to specifically focus on online mediums, the above sample is filtered using the question from the dataset that asks “Do you use the internet, at

least occasionally?" in order to base all findings on those who actively use the internet, in order to avoid a non-use bias. This filtered the total number of respondents to 1, 628 with a sampling error within plus or minus 2.8%.

Measures

All measures included here are those directly relevant to the model, while demographics and traditional media are controlled for.

Table 1 about here.

For reasons identified by previous authors above, demographic variables as summarised in table 1 above are considered important variables in any type of research involving political participation (McLeod et al., 1999; Putnam, 1995; Steinberger, 1984). This research thus controls for demographics. The sample consists of 1, 628 respondents, *age* 18 and older ($M = 44.66$, $SD = 16.86$) with *gender* 44.8% male and women slightly over represented at 55.2% female, 79% white, 8.2% *Hispanics*, and 17.9% people of other ethnicities. *Education* ($M = 4.98$, $SD = 1.48$, Range = 6) is a continuous variable on a 7-point scale that ranges from 0 = none or grade 1 - 8, to 7 = postgraduate training or professional school after college and the mean equal to some college. *Income* ($M = 5.36$, $SD = 2.09$) investigates the total family income in the last year, before tax reductions and ranges from 1 = less than \$10,000 to 9 = \$150,000 or more, with the mean being equal to \$40,000 to \$50,000.

Previous research has also identified the *strength of political ideology* as an important predictor of participation (Cho et al., 2009; McLeod & Perse, 1994; McLeod et al., 1996; Shah, Cho, et al., 2007; Shah, McLeod, et al., 2007). This research thus includes strength of political ideology ($M = .66$, $SD = 2$) operationalised as a 3 point continuous variable recoded to compute the respondents' distance from neutral (0 = neutral, 2 = very liberal and

conservative). The original question asks the respondent how they would describe their political views: In general, would you describe your political views as...

Due to the long history of traditional media influencing political participation, even an online world where they are considered to have faded to the background (Caparini, 2004), traditional media is considered a necessary control variable for predicting any association of online mediums to political participation. *Traditional media* is operationalised as a combination of two variables combining television, radio, magazines, and newspaper news sources ($M = 2.04$, $SD = .92$) into a single variable. Respondents were asked: Overall, how have you been getting most of your news about this year's campaigns and elections- from television, from newspapers, from radio, from magazines, or from the Internet? [Accept two answers].

Online political information use ($M = 2.37$, $SD = 1.72$, $KR20 = .75$) is operationalised as a summative scale of 6 dichotomous items (0 = no, 1 = yes), asking respondents if they did any of the following in the months leading up to the election: Look for information online about candidates' voting records or positions on the issues? Watch video online about the candidates or the election Use the internet to research or 'fact check' claims made during the campaign Get news online? Look online for news or information about politics or the 2010 campaigns?

Facebook political information use ($M = .46$, $SD = .94$, $KR20 = .73$) is operationalised as a summative scale based on 4 dichotomous items asking the respondents to think about what they did during the November 2010 elections (0 = no, 1 = yes): Get any campaign or candidate information on social networking sites? Sign up on a social networking site as a 'friend' of a candidate, or a group involved in the campaign such as a political party or interest group? Post content related to politics or the campaign on a social

networking site? Join a political group, or group supporting a cause on a social networking site?

Mobile phone political information use ($M = .62$, $SD = 1.13$, $KR20 = .69$) has been operationalised as a summative scale constructed from 7 dichotomous items that ask the respondents (0 = no, 1 = yes) firstly whether they a mobile phones in the months leading up the elections to: Keep up with news related to the election or politics? Share photos or videos related to the election campaigns? Download or use any software applications or 'apps' that provide updates from a candidate or a group involved in the campaign such as a political party or interest group? And whether they used it on the day they you voted to: Inform others that you voted? Let others know about conditions at your voting location, such as delays, long lines, low turnout, or other problems? Did you happen to use your mobile phones to monitor the results of the election as they occurred, or did you not do this?

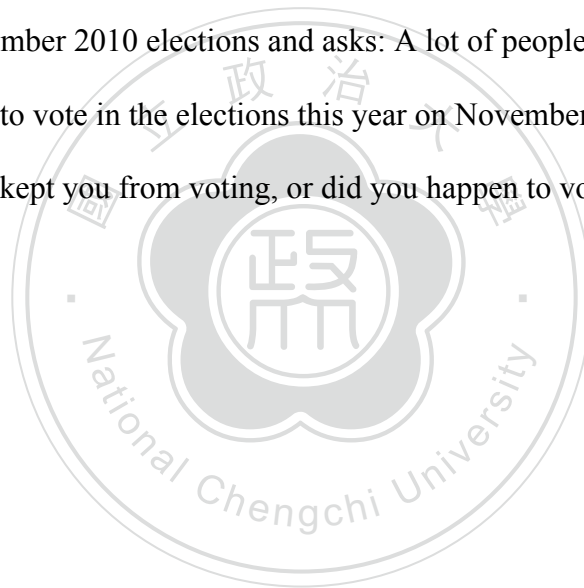
As already argued above, two potential mediators are investigated through exposure to the communication variables. Wider range of views exposure has been recoded into a dichotomous variable with 1 = yes 64.9% and 0 = about the same 35.1%. It asks the respondent: Do you think that the internet exposes people to a wider range of political views than they can get in the traditional news media, or is most of the political information you can find online the same as what you can get elsewhere?

The second potential mediator is that of credibility. Credibility has been operationalised into a dichotomous variable with 1 = easy 37.3% and 0 = difficult 62.7%, that asks the respondent: Thinking about the political information you find online, would you say it's usually easy or difficult for you to tell what is true from what is not true?

As pointed out earlier, this research has two dependent variables. *Online political participation* ($M = .49$, $SD = 1$, $KR20 = .68$) has been operationalised as a summative scale based on 6 dichotomous items (0 = no, 1 = yes). It asks the respondents if they did any of the

following in month leading up to the election: Sign up online to receive updates about the campaign or the elections? Send email related to the campaign or the elections to friends, family members or others? Contribute money online to a candidate running for public office? Use the internet to participate in volunteer activities related to the campaign – like getting lists of voters to call, or getting people to the polls? Take part in an online discussion, listserv or other online group forum like a blog related to political issues or the campaign? Share photos, videos, or audio files online that relate to the campaign or the elections?

Offline political participation has been operationalised as a single dichotomous variable that asks the respondent whether he or she voted (1 = 67.6%), or did not vote (0 = 32.4%) during the November 2010 elections and asks: A lot of people have been telling us they didn't get a chance to vote in the elections this year on November 2. How about you... did things come up that kept you from voting, or did you happen to vote?



Chapter 5: Results

To test the hypothesis for this research, path analyses were applied. Independent variables included online political information use, Facebook political information use, and mobile phones political information use, which were all tested for in separate models due to their conceptual overlaps. These variables were used to test for direct and indirect association, through the two expected mediators namely wider views exposure and credibility, and results were collected in 3 figures and two tables, which constitutes a total of 6 models. Each model represents a different communications variable. Each model contained 4 blocks, with block 1 reflecting demographics, block 2 ideology, block 3 communication variables, and block 4 the two secondary orientations.

This section begins by mentioning some additional results that are noteworthy, but which are not tested for by the research questions. Table 1 shows that age is a consistent indicator for the role of online political information use ($\beta = .075, p < .001$), Facebook political information use ($\beta = .140, p < .001$), and mobile phone political information use ($\beta = .117, p < .001$) in online political participation, which suggests that those who participate in online political participation are mostly older. Another finding for online political participation hints towards a civic divide with regards to mobile phone political information use, with race ($\beta = .072, p < .05$), and education ($\beta = .064, p < .05$) also weakly significant. This suggests that white educated and slightly older respondents are more likely to use mobile phones in online political participation.

The same is also seen in Table 2 for offline political participation, being very strong indicators in the model for online political information use ($\beta = .927, p < .001$), Facebook political use ($\beta = .926, p < .001$), and mobile phone political use ($\beta = 1.003, p < .001$), again indicating that an older respondent is more likely to participate in offline political participation. Also relevant in offline political participation, is the consistent indicator of

education for online political information use ($\beta = .219, p < .05$), Facebook political use ($\beta = .296, p < .01$), and mobile phone political use ($\beta = .258, p < .01$), suggesting that those more likely to participate in offline political participation are also more educated. When combined with the above, signs of civic divide form.

This research then moves on to report the results from the three research questions:

Research question one asks: What are the direct and indirect associations of ideology, online political information use, wider view exposure, and credibility amongst each other and on online political participation within the context of the O-S-O-R model?

Table 2 about here.

Overall, this model is strongly supported, explaining 28% of the variance for online political participation, 1.7% by demographic variables, 2.3% by ideology, 24.1% political information mediums, and .6% by the second level orientations. The first step in the O-S-O-R model finds support for the role of the strength of political ideology on online political information use ($\beta = .087, p < .001$), resulting in an increase of use.

Figure 1 about here.

Next this model investigate the association between online political information use and wider view exposure, and finds strong support ($\beta = .443, p < .001$) leading to a very strong increase of wider view exposure. The same path is also tested through credibility is also strongly supported ($\beta = .458, p < .001$) leading to an increase in credibility. The next step is for this model to determine whether wider view exposure leads to online political participation. This path is found to be not supported ($\beta = .030, p > .05$) suggesting that wider view exposure does not lead to online political participation. Credibility is however supported ($\beta = .070, p < .05$) leading to a small increase in online political participation. This model also tested for direct effects of the strength of political ideology and online political information use. The strength of ideology is found to be strongly supported ($\beta = .087, p$

< .001) leading to a small direct increase in online political participation. Online political information use is also found to be strongly supported ($\beta = .501, p < .001$) leading to a strong increase in online political participation.

Research question 2 asked what differences are distinguishable between online and offline political participation?

Table 3 about here.

Again, overall support is found for offline political participation with 29.3% of the variance explained, 23.7% by demographic variables, .6% by ideology, 4.5% political information mediums, and .5% by second level orientations. Then this model follows the same steps through the O-S-O-R model, finding support for the strength of political ideology on online political information use ($\beta = .087, p < .001$), resulting in an increase of use. Next this model investigate the association between online political information use and wider view exposure, and finds strong support ($\beta = .443, p < .001$) leading to a very strong increase of wider view exposure. The same path is also tested through credibility and is also strongly supported ($\beta = .458, p < .001$) leading to an increase in credibility. The next step is for this model to determine whether wider view exposure leads to offline political participation. This path is found to be not supported ($\beta = .146, p > .05$) suggesting that wider view exposure does not lead to online political participation. Also, no support is found for credibility ($\beta = .114, p > .05$). For the direct effects of the strength of political ideology no support is found ($\beta = .137, p > .05$). For the direct effect of online political information use strong support is found ($\beta = .530, p < .001$) leading to a strong increase in offline political participation.

Research question 3 asks what differences are visible between online political information use, and Facebook political information use, as well as and mobile phone political information use for both direct and indirect association on political participation.

Figure 2 about here.

First is Facebook political information use. Overall, this model is strongly supported, explaining 40.5% of the variance for online political participation, 3% by demographic variables, 3% by ideology, 33.3% by political information mediums, and 1.3% by the second level orientations, as can be seen in Figure 2.

The first step in the O-S-O-R model finds strong support for the role of the strength of political ideology on Facebook political information use ($\beta = .099$, $p < .01$), resulting in an increase of use. Next this model investigate the association between Facebook political information use and wider view exposure, and finds some support ($\beta = .213$, $p < .05$) leading to a strong increase of wider view exposure. The same path is also tested through credibility, some supported is found ($\beta = .154$, $p < .05$) leading to an increase in credibility. The next step is for this model to determine whether wider view exposure leads to online political participation. This path is found to be not supported ($\beta = .048$, $p > .05$) suggesting that wider view exposure does not lead to online political participation. Credibility is however supported ($\beta = .102$, $p < .001$) leading to an increase in online political participation. This model also tested for direct effects of the strength of political ideology and online political information use. The strength of ideology is found to be strongly supported ($\beta = .103$, $p < .001$) leading to a small increase in online political participation. Facebook political information use is also found to be strongly supported ($\beta = .565$, $p < .001$) leading to a strong increase in online political participation.

For offline political participation overall model support is also found with 26.5% of the total variance explained, 23.2% by demographic variables, .2% by ideology, 2.1% political information mediums, and 1% by second level orientations.

Then this model follows the same steps through the O-S-O-R model, finding support for the strength of political ideology on Facebook political information use ($\beta = .099$, p

< .001), resulting in an increase of use. Next this model investigate the association between Facebook political information use and wider view exposure, and finds some support ($\beta = .213, p < .05$) leading to a strong increase of wider view exposure. The same path is also tested through credibility is also supported ($\beta = .154, p < .05$) leading to an increase in credibility. The next step is for this model to determine whether wider view exposure leads to offline political participation. This path is found to be not supported ($\beta = .134, p > .05$) suggesting that wider view exposure does not lead to offline political participation. Some support is however found for credibility ($\beta = .206, p < .05$) leading to a strong increase in offline political participation. For the direct effects of the strength of political ideology no support is found ($\beta = .073, p > .05$). For the direct effect of Facebook political information use strong support is found ($\beta = .266, p < .01$) leading to an increase in offline political participation.

Figure 3 about here.

Overall, this model is strongly supported, explaining 24.3% of the variance for online political participation, 1.8% by demographic variables, 2.3% by ideology, 17.8% by political information mediums, and 2.4% by the second level orientations, as can be seen in Figure 3.

The first step in the O-S-O-R model finds some support for the role of the strength of political ideology on mobile phone political information use ($\beta = .059, p < .01$), resulting in a small increase of use. Next this model investigate the association between mobile phone political information use and wider view exposure, and finds no support ($\beta = .109, p > .05$). The same path is also tested through credibility finding strong support ($\beta = .252, p < .001$) leading to a big increase in credibility. The next step is for this model to determine whether wider view exposure leads to online political participation. This path is found to be strongly supported ($\beta = .097, p < .001$) leading to a small increase in online political participation. Strong support is also found for credibility ($\beta = .116, p < .001$) leading to an increase in

online political participation. This model also tested for direct effects of the strength of political ideology and online political information use. The strength of ideology is found to be strongly supported ($\beta = .112, p < .001$) leading to a small increase in online political participation. Mobile phone political information use is also found to be strongly supported ($\beta = .416, p < .001$) leading to a strong increase in online political participation.

For offline political participation overall model support is also found, with 32.9% of the total variance explained, 23.9% by demographic variables, 1% by ideology, 7.6% by political information mediums, and .4% by second level orientations. Then this model follows the same steps through the O-S-O-R model, finding support for the strength of political ideology on mobile phone political information use ($\beta = .059, p < .05$), resulting in an increase of use. Next this model investigate the association between mobile phone political information use and wider view exposure, but finds no support ($\beta = .109, p > .05$). The same path is also tested through credibility and is strongly supported ($\beta = .252, p < .001$) leading to an increase in credibility.

The next step is for this model to determine whether wider view exposure leads to offline political participation. This path is found to be not supported ($\beta = .114, p > .05$) suggesting that wider view exposure does not lead to offline political participation. The same is also true for credibility ($\beta = .112, p > .05$) suggesting that this path also does not lead to offline political participation. For the direct effects of the strength of political ideology, some support is found ($\beta = .213, p < .05$) with ideology leading to an increase in offline political participation. For the direct effect of mobile phone political information use strong support is also found ($\beta = .706, p < .001$) leading to a very big increase in offline political participation.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion

Through the implementation of the O-S-O-R model, the goal of this research is to indicate the difference between the direct and indirect associations of the three identified mediums in both online and offline political participation. Indirect associations were tested for through the paths of wider view exposure and credibility. Previous research has proven direct associations of online political information use and Facebook political information use (Gaines & Mondak, 2009; Hirzalla et al., 2011; Kluver & Soon, 2005; McLeod & Scheufele, 1999; Valenzuela et al., 2009), but none have yet done so for mobile phones or through the indirect path specified in this paper.

Overall results confirm direct association in online and offline political participation, as experienced by previous authors investigating various political scenarios such as the Howard Dean campaign (Wolf, 2004), the Obama campaign (Strait, 2008), and the 2010 US elections (Smith, 2010; Smith, 2011a, 2011b). For indirect association, full association is only seen through the path of credibility for online political participation in all models, and for offline political participation in the Facebook model. Partial associations suggest that Facebook and online political information use leads to more diverse views, while all three mediums are seen to be credible information sources.

Strength of Political Ideology

In all models, the strength of political ideology is found to be an indicator for political information use through the indirect path. The strongest role is played in the model for online political information use, suggesting that a stronger political orientation is a very strong indicator for information consumption under conditions where the audience seeks for it online, which supports previous findings that it is a stable predictor of information consumption (Cho et al., 2009; Shah, McLeod, et al., 2007). However, here the direct path is only relevant for online political participation.

For Facebook political information use, this finding is slightly weaker in terms of significance, which brings up an argument that when the information exposure is more indirect, there is a reduced need for a strong political ideology. This goes further to support a position that an audience previously disinterested in political participation may be more likely to participate through the information source of Facebook brought about by information exposure through the friend network (Ellison et al., 2007; Steinfield et al., 2008; Zube et al., 2009), which they would otherwise not have been exposed to. For Facebook, this indirect role holds true for both online and offline political participation through the path of credibility. However, the direct role is limited to that of online political participation.

For mobile phone political information use, strength of ideology plays the weakest role through the indirect path. This also suggests a continuation of what is noted through the path of Facebook. There is again a reference to the friend network, which here is argued to be stronger than on the other mediums. This suggests that the strength of political ideology is less a concern when the friend becomes better known, forming an argument not previously existing in other research, to the best of researcher's knowledge. Here the strength of political ideology also has a direct impact on both online and offline political participation, while the indirect path is limited to online political participation.

Wider View Exposure and Political Participation

Results from Figure 1 and 2 indicate that both online political information use and Facebook political information use leads to wider view exposure. For online political information use, this supports a case for the continued existence of sources like professional journalism in the online capacity. This counters claims that the mainstream media are going extinct due to social media (Parsons, 2011), and also supports the argument of Cho et al. (2009) that the internet leads to an increase in political participation, not to a decrease as argued by some. This supports the internet as a supplier of diverse information, and forms an

argument that the user actively seeks for additional information online. In fact, this is found to be strongest and most diverse supplier of information, exceeding that of Facebook.

Furthermore, this may suggest that many online political information sources, especially online main stream media, listservs, and blogs have begun to implement many of the same web2.0 features social media alone is being praised for. This would enrich and simplify their content (Daft & Lengel, 1983; Strait, 2008), also extended through the implementation of profiles and the use of avatars to create a predominantly weak friend network (Bente, Roggenberg, Kromer, & Eschenburg, 2008; Pena & Hancock, 2008; Yee, Bailenson, & Ducheneaut, 2009) to enrich reports with interactive comment sections.

For Facebook this path through wider view exposure is much weaker than for online political information use. This supports an argument where there is a proposed balance between strong and weak friend ties as defined by (Ellison et al., 2007), where a weaker friend network provides a diversity of views, but is weakened by the existence of a strong friend network. Here, it would seem that a strong friend network is more set in their ideological predispositions, being less willing to accept arguments that counter their own, and more likely to coordinate with similar minded groups. There is nevertheless a wider view exposure, and the fact that it does not lead to political participation suggests that it affects this ideological predisposition by creating a certain level of uncertainty. Further notice is also taken of the nature of social media information dissemination, which occurs through a network where the 'friend' can be identified as a person, organisation, non-governmental organisation, or governmental organisation in possession of a profile (Zube et al., 2009). Such identification possibly leads to the information being more credible.

The lack of support for mobile phone political information use actually supports a case where a stronger friend network leads to a lack of diversity and a stronger overall direct association on political participation, specifically in offline political participation. Mobile

phone can then be argued to lead to a network of friends that form a closer group concerning political participation, and the strength of political ideology is less essential for them to form this position. They seem to be more likely to avoid alternative information altogether.

With all considered, especially as noted above under online political information use, a sheer mass of information seems to lead to inaction, although it does live up to the expectations of the libertarian media theory to provide the public with a diversity of views from which they have to decide for themselves whether or not to participate (Fourie, 2001). Arguably, for such diverse information to lead to political participation, it has to be supplied in a reduced or limited fashion by a credible source such as a gatekeeper, in the case of online information use, or an opinion leader, in the case of Facebook.

The next section will take a closer look at this credibility aspect, and test for a possible correlation between that and wider view exposure.

Credibility

Figure 1, 2, and 3 all show support for the role of the importance of credibility for the three mediums, and the following role for online political participation. This is also true for offline political participation through Facebook political use. A strong case is formed for the importance of a credible source visible within the medium.

From Figure 1 online political information use is seen as the most credible. This credibility is also related to the source of the information. For a newspaper this would be related to position of the paper, the editor, or a journalist while a blog would the source would most likely also be seen as that of the writer or the blog owner. A case is then made that these more traditional and mainstream sources are still able to hold a status of credibility. Too often mainstream media are being accused of bias, both on- and offline (Hirschorn, 2010; Parenti, 2004; Smith, 2010), or of favourably framing one political player over another (Christen, 2005; Druckman & Parkin, 2005; Entman, 2007). This has often brought into

question their continuation as the watchdog for society (Caparini, 2004; Parsons, 2011).

Results in this paper, however, find that such traditional information sources online are seen as far more credible than the possible replacing source of Facebook, as one example of social media. What is more, this source also leads to online political participation, but this association is not so strong, losing momentum after a credibility check. This implies that this medium does not have an identifiable leader to sustain political action, and the lack thereof leads to a near complete loss of the motivation to participate based on credible information.

Another aspect, as noted above, is that online political information use is also the strongest source for widest view exposure. This forms an interesting proposition, namely that an information source leading to wider view exposure may also be seen as more credible. A bivariate correlation was run to test for this, results indicating that there is a perfect positive significance between wider view exposure and credibility, $r(1) = 0.124$, $p < 0.01$, indicating that as wider view exposure increases, credibility also increases. This relationship explains 1.54 % of the variance in credibility. This finding also holds relevant to Figure 2 for Facebook. However, it is beyond the scope of this paper to further investigate this relationship, but future researchers could follow up to determine whether online political information use can lead to online political participation through the path of wider view exposure and credibility.

Facebook provides a much weaker sense of credibility, suggesting that a Facebook friend network that is relative also in for credibility perception. This returns to the structure of the friend network, and the Facebook profile (Ellison et al., 2007; Heiberger & Harper, 2008; Steinfield et al., 2008). Credibility would then go in hand with the level to which the Facebook Profile is considered to be a weak friend tie, or a strong friend tie. The weakened results found suggests that a Facebook friend network is balanced between a strong friend network, perceived as credible, and a weak friend network perceived as not credible,

supporting the validity of the so called friend network in assisting the prediction of Facebook uses. Interestingly though, Facebook leads to a much stronger online political participation than online political information use, suggesting that the type of credibility is perhaps more stable and even able to persuade a weak friend into participating in politics online. This supports a case where Facebook provides a platform for a previously disinterested audience to spread their views, protected by the cover a profile and the grouping of similar minded friends (Gaines & Mondak, 2009), which could lead to political participation also for them as they find an audience willing that listens to them (Nisbet & Scheufele, 2004; Scheufele et al., 2004).

When also taking into consideration that Facebook has profiles and avatar, through which a person can establish the perception on an interpersonal relationship, it also becomes plausible to argue that some of these profiles, be they individuals or organisations, may act as opinion leaders through which these groups are formed and coordinated. Such a structure would also increase the level of political participation (Nisbet & Kotcher, 2009). This would perhaps also explain the presence of offline political participation. Facebook provides a platform through which opinion leaders can establish credibility and encourage previously disinterested people to participate in politics online. Then potentially also encourages them through acts of discussion and persuasion to participate in offline voting behaviour (Nisbet & Scheufele, 2004; Scheufele et al., 2004), making this perhaps more useful as a platform through which politicians can engage the growing on community.

This also put to rest fears of persons who believe that Facebook will result in non-critical debate through the mass dissemination of potentially false information and the resulting formation of emotion-fuelled political participation, especially offline (Roux, 2010). Figure 2 actually indicates that Facebook has the weakest direct association to online political participation, suggesting that credibility becomes an important source prior to blind, socio-

emotive, participation. This supports a finding that Facebook is exactly the type of platform needed to boost a more democratic participation in politics, and that attempt to censor this medium could lead to the destruction of this credibility which is needed for the liberalisation of politics.

Mobile phone political information use is also seen as a credible source of information, in fact much more so than Facebook and also leads to a stronger online political participation. This is probably due to the more personal nature of friend network, which suggests the users are more likely to know and trust each other. However, mobile phones have only a short research history of supporting political participation in both online and offline capacity (Tunisian, 2011), but all of it recent (Lenhart, 2010; Smith, 2010). However, when coupled with the strong direct association in offline political participation, the source's credibility is potentially a problem, raising the fear of participation based on emotional and stereotypical views gained from false information. Political participation feeding on the fuel of sensationalism cannot lead to critical debate, and subsequent accountability, which is the essence of a democracy (Caparini, 2004; Fukuyama, 1995). Thus, while this medium is seen as credible and leading to online political participation, it is its role in offline political participation that needs to be questioned.

Limitations

This research initially hoped to also compare two different social media platforms, namely Facebook and Twitter, but the valid number of Twitter users reduced too dramatically compared to that of Facebook, for an unbiased comparison to be possible. This research thus acknowledges a limitation of a random sample, in that it is impossible to control how many of the sample will answer yes to a certain question.

Recognising the many great benefits of having access to a secondary dataset, such as the availability of a nationwide sample, this research also acknowledges that there are some

limitations. This paper recognises one such limitation in that it is not possible to construct scales for some of the main variables used. These variables include offline political participation, credibility, and wider view exposure, all of which are dichotomous.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research should focus on obtaining better datasets for the testing of Twitter, and perhaps also other major social media in use, under the same conditions as Facebook in Figure 2. This would provide for a comparison to see if the second most used social media in the United States is also able to live up to expectations of serving a growing online nature of politics, while also attempting to obtain continuous scale variants of the dichotomous variables used in this paper. This would make it possible to increase the generalizability of findings.

Furthermore, this research found some evidence for the existence of opinion leaders on Facebook, and suggests that future research should apply some more focus to determining the precise role of these opinion leaders in establishing credibility prior to political participation. Closer attention should also be placed on the role of the friend network of Facebook in determining when a source is considered to be credible, for example, whether the source is perceived as credible due to his status, his friendship relations, or his ability to argue a point on his profile page.

In addition, this paper also found some evidence that wider view exposure and online political information use are strongly correlated. This proposes the possibility that these mediums can also lead to political participation through wider view exposure, providing that they are also credible. Future research can also try to pursue this path analyses in order to determine its truth.

In conclusion, this paper finds strong support for both the direct in and indirect role of online political information use, Facebook political information used, and mobile phone

political information use in especially political participation. This paper finds especially that credibility plays a role of all mediums, and is especially strong for online political information use and mobile phone political information use, while also leading to offline political participation through the use of Facebook political information use.

Arguments are formed for Facebook to have a balanced weak and strong friend network, where there is the potential of an opinion leader that can persuade previously disinterested audience members to also participate online, and less so offline, but only if this source is perceived as credible. The case for Facebook argues that social media has the potential to become a mature participant in critical and informed political debate, perhaps even matching and exceeding that of blogs and other online political information sources. It supports and encourages a continued online presence of government and political candidates, but also for the voices of opposition through wider view exposure, which at this stage seems to be blocking political participation.

Mobile phones and online political information use has also been found to be significant role players as credible sources of information that leads to online political participation, but there is no indirect path through credibility or view exposure that leads to offline political participation. Since politics are increasingly going online (Smith, 2011a, 2011b), these mediums become important contributors to online political information dissemination, and potentially debate, but their potential inspire voting behaviour is not yet mature.

This research concludes that the mediums used in this paper have demonstrated a strong tendency to online political through the path of credibility, suggesting the importance of opinion leaders. For Facebook this is especially pertinent, being the only medium that leads to offline political participation. Furthermore, the continued relevancy of mobile phones for political information use has become a providing source of information, being

able to capture videos, photos, and audio and share them online or offline. While they are not seen as a diverse source of information, they can connect to the internet and social media (Smith, 2011c), increasing their friend network to that of social media. The combinations of these sources are becoming increasingly indispensable to political participation. A constant information feed has been turned on, but one that leads only leads to political participation through a path of credibility.



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Appendix: Tables and Figures

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Mediums in Political Participation

	Valid N	Mean	Percentage %	SD	Range	Notes
Age	1582	46.66		0.5	73	Continuous
Gender (Male)	1554		44.8%		1	Dichotomous
Race (White)	1532		81%		1	Dichotomous
Hispanic	1564		8.2%		1	Dichotomous
Income	1290	5.36		2.31	8	Continuous
Education	1572	4.98		1.48	6	Continuous
Ideology	1488	.73		0.66	2	Continuous
Traditional Media	1541	2.04		0.92	2	Continuous
Online Info Use	1582	2.37		1.73	6	Scale
Facebook info use	915	.46		0.95	4	Scale
Mobile phone Info Use	1473	.62		1.68	7	Scale
Wider View Exposure	1467		64.9%		1	Dichotomous
Credibility	1392		37.3%		1	Dichotomous
Offline Pol Part (voted)	1575		67.6%	0.47	1	Dichotomous
Online Pol Part	1582	.49		1.01	6	Scale

Table 2

Association of Mediums in Online Political Participation

	Model 1: Online Info	Model 2: Facebook	Model 3: Mobile phones
O1: Demographics			
Age	.075**	.140***	.117***
Sex (Male)	-.017	.016	-.025
Race	-.012	-.019	.072*
Hispanic	.019	.017	-.013
Education	.008	.024	.064*
Income	-.059	.031	-.011
<i>Incremental R² (%)</i>	<i>1.7%</i>	<i>3.0%</i>	<i>1.8%</i>
O1: Political Ideology			
Ideology	.087***	.103***	.112***
<i>Incremental R² (%)</i>	<i>2.3%</i>	<i>3.0%</i>	<i>2.3%</i>
S: Mediums			
Traditional mediums	.008	.073*	.049
Online info	.501***		
Facebook		.565***	
Mobile			.416***
<i>Incremental R² (%)</i>	<i>24.1%</i>	<i>33.3%</i>	<i>17.8%</i>
O2: Mediators			
Wider View Exposure	.030	.048	.097***
Credibility	.070*	.102***	.116***
<i>Incremental R² (%)</i>	<i>.6%</i>	<i>1.3%</i>	<i>2.4%</i>
Total R ² (%)	28.0%	40.5%	24.3%

Note: All Betas are standardised coefficients. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001.

Table 3

Association of Mediums in Offline Political Participation

	Model 1: Online Info		Model 2: Facebook		Model : Mobile phone	
	Beta	Exp(B)	Beta	Exp(B)	Beta	Exp(B)
O1: Demographics						
Age	.927***	2.526	.926***	2.525	1.003***	2.726
Sex (Male)	.123	1.131	.116	1.122	.060	1.062
Race	-.001	.999	.017	1.017	.078	1.081
Hispanic	-.095	.910	-.114	.892	-.155	.856
Education	.219*	1.245	.296**	1.344	.258**	1.294
Income	.173	1.189	.218*	1.244	.320***	1.377
<i>Incremental R² (%)</i>	23.7%		23.2%		23.9%	
O1: Political Ideology						
Ideology	.173	1.147	.073	1.075	.213*	1.238
<i>Incremental R² (%)</i>	.6%		.2%		1%	
S: Mediums						
Traditional mediums	.055	1.057	.145	1.156	.089	1.093
Online info	.530***	1.699				
Facebook			.266**	1.304		
Mobile					.702***	2.017
<i>Incremental R² (%)</i>	4.5%		2.1%		7.6%	
O2: Mediators						
Wider View Exposure	-.146	.864	-.134	1.228	-.114	.892
Credibility	.114	1.120	.206*	2.985	.122	1.130
<i>Incremental R² (%)</i>	.5%		1%		.4%	
Total R ² (%)	29.3%		26.5%		32.9%	

Note: Betas are standardised coefficients. Exp(B) (Odds Ratios) are not standardised. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001.

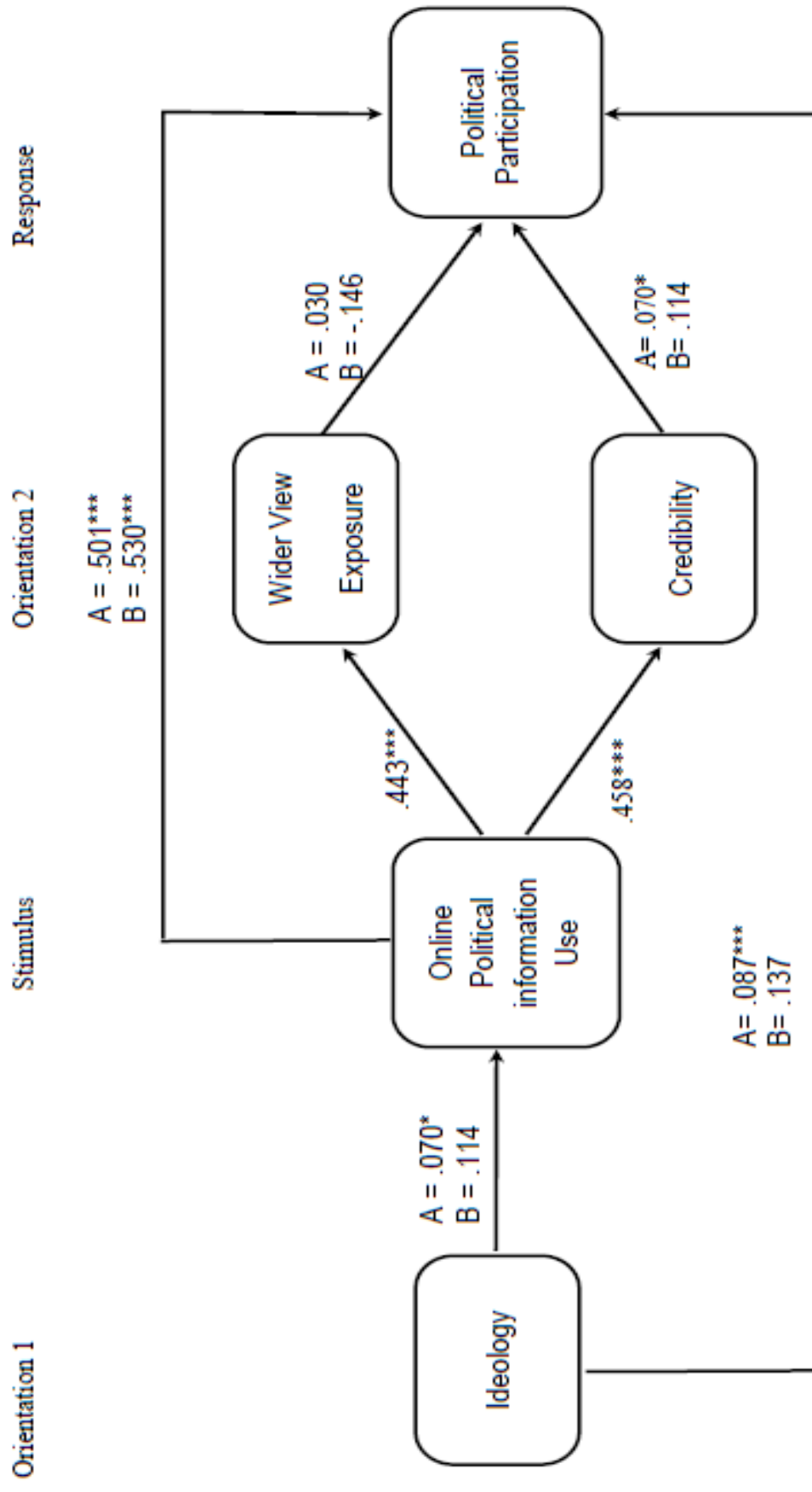


Figure 1. O-S-O-R Model: Association of Online Political Information Use on Political Participation
 Note: All coefficients are based on OLS regression path analyses. The demographic variables (Block 1), and traditional media (Block 3), are used for control purposes and is not indicated here in order to emphasise the hypothesized relationships. A = online political participation, B = offline political participation. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

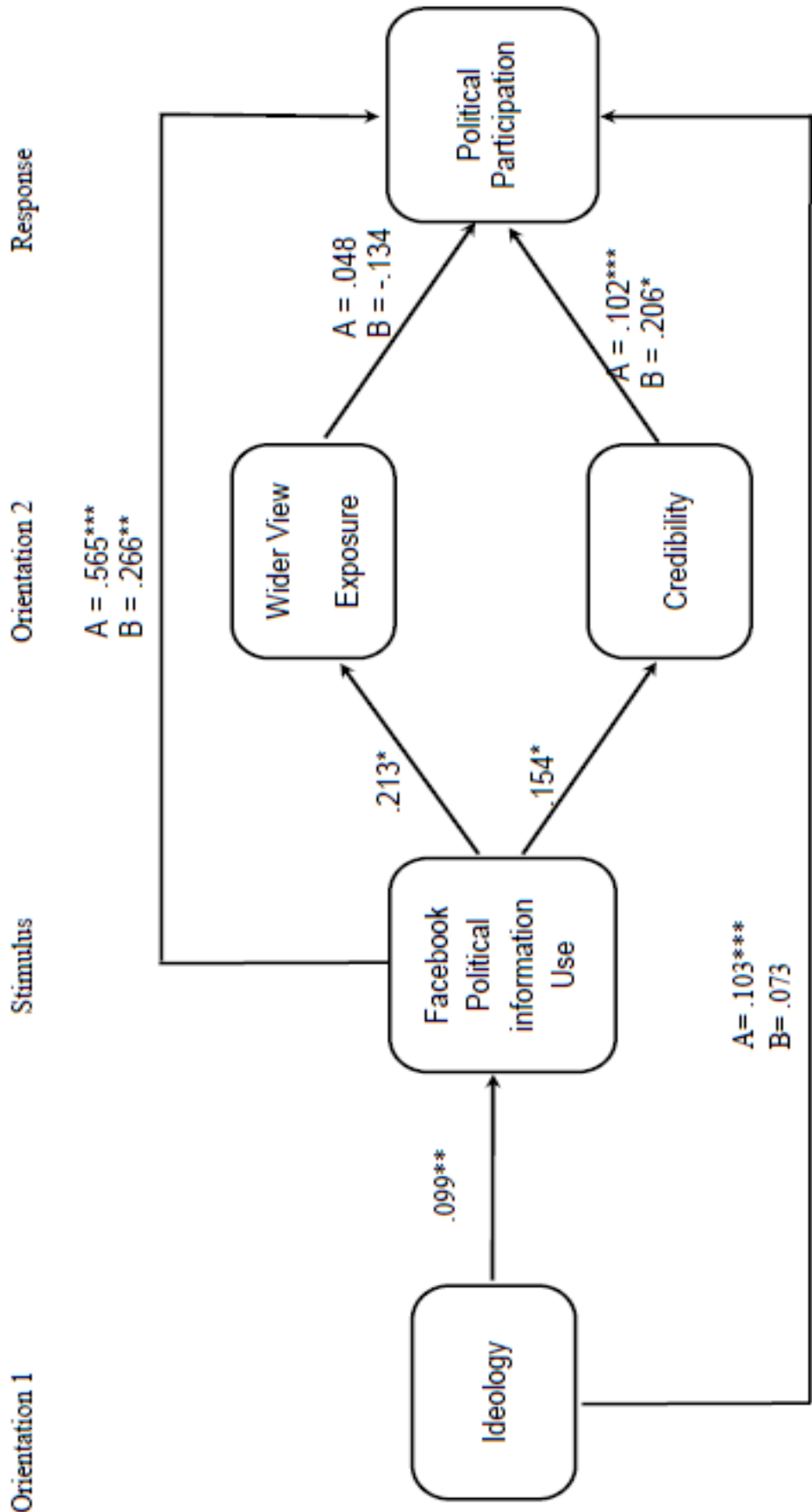


Figure 2. O-S-O-R Model: Association of Facebook Political Information Use on Political Participation

Note: All coefficients are based on OLS regression path analyses. The demographic variables (Block 1), and traditional media (Block 3), are used for control purposes and is not indicated here in order to emphasise the hypothesized relationships. A = online political participation, B = offline political participation. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

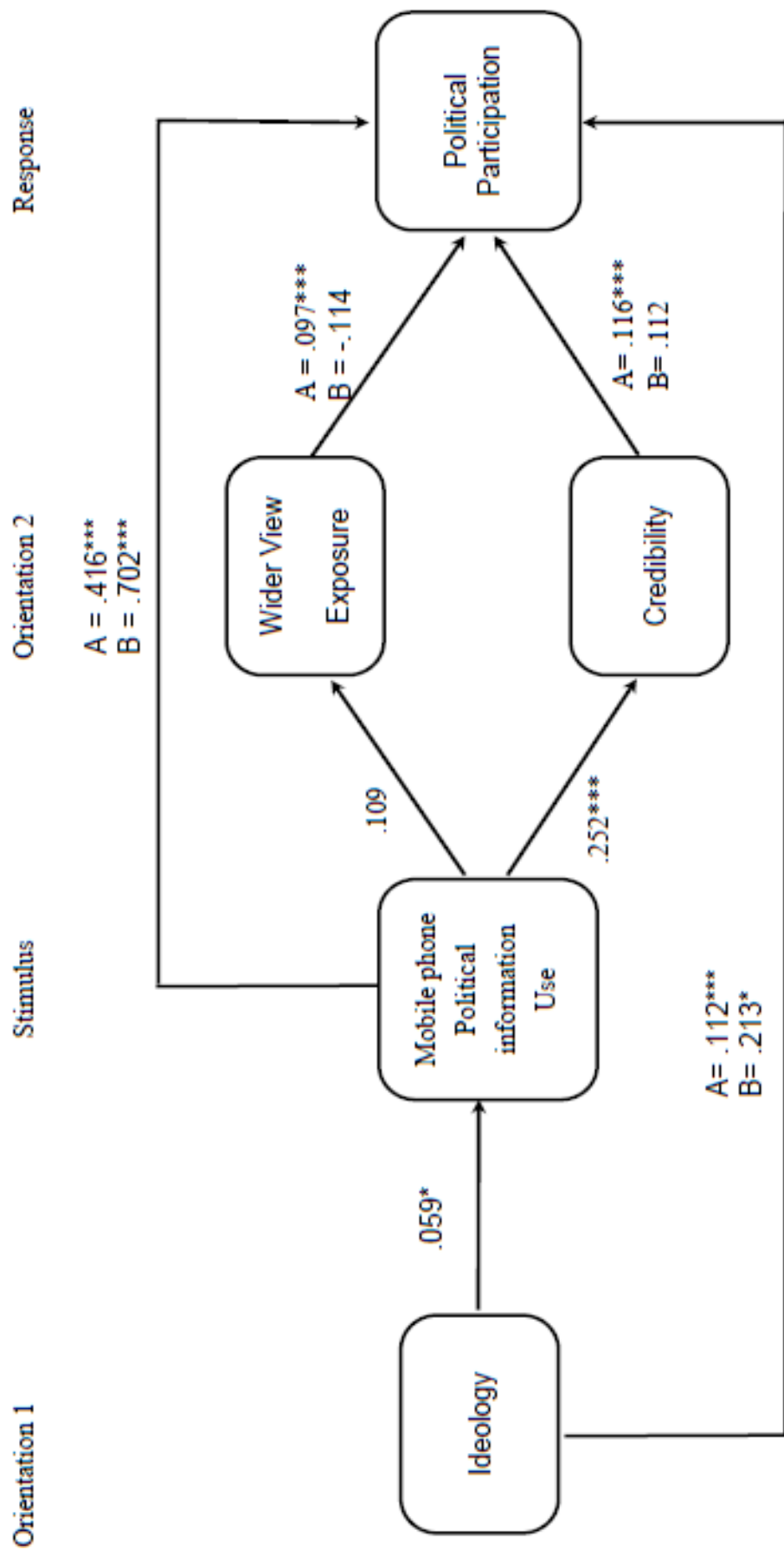


Figure 3. O-S-O-R Model: Association of Mobile phone Political Information Use on Political Participation

Note: All coefficients are based on OLS regression path analyses. The demographic variables (Block 1), and traditional media (Block 3), are used for control purposes and is not indicated here in order to emphasise the hypothesized relationships. A = online political participation, B = offline political participation. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.