

8-14-2017

# Advancing Democracy One Tweet at a Time

Landon T. Hester

*Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, lheste3@lsu.edu*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool\\_theses](https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_theses)



Part of the [Communication Technology and New Media Commons](#), [Mass Communication Commons](#), [Social Influence and Political Communication Commons](#), and the [Social Media Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Hester, Landon T., "Advancing Democracy One Tweet at a Time" (2017). *LSU Master's Theses*. 4308.  
[https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool\\_theses/4308](https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_theses/4308)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Master's Theses by an authorized graduate school editor of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [gradetd@lsu.edu](mailto:gradetd@lsu.edu).

8-14-2017

# Advancing Democracy One Tweet at a Time

Landon T. Hester

8-14-2017

# Advancing Democracy One Tweet at a Time

Landon T. Hester

ADVANCING DEMOCRACY ONE TWEET AT A TIME

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty  
of the Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Mass Communication

in

The School of Mass Communication

By  
Landon Trace Hester  
B.A., Louisiana State University, 2013  
December 2017

## **Acknowledgements**

To start, I would like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Lance Porter, for the tremendous amount of time and effort he invested into this project. I could not have done this without his patience, guidance and expertise. You set high standards for me and helped me produce my best work. Additionally, I would like to thank the members of my committee, Dr. Jack Hamilton and Dr. Meghan Sanders, for providing valuable insight and feedback throughout this process.

I would also like to thank my husband, Anthony Gambino, for his constant patience and encouragement. I could not have completed this without you by my side. Also, I need to thank my Mom and Dad for their continuous support and for teaching me the value of knowledge from a young age. Finally, I would like to thank all of the faculty and staff at the Manship School of Mass Communication who helped me along the way. I am proud to be a two-time alumna of this prestigious institution.

## Table of Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i> .....	<i>ii</i>
<i>Abstract</i> .....	<i>iv</i>
<i>Introduction</i> .....	<i>1</i>
<i>Social Media or Social Networking Sites (SNSs)</i> .....	<i>3</i>
<i>Facebook</i> .....	<i>9</i>
<i>Twitter</i> .....	<i>11</i>
<i>Social Media &amp; U.S. Politics</i> .....	<i>14</i>
<i>2000 Election</i> .....	<i>15</i>
<i>2004 Election</i> .....	<i>16</i>
<i>2008 Election</i> .....	<i>17</i>
<i>2012 Election</i> .....	<i>19</i>
<i>2016 Election</i> .....	<i>21</i>
<i>What is Democracy?</i> .....	<i>23</i>
<i>Political Discussion</i> .....	<i>25</i>
<i>Political Knowledge</i> .....	<i>32</i>
<i>Political Participation</i> .....	<i>41</i>
<i>Methods</i> .....	<i>50</i>
<i>Participants</i> .....	<i>51</i>
<i>Constructing the Measures</i> .....	<i>52</i>
<i>Results</i> .....	<i>55</i>
<i>Mobile &amp; Second Screening</i> .....	<i>56</i>
<i>Political Discussion</i> .....	<i>58</i>
<i>Political Knowledge</i> .....	<i>60</i>
<i>Political Participation</i> .....	<i>64</i>
<i>Discussion</i> .....	<i>66</i>
<i>Future Research &amp; Limitations</i> .....	<i>72</i>
<i>References</i> .....	<i>75</i>
<i>Appendix A</i> .....	<i>85</i>
<i>Appendix B</i> .....	<i>86</i>
<i>Vita</i> .....	<i>107</i>

## **Abstract**

This thesis takes a broad look how citizens use social media to foster political discussion, enhance political knowledge and engage in political participation in the United States. In this study, democracy is broken down into three empirically measurable components: political discussion, knowledge and participation. To begin, I provide an in-depth review of past research examining the impact social media has on each element of democracy. In addition, I analyze data collected from a novel social media panel of 3,811 Twitter users by researchers from Louisiana State University (Davis et. al, 2017). From this, I measure the impact that Facebook and Twitter have had on political discussion, knowledge and participation. I found that Twitter users use both Twitter and Facebook in ways that foster political discussion and enhance political knowledge. The results indicates that Twitter users are in fact using social media to share political news, further enhancing these platforms' democratic potential.

## **Introduction**

Social media have transformed politics around the world, but to what extent? Having witnessed first hand the power of social media in the United States' political process, I have many questions that need answers.

This thesis will take a broad look how citizens use social media to discuss politics, how they interact with and elaborate on political content they see on Facebook and Twitter and how citizens utilize digital media to participate in the political process. In this paper, I will define social media and depict its evolution throughout the U.S. presidential elections starting in 2000. I will also attempt to define democracy and show the rise of digital democracy in our current digitally driven society. After, democracy will be broken down into three empirically measurable components: political discussion, knowledge and participation. From there, I will show how social media have influenced these critical features.

As for the methodology, I will analyze data collected from a novel social media panel of 3,811 Twitter users by researchers from Louisiana State University (Davis et. al, 2017). This data source combines self-identification and self-reported data with social media data gathered from 904 actual Twitter accounts. In this survey, participants were asked a series of demographic, political, social and media-related questions. From this dataset, I aim to analyze the role of Facebook and Twitter in the promotion of democracy. Specifically, I will look at Facebook and Twitter and the extent to which these platforms impact political discussion, knowledge and participation. The data from this study was weighted to be consistent with Pew Research Center's report on the estimated population profile of U.S. Twitter users. Accordingly, sampling weights were computed as a function of



race/ethnicity, gender, education, age and family income. These weights were computed in an attempt to correct for biases in the sample of Twitter users.

Though the Internet was just introduced to the common man at the end of the twentieth century, it has already integrated into the developed world and has transformed into a key source for political information. Internet utopians argue that the Internet contributes to the strengthening of democracy by connecting people across the globe and by creating new social movements and public spheres (Rheingold, 1993). Some argue that the Internet is a democratic medium because citizens have access to a plethora of information, and it allows citizens to voice and exchange their opinions with others (Morris, 2011). Other research indicates that citizens' Internet use is positively associated with political involvement, efficacy, knowledge and participation (Xenos & Moy, 2007; Austin et al., 2008; Hardy & Scheufele, 2005; Johnson & Kaye, 2003; Tedesco, 2007).

With the Internet came the development of social media. Since its introduction, social media have seen rapid, steady growth and have become a prominent forum for political discussion, participation and knowledge. These novel platforms provide an exciting and innovative way for individuals to communicate and share information with each other. Thus, it is quite obvious why the Internet quickly became a prominent part of our political process. In today's digitally driven society, most politicians are turning to social media to build their digital brand and strengthen their online presence. They are using platforms like Facebook and Twitter to stay in touch with the public, share their recent activities, communicate their stance on political issues, raise money, engage citizens and organize the public around their cause. There is no question that social media have reshaped the traditional structures of political communication. It has also drastically

changed the ways in which politicians interact with voters and each other. Communicating through social media has brought politicians and potential voters closer than ever before by enabling fast, efficient and targeted communication without having to rely on the mainstream media to disseminate their messages.

The effectiveness of social media in the political process stems from its' ability to quickly, efficiently and cheaply organize a larger number of supporters around a common goal. The larger a movement becomes, the more money it can raise for lobbying efforts and electing preferred candidates. Social media enable more people to hear about movements and offer more opportunities for people to get involved for relatively little effort. Often times, this comes in the form of sharing content or donating money. These acts increase organizations' ability to influence not only who gets elected but also the policies they propose. There is no doubt that social media have made many positive contributions to the world of politics, but these platforms have also brought forth many new challenges that society will soon have to address. This study extends the current understanding of how social media impacts democratic development, beginning with the following review of relevant literature.

### **Social Media or Social Networking Sites (SNSs)**

Social media is not a completely new generation of Internet tools. In fact, it developed from the concept of Web 2.0. Kaplan and Haenlein provide a comprehensive definition of Web 2.0:

a term that was first used in 2004 to describe a new way in which software developers and end-users started to utilize the World Wide Web; that is, as a platform whereby content and applications are no longer created and published by

individuals, but instead are continuously modified by all users in a participatory and collaborative fashion (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p. 60).

What makes these new Web 2.0 tools unique is their ability to encourage users to produce content and exchange information with other users (O'Reilly, 2005).

Put simply, social media are web-based tools that allow users to follow, rate, create, communicate and share information and knowledge with others. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p. 61).” These sites all contain a user-generated element and are characterized by their openness and collaboration abilities (Bruns, 2006; Leung, 2009).

According to boyd (2007), social media software is organized around human interaction and is focused on the collective. In 2007, social media was still in its early stages. In an attempt to stabilize the conversation around this phenomenon, researchers Nicole Ellison and danah boyd (2007) defined social network sites, SNSs, as:

Web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct public or semi-public profiles within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users within who they share a connection, and (3) view/traverse their lists of connections and those made by others within the system (Ellison & boyd, 2007).

Given the drastic changes of social network sites since 2007, Ellison and boyd (2013) provide an updated and more accurate definition of today's SNSs:

a social network site is a networked communication platform in which participants 1) have uniquely identifiable profiles that consist of user-supplied content, content provided by other users, and/or system-provided data; 2) can publicly articulate connections that can be viewed and traversed by others; and 3) can consume, produce, and/or interact with streams of user-generated content provided by their connections on the site system (Ellison & boyd, 2013).

By 2011, most major social media platforms had become less profile-centric and more media-centric. Sites like Facebook and Twitter were centered around a stream of continuously updated content (boyd and Ellison, 2013). These streams are what Naaman, Boase, and Lai (2010) refer to as “social awareness streams.” Users’ streams are populated with content shared by people they’ve selected to “friend” or “follow” within a given network. According to boyd and Ellison, this “aggregated collection of media and text from one’s Friends serves as the point of departure for other activities on the site or the Web, replacing the act of surfing from profile to profile to discover updated content (boyd and Ellison, 2013, p. 8).”

Throughout recent years, social media platforms have begun to play a more substantial role in government operations and the political process as a whole. Social media users are continuously gaining more opportunities to engage in public speech, greater access to information and a heightened ability to undertake collective action. Citizens are using sites like Facebook and Twitter for not only social interaction but also political participatory actions. One could argue that social media allow for more citizens to actively participate in political process more than ever before. This social use of the

Internet was predicted from the very beginning. The founder of the World Wide Web, Tim Berners-Lee, once said, “The Web is more a social creation than a technical one. It was designed for a social effect to help people work together (Berners-Lee et. al, 2000, p. 133).” Therefore, it would seem that participation is one of the key characteristics that accounts for the difference between ‘old’ web and ‘new’ social media.

Social media and other digital media technologies are different from traditional media in several ways. First, online media are interactive and allow citizens direct access to politicians and allow them to receive instant feedback from the campaign. Second, digital media makes politics appear more accessible to the average citizen (Bucy & Gregson, 2001) and provides a new public space to discuss politics (Papacharissi, 2002). Third, it gives a vast amount of diverse opportunities for citizens to engage in the political process. With these new tools, citizens can follow politicians on social networking sites, blog about issues important to them, debate peers, participate in polls, and create petitions. The Internet significantly reduces the cost of participation in terms of both time and effort and provides citizens with a seemingly endless amount of political information.

There are thousands of social media sites on the web in the form of blogs, social networking sites, image and video sharing platforms, virtual reality sites and countless others. Sites like Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, YouTube, Flickr, LinkedIn, Wikipedia, Blogger and WordPress are among the most popular social networking sites around today. Many researchers agree that sites like these have strong, positive effects on both political participation and knowledge (Hendricks & Denton, 2010), while others believe that these platforms are predominantly entertainment-oriented (Prior, 2007). Though digital media have increased the number of opportunities in which citizens can

learn and participate in the political process, the degree to which citizens learn and participate ultimately depends on their motivation and ability to do so (Dimitrova et. al, 2014).

Many researchers hold a less optimistic view of the democratizing potential of social media sites. For instance, Hindman (2008) demonstrates how the hierarchies of traditional media and politics are reproduced online by examining political campaigns, online political communities, search engines, website traffic and audience concentration. He asserts that characterizing the Internet as a democratic tool implies that it functions to amplify the political voice of ordinary citizens. He argues that the Internet's infrastructure and online gatekeeping constrains citizens' choices and filters the content we see. Additionally, he found that audience concentration equals or surpasses that of traditional media (Hindman, 2008).

Hindman's book, *The Myth of Digital Democracy*, introduces the concept of Googlearchy. He argues that Google's link structure limits the content that we see, and it privileges well-established and heavily resourced sites. By doing this, search engines keep the public's attention highly concentrated by placing the most popular and heavily linked websites at the top of search results. These sites are typically the top search results and draw the most traffic. Thus, it is argued that Google's algorithms reinforce the "winner take all" pattern of the Internet. Overall, this research suggests that though the Internet levels some political inequalities, it also creates new ones. Traditional barriers to entry and gatekeepers determine online political content seen and voices heard in a number of ways (Hindman, 2008). Based on this analysis, it can be argued that the Internet is less open and democratic than many believe it to be.

In many ways, Hindman's argument can be applied to the current social media environment. Even though it is easy for citizens to voice their political opinions on social media by posting status updates, joining political groups or engaging in political discussions, it is much harder for ordinary citizens to be heard by a mass audience. Each social media network has a distinct algorithm that determines what content is seen and which voices are heard. Therefore, social media may further reinforce the "winner take all" pattern of the Internet.

Similarly, Evgeny Morozov's research on the Internet and politics bursts the bubble of Internet optimists everywhere. In his book *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom*, he says, "Where new media and the Internet truly excel is in suppressing boredom. Previously, boredom was one of the few truly effective ways to politicize the population denied release valves for channeling their discontent, but this is no longer the case (Morozov, 2011, p. 80)." Additionally, Morozov does not believe that the Internet has the ability to promote democracy around the globe:

Those of us rooting for the further spread of democracy around the globe must stop dreaming and face reality: The Internet has provided so many cheap and easily available entertainment fixes... that it has become considerably harder to get people to care about politics at all (Morozov, 2011, p. 81).

Morozov worries that social media is causing "narcissism" and "attention seeking" among citizens. "There's nothing wrong with the self-promotion per se, but it seems quite unlikely that such narcissistic campaigners would be able to develop true feelings of empathy or be prepared to make sacrifices that political life... requires (Morozov, 2011, p. 187)." When it

comes to activism, or “slacktivism” as he calls it, Morozov argues that online activism does not compare to traditional activism:

when everyone in the group performs the same mundane tasks, it’s impossible to evaluate individual contributions, and people inevitably begin slacking off...

Increasing the number of participants diminishes the relative social pressure on each and often results in inferior outputs (Morozov, 2011, p. 193).

For the purpose of this study, I will focus specifically on the social media platforms Facebook and Twitter. Though these sites are different in many ways, users of both are equally likely to see and post political content (Pew Research Center, 2016). These sites are also widely used in the political process by politicians and government entities. For these reasons, I believe that these platforms will be most effective for the purpose of this study.

#### Facebook:

Facebook is a multi-purpose social networking platform that has seen exponential growth in recent years. On this site, users can chat with others, like or share content, sell products, promote services, relay information, consume news, send private messages, post photos, watch videos and even engage in real time instant messaging with other users. Users construct personal profiles and provide personal information ranging from their political views to their favorite movies or hobbies. On Facebook, there is no limit on the amount of information that one can share or post to the site. Facebook allows users to like, friend or follow other users, public figures, politicians, businesses, and any other person or organization with an active Facebook account. These elements combined with features such as Facebook groups, fan pages, live streaming and hashtag capabilities have made



Facebook a popular platform for online socializing and networking with other users on the platform.

Throughout literature, scholars have attributed Facebook use to increased levels of political participation and social capital (Gil de Zuniga, Jung & Valenzuela, 2012). Additionally, researchers have found that Facebook serves as a space to participate in political conversation and deliberation (Thorson, Vraga & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2014). Further, the platform also allows for the incidental exposure to political information and news (Valenzuela, 2013).

To keep users interested and coming back, Facebook uses algorithms that are designed to learn users behaviors and determine which content they will find most interesting. Facebook's like button helps developers figure out which content users find interesting, entertaining, boring, offensive, and so on. This allows the platform to deliver each user a personalized experience every time they sign on. In recent years, Facebook has transformed its like button into a reaction button. This allows the Facebook to receive more detailed information on users' reactions to specific content they encounter on platform.

A national survey conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2016 indicates that Facebook continues to be the most popular social networking platform in the United States by a substantial margin. The overwhelming majority of adults who use multiple social media platforms indicate that Facebook is one of them. In fact, nearly 80 percent of online Americans are now using Facebook. This number has increased by 7 percentage points compared to a similar study conducted a year earlier (Pew Research Center, 2016).

Moreover, 93 percent of Twitter users use Facebook as well. With more and more people on Facebook, there has also been a rise in the number of citizens using the platform on a daily basis. The study found that 76 percent of American Facebook users check the site daily and nearly 55 percent visit the site several times a day. Additionally, 62 percent of online adults 65 and older are now using Facebook. This number is up 14 points since last year (Pew Research Center, 2016).

#### Twitter:

On the other hand, Twitter is a newer online social networking service and microblogging platform that allows users to post short, 140-character messages or “tweets.” This site is used to communicate with other individuals, follow updates from other users or public figures and easily network around ideas or topics using the platform’s hashtag capabilities. The “#” symbol, or what is now commonly referred to as a hashtag, is a tool used by social media users to organize topics of discussion and easily connect users with similar content. The clickable hashtag will redirect users to a separate webpage displaying all of the public tweets that include the same topic-tag. This innovative feature makes it easier for users to follow and participate in discussions around specific topics that interest them. Over the years, the hashtag capability has continued to evolve:

in fact, hashtags are no longer simply used as a categorization method, but they are specifically created by individual online users to comment on, praise or criticize ideas (#democracyisbetter) or people (#celochiedebeppe), to promote brands (Coca Cola, #AmericasBeautiful) or events (#Wimbledon), to spread and provide updates on breaking news items (#earthquake), just to mention a few examples (Caleffi, 2015, p. 1).

Twitter users can upload photos and videos, share links to outside information and send private messages to other followers. Also, users are able to retweet or favorite content they enjoy and follow users that interest them. By and large, this platform is used for the sharing of information and opinion. Unlike Facebook, Twitter allows for more anonymity in online communication. Users are not required to share information about themselves in order to interact with others or gain followers. This platform focuses less on whom the users are and more on what the users have to say. Thus, anonymity is a key characteristic that distinguishes Twitter from Facebook.

Since it first launched, Twitter has always placed an emphasis on real-time communication. The anonymous, public atmosphere on the platform is meant to encourage conversation around live events and relevant topics. Historically, users' Twitter Timelines consisted of every tweet from every user they follow, in chronological order. However, Twitter has recently added algorithms to its timeline, departing from the real-time element that has defined the platform since the beginning. In 2015, Twitter changed its functionality to allow users to search for tweets dating as far back as 2006. That same year, Twitter released a "recap" feature that enables users to see popular tweets that they may have missed since their last time on the platform. This update allows users to stay up to date regardless of their time spent on the site.

In 2016, Twitter introduced the "Show me the best Tweets first" feature, which presents Timeline content based on relevancy, rather than chronologically. Put simply, this algorithm ranks tweets based on the accounts users interact most and the content they engage with most often. The remaining tweets are then displayed underneath in reverse

chronological order. Though this seems a lot like the Facebook News Feed algorithm, Twitter allows users to opt out of this feature. Unlike Twitter, Facebook's News Feed has used algorithms since its launch in 2006.

Twitter is another platform that has become prominent in the political process. Partly, this is due to fact that the site has attracted an audience that is largely interested in news and current events. Around one-quarter of adult Internet users use Twitter. Further, Twitter users tend to be younger and more educated than the users of other social media platforms. Thus, these users are likely to be active in politics. A Pew Research Center study found that 36% of adults 18-29 are on Twitter, but a mere 10% adults 65 or older use the platform. Of the adults who use Twitter, 29 percent of them are Internet users with college degrees. Further, 42 percent of users indicate that they visit Twitter daily and 23 percent report visiting it multiple times a day (Pew Research Center, 2016).

From the beginning, Twitter has been a social media platform that focuses on mobile. Thus, Twitter's 140 character limit was based on the original limits of text messaging or SMS constraints. Twitter functions to allow anyone, anywhere to read, write and share tweets. According to Twitter (2017), around 82 percent of the platform's active users access it through a mobile device. With this, I expect smartphone use and mobile access to influence individuals' ability to use the platform for political purposes.

Therefore, this study will attempt to answer the following research question:

- *R1: Does owning a smartphone affect Twitter users' posting patterns and posting frequency?*

## **Social Media & U.S. Politics**

Throughout history, technological developments have continuously reshaped American democracy. The penny press emerged during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which reduced newsprint cost and drastically expanded the reach of partisan newspapers. Some have argued that this significantly compromised the effectiveness of the press as a check on government power (Kaplan, 2002). The radio and television became dominant sources of information in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These new platforms brought with them concern that citizens would judge politicians based on their charisma, that power over information would be concentrated in the hands of large corporations and that policy debates would be reduced to mere sound bites (Lang & Lang, 2002; Bagdikian, 1983). The printing press, telegraphs, telephones, radios and televisions have all been introduced as new media and each was recognized by optimists for its potential to enhance democratic values around the world. However, each of these innovations have also been regularly misunderstood and misjudged throughout literature.

Since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Internet shifted from a novel luxury to a tool used by almost 90 percent of the U.S. population as a primary source of news and information (Pew Research Center, 2016). With the expansion of online news sites in the early 2000s, many became concerned that the Internet would make it easier for like-minded individuals to organize and would result in an echo chamber where citizens are insulated from contradictory perspectives. In recent years, public concern has shifted to focus on social media. These platforms are much different than pervious technologies, because they allow users to create and disseminate content without editorial judgment, fact-checking or filtering. As we have witnessed during the 2016 presidential election, fake

news has become a public concern across party lines due to its' proliferation through social media (Pew Research Center, 2016).

In the section below, I will briefly describe how the Internet and social media have become an influential part of the U.S. political process. What follows is an evolutionary depiction of how the Internet and social media have been utilized in presidential elections from 2000-2016.

#### 2000 Election:

During the 2000 presidential election, campaign websites became a common tool used by campaigns to disseminate their messages. At this time, candidate's campaign websites operated as a sort of electronic brochure. For this reason, some proclaim that the 2000 presidential election is the "first Internet election" (Foot & Schneider, 2004).

At this time, only 6 percent of Americans used the Internet as their main source of campaign news. Though nearly a quarter of Americans received at least some campaign news from campaign websites, the information on these sites were not consistently updated and varied in functionality and navigability. Therefore, citizens still relied on a mix of traditional news outlets for their flow of online campaign information. For the most part, these traditional news sites failed to provide citizens with valuable resources like external links for information on the candidates' policy stances. Also, these sites rarely provided citizens with opportunities engage with the sites through taking polls or surveys on the candidates' abilities. However, some of the sites did offer interactive elements like games and discussion boards (Pew Research Center, 2016).

## 2004 Presidential Election

Howard Dean's 2004 presidential campaign was among the first to recognize the potential power and influence of the Internet for political purposes marks a shift in how campaigns and political candidates use the Web. This was the first presidential election in which digital technologies played a key role in the campaign. In 2004, the campaigns moved beyond using the Internet as simply an electronic brochure and began using it as an "electronic headquarters" (Foot & Schneider, 2004, p. 10).

The Dean campaign was the first to create an interactive campaign website. Through the website, Dean encouraged supporters to generate campaign content, join online discussions, get involved and organize their own campaign events. Some argue that Dean's campaign turned many previous inactive citizens into activists. The Internet provided an innovative means of generating funding and volunteer support. Dean's website use garnered positive press coverage and sparked the citizens' interests. This allowed Dean to receive the necessary name recognition to rise as the Democratic Party front-runner. Many political scientists credit Dean's early and unexpected rise as the Democratic front-runner in the 2004 presidential election to his use of the Internet to organize, energize and finance his campaign (Hindman, 2008). However, Hindman also argued that Dean's campaign "marked the end of the beginning for Internet politics, the moment when the medium impacted traditional concerns like campaign fund-raising and mobilization (Hindman, 2008, p. 37)."

Starting in the midterm election of 2006, what we now know as social media emerged and allowed citizens to join media-rich online communities that focused on the creation and exchange of media content (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010; O'Reilly, 2005).

## 2008 Presidential Election

By 2008, new digital technologies emerged such as social networking sites and microblogging platforms. As this increased in popularity, politicians learned of their potential to effectively mobilize and organize supporters (Hendricks & Denton, 2010). According to the Encyclopedia of Political Communication, the following online tools are critical in the political communication process: social networking, online video sharing, campaign websites that allow online feedback and participation, podcasting and blogging sites (Kaid & Holtz-Bacha, 2007).

Ron Paul was one of the Republican nominees in the 2008 presidential election. The Paul campaign is widely acknowledged for its use of the Internet to facilitate grassroots social networking and fundraising. By using what is now referred to as “money bombs,” the Paul campaign team was able to break multiple presidential fundraising records, including the single-day online fundraising record twice. Despite being one of the lesser-known candidates, the campaign reported raising more than \$6 million from more than 30,000 individual donors in a 24-hour period. This innovative online fundraising strategy started the “Ron Paul Revolution” and resulted in more attention and credibility for the campaign (Los Angeles Times, 2007). Moreover, *TIME* magazine referred to Paul as “the new 2.0 candidate” because of effective recruiting of supporters via social media (TIME, 2007). In large part, President Obama’s 2008 election campaign was systematically based on social media. The Obama campaign used fifteen social networking sites to run his campaign, and these platforms played a key role in the overall campaign strategy (Lutz, 2009; Talbot 2008; Greengard, 2009). His campaign team knew the power of integrating social media into traditionally offline activities. These novel online platforms were used to



raise money and develop a groundswell of passionate volunteers. Using social media, email, online video and text messaging, the campaign team was able to attract everyday citizens and transform them into empowered and engaged volunteers. In fact, Obama's garnered upwards of 5 million supporters from social networking sites alone. The campaign also developed their own social media network, [www.my.barackobama.com](http://www.my.barackobama.com) (MyBO), which allowed users to connect and get involved with the campaign. Overall, around two million MyBO profiles were created (Aaker & Chang, 2010).

Additionally, Aaker and Chang (2010) reported that the sites registered users and volunteers created 35,000 volunteer groups, wrote 400,000 blog posts and planned over 200,000 offline campaign events. Heavily relying on the Internet, the Obama campaign was able to raise \$639 million from 3 million individual donors. Of the funds raised, 6 million of them were in increments of \$100 or less:

The campaign not only used these tools more effectively than other candidates to organize, communicate, and fundraise, but also leveraged them to support its grassroots strategy that tapped into the hearts of the voters. What resulted was both a victory for the Democrats and Obama, and the legacy of one of the most effective Internet marketing plans in history, where social media and technology enabled the individual to activate and participate in a movement (Aaker & Chang, 2010, p. 1).

During this election, social media sites were quite popular among young adults. They used social networking sites to obtain information about the campaign, exchange their political views, share information about the candidates and express their support for a candidate (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010; Kohut, 2008; Smith & Rainie, 2008). This election

marked the turning point where young adults were relying more on new online media than traditional news media for political information. For example, 27 percent of adults under the age of 30 reported obtaining information about the 2008 presidential election from social networking sites compared to only 1 percent of adults 40 and older (Kohut, 2008). Researchers note that social media played a key role in affecting young voters' political cognition and behaviors in the 2008 election cycle (Marchese, 2008; Owen, 2008).

### 2012 Presidential Election

In 2012, the role of the traditional media was reduced even further because of the ever-increasing number of social media platforms that candidates could utilize to by pass the media and speak directly to voters. Both Obama and Romney relied heavily on social media to discuss campaign issues during 2012 presidential election (Pew Research Center, 2016). However, Obama and his experts already had an established social media system up and running. The Obama campaign produced its' own news and disseminated it across nine different social media platforms, posting nearly four times as much content than the Romney campaign. During a two-week period examined by the Pew Research Center, Romney's campaign published 128 posts across social media platforms compared to 614 posts by Obama. The largest gap was seen on Twitter where the Obama campaign posted 29 tweets per day compared to the one tweet per day average by the Romney campaign. Further, the Obama campaign produced more than twice as many YouTube videos and released twice as many blogs as the Romney campaign (Pew Research Center, 2012). Overall, this election cycle showed large divides in candidate's technological advancement and digital activity.

Unlike any campaign before it, the Obama campaign team invested heavily in technology and analytics. The team produced software called Narwhal that allowed everyone involved with the campaign to communicate easily and seamlessly regardless of their geographic location. It also allowed them to collaborate and share information with others working in the campaign. In other words, it was a way to bring the field office to the Internet. This gave regular volunteers access to call sheets, address directories and other tasks that were traditionally offline activities. It also gave volunteers a way to organize their friends and family members as well (Balz, 2013).

New digital technologies allowed citizens to tailor campaign messages to peak their interests. By 2012, both campaigns used third party data to strategically cater their Internet advertisements to different types of voters. Additionally, Obama's website provided 18 different constituency categories allowing viewers to customize their digital experience on the site. Additionally, the candidates used social media and blogs to encourage citizens to take action on- or offline. Around half of Obama and Romney's posts contained a call to action of some sort (Pew Research Center, 2016).

In the final week leading up to the election, the Obama campaign utilized a Facebook application to reach young voters and pull in some last minute support, which the team referred to as "targeted sharing." The idea behind this was that people are more likely to listen to a message from a friend rather than a message from the campaign. Obama's campaign team had more than one million supporters sign up to use the application, and those individuals also gave the campaign permission to access their Facebook friend lists. The campaign team used the app to encourage supporters to share campaign content with their Facebook friends. This tactic resulted in more than 600,000 individuals sharing

Obama campaign content with more than five million contacts. The content urged people to register to vote, donate money, watch a campaign video or simply get out to vote (TIME, 2012).

As election day rolled around in 2012, more than 9 million Facebook users went online to share that they had participated in the election with their social media network by clicking an “I voted” button on the platform (Bakshy et al., 2012). Overall, Rainie, Smith, Schlozman, Brady & Verba (2012) concluded that over one-third of American social media users liked or promoted content related to politics or social issues during this election cycle.

### 2016 Presidential Election

Noting Obama’s ability to successfully leverage social media, there’s no wonder why most of today’s politicians are active on all major social media platforms. With his success, more politicians discovered the benefits and opportunities that come from using social media. Quite rapidly, social media became a central part of the democratic process. Currently, much of our political discourse takes place primarily on social media. According to Pew Research Center (2016) citizens received more news on the 2016 election cycle from social media than ever before. However, considering that content can be posted on social media without any editorial judgment, filtering or fact checking, conflicts and polarized debates often arise.

The 2016 presidential election brought with it an influx of inaccurate information and misleading news stories that were shared by numerous voters across social media. These stories were produced with the intent to confuse and divide voters across party lines. This fake content was shared millions of times and difficult for average social media

users to decipher its validity. This has left many people are concerned by potential impact that fake news has on the political process.

In the modern digital age, voters are looking to their smartphones for news and entertainment. Thus, SNSs provide an ideal platform for candidates to garner support and disseminate messages to the public. During the 2016 presidential election, Donald Trump further highlighted the power of social media using Twitter. Trump was able to attract 20.2 million Twitter followers and created an effective platform to deliver his messages instantly to the public (Pew Research Center, 2016). Truthful or not, Trump used Twitter to say whatever he wanted throughout the 2016 election. In terms of vocabulary, phrasing and mannerisms, Trump has a different way of speaking than other modern presidents. To his supporters, this comes across as refreshing and a change from the typical polished politician. However, to his opponents, his rhetoric comes across as informal, misleading and often times derogatory.

Throughout his campaign, Trump never concealed his contempt for the news media. To this day, he continues to regularly condemn the press as being dishonest, fake and untrustworthy despite relying heavily on the broadcast media and Twitter to deliver his message to the public. Trump's campaign used distortion and deception to skillfully exploit the weaknesses of the modern media landscape. Trump's team understood the power of social media and used it to their advantage. The campaign used platforms like Twitter to bypass the press and speak directly to the masses, only to be later amplified by the news media.

Trump himself seems to understand the power of social media in the U.S. political system and even went as far as to credit Twitter for his victory in the 2016 presidential

election. Perry et al. (2017) coded all of Trump's tweets from the day he received the nomination on May 24th to inauguration day on January 20th. In this span of less than eight months, Trump tweeted 1,229 times. They found that Trump strategically tweeted most frequently in the morning in an attempt to influence the day's news cycle. Further, their results showed that the majority of his tweets were exclamations and that one in five tweets were in all caps, a form of virtual yelling. Almost half of Trump's tweets were coded as negative, which ended up being twice as much as any other category of tweet. Additionally, of Trump's tweets that received more than 30,000 likes, 51 percent of them were negative and 65 percent were in all caps, indicating that his audience engaged more when he negative content or exclamations.

It is evident that social media have not only changed the way politicians communicate with voters but also the overall tone and content of political speech. This past election cycle was a brutal one for candidates and voters alike. Some would argue that social media might have been a significant contributor to many voters' disdain for the political process during the 2016 election.

### **What is Democracy?**

Throughout the literature, scholars have repeatedly attempted to define what constitutes democracy. Existing research offers varying definitions of democracy and has proposed different models of its functionality. Dahl (1971) posits that democracy is a political system in which power is alternated through regular, competitive elections, and the nation's citizens are granted basic human rights.

Researcher Sylvia Walby (2009) identified three main criteria of democracy: suffrage, presence and depth. She argues that all adults should participate in the political

process and vote in elections. Other scholars believe that a vibrant civil society and public sphere are critical to democracy and civility in public discourse. Moreover, some claim that nations should ensure broad representation of the citizenry and the democratization of a variety of institutions, such as welfare, employment and military (Walby, 2009). Markoff (1999) saw democracy as an ever-evolving process that must be continually renewed, redefined and reinvented.

More recently, Moghadam (2013) provides a more expanded definition of democracy stating that “democracy refers to a political regime in which citizens enjoy an array of civil, political, and social/economic rights that are institutionalized, and citizens participate through the formal political process, civil society, and social movements; it also refers to a society or culture governed by the values of tolerance, participation, and solidarity (Moghadam, 2013, p. 394).” In the same study, the researcher refers to liberal democracy as the following:

a system of government in which those who hold public political office are chosen through regularly held competitive elections in which all adult citizens possessing legal capacity may freely participate by casting equally weighted votes. The strength of this model of democracy is that citizens are constitutionally guaranteed their rights to acquire and disseminate information, organize for lawful purposes, express their views, receive due process of law, and participate in the political process. But liberal democracy need not ensure that citizens have the material means to enjoy the civil and political rights that are afforded constitutionally. Real democracy should be seen as a multifaceted and ongoing process at different levels of social

existence: in the family, in the community, at the workplace, in the economy, in civil society, and in the polity (Moghadam, 2013, p. 403 & 404).

As shown, there is no clear way to define democracy. Therefore, I will focus on three important aspects of a healthy democracy: political discussion, knowledge and participation. For each variable, I will attempt to show why it is important to the democratic process and how social media impacts it.

### **Political Discussion**

*“Conversation is the soul of democracy.” - Alexander de Toqueville*

The right to speak openly and freely about politics has long been a key feature of the democratic process. Discussing politics allows citizens to exchange information with others and provides an interpretive framework to process that information. Conversations are a rich form of political information because they allow individuals to exchange ideas, debate topics and reflect upon the information obtained through discussion (Valenzuela et. al, 2012).

For many years, equality of political voices for each citizen has been one of the most revered democratic values in the United States (Dahl, 1971). Shave emphasized the critical role of political discussion for democracy (Dewey, 1927; Habermas, 1984; Cohen & Arato, 1992; Kim, Wyatt & Katz, 1999). Even in today’s mass media environment, political conversation remains a fundamental component of democracy, leading some to argue that democracy begins with human conversation (Anderson, Dardenne & Killenberg, 1994). Scholarship has defined political discussion in a number of ways. For example, Kim, Wyatt and Katz (1999) suggest that political conversation refers to “all kinds of political talk,



discussion, or argument as long as they are voluntarily carried out by free citizens without any specific purpose or predetermined agenda (Kim, Wyatt & Katz, 1999, p. 362).” Schmitt-Beck (2008) defines political discussions as “episodes of political conversation and discussion that take place between the non-elite members of a political community (Schmitt-Beck, 2008, p. 341).” Political discussions are goal-oriented and should attempt to be problem solving, issue-based and aimed at exposing principles or defending public interests (Valenzuela et. al, 2012).

There is a vast amount of research highlighting the positive outcomes that come from political discussion. Katz (1992) argues that political discussion leads to political action, stating that:

opinions are really formed through the day-to-day exchange of comments and observations, which goes on among people... By the very process of talking to one another, the vague dispositions which people have are crystallized, step-by-step, into specific attitudes, acts, or votes (Katz, 1992, p. 80).

Lasker (1949) pointed out that, “our opinions can remain unformed and mutually contradictory for a long time unless a discussion or some other stimulus forces us to reconsider them (Lasker, 1949, p. 207-208).” In the years since Lasker’s work, many scholars have shared this same view (Zaller & Feldman, 1992; Zaller, 1996; Mutz, Sniderman & Brody, 1996). Thus, one can argue that citizens who frequently engage in political discussion will likely have more clear, considered and consistent opinions.

A number of studies indicate that individuals are more likely to mobilize and engage in political activities when they talk about public affairs (Cho et. al, 2005; Wyatt et. al, 2000;

Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995). After controlling for offline participation, political orientations, news use and socio-demographics, Valenzuela et. al (2012) found that political communication within networks is a significant predictor of web-based forms of political engagement. In the same study, the researchers found that increased online participation is positively associated with the size of online discussion networks. For individuals, political discussion provides citizens with the opportunity to reduce cognitive inconsistency (Zaller, 1992) and improves the quality of a person's opinions and arguments (Lasker, 1949; Billing, 1996).

Over the last few decades, researchers have found strong empirical evidence to support the claim that informal discussions spur political engagement (Kim et. al, 1999). Similarly, Hardy & Scheufele (2005) found a direct association between chatting about politics online and political participation offline. Political discussions allow citizens the opportunity to learn new information, debate issues and reach mutual understanding, which are all central precursors of political participation. Based the process of political discussion introduced by Tarde (1989), one can assume that social media fuels conversation, conversation shapes opinions and opinions trigger political action. Tarde believes that the news media provides the public with conversational topics of the day and serves as universal trigger of political discussion (Tarde, 1989). Mirroring that, Anderson, Dardenne and Killenberg (1994) assert that, "news is what people talk about, and news makes people talk (Anderson, Dardenne & Killenberg, 1994, p. 37)."

When it comes to political discussion, social media platforms present many new opportunities but also several new challenges. Often, users will encounter offensive or contentious content without even seeking it out. A seemingly harmless post can quickly

turn into endless comment stream of partisan bickering. With many users having complex networks made up of family, friends, acquaintances, professional connections and public figures, traversing through these personal and political interactions can be annoying and daunting.

Though there are numerous studies that indicate the positive effects from online political discussion, there are a number of others that show the challenges it brings. This aligns with the Schudson (1997) argument that not all political conversations are meaningful for democratic participation. He asserts that conversation is not a magic solution for the problems facing our democracy and that, “Nothing in conversation itself suggests democracy (Schudson, 1997, p. 305).” He suggests that conversation should not be thought of as being the “soul of democracy” and believes that conversation is more concerned with sociability. Schudson asserts that democracy creates conversation, rather than conversation creating democracy.

Since the rise of the Internet, scholars have noted that people are more likely to engage in uncivil behavior in online political discussions, especially when users are able to remain anonymous (Davis, 2005). Further, there is evidence to show that incivility in political exchanges can reduce individuals’ political trust (Mutz & Reeves, 2005). Thus, it can be argued that uncivil political discussions on SNSs will deter people from online political participation. As stated in the spiral of silence theory, those who feel like their opinion aligns with the majority are more likely to engage in political discussion (Noelle-Neumann, 1993). Hayes (2007) offers an interesting insight into the avoidance strategies used by citizens to refrain from voicing their opinions in hostile environments. The study identifies a number of different approaches people use to censor their own opinion

expression including: expressing indifference or ambivalence, reflecting the question back without answering it and trying to change the subject. The researcher found that if a person's opinion is perceived as different, they will be less comfortable expressing that opinion because of the possibility that they will be isolated from everyone else. The findings suggest that the need for being respected by peers takes precedence over expressing one's opinion (Hayes, 2007). If the spiral of silence theory is applicable in the digital media environment, this could lead to the creation of social echo chambers that will negatively impact political discussion on social media.

On the other hand, it has been suggested that dialogue between citizens holding contrasting views is the essence of deliberative democracy (MacKuen, 1990). The theory proposed by MacKuen (1990) posits that one's likelihood of engaging in political discussion is dependent upon the perceived friendliness of the environment in which the conversation is taking place. Price, Cappelle and Nir (2002) examine how disagreement in political conversation contributes to citizens' ability to make quality opinions and gain an understanding of different perspectives. The researchers found that disagreement in political discussion enhances deliberative opinions by prompting more careful consideration of issues. They also argue that civility in political discourse is fostered by a heightened exposure to disagreement (Price, Cappelle & Nir, 2002). Based on this logic, citizens who deliberate gain the capacity to form better-reasoned opinions. Though some research highlights the potential positive effects that discussion disagreement can have on political decision-making, it can also be argued that disagreement in online political discourse could lead to increased polarization and heightened distrust for government among social media users.

More recently, a study showed that only 9 percent of users indicate that they often comment, discuss or post about politics on social media. Meanwhile, almost 70 percent said that they never or hardly ever do this. According a 2016 Pew Research Center survey of U.S. adults, “some users enjoy the opportunities for political debate and engagement that social media facilitates, but many more express resignation, frustration over the tone and content of social platforms (Pew Research Center, 2016).” The center found that political debate and discussion is common among social media users, and that those who are already political active appreciate the ability to participate intense debates and additional engagement opportunities these platforms provide. However, a larger number of participants found the content and tone of the political interactions on their social media pages to be annoying and aggravating. More than half of the respondents said the political disagreements that encounter are frustrating and stressful, while only 37 percent found their social media interactions interesting and informative. Still, 41 percent of people do not feel strongly one-way or the other about the political content they see on social media. Another interesting finding is that 64 percent of the respondents indicated that their social media interactions with users that have opposing viewpoints leave them feeling like they have less of mutual understanding or more polarized (Pew Research Center, 2016). However, it has been suggested that conflict tends to increase both political knowledge and participation levels (Cho & McLeod, 2007).

Also thought provoking is the discovery that many social media users find their political conversations on these platforms to be uniquely angry and disrespectful, with a large segment feeling like it is a representation of the broader political climate of 2016. Around half of social media users found political discussions to be more disrespectful, more

uncivil and angrier than the other spaces in which politics is discussed. Around 83 percent of users actively try to ignore political arguments on social media and content that they disagree with. Arguably more concerning, 60 percent of users deliberately changed their settings in order to see less political content from a friend or have taken measures to block or remove someone as a friend because of something related to politics (Pew Research Center, 2016).

However, the Pew Research Center also found that users with high levels of political interest and involvement enjoy debating, talking and posting political messages on social media. These users express the same annoyance over the tone and tenor of the political discussions on social media, but think these platforms are valuable tools that enable political discussion and action. Among the users with high levels of political engagement, around one-third of them believe that social media sites do “very well” at including new voices in political discussion (Pew Research Center, 2016). For many users of Facebook and Twitter, it is normal to encounter political content from a range of people holding a wide variety of viewpoints. Around half of Facebook users and more than a third of Twitter users have network made up people holding a mix of political views. However, when users come across political posts that they disagree with, they are more likely to ignore it than engage in further discussion (Pew Research Center, 2016).

The findings from the Pew Research Center study are eye-opening and make me question the overall impact that social media is having on political discussion. If the majority of citizens are turned off by the political discussions fostered by social media, are these platforms creating the political dialogue necessary for a functioning democracy? This question is complex with much to consider.

Discussing politics allows us to exchange information with others and provides an interpretive framework to process that information. In my opinion, it is one of the most critical elements of a healthy democracy. Discussion teaches us how to empathize with others and makes us work to develop a mutual understanding. In order to have effective political discussion, there must be a certain level of respect that has arguably been lost on social media. I also believe that social media users' ability to selectively filter the content they see and discussions in which they engage could have a polarizing effect, creating an echo chamber of like-minded individuals. Argumentation and disagreement have the possibility to be a valuable source of political knowledge, which is a key antecedent of participation and is critical to a healthy democracy.

Therefore, this study will attempt to answer the following research question:

- *R2: To what extent do Twitter users use social media to post political content and engage in political discussion?*

### **Political Knowledge**

One of the key functions of the news media in a democratic society is to inform its citizens. In today's digitally mediated society, there seems to be an infinite number of ways in which citizens can access the news. With more and more people turning to social media for political news and information, we must consider what impact social media as a source of political news is having on citizens' political knowledge.

Political knowledge has been defined as "the range of factual information about politics that is stored in long-term memory (Delli Carpini & Keeter 1989, p. 10)." In order for citizens to be politically informed, Luskin (1990) argues that individuals need to be exposed to political information, have the abilities to make sense of that information and be

motivated enough to seek and process more information about the topic at hand. This aligns with cognitive mediation model proposed by Eveland (2001) that suggests cognitive variables such as attention and elaboration mediate media effects on knowledge.

Regardless, political knowledge is important because it not only helps citizens make informed decisions, but it also allows them to develop political preferences that reflect their unique interests and needs (Althaus, 2001). During the 2000 presidential election, Kenski & Stroud (2006) found that both Internet access and online exposure to campaign information were significant predictors of citizens' overall political knowledge levels. Additionally, another study found that individuals who visited candidates campaign websites had higher levels of knowledge about political issues than those who did not (Bimber & Davis, 2003).

More recently, a survey conducted during the 2008 presidential elections showed that heightened exposure and attention to online news was positively related to individuals' level of political knowledge (Groshek & Dimitrova, 2011). Moreover, scholars have found that trust is strongly associated with active engagement in civic life. Trust has the ability to encourage interpersonal discussion, which leads to additional opportunities to learn about public affairs (Putman, 2000). Since trust is conducive to interpersonal interaction, trust in others may also enhance political knowledge. Additionally, some studies have found that access to the Internet is associated with higher levels of political knowledge and engagement (Kenski & Stroud, 2006; Shah, Cho, Eveland & Kwakm 2005).

Other research indicates that the use of digital media has little or no effect on citizens' political knowledge. After controlling for factors such as age, gender, education, political interest, general knowledge and attention to politics in traditional media,



Dimitrova et. al (2014) found that digital media use has little impact on political knowledge. They argued that a person's political interests, prior knowledge and attention to politics in traditional media have a greater impact on individuals' political learning. Though the Internet is the largest information source ever created by mankind, some argue that, "diversity on the Internet is a mile wide but only an inch deep (Hindman & Cukier, 2004, p. 12)." Researchers Matthew Hindman and Kenneth Neil Cukier (2004) argue that even though it is easier than ever for individuals to create online content, it is more difficult than ever to have that content seen by others. They believe that despite the immeasurable amount of data the Internet provides, the Web's structure "leads to a staggering and unexpected degree of concentration, and may even exceed the concentration found in traditional, offline media (Hindman & Cukier, 2004, p. 12)." Hindman and Cukier suggest that though all sites on the Internet are equally retrievable, they are not equal in their visibility, ability to be found or audience reach. In their research on political websites, the researchers found that a few familiar and prominent sites control the online information environment.

Hindman (2009) argues that the Internet is far too large for any one person to view or comprehend in one lifetime. Thus, users must rely on search engines and hyperlinks. By using these navigational aids to find new content online, users are typically directed to the most popular content, making less common content extremely arduous to find. Being structured in this way, the Internet functions as a hierarchy that continually perpetuates itself. In other words, the most popular sites continuously get more links and become more dominant. Like its link structure, the Internet's traffic pattern is also extremely concentrated, meaning that there are a small number of popular sites but a vast number of

invisible ones. Hindman's studies indicate that the high degree of information-source concentration on the Web prevents it from providing the diversity of content that it theoretically promises. "In short, every Web site has a voice- but most speak in a whisper, and a powerful few are given a megaphone (Hindman & Cukier, 2004, p. 15)." This argument can also be applied to content on social media. Though everyone on social media has the ability to voice their opinion, it remains extremely difficult to be heard by a large audience. However, social media users are exposed to a diversity of content and new stories they wouldn't typical encounter. Considering that more citizens are now receiving their news from social media than search engines (Pew Research Center, 2016), the concentration that Hindman argues may not apply to news from social media.

According to a study conducted by the Pew Research Center in November of 2016, the majority of Americans indicated that they now receive their news from social media platforms. Additionally, around half of the voting public learned information about the 2016 presidential election from social media sites (Pew Research Center, 2016). However, others are concerned about the immense amount of information citizens receive and have access to, what many have come to refer to as an "information overload." Interestingly, another survey conducted by Pew Research Center in December of 2016 found that the vast majority of citizens do not think that information overload is a problem in their lives. In fact, the amount of people who feel overloaded by information has decreased from 27 percent to 20 percent over the past decade. Moreover, two-thirds of participants found that having more information at their fingertips actually simplifies their lives and the majority of respondents feel comfortable with their ability to deal with continuous information flows in their daily lives. Another interesting finding is that the more devices a person has,

the better they are in handling the continuous information flows. Nearly 80 percent of Americans find it easy to determine trustworthy information on the Internet and feel confident in their ability to use it to keep up with information demands. Further, around the same number of people believe that having all of this information makes them feel as though they have more control of things in their lives (Pew Research Center, 2016).

On the other hand, the same survey also showed that citizens with less access to the Internet have more difficulty finding the information they need and express more concern with information overload. In other words, those who have home broadband, smartphones and a tablet computer have an easier time managing the information they receive through the Internet. In addition, nearly half of the survey respondents believe that it is burdensome to keep track of the high information demands required by institutions in order to deal with them. Those who feel this way are also more likely to find it stressful to keep track of information on the Internet (Pew Research Center, 2016).

During the beginning of the Internet era, many were hopeful that it would narrow the geographic, demographic, ideological and cultural divides that persisted within American society (Kush, 2000; Schwartz, 1996). However, others contend that the Internet has failed to fill these divides, and that gaps in political knowledge and participation persist (Schlozman et al., 2012). This has led many researchers to fear that the Internet has created a digital divide by increasing inequalities along the lines of socioeconomic status, gender, age, race and location (Van Dijk, 2005; Mossberger et. al, 2003). According to Eastin, Cicchirillo and Mabry (2015), the digital divide refers to the increasing gap between low-income citizens who do not have Internet access and the wealthy or middle-class citizens living in the city who have access. Research on digital divides focuses on two

dimensions: Internet access and Internet skill (DiMaggio et al., 2004). The gap in Internet access is referred to as the first-level divide, while the second-level divide refers to the gap in individuals' skills using the Internet (Hargittai, 2002, 2008). Though many scholars claim that first level divide is being bridged by increased online access and computer ownership, Internet access still looks strikingly different for different demographics. If the Internet and social media sites are only being used by a certain segment of the population, this undermines the Internet as a democracy-promoting medium.

As with the Internet, computers and mobile have become more widely adopted in society, it is likely that the access divide will eventually disappear. For this reason, the research focusing on digital divides has shifted from focusing on who has access to digital technologies to now looking at the degree to which Internet users can use these technologies to find information, solve problems and make decisions, what many call the "second-level" digital divide. Those who focus on the second-level digital divide also look at citizens' ability to obtain the information necessary to contribute to the political process and their motivations for gathering that information (Min, 2010). Some refer to this as usage divides or what Norris (2001) called the democratic divide, which signifies "the differences between those who do, and do not, use the panoply of digital resources to engage, mobilize and participate in public life (Norris, 2001, p. 4). Other studies have found that that low SES citizens lack the skills necessary to locate information relevant to democratic participation. They argue that citizens with higher education levels actively seek information about public affairs whereas less educated individuals often seek entertainment information. The researchers found that citizens with a lower

socioeconomic status tend to acquire knowledge from gossip, rumor and folklore (van Dijk, 2005; Hargittai & Hinnant, 2008).

Instead of focusing on access to Internet technologies, researchers are now looking into the divide in users' skill levels. Hargittai (2002) found that there is a skill divide among Internet users by showing that more highly skilled Internet users make better use of the Internet. This finding suggests that those individuals who have been using the computers and Internet from their early stages will be better situated in our highly digital environment. For today's students, Internet access has become a requirement. Hargittai (2010) found that students lower in socioeconomic status, women, Hispanic students and African-American students have lower levels of Web know-how than other students. This is a huge problem within our society that will only become more prevalent as our reliance on the Internet for educational, political and professional purposes increases. Mirroring these concerns, Shelley, Thrane and Schulman (2006) argue:

by permitting some citizens to conduct their routine business with the government more easily, information technology appears to be widening the gap between the IT literate and those without basic navigation skills. As society becomes increasingly dependent on e-government, social barriers will be compounded if non-electronic voices are marginalized from political participation (Shelley, Thrane & Schulman, 2006, p. 48),

Additionally Schradie explores the theory that the Internet promotes a democratic and diverse public that is not solely dominated by elite voices. In her study, she found evidence for the existence of a digital production gap among adults based on education,

income, race, ethnicity and even gender. Schradie argues that class-based inequalities persist on the Internet. She found that the key mechanisms of this are the location of where one accesses the Internet and the frequency. From the findings of her study, Schradie concludes that the poor and working class are not able to access Internet technologies at the same rate as other users. In turn, this is creating a growing digital production divide within our society and lead to unequal political participation abilities among our citizens (Schradie, 2011). "If the Internet, which is much touted as a democracy-promoting medium, is mainly used by a certain segment of the population, then its democratic potential will be greatly undermined (Min, 2010, p. 23)."

According to another Pew Research Study released in 2016, individuals' preparedness and comfort using digital technologies for learning, or what they refer to as digital readiness, is dependent upon their race and ethnicity, socio-economic status and level of access to smartphones and home broadband. Around 52 percent of adults reported being relatively hesitant about embracing technology for learning. This finding indicates that the majority of American adults score below average on the measures of digital readiness, meaning that most citizens do not utilize the Internet for learning. Of the citizens that fall into this category, 14 percent are not confident in their computer skills and do not know how to locate trustworthy information online. Equally concerning, only 17 percent of adults reported feeling confident in their ability to use digital tools for personal learning (Pew Research Center, 2016).

Due to its prevalence in the 2016 presidential election, everyone from Pope Francis to President Obama has raised concerns about the potential impact of fake news on our political system. According to a Pew Research Survey released in December of 2016, 64

percent of Americans believe that fake news is causing mass confusion about current issues and events among the electorate. Around one-third of citizens indicate that they often see fake political news stories. However, the majority of Americans have some degree of confidence in their ability to know when a news story is made up. Of the respondents, 23 percent indicated that they have shared fake news on social media. Jerit and Barabas (2006) found that moderate levels of misleading rhetoric could degrade political knowledge. They claim that the misleading information environment is a reason why political knowledge may be so low. Nyham and Reifler (2010) explore the “backfire” effect of corrections and the persistence of political misperceptions. They found that corrections fail to reduce misperceptions. Instead, when people are given evidence against their beliefs, they reject the evidence and accept their previously held belief more strongly.

Political knowledge is closely related to political discussion and participation. Research indicates that individuals who possess context-relevant knowledge are more likely to participate in the political process (Ragsdale & Rusk, 1995). In fact, Delli Carpini and Keeter (1989) found that more than 70 percent of the most knowledgeable citizens participate in campaign activities, whereas only 16 percent of less knowledgeable citizens did so. Others argue that both political knowledge and participation are key mechanisms through which democracies bring about social good (Cho & McLeod, 2007).

Based on the incidental by-product model introduced by Baum (2003), citizens have the opportunity to gain political knowledge from social media even without actively seeking out the information. According to this model, the learning process is a by-product because individuals accidentally stumble upon political information that they normally would not encounter while scrolling through these platforms. With this, the gateway

hypothesis suggests that this accidental exposure to political information via social media can increase citizens' motivation to gather more information, spur political interest, increase engagement and lead to a greater willingness to express one's political voice (Baum, 2003). Political knowledge has been found to lead to more complex communication skills and the capacity to process information more thoroughly and effectively. Citizens with higher levels of education also have more opportunities to engage in political communications, both mass and interpersonal (Tichenor et al., 1970; Cho & McLeod, 2007). This could be because citizens with factual knowledge are more likely to know where and how to participate in the political process (Lemert, Mitzman, Seither, Cool & Hackett, 1977).

With all of that in mind, this study will attempt to answer the following research question:

- *R3: To what extent do Twitter users use social media to consume political information and learn about politics?*

### **Political Participation**

Through mass mobilizations like the civilian protests in the Middle East, Occupy Wall Street and Black Lives Matter, it is safe to say that social media have changed the game of politics. Social media enables action in the real world by helping facilitate channels of communication in the digital world. The rise of social media has also allowed politicians and government organizations to create new opportunities for political participation and to enable, engage and empower followers for various benefits. There is no question that social media have had a significant overall impact on how society participates in the political process. These digital technologies facilitate new forms of engagement and provide citizens with various ways to engage in civic political life. This is an important



focus of study, because some scholars argue that low levels of political participation among citizens are indicative of a weak democracy (Verba & Nie, 1987). Thus, many question the extent to which these digital forms of engagement have impacted society and the way it is governed.

Traditionally, political participation had been narrowly defined. According to Grönlund (2009) participation is “the specific activity of doing things together (Grönlund, 2009, pg. 13).” It has also been defined as an “activity that has the intent or effect of influencing government action – either directly by affecting the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make those policies (Verba et al., 1995, p. 38).” Verba and colleagues introduced a resource model that specifies three resources that account for political participation: time to participate in political activities, money to contribute to the political process and civic skill that ensure an individual can effectively participate in politics (Verba et al., 1995). More recently political participation was described as “behaviors aimed at shaping governmental policy, either by influencing the selection of government personnel or by affecting their choices (Xie & Jaeger, 2008, pg. 3).” Put simply, political participation can take place on social media, in the home or the streets, but the action must have the explicit intent to influence the political process. For this purpose of this study I will focus specifically on online political engagement and define it is any online political action that has the intent of influencing the political process or furthering a political agenda.

For many years, political participation and engagement has been a focal point of political science research. Many focus on traditional forms of participation such as voting, protesting, contacting elected officials or joining political groups. Though these forms of

participation have long been recognized as the core to democratic society, debates have emerged concerning the novel forms of political participation fostered by new digital technologies like social media and the Internet. Some scholars have been quick to label this form of participation off as slacktivism (Morozov, 2009), while others suggest that political participation is evolving alongside technological innovations (Koc-Michalska et. al, 2016).

Verba et. al (1995) introduced a civic voluntarism model aimed at explaining political participation. According to the proposed model, individuals participate in politics when they have the necessary resources to do so, such as time, money and cognitive abilities. Additionally, being asked to join political causes and/or possessing internal political efficacy can provide individuals with a psychological incentive to participate in the political process. Internal political efficacy is simply the “feeling that one is capable of influencing the public decision-making process (Milbrath & Goel, 1977, p. 57).” According to Verba and colleagues, the various forms of financial, human and social capital mentioned above have the ability to reduce the costs associated with engaging in politics (Verba et. al, 1995). Based on their logic, even nonpolitical participation, such as casually scrolling through social media, can be linked to political participation because it can “provide opportunities for the acquisition of politically relevant resources and the enhancement of a sense of psychological engagement with politics (Verba et al., 1995, p. 4).”

Other research has shown that social trust is positively linked to various forms of civic and political participation. Individuals with higher levels of trust for others tend to volunteer more often, donate more to charity, have higher levels of political and civic participation and are more accepting of minority views (Putnam, 2000). Like trust, community receptivity, or feeling comfortable in one’s surroundings, can be a significant

predictor of political participation, because it reduces the psychological barriers that may deter participation (Cho & McLeod, 2007). News media use has also been linked to political participation. This facilitates participation by providing a basis for political deliberation and discussion (Shah, Cho, Eveland & Kwak, 2005) and by enhancing political knowledge and awareness of civic opportunities (Norris, 1996).

In more recent years, scholars have found that using social media for political purposes is one of the strongest predictors of political participation (Dimitrova et. al, 2014). This could be due to the idea that social media has the ability to increase individuals' social capital related to political participation (Zhang et. al, 2010). Social media can be highly empowering and psychologically rewarding by making citizens feel like they are more engaged in the political process. Tan (1980) defined self-efficacy as an individual's belief that he or she can impact the political process through their efforts. Studies have found that self-efficacy can serve as a significant predictor of political participation (Scheufele & Nisbet, 2002) and voting behavior (Pinkleton & Austin, 2001). Further, citizens with high levels of self-efficacy also report having high cognitive involvement with politics (Pinkleton & Austin, 2001). It has also been argued that, "Even if such interactivity is only perceived and not truly realized, the very perception of opportunities to participate may contribute to higher internal and external self- efficacy (Dimitrova et al., 2014, p. 97)." Craig, Niemi & Silver (1990) believe that self-efficacy is a key determinant of a healthy democracy. Studies also found that the Internet can entice individuals who are typically underrepresented when it comes to political participation, such as young people, racial/ethnic minorities and women (Correa & Jeong, 2010; Mossberger et. al, 2007).

There is no questioning the fact that new media has become a growing force in civic engagement. The Internet provides opportunities for members of political groups to interact in ways that we have never seen before. For contemporary democratic movements, reformers and revolutionaries, information technologies have become indispensable. Social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter have been credited for the uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt and elsewhere (Youmans & York, 2012). These technologies make it easy for like-minded individuals to organize political action and quickly construct extensive networks. They function as platforms for the dissemination of information, shared expression of dissent and collective action. Around the world, social media and other digital technologies have drastically changed the way in which dissent is organized and become a fundamental infrastructure for collective action (Howard, 2010). For civil society groups, the Internet serves as an invaluable logistical tool for organization, information and communication. These technologies are used to share political information to the international community, organize collective action and activate local protest networks (Shumate, 2006).

While studying the impact of social media during the uprisings in Egypt, Lynch (2011) found that social media contributed to collective action in four ways: (1) made it easier for disaffected citizens to act publicly in coordination; (2) strengthened protesters' perceptions of the likelihood of success by creating information cascades; (3) raised the costs of repression by the state; and (4) by dramatically increased publicity through diffusion of information to regional and global audiences. Researchers argue that activism and advocacy in the form of social movements are critical to supporting and deepening democracy and also contribute to the creation of vibrant civil societies and public spheres.

However, the researcher explains that, “Not all protest movements are pro-democracy movements, and not all pro-democracy movements necessarily result in stable democratic institutions and cultures (Moghadam, 2013, p. 397).”

Over the past decade, there has been an ongoing debate on concerning the effects of social media on political engagement and participation. While numerous studies highlight the positive impact the Internet and social media can have on political participation, other researchers claim that the Internet is potentially harmful, or sometimes even irrelevant, to the political process (Conroy et al., 2012). Mutz (2006) argues that higher levels of disagreement can discourage participation by either increasing indecision or making people more aware of the social costs of political participation. Additionally, she found that individuals are less likely to participate when they are exposed to political messages that challenge their views due to the fear of isolation and increased political ambivalence. Though disagreement may elicit a better understanding on political issues, it acts as a deterrent to online political participation (Mutz, 2006). On the other hand, discussion agreement within a interpersonal network can encourage participation by creating a safe and supportive environment for political discussion (Eveland & Hively, 2009). A number of researchers have found discussion agreement is positively related in online political participation while disagreement is negatively related to it (Valenzuela et. al, 2012; Mutz, 2006).

Other research indicates that the rise of the Internet did not increase the publics' level of political participation (Davis et. al, 2009; Van Dijk, 2006). When researching online political participation, the concept of a digital divide is a relevant topic indicated throughout the literature. Many researchers believe that online political participation is not

equally represented. For instance, research indicates that digital technologies reinforce the traditional gaps in political participation. Those engaging in online political participation are predominately higher in socioeconomic status, middle-aged, male, better educated and have more social capital, which shapes the Internet in terms of access and participation (Hindman, 2009; Prior, 2007). Thus, it can be argued that those who are politically interested online are the same people who are politically interested offline. Other researchers agree and argue that social networking sites have no effect on individuals' political participation levels (Zhang et. al, 2010).

Another issue that undermines social platforms' ability to promote democratic ideals is the fact that the business considerations of social media firms can legally trump civic considerations. Like most for-profit companies, social media firms are primarily focused on attracting more users, increasing revenue, improving the platform's usability, avoiding negative publicity and expanding into new markets. Social media platforms are driven by commercial considerations and must appeal to a broad spectrum of users and advertisers (Youmans & York, 2012). One way in which social media companies limit the utility of these platforms is by banning anonymous users. For instance, Facebook limits users to one profile and requires that individuals provide their real names and information to use the platform. This is a problem because anonymity in online social action can be essential to protecting citizens' privacy, dignity and liberty (Kerr, Steeves & Lucock, 2009). Social media platforms also prohibit certain types of content and use community-policing practices that can have grave consequences for activists. Activists frequently recruit others to join their collective action efforts by using social media platforms to document and circulate content showing state corruption or brutality. However, there are many examples

of state agents and regime supporters exploiting the reporting mechanisms on social media site to censor views they oppose and remove content generated by activists. In other words, it is easy for community policing practices to be used to silence members of minority identity groups or activists who hold unpopular opinions (Howard, Agarwal & Hussain, 2010).

In addition to constraints placed on activists by social media firms, government interference is another problem to consider when discussing online political participation. In general, governments use the following tactics to suppress communications among activists: censorship, surveillance and propaganda (Morozov, 2011). According to Howard, Agarwal & Hussain (2010), various governments from around the globe have intervened in connections of a digital network more than 566 times. These interferences have been enacted by both authoritarian and democratic regimes. In fact, 39 percent of the incidents occurred in democracies and 7 percent in emerging democracies. Government interference comes in various forms:

states interfere with digital networks using many tactics, with various levels of severity: online, by shutting down political websites or portals; offline, by arresting journalists, bloggers, activists, and citizens; by proxy, through controlling internet service providers, forcing companies to shut down specific websites or denying access to disagreeable content; and, in the most extreme cases, shutting down access to entire online and mobile networks (Howard, Agarwal & Hussain, 2010, p. 7).

The researchers found that digital interference by democracies is most likely to come in the form of online content censorship or the targeting of civil society members offline.

Additionally, democracies have the unique tendency to block content and control civil society actors indirectly by target the Internet service providers. In fact, there are numerous examples of democratic regimes using the legal system and roundabout measure to target both Internet providers and their users. All of the reasons for state interference in public access to social media fell under two broad themes, protecting political authority and preserving the public good. Though many have come to expect this type of intervention from authoritarian regimes, it is surprising to see that “democratic regimes exercise intervention efforts at nearly the same level for these same reasons, which severely limits civil society groups from participating in the foundational democratic practices of the regime (Howard, Agarwal & Hussain, 2010, p. 10).” The researchers conclude with the following assertion:

information infrastructure is politics. And the political culture that we now see online during elections comes not just from political elites, but from citizens: using social media, documenting human rights abuses with their mobile phones, sharing spreadsheets to track state expenditures, and pooling information about official corruption. Perhaps the most lasting impact of digital media use during crises is that people get accustomed to being able to consume and produce political content (Howard, Agarwal & Hussain, 2010, p. 12).

Though social media tools have proven effective tools to facilitate protests and for political participation, it is obvious how easily these platforms can also be utilized by repressive



regimes and privatized businesses to shut down and silence everyday citizens. With all of variables considered, I will attempt to answer the following research question in this study:

- *R4: To what extent do Twitter users use social media to participate in the political process?*

## **Methods**

The primary focus of this study was to investigate the extent to which Twitter users use social media for political discussion, knowledge and participation. The goal is to analyze the role of social media in promoting the three elements of democracy mentioned above. The research data under investigation looks at the extent to which Twitter users vary in online production, communications and knowledge acquisition. I will analyze data collected by researchers Belinda Davis, Michael Henderson, Martin Johnson and Lance Porter from Louisiana State University. This data is from a novel social media panel of 3,964 survey respondents with Twitter accounts, identified by Qualtrics Online Panels. Respondents participated in an online survey fielded June 10-July 28, 2016 for compensation. In this paper, I will focus on all respondents' self-reported survey responses. The data collected was analyzed using the computer program Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). My sample was weighted to be consistent with Pew Research Center's report on the estimated population profile of U.S. Twitter users. Accordingly, sampling weights were computed as a function of race/ethnicity, gender, education, age and family income. These weights were computed in an attempt to correct for biases in the sample of Twitter users.

The purpose of the survey was to identify how Twitter users keep up with news and use social media such as Facebook and Twitter. In the survey, participants were asked a

series of demographic, political, social and media-related questions. I have included all question wordings and further coding details in an appendix. For this study, democracy was broken down into three empirically measurable components: political discussion, knowledge and participation. Each of these three components are central features of a highly functioning representative democracy. The dependent variables in this study focus on self-reported behavior using Twitter. Participants' *General Posting* patterns on Twitter were measured using an item that asks respondents to describe the frequency to which they post content to Twitter. Participants were also asked about the frequency to which they post nine specific types of tweets, including: *Personal Life, Work Life, General Observations, Photos, Videos, Geolocation, News Links, Retweeting Others* and sending *Direct Messages* to other users. These nine specific activities were combined into an averaged index of *Twitter Activities*. The independent variables in the study include *Education, Family Income, Age, Ethnicity, Gender, Voter Registration, Party Identification* and *General Interest in Public Affairs*. From this dataset, I aim to analyze the role of Facebook and Twitter in the promotion of democracy.

#### Participants:

The sample consisted of 3,964 Twitter users, ranging from ages 18-85 (M=39.54, sd=14.02). Around 29.1 percent of the respondents were ages 18-29, 45 percent were 30-49, 20.2 percent were 50-64 and the remaining 5.4 percent were 65 or older. The study respondents were 37.1 percent male, 62.7 percent females and .2 percent of the participants identified as something other than male or female. The participants were 65.7 percent white, 25.5 percent black or African American, 2.1 percent Asian American or Pacific Islander, 1.8 percent American Indian or Alaska Native and 8 percent identified as

mixed or other. Only 1.9 percent of the sample had less than a high school education, 19.2 percent obtained only a high school diploma, 40 percent has some college or a two year degree and the remaining 38.9 percent obtained a four year college degree or higher. Forty-seven percent of the sample had an income of under \$50,000, 21.6 percent had an income between \$50,000-\$74,999 and 27.8 percent had a family income of \$75,000 or more. Of the participants, 40 percent of the respondents reported holding extremely liberal (8.4 percent), liberal (19 percent) or slightly liberal (12.6 percent) political views. Around 36.5 percent of the respondents claim to hold moderate, or middle of the road, political views. Conversely, only 23.5 percent of participants reported holding slightly conservative (10.1 percent), conservative (9.1 percent) or extremely conservative (4.3 percent) political views. Again, the data from this survey was weighted to be consistent with Pew Research Center's report on the estimated population profile of U.S. Twitter users.

### Constructing the Measures

#### Mobile & Second Screening:

To measure Twitter users mobile use and the frequency to which they second screen, I looked at the survey questions one smartphone ownership and the frequency to which users use an additional electronic device to discuss or get more information during political speeches or debates, the news and during election coverage. I also used the questions regarding how frequently Twitter users post news links on both Facebook and Twitter. From there, I combined four items measuring how closely Twitter users follow news about national and local politics and how often Twitter users use a second device to discuss or find additional information during political speeches or debates, the news and

during election coverage into one factor. The factor is called “*political information elaboration*” (Cronbach’s alpha = .666)..I split the factor into two items at the mean.

#### Political Discussion:

To study users’ posting patterns on Twitter and Facebook respondents were asked to characterize the frequency to which they post new articles on Facebook and Twitter. Specifically, participants were asked to state the frequency to which they might post news links to Facebook and Twitter. Participants were also asked questions related their news media use, general interest in public affairs and how closely they follow news about national and local politics. I combined two items measuring users’ reported news consumption and general interest in public affairs. The factor is called “*political news interest*” (Cronbach’s alpha = .630).

#### Political Knowledge:

To understand if and how citizens use social media to consume news and information about politics, I analyzed survey questions regarding respondents level of education, news consumption, political affiliation, social media usage patterns and general interest in public affairs. I also used the questions regarding how often Twitter users post news links to both Facebook and Twitter. This allowed me to see who is using social media to consume political information and gain political knowledge. To better measure political knowledge, I combined two items measuring how closely Twitter users follow news about national and local politics, which I labeled “*political news knowledge*” (Cronbach’s alpha = .722). It consists of two items that measure how closely Twitter users follow information about local government and news about political figures and events in Washington D.C. I split the factor into two items at the mean. I also performed a principal components factor

analysis of the four items measuring general interest in public affairs, news consumption and how closely Twitter users follow news about national and local politics using a varimax rotation, which resulted in loading of one factor. The factor is called “*political news consumption*” (Cronbach’s alpha = .794) and consists of four items that measure how close Twitter users follow national political news, local government new, their general interests in public affairs and overall news consumption. From there, the political news variable was recoded to label users as high or low.

#### Political Participation:

For political participation, I used questions regarding the degree to which respondents use the Internet and social of online to participate in the political process. This allowed me to determine how citizens use social media platforms for political participation and to what extent. I calculated this by measuring the frequency to which participants perform the following seven online acts of political participation: (1) created an online petition, (2) signed a petition online, (3) participated in an online question and answer session with a politician or public official, (4) signed up online to volunteer to help with a political cause, (5) used a mobile phone to donate money to a campaign or political cause, (6) started a political or cause-related group on a social media site, (7) viewed live video (on a platform like Periscope or Facebook Live) of a political candidate. In addition, I analyzed the survey questions regarding Twitter users news use, general interest in public affairs and how often they post news links to Facebook and Twitter.

To begin, I reverse coded the political variables from high to low to match the scales of the other questions. I performed a principal components factor analysis of the seven items measuring political participation using varimax rotation, which resulted in loading of

one factor. The factor is called “*overall political participation*” (Cronbach’s alpha = .822) and consists of seven items that measure how often Twitter users engage in different forms of online political participation. I performed a principal components factor analysis of 20 items measuring social media checking frequency and posting patterns by using a varimax rotation, which resulted in loading of one factor. The factor is called “*social media use*” (Cronbach’s alpha = .967) and consists of 20 items that measure how often Twitter users check and post content on 10 different social media platforms.

### **Results**

Below is a basic frequency table for the variables included in the survey. I used these survey items to preform the analysis that follows.

<b><u>Table 1: Variable Frequencies From the News &amp; Social Media Use Survey</u></b>			
<b>Second Screen</b>			
	<i>During political speeches or debates</i>	M= 2.84	sd= 1.310
	<i>During news</i>	M= 2.89	sd= 1.231
	<i>During election coverage</i>	M= 2.97	sd= 1.320
<b>Information Type</b>			
	<i>Local Government</i>	M= 1.99	sd= .878
	<i>News about political figures and events in Washington, D.C.</i>	M= 1.83	sd= .865
<b>Smartphone</b>	<i>(1) Yes, smartphone (2) No, not a smartphone (3) Not sure</i>	M= 1.07	sd= .272
<b>Interest</b>	<i>(1) Very interested (2) Fairly interested (3) Not very interested (4) Not at all interested</i>	M= 1.65	sd= .712
<b>News</b>	<i>(1) Never (2) Once or twice a month (3) Once a week (4) A few times a week (5) Everyday</i>	M= 4.44	sd= .880
<b>Fair</b>	<i>(1) Most people would try to take advantage</i>	M= 1.52	sd= .500

	<i>(2) Most people try to be fair</i>		
<b>Trust</b>	<i>(1) Most people can be trusted (2) You can't be too careful</i>	M= 1.64	sd= .479
<b>Helpful</b>	<i>(1) People try to be helpful (2) People are just looking out for themselves</i>	M= 1.45	sd= .498
<b>Participation</b>			
	<i>Created an online petition</i>	M= 1.28	sd= .965
	<i>Participated in an online question and answer session with a politician or public official</i>	M= 2.72	sd= 1.907
5	<i>Signed a petition online</i>	M= 1.86	sd= 1.531
	<i>Signed up online to volunteer to help with a political cause</i>	M= 1.57	sd= 1.276
	<i>Used a mobile phone to donate money to a campaign or political cause</i>	M= 1.52	sd= 1.261
	<i>Started a political or cause-related group on a social media site</i>	M= 1.39	sd= 1.157
	<i>Viewed live video (on a platform like Periscope or Facebook Live) of a political candidate</i>	M= 2.79	sd= 2.054
<b>Social Media Check</b>			
	<i>Facebook</i>	M= 2.27	sd= 1.539
	<i>Twitter</i>	M= 3.51	sd= 1.958
<b>Social Media Post</b>			
	<i>Facebook</i>	M= 3.76	sd= 2.248
	<i>Twitter</i>	M= 4.77	sd= 2.285
<b>Twitter Act</b>			
	<i>Tweet links to news stories</i>	M= 4.86	sd= 1.979
<b>Facebook Act</b>			
	<i>Share links to news stories</i>	M= 4.03	sd= 1.995

Mobile Use & Sceond Screening:

- *R1: Does owning a smartphone affect Twitter users' posting patterns and posting frequency?*

Since previous research indicates that access impacts social media usage, I want to know how smartphone ownership impacts political posting patterns. I computed a one-

way ANOVA comparing smartphone ownership to the frequency in which the participants post news related content on Facebook and Twitter. For this question, I only examined Twitter users who indicated that own a smartphone and those who reported that they do not own a smartphone. I excluded individuals who did not know if they own a smartphone. The results indicate a significant difference regarding the news-related posting frequency on Twitter between those who own a smartphone and those who do not ( $F(2, 3872) = 23.22, p < .05$ ). Also, I observed a significant difference regarding the news related posting frequency on Facebook between those who own and smartphone and those who do not ( $F(2, 3713) = 23.77, p < .05$ ). This analysis indicates that individuals who own a smartphone post more news-related content on Twitter ( $M = 3.22, sd = 1.98$ ) than those who do not own a smartphone ( $M = 2.40, sd = 1.73$ ). The analysis also suggests that individuals who own a smartphone post more news related content on Facebook ( $M = 4.03, sd = 1.98$ ) than those who do not own a smartphone ( $M = 3.19, sd = 1.97$ ). This indicates that smartphone owners post news related content more frequently on Facebook and Twitter.

I conducted a one-way ANOVA comparing Twitter users political information elaboration to the frequency to which they post news articles on Facebook and Twitter. The results show significant differences in users' posting patterns of news articles on Facebook ( $F(1,3793) = 152.5, p < .05$ ) and Twitter ( $F(1,3961) = 331.9, p < .05$ ). This analysis revealed that Twitter users with high levels of political information elaboration ( $M=4.47, sd=1.99$ ) tend to post news articles on Facebook significantly more than users with low levels of political information elaboration ( $M=3.68, sd=1.93$ ). Additionally, Twitter users with high levels of political information elaboration ( $M=5.46, sd=1.76$ ) tend to post news articles on



Twitter significantly more than users with low levels of political information elaboration (M=4.36, sd=2.01).

Political Discussion:

- *R2: To what extent do Twitter users use social media to post political content and engage in political discussion?*

For political discussion, I want to know the extent to which Twitter users use social media to post political content and engage in political discussion. Overall, the majority of participants in this study reported high levels of general interest in public affairs. Around 46.9 percent claim to be very interested, 43 percent fairly interested, 8.2 percent not very interested and only 1.9 percent of respondents indicated that they are not at all interested in public affairs.

For both of the platforms under consideration, participants reported the frequency to which they post content on Facebook and Twitter. On Facebook, 21.9 percent of respondents claim that they constantly post on this platform, 13.9 percent post content several times a day and another 12.3 percent post at least once a day. Taken together, this means that nearly half, 48.1 percent, of the participants make daily Facebook posts, compared to 21.3 percent that make weekly posts and the 26.2 percent that post every few weeks or less. Overall, respondents' general posting frequency on Facebook is high. Content posting on Twitter is more scattered. Only 11.6 percent of respondents claim that they constantly post on this platform, 10.8 percent post content several times a day and another 11.2 percent post at least once a day. Taken together, only 33.6 percent of the people in this study post daily to Twitter, compared to 20.7 percent that make weekly posts and the 45.9 percent that post every few weeks or less. Though this is a study of Twitter users, the findings show that content posting on Twitter is significantly lower than on Facebook.

As for the posting frequency of news articles on Twitter, 8.3 percent of respondents reported posting news articles several times a day, 9.0 percent post about once a day, 9.4 percent post three to five days a week and another 11.1 percent post news articles one to two days a week, 14.3 percent post every few weeks and the remaining 47.9 percent post news articles less often or never post them at all. For the posting frequency of news articles on Facebook, 13.9 percent of respondents reported posting news articles several times a day, 12.6 percent post about once a day, 13.1 percent post three to five days a week and another 14.1 percent post news articles one to two days a week, 14.4 percent post every few weeks and the remaining 27.7 percent post news articles less often or never post them at all.

I computed a one-way ANOVA to compare social media interest to the frequency to which Twitter users post links to news stories on social media. I found a significant difference for individuals who use both Facebook ( $F(1,3793) = 60.93, p < .05$ ) and Twitter ( $F(1,3961) = 132.52, p < .05$ ). This test revealed that Twitter users who have high levels of social media use tend to upload news articles on Facebook at significantly higher rates ( $M=4.06, sd=1.99$ ) than Twitter users with low levels of social media use ( $M=1.96, sd=1.17$ ). Additionally, Twitter users who have high levels of social media use tend to upload news article on Twitter at significantly higher rates ( $M=4.90, sd=1.96$ ) than Twitter users with low levels of social media use ( $M=1.85, sd=1.10$ ). This implies that the more Twitter users use social media, the more likely they are to upload news articles on Facebook and Twitter.

I computed a one-way ANOVA to compare how closely individuals follow news about political figures and events in Washington, D.C. to the frequency to which they post

links to news stories on social media. I found a significant difference for individuals who post news articles on both Facebook ( $F(3,3791) = 82.81, p < .05$ ) and Twitter ( $F(3,3959) = 119.33, p < .05$ ). This test revealed that individuals who follow news about political figures and events in Washington, D.C. very closely post more links to news articles on Facebook ( $M=4.51, sd=1.95$ ) and Twitter ( $M=3.79, sd=2.06$ ) than Twitter users who follow news about political figures and events in Washington, D.C. somewhat closely post links to Facebook ( $M=3.73, sd=1.90$ ) and Twitter ( $M=2.81, sd=1.77$ ), those who follow news about political figures and events in Washington, D.C. not very closely post on Facebook ( $M= 3.32, sd=1.92$ ) and Twitter ( $M=2.43, sd=1.71$ ) and Twitter users who follow news about political figures and events in Washington, D.C. not at all closely post on Facebook ( $M=3.09, sd=2.05$ ) and Twitter ( $M=2.38, sd=1.87$ ).

I also computed a one-way ANOVA to compare individuals' general interests in public affairs to the frequency in which they post links to news stories on social media. The findings suggest a significant difference in posting patterns on both Facebook ( $F(1,3793) = 139.77, p < .05$ ) and Twitter ( $F(1,3961) = 107.49, p < .05$ ) between individuals with high and low general interest in public affairs. The findings reveal that individuals with higher levels of general interests in public affairs also post more links to news articles on Facebook ( $M=4.07, sd=1.97$ ) than users with lower levels of general interest in public affairs ( $M=2.95, sd= 1.90$ ). Also, Twitter users with high levels of general interest in public affairs tend to post on Twitter at significantly higher rates ( $M=3.26, sd=1.99$ ) than users with low levels of general interest in public affairs ( $M=2.05, sd=1.53$ ).

#### Political Knowledge:

- *R3: To what extent do Twitter users use social media to consume political information and learn about politics?*

Overall, the vast majority of the sample reported having at least some college education. Only 1.9 percent of participants gained less than a high school education, while 19.2 percent indicated they graduated high school, 40 percent had some college or a two year degree and the remaining 38.9 percent had a four year degree or higher. With that, the majority of respondents, 62.4 percent, indicated that they watch or read the news every day. Further, 26.1 percent of the participants consume news a few times a week, compared to the 6.1 percent that do it once a week, 4 percent that only do it once or twice a month and 1.4 percent that reported never watching or reading the news. Nearly 70 percent of the participants with a college degree reported consuming news daily compared to around 55 percent of those without a college degree.

On Twitter, 8.3 percent of the sample reported posting news articles on Twitter several times a day, 9 percent posted news links once a day, 9.4 percent posts this type of content 3-5 days a week and 11.1 percent post news articles 1-2 days a week. A significant portion of respondents, 34.4 percent, indicated that they post news articles every few week or less often, and the remaining 27.8 percent said that they never post news on Twitter. On Facebook, individuals post news articles at a considerably higher rate. The majority of Facebook users in this study, 53.7 percent, post news articles on the platform weekly. This number was significantly higher than the 37.8 percent of Twitter users that post news articles on weekly basis. However, there were still a large number of Facebook users that rarely post news articles on the platform. From the sample, 14.4 percent of Facebook users indicted that they only post news links every few weeks, and the remaining 27.7 percent of individuals post news less often or never post it at all.

I combined two items measuring how closely Twitter users follow news about national and local politics, which I labeled “political news knowledge” (Cronbach’s alpha = .722). It consists of two items that measure how closely Twitter users follow information about local government and news about political figures and events in Washington D.C. From there, the political news knowledge variable was recoded to label users as high or low. I conducted a one-way AVOVA comparing Twitter users political news knowledge to the frequency to which they post news articles on Facebook and Twitter. The results show significant differences in users’ posting patterns of news articles on Facebook ( $F(1,3793) = 264.77, p < .05$ ) and Twitter ( $F(1,3961) = 336.55, p < .05$ ). This analysis revealed that Twitter users with high levels of political news knowledge tend to post news articles on Facebook ( $M=4.85, sd=1.91$ ) significantly more than users with low levels of political news knowledge ( $M=3.67, sd=1.93$ ). Additionally, Twitter users with high levels of political news knowledge tend to post news articles on Twitter ( $M=4.11, sd=2.07$ ) at significantly higher rates than users with low levels of political news knowledge ( $M=2.83, sd=1.84$ ).

I used a one-way ANOVA to compare individuals’ political news consumption (high vs. low) to the frequency in which they post links to news stories on social media. The results show a significant difference in posting patterns between individuals with high and low levels of news consumption on both Facebook ( $F(1,3793) = 252.17, p < .05$ ) and Twitter ( $F(1,3961) = 318.98, p < .05$ ). This test indicates that Twitter users with high levels of political news consumption reported posting more links to news articles on Facebook ( $M=4.99, sd=1.87$ ) than users with low levels of political news consumption ( $M=3.73, sd=1.95$ ). Also, Twitter users with high levels of political news consumptions also tend to

post more news links on Twitter ( $M=4.26$ ,  $sd=2.07$ ) than users with low levels of political news consumption ( $M=2.88$ ,  $sd=1.86$ ).

I also computed a one-way ANOVA comparing participants' political news consumption (high vs. low) to the frequency to which they check Facebook and Twitter. I found a significant difference was found among respondents' news consumption and the frequency to which they check Facebook ( $F(1,3793) = 76.41$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and Twitter ( $F(1,3962) = 124.24$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The analysis revealed that Twitter users who with high levels of political news consumption tend to check Facebook ( $M= 6.20$ ,  $sd= 1.79$ ) more than Twitter users with low levels of political news consumption ( $M=5.32$ ,  $sd=1.96$ ). Also, Twitter users who with high levels of political news consumption tend to check Facebook ( $M= 7.17$ ,  $sd= 1.17$ ) more than Twitter users with low levels of political news consumption ( $M=6.62$ ,  $sd=1.60$ ).

I conducted a one-way ANOVA to compare participants' general interests in public affairs to the frequency to which they check Facebook and Twitter. The results from this test indicate a significant difference among respondents' general interests in public affairs and the frequency to which they check Facebook ( $F(3,3791) = 18.80$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and Twitter ( $F(3,3960) = 49.22$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The analysis shows that Twitter users who are very interested in public affairs tend to check Facebook ( $M= 6.90$ ,  $sd= 1.43$ ) and Twitter ( $M= 5.88$ ,  $sd= 1.87$ ) at a significantly higher rate than Twitter users who are fairly interested in public affairs check Facebook ( $M= 6.61$ ,  $sd=1.58$ ) and Twitter ( $M= 5.15$ ,  $sd= 1.96$ ), those who are not very interested in public affairs check Facebook ( $M= 6.49$ ,  $sd=1.60$ ) and Twitter ( $M= 5.09$ ,  $sd= 1.99$ ) and more than those who are not at all interested in public affairs check Facebook ( $M= 6.01$ ,  $sd=2.17$ ) and Twitter ( $M= 5.10$ ,  $sd= 2.19$ ).

### Political Participation:

- *R4: To what extent do Twitter users use social media to participate in the political process?*

For political participation, I want to determine the extent to which Twitter users use social media to participate in the political process. I measured online political participation by determining the frequency to which participants perform the following seven online acts of political participation: (1) created an online petition, (2) signed a petition online, (3) participated in an online question and answer session with a politician or public official, (4) signed up online to volunteer to help with a political cause, (5) used a mobile phone to donate money to a campaign or political cause, (6) started a political or cause-related group on a social media site, (7) viewed live video (on a platform like Periscope or Facebook Live) of a political candidate. Interestingly, 70.4 percent of respondents fell into the low political participation category, while only 29.6 percent reported having high levels of online political participation based on the actions in question.

Only 33.1 percent of the sample had ever participated in an online question and answer session with a politician or public official. This could be due to a lack of opportunities to participate in this way or could also suggest that the Internet has failed to make politicians and public officials more accessible to the general public. It was much more startling to see that 76.7 percent of the respondents had never signed up online to volunteer to help with a political cause. This means that only 23.3 percent of the respondents had ever used the Internet or social media to sign up to volunteer for political causes. Additionally, 79.1 percent of the respondents had never used their phone to donate money to a political campaign or cause, meaning a mere 20.9 percent of the sample had done this one or more times. Further, a whopping 85.9 percent had never done started a

political or cause-related group on a social media site. More hopeful, the majority of the sample, 55.8 percent, had views a live video of a political candidate or event.

I computed a one-way ANOVA to comparing Twitter users with high and low levels of social media use to overall political participation. The results show a significant difference between the groups ( $F(1,2963) = 172.6, p < .05$ ). This analysis revealed that Twitter users with low levels of social media usage participate at significantly lower rates ( $M = -2.09, sd = 2.73$ ) than those with high levels of social media usage ( $M = .02, sd = .93$ ). This finding suggests that Twitter users who use social media more often tend to also engage in online political participation more frequently. Interestingly, the majority Twitter users who reported low levels of social media use are college educated individuals under the age of 50 who make more than \$50,000 per year. I also conducted a one-way ANOVA comparing Twitter users political news consumption to the overall online political participation scale. The results show a significant difference between the groups ( $F(1,3961) = 288.2, p < .05$ ). This analysis revealed that Twitter users with high levels of political news use ( $M = .25, sd = 1.19$ ) tend to engage in online political participation significantly more than users with low levels political news use ( $M = -.27, sd = .62$ ).

I combined two items measuring the frequency to which Twitter users post new articles on Facebook and Twitter, which is called “news posting” (Cronbach’s alpha = .748) and consists of two items that measure how often Twitter users post new articles on Facebook and Twitter. From there, I split the mean and recorded the reported news posting variable into high or low based on the frequency to which users post news articles on these platforms. I conducted a one-way ANOVA comparing Twitter users posting frequency of news articles to the overall online political participation scale. The results



show a significant difference between the groups ( $F(1,3961) = 505.4, p < .05$ ). This analysis revealed that Twitter users with high frequency of news posting ( $M=.39, sd=1.24$ ) tend to engage in online political participation significantly more than users with low frequencies of news posting ( $M=-.29, sd=.64$ ).

I computed a one-way ANOVA to compare Twitter users with high or low general interests in public affairs to individuals with high or low participation levels. The results show a significant difference between the groups ( $F(1,3962) = 88.71, p < .05$ ). I found that that Twitter users with high levels of general interests in public affairs participate more ( $M=1.32, sd=.47$ ) than Twitter users with lower levels of general interests in public affairs ( $M=1.09, sd=.29$ ). This held true across all seven types of online participation asked about in this study. I also conducted a one-way ANOVA to compare individuals' reported news consumption to Twitter users' participation levels. The finding indicate a significant difference between the groups ( $F(4,3959) = 15.16, p < .05$ ). This revealed that Twitter users who reported consuming news every day tend to participate more ( $M=1.34, sd=.47$ ) than Twitter users who reported reading or watching the news a few times a week ( $M=1.25, sd=.43$ ), once a week ( $M=1.23, sd=.42$ ), once or twice a month ( $M=1.14, sd=.35$ ) and those who reported never reading or watching the news ( $M=1.13, sd=.34$ ). This held true across all seven types of online participation asked about in this study.

## **Discussion**

Going back as early as the 1800s, citizens' freedom to form communities with like minded individuals to address social issues through advocacy and persuasion has been thought of as one of the unique and enduring feature of our democracy (Tocqueville, 1831). Theoretically, social media does just this by providing a democratic platform that supports

public debates and allows citizens with diverse opinions to easily assemble and voice these ideas.

This study generated many important findings, the most significant being that Twitter users use both Twitter and Facebook in ways that foster political discussion and enhance political knowledge. Nearly half of the sample reported making daily post on both platforms and large portion reported posting news articles several times a week. Almost 90 percent of the sample reported being interested in public affairs and the overwhelming majority of Twitter users reported that they watch or read the news daily. Moreover, more than 80 percent of Twitter users closely follow news about political figures and events in Washington, D.C. and nearly 75 percent closely follow news on local government.

Considering that the content we see on Facebook and Twitter is filtered through algorithms intended to meet our interests, this implies that individuals who reported regularly read the news and are interested in public affairs will frequently be exposed to political content on these platforms. According to the results from this study, the significant portion of the Twitter users in this study use both Facebook and Twitter to share political content, which has the potential to foster political discussion. Knowing that Twitter users are sharing political content on social media, it is safe to assume that they are also regularly exposed to a diverse range of political content on these platforms. One could argue that the greater access to diverse news and information provided by social media has the ability to translate into greater political knowledge and engagement, even when motivation and skill is lacking.

Another key finding from this study is that Twitter users post news on Facebook at significantly higher rates compared to Twitter. I examined this with the assumption that

individuals who post political news articles on social media are reading the articles before posting them. For this study, the act of reading and sharing news articles on social media is viewed as an act of fostering political discussion and enhancing political knowledge.

Though I assumed that the posting of news articles would be higher on Twitter compared to Facebook, the opposite was true. This finding is surprising considering the fact that Twitter is a platform specifically designed for the discussion, sharing and consumption of information about certain topics, and it also tends to attract a more politically oriented audience. Knowing that the nearly all Twitter users in this study have high levels of interest in public affairs, closely follow political news, frequently check both of these platforms and regularly post new articles on Facebook, this finding may imply that Twitter users are using Twitter to consume news and using Facebook to share and discuss that news.

Regardless, the results show that Twitter users are in fact using social media platforms to share political news. By sharing political news on social media, these Twitter users are not only fostering political discussion, but they are also enhancing political knowledge.

Equally important, the study revealed that Twitter users who have more general interest in public affairs are more likely to post news on both Twitter and Facebook. Further, Twitter users who consume news more frequently tend to post more news articles on both of the platforms under investigation. Considering the fact that 62.4 percent of the respondents read or watch the news everyday and nearly 90 percent are interested in public affairs, this would imply that the vast majority of Twitter users are in fact using Facebook and Twitter to engage in political discussion. On the other hand, this result could indicate that those who are already interested in news and politics are the same people who are discussing politics on social media. Luckily, the majority of participants use social media to

share news and information about news and politics. By doing this, citizens are fostering political discussion through the content they share on Facebook and Twitter. In my opinion, the strongest feature of social media is its ability to cultivate political discourse. This plays a critical role in our democracy by expanding citizens' political knowledge and encouraging political participation.

For political participation, my analysis found that Twitter users with high levels of general social media use tend to engage in online political participation at significantly higher rates than low level users. These tests revealed a significant positive correlation between general social media use and online political participation amongst Twitter users, implying that increased levels of social media usage will result in increased levels of online political participation. The results also showed that Twitter users who consume more political news and have more general interest in public affairs tend to have higher levels of online political participation.

Another notable finding from this study is that there was a significant positive correlation between the frequency of participants' news consumption and the frequency to which they check social media. Specifically, the data suggest that those who consume news more often check social media more frequently. Considering the fact that both general interest in public affairs and frequency of news consumption were high among the majority of participants, one could assume that those users are going to social media to consume and share news. Instead of going to search engines or directly to news sites in order gather news and information, it appears as though individuals are, or at least perceive they are, consuming news as they scroll through their social media feeds. This is especially true

when you consider the finding that those who consume news more frequently post more links new articles on social media platforms.

Also important, is the finding that Twitter users who watch or read the news every day are more likely to use an additional electronic device for discussion or more information during political speeches or debates, news coverage and election coverage. Considering that the vast majority of the sample indicated consuming the news daily, this implies that a large portion of Twitter users frequently seek additional information about politics or use digital media to further discuss political news. This finding suggests that Twitter users are not only interested in politics, but take the additional steps necessary to foster political discussion or enhance political knowledge.

As I stated earlier, respondents' levels of participation were unexpectedly low. The overwhelming majority of citizens, 88.6 percent, have never created an online petition, meaning that only 11.4 percent of the respondents had engaged in this for online political participation. However, 59.8 percent of respondents have signed an online petition. This could mean that the political elite, or those heavily involved in the political process, are the ones creating online petitions to inform and rally the support of the general public. Though the masses aren't responsible for creating online petitions, it is reassuring to see that the majority of social media users are at least taking the time to read and sign online petitions regarding issues they support.

The data from this study revealed that individuals who have more general interest in public affairs tend to participate more than individuals who have low general interest in public affairs. Across all seven types of online participation asked about in this study, individuals who post more content on Facebook and Twitter tend to participate more

online. In addition, the results indicated that individuals who share more news articles on Facebook and Twitter also tend to have higher levels of online political participation for each type examined here. I was surprised to see such low levels of political participation among Twitter users considering the fact that the sample reported such high levels of general interests in public affairs and high levels of news consumption. However, at the time that this study was conducted, live streaming technology was still new. Its growth in use and popularity since leaves me optimistic that innovative technologies, like live streaming, may continue to grow and encourage more people actively participate in the political process.

In summary, the findings from this study suggest that the social media is heavily used to foster political discussion and to share and obtain news and information about politics and public affairs. By in large, it seems that social media do in fact democratically promote and foster political discussion and political knowledge. On the other hand, the study failed to show evidence that social media is widely used to engage in the forms of political participation examined in this study. However, this does not mean that there is a lack of opportunities available on social media or that citizens aren't using social media to participate in the political process in other ways. It could mean that Twitter users are using platforms Facebook and Twitter for political discussion and knowledge enhancement, and that these platforms are empowering to engage in traditional forms of participation like voting. It seems as though the majority are using these platforms to voice their political opinions and educate others within their networks in an effort to change minds and influence public policy. In essence, this could be viewed as meaningful political

participation, because it could be encouraging forms of traditional participation by increasing individuals' self-efficacy and political knowledge.

From this study, I am left somewhat optimistic in Facebook and Twitter's capacity to promote and foster the democratic values of political discussion, knowledge and participation. I would therefore consider social media a potentially effective but underutilized democratic tool. However, these tools are only as useful as the citizens utilize them for political purposes. Citizens' interests in politics and capacity to effectively utilize these networks are equally important in this regard. At the end of the day, the democratic potential of social media depends on citizens' ability and motivation to make meaningful changing using these technologies. The opportunities are there, it is up to us to seize them.

### **Future Research & Limitations**

One obvious limitation of this study is that it only focuses on Facebook and Twitter, even though there are numerous other social media platforms that citizens can use for political purposes. Additionally, the data from this study is only generalizable for Twitter users. Though Facebook and Twitter are the most prominent social networking sites used in the current political landscape, newer social media sites, like Snapchat, Instagram and Periscope, were also heavily utilized by politicians and citizens alike during this past election cycle. Further research should look at other social media platforms to determine their role in promoting democracy.

Another limitation is that this study only looked at three variables of democracy: political discussion, knowledge and participation. As we established, democracy is ever evolving and difficult to operationalize for a study such as this. Therefore, future research should look into other aspects of democracy and how social media impacts each of them.

Also, researchers should look into other forms of online political participation not mentioned in the current study. I urge future researchers to breakdown the barrier between traditional and non-traditional forms of political participation and to develop a more inclusive definition of political participation that embraces all forms of political participation that could have an impact on the political processes and debates that shape society.

A third limitation of this study is that I relied on secondary data. This prevented me from being able to include many of the direct questions that would have been more effective and relevant to study role that social media plays in democracy. Future research should replicate this study topic and include additional survey questions that could better empirically measure political discussion, knowledge and participation on social media. Additionally, further research should formulate questions that are able to directly measure political knowledge. Finally, the sample was overwhelmingly liberal and female. This could have skewed the results to reflect a more democratic perspective on social media and democracy. Thus, the final limitation is there was a liberal bias in study's sample. Further research should control for this limitation.

Future research also should look at the role that social media potentially plays in proliferating or combating the fake news and information readily available on these platforms. Researchers should focus on how social media can be used to correct misinformation and better inform our citizen. Additionally, the content that social media users are exposed to is solely based on the material that their friends post. Instead, the content users see is largely based on complex algorithms that govern content exposure (Gillespie, 2014). So over time, social media sites, like Facebook and Twitter, are learning



users' preferences and filtering content to ensure visitors have a pleasant experience and keep coming back for more. However, future research needs to look at the impact these algorithms have on the political content users see. Are users still being presented with the diverse that gives social media sites their democratic advantage, or are these algorithms creating a filter bubble that serves to reinforce users' previously held beliefs? If it is the latter, this could seriously undermine the democratic potential of social media

## **References**

- Aaker, J., & Chang, V. (2010). Obama and the power of social media and technology. *The European Business Review*, 17-21.
- Althaus, S. L. (2001). Who's voted in when the people tune out? Information effects in congressional elections. *Communication in US elections: New agendas*, 33-54.
- Anderson, R., Dardenne, R., & Killenberg, G. (1994). *The conversation of journalism: Communication, community, and news*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Austin, E. W., & Pinkleton, B. E. (2001). The role of parental mediation in the political socialization process. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 45(2), 221-240.
- Austin, E. W., Vord, R. V. D., Pinkleton, B. E., & Epstein, E. (2008). Celebrity endorsements and their potential to motivate young voters. *Mass Communication and Society*, 11(4), 420-436.
- Bagdikian, B. H. (1987). *The media monopoly*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Bakshy, E., Rosenn, I., Marlow, C., & Adamic, L. (2012, April). The role of social networks in information diffusion. In *Proceedings of the 21st international conference on World Wide Web* (pp. 519-528). ACM.
- Balz, D. (2013). *How the Obama campaign won the race for voter data*. Retrieved from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/how-the-obama-campaign-won-the-race-for-voter-data/2013/07/28/ad32c7b4-ee4e-11e2-a1f9-ea873b7e0424\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.163f6e513c95](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/how-the-obama-campaign-won-the-race-for-voter-data/2013/07/28/ad32c7b4-ee4e-11e2-a1f9-ea873b7e0424_story.html?utm_term=.163f6e513c95)
- Baum, M. A. (2003). Soft news and political knowledge: Evidence of absence or absence of evidence? *Political Communication*, 20, 173-190.
- Berners-Lee, T., Fischetti, M., & Foreword By-Dertouzos, M. L. (2000). *Weaving the Web: The original design and ultimate destiny of the World Wide Web by its inventor*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Billing, M. (1996). *Arguing and thinking: A rhetorical approach to social psychology*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Bimber, B., & Davis, R. (2003). *Campaigning online: The Internet in US elections*. Oxford University Press.
- Boyd, D. M. and Ellison, N. B. (2007), Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13: 210-230.

- Bruns, A. (2006). Towards produsage: Futures for user-led content production. *Proceedings Cultural Attitudes Towards Communication and Technology*, 275-284.
- Bucy, E. P., & Gregson, K. S. (2001). Media participation a legitimizing mechanism of mass democracy. *New media & society*, 3(3), 357-380.
- Caleffi, Paola-Maria. (2015). The 'hashtag': A new word or a new rule? *Journal of Theoretical Linguistics*, 12(2), 46-69.
- Cho, J., & McLeod, D. M. (2007). Structural antecedents to knowledge and participation: Extending the knowledge gap concept to participation. *Journal of Communication*, 57(2), 205-228.
- Cohen, J. L., & Arato, A. (1992). *Civil society and political theory*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Conroy, M., Feezell, J. T., & Guerrero, M. (2012). Facebook and political engagement: A study of online political group membership and offline political engagement. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 28(5), 1535-1546.
- Correa, T., & Jeong, S. H. (2011). Race and online content creation: Why minorities are actively participating in the Web. *Information, Communication & Society*, 14(5), 638-659.
- Craig, S. C., Niemi, R. G., & Silver, G. E. (1990). Political efficacy and trust: A report on the NES pilot study items. *Political Behavior*, 12(3), 289-314.
- Dahl, R. A. (1971). *Polyarchy: Participation and opposition*. Yale University Press.
- Davis, R. (2005). *Politics online: Blogs, chatrooms, and discussion groups in American democracy*. New York: Routledge.
- Davis, R., J. Baumgartner, P.L. Francia and J. S. Morris (2009). The Internet in US election campaigns. In: A. Chadwick & Ph. Howard (Eds.). *Routledge Handbook of Internet Politics*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Delli Carpini, M. X., & Keeter, S. (1989). *What Americans know about politics and why it matters*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- De Tocqueville, A. (2003). *Democracy in america* (Vol. 10). Regnery Publishing.
- Dewey, J. (1927). *The public and its problems*. New York: Holt.
- DiMaggio, P., Hargittai, E., Celeste, C., & Shafer, S. (2004). Digital inequality: From unequal access to differentiated use. In K. Neckerman (Ed.), *Social inequality* (pp. 355-400). New York, NY: Sage.

- Dimitrova, D. V., Shehata, A., Strömbäck, J., & Nord, L. W. (2014). The effects of digital media on political knowledge and participation in election campaigns: Evidence from panel data. *Communication Research*, 41(1), 95-118.
- Eastin, M. S., Cicchirillo, V., & Mabry, A. (2015). Extending the digital divide conversation: Examining the knowledge gap through media expectancies. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 59(3), 416-437.
- Ellison, N. B. & boyd, d. (2013). Sociality through Social Network Sites. *The Oxford Handbook of Internet Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 151-172.
- Eveland, W. P. (2001). The cognitive mediation model of learning from the news: Evidence from non-election, off-year election, and presidential election contexts. *Communication Research*, 28, 571-601.
- Eveland Jr, W. P., Hayes, A. F., Shah, D. V., & Kwak, N. (2005). Observations on estimation of communication effects on political knowledge and a test of intracommunication mediation. *Political Communication*, 22(4), 505-509.
- Eveland, W. P., & Hively, M. H. (2009). Political discussion frequency, network size, and “heterogeneity” of discussion as predictors of political knowledge and participation. *Journal of Communication*, 59(2), 205-224.
- Gil de Zúñiga, H., Jung, N., & Valenzuela, S. (2012). Social media use for news and individuals' social capital, civic engagement and political participation. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 17(3), 319-336.
- Gillespie, T. (2014). The relevance of algorithms. *Media technologies: Essays on communication, materiality, and society*, 167.
- Goel, L. M. M., & Milbrath, L. (1977). *Political participation; how and why do people get involved in politics?*. Chicago: Rand McNally.
- Greengard, S. (2009). The first Internet president. *Communications of the ACM*, 52(2), 16-18.
- Grönlund, Å. (2009). ICT is not participation is not democracy—eParticipation development models revisited. *ePart 2009*, 12-23.
- Groshek, J., & Dimitrova, D. (2011). A cross-section of voter learning, campaign interest and intention to vote in the 2008 American election: Did Web 2.0 matter. *Communication Studies Journal*, 9(1), 355-375.
- Habermas, J. (1984). *The theory of communicative action: Reason and the rationalization of*

- society*, Vol. 1. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Hardy, B. W., & Scheufele, D. A. (2005). Examining differential gains from Internet use: Comparing the moderating role of talk and online interactions. *Journal of Communication*, 55(1), 71-84.
- Hargittai, E. (2002). Beyond logs and surveys: In-depth measures of people's web use skills. *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, 53(14), 1239-1244.
- Hargittai, E., & Hinnant, A. (2008). Digital inequality: Differences in you adults' use of the Internet. *Communication Research*, 35, 602-621.
- Hargittai, E. (2010). Digital natives? Variation in internet skills and uses among members of the "net generation". *Sociological inquiry*, 80(1), 92-113.
- Hayes, A. F. (2007), Exploring the Forms of Self-Censorship: On the Spiral of Silence and the Use of Opinion Expression Avoidance Strategies. *Journal of Communication*, 57: 785-802.
- Hendricks, J. A., & Denton, R. E. (Eds.). (2010). *Communicator-in-chief*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Hindman, M. (2008). *The myth of digital democracy*. Princeton University Press.
- Hindman, M. & Cukier, K.N. (2004). *More Media, Less Diversity*. The New York Times, p.A23.
- Howard, P. N. (2010). *The digital origins of dictatorship and democracy: Information technology and political Islam*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Huckfeldt, R. R., & Sprague, J. (1995). *Citizens, politics and social communication: Information and influence in an election campaign*. Cambridge University Press.
- Jerit, J., Barabas, J. and Bolsen, T. (2006), Citizens, Knowledge, and the Information Environment. *American Journal of Political Science*, 50: 266-282.
- Johnson, T. J., & Kaye, B. K. (2003). A boost or bust for democracy? How the web influenced political attitudes and behaviors in the 1996 and 2000 presidential elections. *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, 8(3), 9-34.
- Kaid, L. L., & Holtz-Bacha, C. (Eds.). (2007). *Encyclopedia of political communication*. SAGE publications.
- Kaplan, Richard L. (2000). *Politics and the American Press: The Rise of Objectivity, 1865-1920*. New York: Cambridge University Press

- Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Business horizons*, 53(1), 59-68.
- Kenski, K., & Stroud, N. J. (2006). Connections between Internet use and political efficacy, knowledge, and participation. *Journal of broadcasting & electronic media*, 50(2), 173-192.
- Kim, J., Wyatt, R. O., & Katz, E. (1999). News, talk, opinion, participation: The part played by conversation in deliberative democracy. *Political communication*, 16(4), 361-385.
- Kohut, A. (2008). Social networking and online videos take off: Internet's broader role in campaign 2008. The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. Retrieved from [http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/Pew\\_MediaSources\\_jan08.pdf](http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/Pew_MediaSources_jan08.pdf)
- Kush, C. (2000). *Cybercitizen: How to fight for all the issues you care about*. New York, NY: St. Martin's.
- Kushin, M. J., & Yamamoto, M. (2010). Did social media really matter? College students' use of online media and political decision making in the 2008 election. *Mass Communication and Society*, 13(5), 608-630.
- Lang, K. & Lang, G. (2002). *Politics and television re-viewed*. Television and politics. Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, N.J
- Lasker, B. (1949). *Democracy through discussion*. New York: H. W. Wilson.
- Lemert, J. B., Mitzman, B. N., Seither, M. A., Cook, R. H., & Hackett, R. (1977). Journalists and mobilizing information. *Journalism Quarterly*, 54(4), 721-726.
- Leung, L. (2009). User-generated content on the internet: an examination of gratifications, civic engagement and psychological empowerment. *New media & society*, 11(8), 1327-1347.
- Luskin, R. C. (1990). Explaining political sophistication. *Political Behavior*, 12, 331-361.
- Lutz, M. (2009). *The Social Pulpit. Barack Obama's Social Media Toolkit*. Eldelman, Digital Public Affairs.
- Lynch, M. (2011). After Egypt: The limits and promise of online challenges to the authoritarian Arab state. *Perspectives on Politics*, 9(2), 301-310.
- MacKuen, M. (1990). Speaking of politics: Individual conversational choice, public opinion, and the prospects for deliberative democracy. In J. Ferejohn & J. Kuklinski (Eds.), *Information and democratic process* (pp. 59-99). Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

- Malcolm, A. (2007). *Breaking News: Ron Paul campaign donors set a record*. Retrieved May 07, 2017, from <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/washington/2007/12/rp.html>
- Markoff, J. (1999). *Democracy*. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.
- Min, S. J. (2010). From digital divide to the democratic divide: Internet skills, political interest, and the second-level digital divide in political Internet usage. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 7, 22–35.
- Moghadam, V. M. (2013). What is democracy? Promises and perils of the Arab Spring. *Current Sociology*, 61(4), 393-408.
- Morris, D. (2011). *Vote. com: Influence, and the Internet is Giving Power Back to the People*. Macmillan.
- Morozov, E. (2011). *The net delusion: The dark side of internet freedom*. New York: Public Affairs.
- Mossberger, K., Tolbert, C. J., & Stansbury, M. (2003). *Virtual inequality: Beyond the digital divide*. Georgetown University Press.
- Mossberger, K., Tolbert, C. J., & McNeal, R. S. (2007). *Digital citizenship: The Internet, society, and participation*. MIT Press.
- Mutz, D. C., & Reeves, B. (2005). The new videomalaise: Effects of televised incivility on political trust. *American Political Science Review*, 99, 1–15.
- Mutz, D., Sniderman, P., & Brody, R. (Eds.). (1996). *Political persuasion and attitude change*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Naaman, M., Boase, J., & Lai, C.-H. (2010). Is it really about me?: Message content in social awareness streams. *In Proceedings of the 2010 ACM Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work* (pp. 189–192). New York: ACM Press.
- Noelle-Neumann, E. (1993). *The spiral of silence: Public opinion—Our social skin (2nd ed.)*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Norris, P. (1996). Does television erode social capital? A reply to Putnam. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 29(3), 474-480.
- Norris, P. (2001). *Digital divide: Civic engagement, information poverty, and the internet worldwide*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Nyhan, B., & Reifler, J. (2010). When corrections fail: The persistence of political

- misperceptions. *Political Behavior*, 32(2), 303-330.
- O'Reilly, T. (2005, September 30). What is web 2.0: Design patterns and business models for the next generation of software. Retrieved from <http://www.oreillynet.com/pub/a/oreilly/tim/news/2005/09/30/what-is-web-20.html?page=1>
- Owen, S. (2008, November 3). Citizens, media use social media to monitor election. *PBS*. Retrieved from <http://www.pbs.org/mediashift/2008/11/citizens-media-use-social-media-to-monitor-election308.html>
- Papacharissi, Z. (2002). The virtual sphere The internet as a public sphere. *New media & society*, 4(1), 9-27.
- Perry, L., & Joyce, P. (2017). Trump's Use of Twitter in the 2016 Campaign by Luke Perry and Paul Joyce. Retrieved July 23, 2017, from <https://www.ucpublicaffairs.com/home/2017/3/19/trumps-use-of-twitter-in-the-2016-campaign-by-luke-perry-and-paul-joyce>
- Pew Research Center. (2016). *Digital Readiness Gaps*. Retrieved from <http://www.pewinternet.org/2016/09/20/digital-readiness-gaps/>
- Pew Research Center. (2016). *Information Overload*. Retrieved from <http://www.pewinternet.org/2016/12/07/information-overload/>
- Pew Research Center. (2016). *Social Media Update 2016*. Retrieved from <http://www.pewinternet.org/2016/11/11/social-media-update-2016/>
- Pew Research Center. (2016). *The Political Environment on Social Media*. Retrieved from <http://www.pewinternet.org/2016/10/25/the-political-environment-on-social-media/>
- Pew Research Center. (2017). *The Future of Free Speech, Trolls, Anonymity and Fake News Online*. Retrieved from <http://www.pewinternet.org/2017/03/29/the-future-of-free-speech-trolls-anonymity-and-fake-news-online/>
- Prior, M. (2007). *Post-broadcast democracy: How media choice increases inequality in political involvement and polarizes elections*. Cambridge University Press.
- Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Ragsdale, L., & Rusk, J. G. (1995). Candidates, issues and participation in Senate elections. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 20, 305-327.



- Rainie, L., Smith, A., Schlozman, K. L., Brady, H., & Verba, S. (2012). Social media and political engagement. *Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project*, 19.
- Rheingold, H. (1993). *The virtual community: Homesteading on the electronic frontier*. The MIT Press.
- Scherer, M. (2012). *Friended: How the Obama Campaign Connected with Young Voters*. Retrieved from <http://swampland.time.com/2012/11/20/friended-how-the-obama-campaign-connected-with-young-voters/>
- Scheufele, D. A., & Nisbet, M. C. (2002). Being a citizen online: New opportunities and dead ends. *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, 7(3), 55-75.
- Schlozman, K. A., Verba, S., & Brady, H. E. (2012). *The unheavenly chorus: Unequal political voice and the broken promise of American democracy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Schmitt-Beck, R. (2008). Interpersonal communication. In L. L. Kaid & C. Holtz-Bacha (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of political communication*, Vol. 1, pp. 341-350. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Schneider, S. M., & Foot, K. A. (2004). Web campaigning by US presidential primary candidates in 2000 and 2004. *The Internet election: Perspectives on the Web in campaign*, 21-36.
- Schradie, J. (2011). The digital production gap: The digital divide and Web 2.0 collide. *Poetics*, 39(2), 145-168.
- Schudson, M. (1997). Why conversation is not the soul of democracy. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 14(4), 297-309.
- Schwartz, E. A. (1996). *Netactivism: How citizens use the Internet*. Sebastopol, CA: O'Reilly Media.
- Shah, D. V., Cho, J., Eveland Jr, W. P., & Kwak, N. (2005). Information and expression in a digital age: Modeling Internet effects on civic participation. *Communication research*, 32(5), 531-565.
- Shelley II, M. C., Thrane, L. E., & Shulman, S. W. (2006). Lost in cyberspace: Barriers to bridging the digital divide in e-politics. *International Journal of Internet and Enterprise Management*, 4(3), 228-243.
- Shumate, M., & Pike, J. (2006). Trouble in a geographically distributed virtual network organization: Organizing tensions in continental direct action network. *Journal of*

- Computer-Mediated Communication*, 11(3), 802-824.
- Smith, A., & Rainie, L. (2008). The Internet and the 2008 election. *Pew Internet & American Life Project*. Washington, DC: Pew Trust. Retrieved from [http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP\\_2008\\_election.pdf](http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_2008_election.pdf)
- Talbot, D. (2008). How Obama really did it. *Technology Review*, 111(5), 78-83.
- Tan, A. S. (1980). Mass media use, issue knowledge and political involvement. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 44(2), 241-248.
- Tancer, B. (2007). *Ron Paul for President 2.0?* Retrieved May 07, 2017, from <http://content.time.com/time/business/article/0,8599,1661290,00.html>
- Tarde, G. (1899). *Social laws: An outline of sociology*. New York: Macmillan.
- Tedesco, J. C. (2007). Examining Internet interactivity effects on young adult political information efficacy. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 50(9), 1183-1194.
- Tichenor, P. J., Donohue, G. A., & Olien, C. N. (1970). Mass media flow and differential growth in knowledge. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 34, 159-170.
- Van Dijk, J. A. (2005). *The deepening divide: Inequality in the information society*. Sage Publications.
- van Dijk, Jan (2006). *The Network Society, Social Aspects of New Media*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage.
- Verba, S., & Nie, N. H. (1987). *Participation in America: Political democracy and social equality*. University of Chicago Press.
- Walby, S. (2009). *Globalization and inequalities: Complexity and contested modernities*. Sage.
- Wyatt R O, Katz E, & Kim J. (2000). Bridging the spheres: Political and personal conversation in public and private spaces, *Journal of Communication*, vol. 50, 71-92.
- Xenos, M., & Moy, P. (2007). Direct and differential effects of the Internet on political and civic engagement. *Journal of communication*, 57(4), 704-718.
- Xie, B., & Jaeger, P. T. (2008). Older adults and political participation on the Internet: A cross-cultural comparison of the USA and China. *Journal of Cross Cultural Gerontology*, 23, 1-15.
- Youmans, W. L., & York, J. C. (2012). Social media and the activist toolkit: User agreements, corporate interests, and the information infrastructure of

- modern social movements. *Journal of Communication*, 62(2), 315-329.
- Zaller, J. (1996). The myth of massive media impact revived: New support for a discredited idea. *Political persuasion and attitude change*, 17.
- Zaller, J., & Feldman, S. (1992). A simple model of the survey responses: Answering versus revealing preferences. *American Journal of Political Science*, 36, 579–616.
- Zhang, W., Johnson, T. J., Seltzer, T., & Bichard, S. L. (2010). The revolution will be networked: The influence of social networking sites on political attitudes and behavior. *Social Science Computer Review*, 28(1), 75-92.

# Appendix A

## ACTION ON EXEMPTION APPROVAL REQUEST



**TO:** Martin Johnson  
Mass Communication

**FROM:** Dennis Landin  
Chair, Institutional Review Board

**DATE:** May 27, 2016

**RE:** IRB# E9087

**TITLE:** The Behavioral and Economic Bases of Sentiment Expression via Social Media

Institutional Review Board  
Dr. Dennis Landin, Chair  
130 David Boyd Hall  
Baton Rouge, LA 70803  
P: 225.578.8692  
F: 225.578.5983  
[irb@lsu.edu](mailto:irb@lsu.edu) | [lsu.edu/irb](http://lsu.edu/irb)

**New Protocol/Modification/Continuation:** Modification

**Brief Modification Description:** Changes in participant recruitment using Qualtrics as the survey vendor as well as added survey items.

**Review date:** 5/26/2016

**Approved**   X   **Disapproved** \_\_\_\_\_

**Approval Date:** 5/26/2016                      **Approval Expiration Date:** 2/1/2018

**Re-review frequency:** (three years unless otherwise stated)

**LSU Proposal Number** (if applicable): 42164

**Protocol Matches Scope of Work in Grant proposal:** (if applicable) \_\_\_\_\_

**By:** Dennis Landin, Chairman 

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING –**  
**Continuing approval is CONDITIONAL on:**

1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU's Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects\*
2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.
3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submittal of a termination report), prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins); notification of project termination.
4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.
5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants including notification of new information that might affect consent.
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.
7. Notification of the IRB of a serious compliance failure.
8. **SPECIAL NOTE: Make sure you use bcc when emailing more than one recipient. Approvals will automatically be closed by the IRB on the expiration date unless the PI requests a continuation.**

*\*All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU's Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at <http://www.lsu.edu/irb>*

## **Appendix B**

### News & Social Media Use Study Questions:

Thank you for participating in this research. The purpose of this study is to learn more about how people stay informed of news and use social media such as Facebook and Twitter. In this study, we will ask you to answer questions on a survey about your interest in news, current issues, and your use of social media. The principal investigator for this study is Professor Martin Johnson, Louisiana State University, martinj@lsu.edu, (225) 578-7381. It should take you no more than 15 minutes to complete the survey. There are no risks in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. The LSU Institutional Review Board has approved this study. For questions concerning participant rights, please contact the LSU IRB Chair, Dr. Dennis Landin, (225) 578-8692, or irb@lsu.edu. Participants may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of any benefit to which they might otherwise be entitled. You will receive compensation upon completion of the survey as previously outlined in your panel membership. Your participation in this research is voluntary and confidential. In the event of publication of this research, no personally identifying information will be disclosed. To proceed, please click "Proceed" below, indicating you understand this information about the study, agree to participate and are 18 years of age or older. The alternative is not to participate and exit this web page.

- Proceed (1)
- Exit (2)

meta Browser Meta Info

Browser (1)

Version (2)

Operating System (3)

Screen Resolution (4)

Flash Version (5)

Java Support (6)

User Agent (7)

dob What was the month, day, and year of your birth? (mm/dd/yyyy) (e.g.: 12/25/1980)  
Date of Birth (1)

hisp Are you of Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

race How would you describe yourself? (Select one or more responses.)

- American Indian or Alaska Native (1)
- Asian American or Pacific Islander (2)
- Black or African American (3)
- White (5)

Other/Mixed (please specify) (6) \_\_\_\_\_

gender What is your gender?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Other (please specify) (3) \_\_\_\_\_

news How often do you watch or read the news?

- Never (1)
- Once or twice a month (2)
- Once a week (3)
- A few times a week (4)
- Every day (5)

interest How interested would you say you are in public affairs generally speaking? Would you say you are very interested, fairly interested, not very interested, or not at all interested?

- Very interested (1)
- Fairly interested (2)
- Not very interested (3)
- Not at all interested (4)

cell Do you have a cell phone, or not?

- Yes, have a cell phone (1)
- No, do not have a cell phone (2)

Answer If Do you have a cell phone, or not? Yes, have a cell phone Is Selected

smart Some cell phones are called “smartphones” because of certain features they have. Is your cell phone a smartphone such as an iPhone, Android, Blackberry or Windows phone, or are you not sure?

- Yes, smartphone (1)
- No, not a smartphone (2)
- Not sure (3)

devices Please tell us if you happen to have each of the following items, or not.

	Yes (1)	No (2)
A handheld device made primarily for e-book reading, such as a Nook or Kindle e-reader (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A tablet computer like an iPad, Samsung Galaxy Tab, Google Nexus, or Kindle Fire (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

A desktop computer (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A laptop computer (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
An iPod or other MP3 music player (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A game console like Xbox, Play Station, or Wii (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A portable gaming device like a PSP or Sega Genesis game player (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

infotype Now, we have a list of different types of news and information. Please tell us how closely you follow this type of news either in the newspaper, on television, on radio, or on the Internet: very closely, somewhat closely, not very closely, or not at all closely?

	Very closely (1)	Somewhat closely (2)	Not very closely (3)	Not at all closely (4)
Business and Finance (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Local government (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Entertainment (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Science and technology (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
International affairs (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sports (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
News about political figures and events in Washington, D.C. (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Health news (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Religion (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Consumer news (10)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Crime (11)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People and events in your own community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

(12) Culture and the arts (13)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
-----------------------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------

second When watching television, how often do you use an additional electronic device to get more information or talk about the program or event you're viewing – a process called second screening?

	Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Sometimes (3)	Very often (4)	Always (5)
During political speeches or debates? (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
During news? (10)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
During election coverage? (11)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
During commercials? (12)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
During sporting events? (13)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
During live television programming? (14)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
During scripted dramas? (15)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
During situation comedies? (16)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



pid We are interested in your partisan identification, regardless of how you vote. Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a . . .

- Republican (1)
- Democrat (2)
- Independent (3)
- Other. Please indicate (4) \_\_\_\_\_

Answer If We are interested in your partisan identification, regardless of how you vote. Generally speaking... Republican Is Selected

pidr Would you call yourself a . . .

- Strong Republican (1)
- Not very strong Republican (2)

Answer If We are interested in your partisan identification, regardless of how you vote. Generally speaking... Democrat Is Selected

pidd Would you call yourself a . . .

- Strong Democrat (1)
- Not very strong Democrat (2)

Answer If We are interested in your partisan identification, regardless of how you vote. Generally speaking... Independent Is Selected Or We are interested in your partisan identification, regardless of how you vote. Generally speaking... Other. Please indicate Is Selected

pidi Do you think of yourself as closer to the . . .

- Republican party (1)
- Democratic party (2)
- Neither party (3)

tipi Here are a number of personality traits that may or may not apply to you. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree that each of these personality traits apply to you. You should rate the extent to which you agree or disagree that the pair of traits applies to you, even if one characteristic applies more strongly than the other.

	Disagree strongly (1)	Disagree moderately (2)	Disagree a little (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Agree a little (5)	Agree moderately (6)	Agree strongly (7)
Extraverted, enthusiastic (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Critical, quarrelsome (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dependable,	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

self-disciplined (3)							
Anxious, easily upset (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Open to new experiences, complex (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reserved, quiet (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This is an attention filter. Please select 'Agree moderately' for this row. (11)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sympathetic, warm (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Disorganized, careless (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Calm, emotionally stable (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Conventional, uncreative (10)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

trust Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?

- Most people can be trusted (1)
- You can't be too careful (2)

fair Do you think most people would try to take advantage of you if they got the chance or would they try to be fair?

- Most people would try to take advantage (1)
- Most people try to be fair (2)

helpful Would you say that most of the time people try to be helpful, or that they are just looking out for themselves?

- People try to be helpful (1)
- People are just looking out for themselves (2)

ideology We hear a lot of talk about liberals and conservatives. Here is a seven-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Where would you place yourself on this scale?

- Extremely liberal (1)
- Liberal (2)
- Slightly liberal (3)
- Moderate; middle of the road (4)
- Slightly conservative (5)
- Conservative (6)
- Extremely conservative (7)

regvote Are you registered to vote?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Don't know (3)

poltherm We'd like to get your feelings toward some of our political leaders and other people who are in the news these days. We list the names of people and would like you to rate each of them using something we call the feeling thermometer. Ratings between 50 degrees and 100 degrees mean that you feel favorable and warm toward the person. Ratings between 0 degrees and 50 degrees mean that you don't feel favorable toward the person and that you don't care too much for that person. You would rate the person at the 50 degree mark if you don't feel particularly warm or cold toward the person.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Barack Obama (1)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Hillary Clinton (2)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Donald Trump (3)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Bernie Sanders (4)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Ted Cruz (5)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Sarah Palin (6)

horse1 If the 2016 presidential election were between Hillary Clinton for the Democrats and Donald Trump for the Republicans, would you vote for Hillary Clinton, Donald Trump, someone else, or probably not vote?

- Hillary Clinton (1)
- Donald Trump (2)
- Someone else (3)
- Probably not vote (4)

horse2 If the 2016 presidential election were between Bernie Sanders for the Democrats and Donald Trump for the Republicans, would you vote for Bernie Sanders, Donald Trump, someone else, or probably not vote?

- Bernie Sanders (1)
- Donald Trump (2)
- Someone else (3)
- Probably not vote (4)

participation How often in the past 12 months have you done the following?

	None (1)	1 time (2)	2 times (3)	3 times (4)	4 times (5)	5-9 times (6)	10 or more times (7)
Created an online petition (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Signed a petition online (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Participated in an online question and answer session with a politician or public official (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Signed up online to volunteer to help with a political cause (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Used a mobile phone to donate money to a campaign or political cause (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Started a	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

political or cause-related group on a social media site (6)							
Viewed live video (on a platform like Periscope or Facebook Live) of a political candidate (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Rel1 What is your present religion, if any?

- Protestant (1)
- Catholic (4)
- Orthodox, such as Greek or Russian Orthodox (5)
- Mormon (2)
- Jewish (6)
- Muslim (3)
- Something else (please specify) (11) \_\_\_\_\_
- Nothing in particular (12)

Answer If What is your present religion, if any? Muslim Is Not Selected And What is your present religion, if any? Jewish Is Not Selected And What is your present religion, if any? Nothing in particular Is Not Selected

Rel2 Would you describe yourself as a 'born-again' or evangelical Christian, or not?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Rel3 How important is religion in your life?

- Very important (1)
- Somewhat important (2)
- Not too important (3)
- Not at all important (4)

Rel 4 How often do you attend religious services at a church, synagogue, mosque, or other place of worship?

- Never (1)
- Once a year (2)
- A few times a year (3)
- Once a month (4)
- A few times a month (6)
- Once a week or more (5)

educ What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

- Less than high school (1)
- High school graduate (2)
- Some college, no degree (includes community college) (3)
- Two year associate degree from a college or university (4)
- Four year college or university degree/Bachelor's degree (e.g., BS, BA, AB) (5)
- Some postgraduate or professional schooling, but no postgraduate degree (6)
- Postgraduate or professional degree, including master's, doctorate, medical or law degree (e.g., MA, MS, PhD, MD, JD) (7)

income We would like to know what your family income was last year before taxes. Please which category includes your family income.

- Less than \$10,000 (1)
- \$10,000 to \$14,999 (2)
- \$15,000 to \$24,999 (3)
- \$25,000 to \$34,999 (4)
- \$35,000 to \$49,999 (5)
- \$50,000 to \$74,999 (6)
- \$75,000 to \$99,999 (7)
- \$100,000 to \$149,999 (8)
- \$150,000 to \$199,999 (9)
- \$200,000 or more (10)
- Prefer not to answer (11)

sexualid Do you consider yourself to be:

- Heterosexual or straight (1)
- Gay or lesbian (2)
- Bisexual (3)

smuse Please tell us if you ever use any of the following social networks:

	Yes (1)	No (2)
Facebook (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Google+ (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Instagram (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
LinkedIn (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pinterest (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tumblr (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Twitter (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Snapchat (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A location-based social-networking site such as Foursquare or Swarm (10)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Yik Yak (11)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Answer If Please tell us if you ever use any of the following social networks: - Yes Is Greater Than 0

smcheck About how often do you check these networks for content posted by others? Constantly, Several times a day, about once a day, 3-5 days a week, 1-2 days a week, every few weeks, less often or never?

	I'm on this network constantly (1)	Several times a day (2)	About once a day (3)	3-5 days a week (4)	1-2 days a week (5)	Every few weeks (6)	Less often (7)	Never (8)
If Please tell us if you ever use the Internet to access any of the following social networks: Facebook - Yes Is Selected Facebook (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

<p>If Please tell us if you ever use the Internet to access any of the following social networks: Google+ - Yes Is Selected Google+ (2)</p>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<p>If Please tell us if you ever use the Internet to access any of the following social networks: Instagram - Yes Is Selected Instagram (3)</p>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<p>If Please tell us if you ever use the Internet to access any of the following social networks: LinkedIn - Yes Is Selected LinkedIn (4)</p>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



<p>If Please tell us if you ever use the Internet to access any of the following social networks: Pinterest - Yes Is Selected Pinterest (5)</p>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<p>If Please tell us if you ever use the Internet to access any of the following social networks: Tumblr - Yes Is Selected Tumblr (6)</p>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<p>If Please tell us if you ever use the Internet to access any of the following social networks: Twitter - Yes Is Selected Twitter (7)</p>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<p>If Please</p>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

<p>tell us if you ever use the Internet to access any of the following social networks: Snapchat - Yes Is Selected Snapchat (8)</p>								
<p>If Please tell us if you ever use the Internet to access any of the following social networks: A location-based social-networking site such as Foursquare or Swarm - Yes Is Selected A location-based social-networking site such as Foursquare or Swarm (9)</p>	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
<p>If Please tell us if you ever use the</p>	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Internet to access any of the following social networks: Yik Yak - Yes Is Selected Yik Yak (10)								
--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Answer If Please tell us if you ever use any of the following social networks: - Yes Is Greater Than 0  
smpost About how often do you post content to these networks? Several times a day, about once a day, 3-5 days a week, 1-2 days a week, every few weeks, less often or never?

	I post on this network constantly (1)	Several times a day (2)	About once a day (3)	3-5 days a week (4)	1-2 days a week (5)	Every few weeks (6)	Less often (7)	Never (8)
If Please tell us if you ever use the Internet to access any of the following social networks: Facebook - Yes Is Selected Facebook (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If Please tell us if you ever use the Internet to access any of the	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

<p>following social networks: Google+ - Yes Is Selected Google+ (2)</p> <p>If Please tell us if you ever use the Internet to access any of the following social networks: Instagram - Yes Is Selected Instagram (3)</p> <p>If Please tell us if you ever use the Internet to access any of the following social networks: LinkedIn - Yes Is Selected LinkedIn (4)</p> <p>If Please tell us if you ever use the Internet to access any</p>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

<p>of the following social networks: Pinterest - Yes Is Selected Pinterest (5)</p> <p>If Please tell us if you ever use the Internet to access any of the following social networks: Tumblr - Yes Is Selected Tumblr (6)</p> <p>If Please tell us if you ever use the Internet to access any of the following social networks: Twitter - Yes Is Selected Twitter (7)</p> <p>If Please tell us if you ever use the Internet to access any of the</p>	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

<p>following social networks: Snapchat - Yes Is Selected Snapchat (8)</p> <p>If Please tell us if you ever use the Internet to access any of the following social networks: A location-based social-networking site such as Foursquare or Swarm - Yes Is Selected A location-based social-networking site such as Foursquare or Swarm (9)</p> <p>If Please tell us if you ever use the Internet to access any of the following social networks:</p>	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Yik Yak - Yes Is Selected Yik Yak (10)								
--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Answer If Please tell us if you ever use the Internet to access any of the following social networks: Twitter - Yes Is Selected  
twitact How often, if ever, do you do the following things on Twitter?

	Several times a day (1)	About once a day (2)	3-5 days a week (3)	1-2 days a week (4)	Every few weeks (5)	Less often (6)	Never (7)
Tweet updates related to your personal life, activities and interests (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tweet updates related to your work life, activities and interests (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tweet humorous or philosophical observations about life in general (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Share photos (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Share videos (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tweet your location (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tweet links to news stories (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Retweet material that someone else posted (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Send direct messages to other users (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Answer If Please tell us if you ever use the Internet to access any of the following social networks: Facebook - Yes Is Selected

fbact How often, if ever, do you do the following things on Facebook?

	Several times a day (1)	About once a day (2)	3-5 days a week (3)	1-2 days a week (4)	Every few weeks (5)	Less often (6)	Never (7)
Post status updates related to your personal life, activities and interests (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Post status updates related to your work life, activities and interests (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Post humorous or philosophical observations about life in general (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Share photos (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Share videos (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Post your	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



location with Facebook Places (6)							
Share links to news stories (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Share material that someone else posted (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Send Facebook messages to other users (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

chat How often do you use the following messaging and chat apps?

	Several times a day (1)	About once a day (2)	3-5 days a week (3)	1-2 days a week (4)	Every few weeks (5)	Less often (6)	Never (7)
LINE (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
WhatsApp (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
WeChat (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Snapchat (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
GroupMe (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## **Vita**

Landon Hester, native of Shreveport, Louisiana, is a graduate student at Louisiana State University's Manship School of Mass Communication. He graduated from LSU in 2013 with a bachelor's degree in mass communication, concentration in public relations. Upon completion, he worked as a Public Relations and Branding Specialist in Baton Rouge until returning to school to obtain his master's degree.