A MULTIVARIATE MODEL OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL MEDIA IN AUSTRIA

POLITICAL USAGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA BY CITIZENS

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Problem

- Regular citizen’s social media usage in the context of political issues
  - Social media usage: Social networks, comments, blogs, Twitter, message boards
  - Political issues

What predicts political social media usage?

- Representation?
- New/differing participants (compared to offline participation)?

Issues that concern politicians or political parties, or issues that are about political questions or decisions. This can be on any level (local, national, international) and in any area like health care, defense, immigration, elections, security, education, culture, traffic, construction projects, taxes etc.
Related work

► Online participation/Political Internet use
(Jacobs et al., 2009; Stromer-Galley, 2002; Lindner et al., 2011; Neblo et al., 2010; Best et al., 2005)
- Politics-related internet users tend to be young, educated, male, technically skilled, liberals and politically interested
- Findings on effects of political knowledge are inconsistent

► Traditional participation
- Resource and socialization models (e.g. Verba et al., 1972; 1978; 1993)
- Civic talk has positive effects on participation in society and politics (Walsh, 2004; Klofstad, 2011)
Background

Societal Modernization  Structure of the State  Mobilizing agencies

Resources  Political Activism  Motivation

Macro-level  Meso-level  Micro-level

Source: Norris, 2002, p. 20

(e.g. Inglehart, 1997)  (e.g. Blais, 2006)  (e.g. Brady et al., 1995)  (e.g. Verba et al., 1972, 1978, 1993)
## Expected outcomes

Expected effects on the political usage of social media

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Expected effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>−</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender: male</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet usage &amp; skills</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political interest</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political knowledge</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left-leaning</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right-leaning</td>
<td>−</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal political efficacy</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External political efficacy</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News media usage</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic talk</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual trust in people</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data & data analysis

► Dataset
  ● Collected in autumn 2010
  ● 2,953 Austrians from age 14
  ● Provided to me by Prof. Klaus Schönbach
  ● Online survey conducted by Marketagent.com, on behalf of the Amsterdam School of Communication Research
  ● Proportional for age, gender and province

► Analysis
  ● Negative binomial and logistic models
Data analysis
Computed models

- Number of social media used on political issues
  - Usage at some point of time (= not “never”)
    - Actively
    - Passively
  - On a regular basis (= at least “a few times a month”)
    - Actively
    - Passively
- Active usage (not “never”) of certain social media
  - Comments
  - Social networks
  - Blogs
  - Message boards
  - Twitter

4 negative-binomial regression models
5 logistic regression models
Results

Number of people using different social media for political issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Media Type</th>
<th>Active</th>
<th>Passive</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>N = 2,953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blogs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Message boards</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social networks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results
Usage of different social media for political issues on a regular basis

- Twitter: 2%
- Blogs: 11%
- Message boards: 11%
- Social networks: 32%
- Comments: N = 2,953

N = 2,953
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictors</th>
<th>Summary</th>
<th>Expected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>−−−</td>
<td>−</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender: male</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational training</td>
<td>−</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school degree</td>
<td>−</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet usage</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet skills</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pol. interest</td>
<td>+++</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pol. knowledge</td>
<td>−−</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pol. alignment&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal pol. efficacy</td>
<td>+++</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust in people</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary of nine models on social media usage in the context of political issues

Explanation:

+ means positive effects
− means negative effects

For summary:

+++/−−− means highly significant (p < .01) effects in all models

++/-- means highly significant effects in at least half of the models

+/− means a significant effect (p < .05) in at least one model

<sup>a</sup> base category: compulsory school
<sup>b</sup> base category: political center
Conclusions and summary

- Social media differ – especially in usage and in the proportions of active and passive users
- Small number of people actively generating political content
  - They tend to be young, Internet savvy, male, politically interested and tend to have high political efficacy
- Most stable predictors of political social media usage: age, political interest and internal political efficacy
- Models from research on traditional forms of political participation and activism can help in explaining the usage of social media for political issues
New groups of politically active?
Characteristics:
- Very young
- Dominantly female
- Heavy Internet users
- Little news media usage
- Very little political interest and little knowledge

N = 2,495
458 without any activity
Outlook and limitations

- Patterns of uneven representation last
- But: some hints that new groups of people could be engaged
- Difficult: the young are a big group → how to assess their socio-economic status?
- Causality? Reciprocal effects?

Good news: there is still a lot of work to do
THANK YOU!

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Based on my master thesis at the University of Vienna:
Supervisor: Prof. Klaus Schönbach
Bibliography (1/2)


Bibliography (2/2)