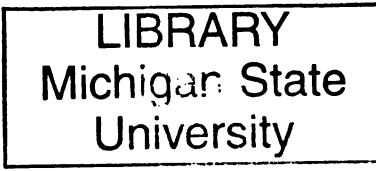This is to certify that the
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NEW MEDIA, NEW POLITICS: POLITICAL LEARNING EFFICACY AND THE
EXAMINATION OF USES OF SOCIAL NETWORK SITES FOR
POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

By

Rebecca A. Hayes

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# ABSTRACT

## NEW MEDIA, NEW POLITICS: POLITICAL LEARNING EFFICACY AND THE EXAMINATION OF USES OF SOCIAL NETWORK SITES FOR POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

By

Rebecca A. Hayes

Online social network sites (SNSs) have become active political forums in the United States and elsewhere. During the 2008 presidential election, the two major candidates directed significant resources toward the creation and maintenance of SNS profiles and pages in an effort to reach out to young voters. These efforts garnered substantial media and scholarly attention. One of the main demographic targets of these sites, individuals aged 18-25, has historically been largely apathetic toward the political process and has demonstrated a low level of engagement in politics. This may have changed in the 2008 election with a winning campaign that was well-versed in online social networking and engagement. Yet little is known about how these sites impact young voters in terms of increased participation in the electoral process and the variables that precede participation, such as political knowledge and efficacy.

A person's feeling of political efficacy, the confidence that one can both effectively participate in and influence the political process, is a determinant of political participation. This construct has been broken down into two components, internal and external political efficacy (IPE and EPE, respectively), and has been further extended into the concept of political information efficacy (PIE). The similarities between the constructs of IPE and PIE, and their respective measurement scales, suggest that the concepts may not be entirely different. There is a need for conceptual and operational

clarification and validation. A measurement instrument is needed to fill the gap in the literature regarding learning and informational antecedents to political efficacy. Preliminary research indicates that political candidate social network efforts are largely tools of information provision. The proposed instrument will help answer the question of whether SNSs can be valuable political engagement tools.

With these two issues in mind, the following multi-stage research was undertaken. Using Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1986; 1997) as a theoretical guide, the concepts are examined and sorted, and a new scale, Political Learning Efficacy, is developed using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Next, the new scale is used in a nationally representative survey of 18-25 year olds (n=625) to examine the effects of previous and continued use of political social networking on PLE, political knowledge and participation with interesting and informative results.

Results show that use of social network sites for political purposes can have a positive impact on political learning efficacy and, thus, on knowledge and participation. However, these results also demonstrate that political participation through social media during the 2008 election was much lower than was anecdotally reported in the news media. In addition, online sources of news and political information are not the preferred informational source among this demographic. Contrary to conventional wisdom regarding this group, traditional media such as newspapers and televised news are reported as the preferred informational source.

This research provides a valuable new discipline-spanning measure to the political efficacy literature and helps to establish the value of candidate social networking in the political communication arena.

## DEDICATION

For my parents, Joy and Randy, my husband, Steve, and my pseudo-kids, Buddy and
Phoebe.  Thanks for putting up with me.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Young people aged 18-25 have relatively low rates of voter participation, typically about 20% less than older age groups (CIRCLE, 2008). This group is known to have a much lower confidence in their political knowledge than the general population (Kaid et al., 2007b); lack of information, knowledge, and attention from candidates is often cited by this group as reasons for not voting (Kaid, McKinney, & Tedesco, 2007; Hayes; 2008a). Their media choices vary significantly from those of the general population (Delli Carpini, 2000), and this has been noted for contributing to a lack of exposure to traditionally informative political communication methods.

The media mix of this young population includes heavy use of social network sites (SNSs), such as MySpace and Facebook, and Web sites where users have become accustomed to a level of personal information and interactivity not afforded by traditional political communication methods. As recently as 2006, political candidates began posting profiles on these sites in order to reach out to younger voters and keep pace with other candidates (Williams & Gulati, 2007). The 2008 presidential election supplied some of the most complex and interactive candidate Web communication yet. With varying degrees of success, the two leading candidates built their own social network platforms within their main Web sites, in addition to maintaining a presence on the popular public social network sites (Gizmondo, 2008). While candidates were and are expending significant resources to create and maintain these sites, limited research exists on the impact of the sites on targeted groups and the tactic's ability to increase knowledge of or participation in the political process (Utz, 2009).

The 2008 presidential election saw record total turnout among young voters, and a significant increase in turnout from the previous presidential elections in 2000 and 2004. While much of this is attributable to a dynamic candidate who appealed to young voters, this candidate's embrace of online recruiting tools indicates that these tools may be effective in significantly increasing the precursors to voting, such as political efficacy.

While the available research on political social network sites has only recently begun to build and is there is promising research on the effects of the Internet overall on political interest, involvement, and engagement. There is also some evidence that the Internet, for a variety of reasons, could be more effective at promoting democratic participation than traditional media (Jennings & Zeitner, 2003; Delli Carpini, 2004; Lenhart, Madden, & Hitlin, 2005; Levine & Lopez, 2004; Lupia and Philpot, 2005; Pasek, Kenski, Romer, & Jamieson, 2006). These effects are expected to extend to political SNS. Some of the first studies in the area of SNSs show that they may have a positive impact on a voter's confidence in his or her adequacy to engage in the political process (Tedesco, 2007; Hayes et al., 2008), an important precursor to political participation (Kim, 2003). SNSs also have the ability to reach those who are less interested in politics, who tend to miss other online candidate communications such as Web sites, since these sites have to be intentionally sought out rather than just stumbled upon as one might incidentally find the social network profile of a candidate (Utz, 2009).

Political efficacy, "the feeling that individual political action does have, or can have, an impact on the political process" (Campbell, Gurin, & Miller, 1954 p. 187), is an established precursor to political participation (Campbell et al., 1954; Milbrath & Goel, 1977). This larger construct of political efficacy was sub-divided into the two concepts

of internal and external political efficacy (Converse, 1972; Balch, 1974) due to repeated findings of multidimensionality and concerns regarding the validity of the larger construct (Morrell, 2003). Research has demonstrated the value and validity of each of these separate concepts in isolation, with IPE in particular being noted as a robust measure (Craig, Niemi, & Silver, 1990; Niemi, Craig, & Mattei, 1991; Morrell, 2003). A new construct, political information efficacy, has emerged, sharing remarkable similarities with the construct of internal political efficacy both in its construct definition and most particularly in its measurement (Kaid et al. 2007a; Tedesco 2007), and may muddying the conceptual waters. This new construct is not well-validated and three of the four items used to measure it are shared with the measurement of internal political efficacy.

In addition to the need for conceptual and operational clarification, the earlier measures of internal and external political efficacy do not fully capture the range of effects of online candidate communication through social networks. Other forms of candidate communication, while providing information to voters, are generally considered voter persuasion attempts. These new media sources provide political information, promote learning, and encourage participation without the hard-sell of traditional candidate communication methods, and current efficacy measures do not capture that. In order to address both the paucity of research in the area of effects of SNS candidate communication and the lack of a relevant measurement instrument, a new construct called *Political Learning Efficacy* and an evaluative measure for it is developed here using Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura 1986; 1997) and qualitative research as a guide. This scale development process used both qualitative focus groups (n=36) and

quantitative survey research (n=358) to formulate the new construct and evaluate its measurement. Survey research was then implemented with a large, nationally representative survey of 18-25 year-olds (n=625) to measure whether previous and continued use of political social network tools increase political knowledge and participation through increases in political learning efficacy.

# CHAPTER 2

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The mass media have been heralded as both an important source of political

knowledge (Sotirovic & McLeod, 2004; Eveland, Hayes, Shah, & Kwak, 2005) and a

potential cause of disengagement (Putnam, 2000), and studies of media effects on a

variety of political variables are an active and exciting field of research. The most recent

media of interest is the Internet, and, by extension, social network sites such as MySpace

or Facebook. During the 2008 election year, nearly every candidate for office at the

national, state, and local level had a Web site, and very likely had a social network profile.

Web-based political communication is touted by many as the political tool of tomorrow,

but that doesn't mean that the rich scholarly history based on more traditional methods of

political communication, such as the news media and televised advertising, need be

abandoned. This field has evolved significantly since its beginnings as a minor subfield

of propaganda research (Rogers, 2004), and all future research has its foundations in the

past studies of Walter Lippman, Harold Lasswell, and Paul Lazersfeld, among others.

Originally concerned with the study of propaganda and later the effects of print

media and television on individuals' vote choice (Rogers, 2004), political communication

has evolved in a parallel fashion in somewhat disparate fields, political science and

communication. In the past, the two areas rarely viewed the relationship between media

and politics in the same way; communication scholars primarily concerned themselves

with the processes of influence (the means), while political science scholars tended to

focus on outcomes of exposure (the ends) (Holbert, 2005). More recently, the fields have

started to come together in their use of similar outcome variables, such as knowledge,

efficacy, and behavior in their studies of effects of various media, including new media social network sites.

<u>Historical Foundations of Political Communication</u>

Considered by many to be the founding document of political communication, Walter Lippman's (1922) *Public Opinion* argued that controlling public opinion (through propaganda) was key to controlling public behavior and laid the groundwork for the later theory of media agenda setting. Lippman's argument that media are crucial in creating a free marketplace of ideas helped stimulate a normative concern in political communication research (then called public opinion and propaganda research) about the need for a free press and an informed citizenry in a strong democracy (Rogers, 2004).

While the origins of public opinion research began with Lippman, the study of media effects began with Harold Lasswell. His 1927 work examined the effects of German, French, American and British propaganda during World War I and it established the five question model that many still follow in their media effects research: *Who* says *what* to *whom* via *which* channels with *what* effects? (Rogers, 2004).

Finally, and perhaps most relevant to this work, the first quantitative studies of voting behavior and the media's effects on it were conducted by Paul F. Lazarsfeld in the 1940s. Lazarsfeld and his colleagues, utilizing a sample of 600 people in Erie County, Ohio, conducted over 3600 personal interviews in the months leading up to the 1940 presidential election. Erie County was chosen as representative of the nation as a whole, and the study was intended to measure the direct effects of the media on voting behavior. Lazarsfeld found that only a very small number (54 out of the 600) changed their minds over the course of the campaign, with information provided by the news media rarely

cited as the cause of a change. He concluded that the media had negligible direct effects on voting behavior and proposed a theory of a two-step flow of communication in which interpersonal communication with opinion leaders plays an important factor in determining media effects. This theory asserts that media information moves in two different stages. First, individuals (opinion leaders) who pay close attention to the mass media and its messages receive the information. Second, these opinion leaders pass on their own interpretations of this information to those around them. The term 'personal influence' was coined by Lazarsfeld to refer to the intervening process between the media's direct message and the audience's reaction to that message. The two-step flow theory has improved understanding of how the mass media influence behavior and has helped to refine the ability to predict the influence of media messages on audience behavior, and it helped explain how and why certain media campaigns may have failed (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Katz, 1973).

From the time of Lazarsfeld's work to through the early 1970s, the media were thought to have little direct effect on behavior or attitudes (Klapper, 1960; Johnston, Hagen, & Jamieson, 2004; Rogers, 2004; Huber & Arceneaux, 2007). Propaganda research was still popular, as was persuasion research related to televised news media viewing, but neither demonstrated definitive media effects (Rogers, 2004). It was at this time that McCombs and Shaw (1972) argued that a lack of research on the cognitive and informational effects of political communication hindered the true understanding of effects of mass media and that perhaps this was the cause of the lack of findings. Their agenda-setting theory of the media, which postulated that the media doesn't determine how a person thought about an issue, but it did determine if they thought an issue was

important, became a dominant theory for years, and is noted for being the most frequently cited work in political communication (Dearing and Rogers, 1996).

Even with McComb and Shaw's argument related to problems in the research base, there wasn't a distinct shift in the research paradigm until the early 90s, when researchers began to focus primarily on the cognitive, affective and behavioral impacts of political communication, advertising in particular (Johnson-Cartee & Copeland, 1997). This shift in research paradigm uncovered many of the previously unrealized effects of political communication. While definitive results related to persuasion were still elusive, some candidate communication, notably traditional 30-second televised political advertisements, were found to improve voter knowledge, political efficacy, and interest in campaigns (Brians & Wattenberg, 1996; Freedman, Franz & Goldstein, 2004; Kaid & Postelnicu, 2007), and perhaps increase turnout (Finkel & Geer, 1998). Other researchers demonstrated negative effects of political advertising, from decreased efficacy (Austin & Pinkleton, 1995), increased cynicism (Yoon, Pinkleton, & Ko, 2002), and reduced turnout and disengagement (Ansolabehere, Iyengar & Valentino,1994; Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995).

The Internet in Elections

The Internet has emerged as a significant force in political campaigns in recent years. Howard Dean in 2004 and Ron Paul in 2007 were both propelled to national prominence primarily because of successful online efforts, and the potential of SNSs and other online political tools were heralded throughout the news media during the latest election cycle. Emerging as an entirely new media for political communication since many of the studies on traditional campaign communication were conducted, so far,

research into the effects of Internet political communication has shown promising results in the areas of efficacy, information, and involvement. Investigating the impact of Internet political communication in the same manner and with many of the same variables that traditional political communication has been will provide a valuable comparison and an indicator of how powerful these new political communication tools can be.

Survey research indicates the value that the Internet has to the political process, with typical Web users found to be more likely to vote, more informed and more politically efficacious than the general public (Johnson & Kaye, 1998), and exposure to political material online has been shown to increase political participation (Kenski & Stroud, 2006). Web sites of political candidates have been drawing attention since the 1996 presidential election, when they were used primarily as "brochure-ware," static environments that duplicated other campaign literature (Tedesco, 2004). Recent online efforts have become extremely sophisticated with many interactive elements such as polls and videos, and this interactivity has been linked to increases in political efficacy and involvement (Hayes et al., 2008; Tedesco, 2007).

In addition to traditional Web sites, social network sites (SNSs) such as Facebook and MySpace have, for the first time in a presidential election, become active forums for participation in a candidate's campaign. During the Democratic and Republican primaries of 2007 and 2008, all of the active candidates had active profiles on Facebook and MySpace in addition to highly interactive Web sites, and the party nominees were obviously expending significant resources maintaining their online presence. Both candidates even established their own social networking sites ("McCainSpace" and

"MyBarackObama.com").  This recent surge in online presence begs the questions of what the target audience thinks of this new way to reach out to young voters and what the effect on them might be.  Could SNS profiles of candidates provide the extra information they need to increase their political confidence and, as a result, vote?

The Social Network Phenomena

Defining social network sites as "Web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system," boyd (sic) and Ellison (2007) explicated the concept and summarized the small amount of research that has been done in this rapidly emerging and dynamic field.  Launched in 2003 and 2004, MySpace and Facebook rank consistently in the top five most popular Web sites in the United States (Alexa, 2009).  With 125 million and 250 million users respectively, MySpace and Facebook have become seemingly essential habits and parts of the daily social lives of America's young people aged 18-25, who comprise approximately 40% of the total number of users for Facebook (cnn.com, 2009; Facebook, 2009; Steinfield, Ellison, & Lampe, 2008) and 18% of users for MySpace (TechCrunch, 2008).  Nearly 80% of Facebook users are under 34, and 66% of all online 18-25 year-olds have a profile on one of the two main sites (TechCrunch.com, 2007; Pew, 2009). Users of the sites may use them to interact with established friends or to meet new people (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007) and many people use the sites, MySpace in particular, to discover new music, trends, campaign for an issue, and build social groups.  Users are able to discuss whatever person, band or entity's profile they are visiting on the "wall" of that profile, an

area that allows for real-time posting by "friends" of the profile's owner. In the past two years in particular, these sites have been used to form groups around a particular topic, idea, or person, further expanding the definition of SNS to allow groups or entities (such as campaigns) to construct their own profiles and connect to others through them.

Wells and Dudash (2007) found that the top two sources of political information for young people were discussions with family and friends and the Internet, and Pasek et al. (2006) found that media use, especially the Internet, facilitates civic and political engagement. The social network environment, which enables discussion and political interaction with friends and family while online, could be the perfect intersection of these findings by providing a setting for promoting engagement with a political campaign and encouraging dialogue and information-seeking behavior while also, as Vitak et al. (2009) suggest, making political participation among younger people a more normative behavior. In addition, these authors argue that SNSs might increase political participation by lowering the traditional barriers to political communication and participation through instant connection and sharing with peers.

Political SNS activity received significant media and scholarly attention early in the 2008 election cycle. Preliminary focus group and survey research indicated that they may not be as valuable as hoped, with many participants deeming the profiles "creepy" (Hayes, 2009) or reacting negatively to the presence of candidates in what they consider their personal space (Hayes et al., 2008). Other survey research demonstrated their effectiveness in recruiting votes for a candidate (Williams & Gulati, 2007), and their appropriateness as a political communication media (Vitak et al., 2009). Perhaps most promising, Utz (2009), in a large survey and experiment involving Dutch young people,

found that SNS were effective at reaching previously uninvolved individuals through unexpected or casual exposure. This indicates that SNS might be a more powerful tool for reaching new voters than other online communications methods, which need to be sought out with intent and are rarely just stumbled across (Utz, 2009).

While the potential of these sites is high, and the early research mostly promising, what SNS users are actually using political SNS profiles and pages for is largely unknown. In addition, what the impact is of exposure and continued use of candidate social networking is only conjecture at this time. Like advertising, social network site profiles provide a significant amount of cognitive and affective information to users (Hayes, 2008) suggesting that, as long as they provide adequate political information, they may be able to afford the same type of informational benefits to users that viewers of political advertising receive.

*RQ1: What political social network behaviors did young people undertake during and after the 2008 election?*

*RQ2: Will young people report increased interest in the 2008 election because of social network sites?*

<u>Young People and Media</u>

The media consumption behaviors of young people differ significantly from those of people less than a generation ago; very few young people watch the evening news as their parents once did, and even fewer read the newspaper. Eighty-seven percent of this population is online, 58% every day, and when they do gather news for themselves, they most likely view it on Web-based news sites. However, only 36% of young people say they follow any sort of news (Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2005; Pasek et al., 2006). Wells and Dudash (2007), in a large national focus group study, found that the

two primary sources of political information for young people are discussion with friends and family (28.5%) and online sources (15%), with smaller numbers preferring cable news and newspapers. Delli Carpini (2000), in his analysis of current data on young people and participation, noted the value of Internet sources of political information to young people, and further research has played out that proposition with growing evidence that the Internet can be more successful in building young people's knowledge of and engagement in public affairs than many traditional media sources (Jennings & Zeitner, 2003; Lenhart, Madden, & Hitlin, 2005; Levine & Lopez, 2004; Pasek et al., 2006). In focus groups, members of this demographic expressed a strong desire for more online interactive functions to learn about campaigns to mirror the highly interactive Web sites they choose to frequent in their non-political Internet activities. They also desire a political information source that lacks the negativity so prevalent in other media (Hayes, 2009). SNSs and candidate Web sites are noted for their lack of negativity and high level of interactivity (Hayes, 2008). This finding, combined with Wells and Dudash's (2007) findings that family and friends (who are linked together in a SNS environment) and the Internet are the preferred political information sources for this demographic indicate that SNSs might be highly valuable political tools. Thus, the possibility that SNSs have become important sources of information and an avenue to increase engagement for young voters is very real.

*H1: Young people will indicate a preference for online media over traditional media for gathering political information*

## Young People and the Political Process

*Engagement, Knowledge, and Political Efficacy*

Two schools of thought emerge in the political literature relating to political

participation and engagement. The first conceptualizes participation as a conduit for

achieving influence, with Conway (2000) defining political participation as actions that

citizens perform toward influencing different levels of government, and Best and Krueger

(2005) noting that individuals can take control of policy decisions that may impact them

through active participation in the process. The second school of thought, that political

participation and engagement is more related to specific activities and learning, such as

volunteering, donating, placing of signs and bumper stickers, etc. has been

conceptualized by Delli Carpini (2004) as being composed of 1) political behaviors such

as voting, communicating with representatives, and volunteering for a political cause or

candidate 2) holding a set of attitudes and beliefs about politics, 3) maintaining informed

positions about current issues, and finally 4) adherence to Democratic norms and values,

such as political efficacy, civic duty and tolerance (Delli Carpini, 2004). Additionally, in

their definition of political participation, Kenski and Stroud (2006) include actively trying

to persuade others along with participation in political activities. This second school of

thought, with its emphasis on maintaining informed positions (through knowledge

accrual), persuasion, and social norms such as political efficacy, is particularly relevant to

this work.

Historically, young people aged 18-25 have relatively low rates of political

participation, with only 53% of those eligible to vote actually voting in 2008, a highly

contested presidential election year in which 64% of the U.S. population overall voted.

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Among young people, 2008's turnout reflected an increase of only 2% from 2004, somewhat disappointing given the media and candidate attention this group received in 2008 (CIRCLE, 2008). However, looking back to the presidential election of 2000, turnout among youth then was only 40% and in recent non-presidential election years turnout has been closer to 22% (CIRCLE, 2005) compared to rates of 60 - 69% among the general population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004), thus 2008 was a actually a relatively good year for young voter participation. However, many democratic countries see much higher participation among young people, so there is still progress to be made. Increasing participation among this demographic is of vital importance as there is a chance that if people do not develop political habits by the time they are out of their twenties, they never will (Delli Carpini, 2000).

There is evidence for strong links between political engagement and political knowledge (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1993). Political knowledge develops through the political learning. Political learning is a participatory process in which "individuals actively collect, store, modify, interpret, and incorporate new information with what they already know about the world" (Sotirovic & McLeod, 2004, pp. 358). This information, about institutions, processes, and the substance of national and state politics can come from the media or other individuals and provides the base for the well-informed citizenry that is necessary for any democracy (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1991).

Scholars have found that over time, political knowledge in the United States has been eroding somewhat. This finding is contrary to expectations based on higher educational attainment by its citizens. Knowledge related to current events is lower than it has been in the past and this erosion is partially attributed to the decline in political

interest observed from the 1940s and 50s to the 1980s (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1991; Delli Carpini, 2004) in addition to the decline in civics education in American schools. Among young people, political knowledge has been reported as particularly low (Sotirovic & McLeod, 2004), a troubling state of affairs for the future of our democracy, as efficacy and engagement, and thus, voting, depend on knowledge (Finkel, 1985; Delli Carpini, 2004; Kaid et al., 2007).

Political knowledge is typically measured as an index; a series of questions (between three and twelve, usually) relating to national and sometimes international public affairs is administered. This approach is followed by the National Election Studies (NES), and has been for years, providing a consistent measure over time of political knowledge in the country (though, as Delli Carpini and Keeter [1991] argue, since the items can vary from year to year, it isn't truly comparable). Questions usually include who the vice president is, which party is more conservative, and sometimes who the prime minister of the United Kingdom is, among others. Delli Carpini and Keeter (1993), in their highly-detailed review and testing of a variety of knowledge questions, arrive at a five-item index that includes party control of the American House of Representatives, the percentage needed to override a presidential veto, the ideological location of the parties, who has the power to declare a law constitutional or not, and finally, identification of the current vice president. Problems with this approach are noted by Sotirovic and McLeod (2004), who argue for a measure of political knowledge that is not just regurgitation of facts and requires some indication of processing of the information on the part of the individual so that they may attach meaning and relevance to elements of information.

The mass media have been heavily studied as a contributor to political knowledge, and, along with discussion with family and peers, is likely the source of most political knowledge an individual has (Eveland et al., 2005). Every major mass medium from newspapers, radio, television (news and entertainment), magazines, and now the Internet, has been studied for effects on political knowledge. With the exception of entertainment television, use of each type of medium shows a positive correlation with political knowledge (Sotirovic & McLeod, 2004). Recent studies have indicated that the Internet has a powerful potential in informing people, especially young people, who prefer it as an information source over all others except discussion with friends and family (Wells & Dudash, 2007). Delli Carpini (2000), in his analysis of existing data on young people and participation, noted the (at the time) growing potential of the Internet to inform young people, and finally, there is growing evidence that the Internet can be more successful in building young people's knowledge of and engagement in public affairs than many traditional media sources (Jennings & Zeitner, 2003; Lenhart, Madden, & Hitlin, 2005; Levine & Lopez, 2004; Pasek et al., 2006; Diddi & LaRose, 2006).

*H2: Social network use for political purposes will be positively associated with political knowledge*

*Reasons for Lack of Engagement*

While there have been active efforts in recent years to involve younger voters in political campaigns, such as Rock the Vote, which utilized public service announcements, Web sites and debate-style programming to involve youth and is credited with producing a much higher than usual turnout among young voters in 1992 (Tindell & Medhurst, 1998), it seems that traditional political communication methods, such as political advertising, do not reach out and involve young people or address the issues important to

them. In a series of focus groups with Midwestern young people, many individuals noted their lack of connection with most of the political spots they were seeing and many more still expressed disdain for both the candidates and political process due to the negativity so prevalent in current televised political advertising (Hayes, 2009). These traditional ads are the primary media vehicle for more than 95% of campaign communication spending, with $600 million spent on traditional TV and radio ads in 2004, and only $29 million spent online (Minnesota Public Radio 2004; Kaye 2006), though the amount spent online increased significantly during the run-up to the 2008 presidential election. Many factors may contribute to lack of involvement among young voters, but with televised campaign ads being the predominant form of political discourse most people are exposed to, it is safe to say that they may be one of the factors.

Historically, there are many reasons young people may choose not to participate, but in recent research they personally cite a lack of knowledge or information about a given race or politics in general as a reason for not voting and usually have a lower political efficacy, the feeling that one can have an impact on the political process, than the larger U.S. population (National Association of Secretaries of State, 1998; Kaid et al., 2007). Political efficacy is a strong determinant of future engagement (Campbell et al., 1954; Finkel, 1985; Niemi, Craig, & Mattei, 1991), and there is evidence that one's political efficacy is formed at a young age (CIRCLE, 2005; Jennings & Niemi, 1981) Young adults often lack the ability to participate; they are frequently deficient in knowledge about how the government works and do not know how to register to vote (Delli Carpini, 2000). This lack of civic ability is tied to three factors: heavy media use (television in particular) cutting traditional social and civic ties (Putnam, 2000), a serious

decline of civics education in schools, and a news media and government that does not pay attention to the demographic (Delli Carpini, 2000). Clearly, the campaigns and media environment of past years have not been providing, or they have been ignoring, his demographic the tools and information they need to participate effectively.

This situation may have changed for the better in 2008, with estimates indicating the highest total turnout ever for young people, even though participation still trailed that of older Americans (CIRCLE, 2008). Obviously, part of this increased turnout was due to a dynamic candidate who appealed to young people, but some of this candidate's appeal is attributable to his embrace of media popular with young people, such as Facebook, MySpace, and his own social networking platform, for online organizing. These media provided tools to increase involvement and stimulate "supporter empowerment," a self-identified goal of at least one candidate's personal social networking site. These sites' apparent goals were to increase involvement in the process through voter registration, information availability, interactive tools, and volunteer and recruiting opportunities, and were not necessarily designed to persuade.

Study Focus

The main focus of this study is on whether political knowledge and efficacy, and thus engagement, can be increased through use of political social network tools.

A first step in measuring any increase is identifying the precursors of knowledge through development of a new measure of political efficacy and learning called *Political Learning Efficacy*. This new measure will be valuable to the scholarly community as a discipline-spanning measurement instrument and it will help in the identification of truly valuable political information sources. In the next section, contributing concepts and

theory will be presented toward development of this new concept; this will help us in our goal of determining whether social network sites can be an impactful media in political knowledge and engagement. It is expected that, as Internet use in general has a positive impact on knowledge, participation and efficacy, that social network use for political purposes will also have a positive impact.

Identifying any media that could have a positive impact on the electoral engagement of young people is of vital importance to our democracy for two reasons: First, scholars have noted the lack of control and efficacy younger people feel, and the concern is that a whole generation will grow up alienated from our civic institutions (Delli Carpini, 2000). Second, in the past election, and in many elections, increasing turnout of dedicated partisans is the goal of campaigns which are dealing with only a very small number of undecided voters and very slim margins. Thus, the impetus is on ensuring as many of your partisans get to the polls as possible, as persuading new partisans is increasingly unlikely as the campaign wears on. Campaigns looking to recruit new voters should look to the long-ignored demographic of young voters and the media they frequent. The presidential election of 2008 demonstrated that young voters, perhaps for the first time since the early 1970s, can be a powerful force in politics, and for that to continue, knowledge on how to both foster their civic development and best connect with them is needed. Considering the established research on the impacts of the Internet on political variables and the high involvement younger individuals have with SNS, the following hypotheses are posited:

*H3: Use of social network sites for political purposes will be positively associated with political participation*

*H4: Use of social network sites for political purposes will be positively associated with political learning efficacy*

*H5: Use of social network sites for political purposes will be positively associated with internal political efficacy*

*H6: Political learning efficacy will be positively associated with political participation*

# CHAPTER 3

## THEORY

### Political Efficacy

Political efficacy is one of the most influential and highly researched concepts in political communication research (Craig et al., 1990; Niemi et al., 1991; Morrell, 2003). Political efficacy was first conceptualized as a uni-dimensional construct, "the feeling that individual political action does have, or can have, an impact on the political process" by Campbell et al. (1954, p. 187), and it has been part of the University of Michigan-conducted American National Election Studies (NES) in most years ever since. This dataset, the oldest continuous series of survey data investigating electoral behavior and attitudes in the United States, has allowed the steep decline in political efficacy experienced in the 1960s and 70s to be documented (Craig et al., 1990). Political efficacy is strongly associated with political participation (Campbell et al, 1954; Milbrath & Goel, 1977; Finkel, 1985; Niemi et al., 1991), and a decline parallel to that in political efficacy has been observed in political participation over the same time frame.

While this has been a popular measure, the five items that originally made up the scale have shown continual reliability and validity problems (Craig et al., 1990; Reef & Knoke, 1999; Morrell, 2003). Later research revealed that many of the problems lay with the scale actually measuring two separate dimensions, internal efficacy (IPE), which refers to a person's beliefs about their competence to understand and to participate effectively in politics, and external political efficacy (EPE), which relates to beliefs on the responsiveness of government to citizen demands (Converse, 1972; Balch, 1974; Craig et al., 1990). Work in the late-1980s using the NES Pilot Study and the 1988 NES

Post-Election Study helped to validate a four-item scale of internal political efficacy

(Craig et al., 1990; Niemi et al. 1991; Morrell, 2003). This scale was found to be robust

with strong reliability, but it has only been used intermittently by the NES (without

explanation), and has not been appropriately used by some researchers who do not follow

the validated wording of items or just make up their own measures without regard for the

validated scale (Morrell, 2003).

*Internal Efficacy Scale* (Craig et al., 1990; Niemi et al. 1991):
*Five Item, Likert-type Measures from Strongly Agree-Disagree Strongly*
*IPE1: I consider myself to be well qualified to participate in politics.*
*IPE2: I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues*
*facing our country.*
*IPE3: I feel that I could do as good a job in public office as most people.*
*IPE4: I think that I am better informed about politics and government than most people.*

Two additional items were considered but rejected from NES for response set

reasons, though they are occasionally used by other researchers (Morrell, 2003), they are:

*IPE5: I often don't feel sure of myself when talking with other people about politics and*
*government.*
*IPE6: Other people seem to have an easier time understanding complicated issues than I*
*do.*

External political efficacy is not used as frequently in research as internal political

efficacy, and its scale consists of only two items (Balch, 1974):

*External Efficacy Scale*
*EPE1: People like me don't have any say about what the government does.*
*EPE2: I don't think public officials care much what people like me think.*

It is clear from the scale items used to measure these two constructs, and IPE in

particular, that they are measuring an overall, end-state, belief, not the source of that

belief (i.e. adequate knowledge, experience, peer observation, confidence, self-efficacy,

etc.).

A positive relationship has been found between internal political efficacy and voting and campaigning (Pollock, 1983; Finkel, 1985), and political knowledge and political communication usage significantly increase internal political efficacy (Kim, 2004). Political participation seems to operate in a manner of reciprocal determination, both creating and resulting from external political efficacy (Finkel, 1985).

<u>Political Information Efficacy</u>

Closely related to (and using three of four of the same scale measures of) internal political efficacy, political information efficacy (PIE) measures a "voter's confidence in his or her own political knowledge and its sufficiency to engage in the political process" (Kaid et al., 2007, p. 1096). This construct was developed specifically to study feelings of lack of information about campaigns and political issues, rather than an efficacy towards participating, among young voters, who frequently cite lack of knowledge as a primary reason for not voting (Kaid, Tedesco, & McKinney, 2004; Tedesco, 2007). Beyond a special issue of the *American Behavioral Scientist* that included four studies utilizing PIE, an additional study by the same authors (Kaid & Postelnicu, 2005) and a pilot study (Hayes, Zube, & Isaacson, 2008) it has not been extensively validated or tested for reliability beyond the Cronbach's alpha of +.87 reported by the original authors. Utz (2009) attempted to use the scale in her study of Dutch youth and political social networks, but had problems demonstrating more than a main effect of political information efficacywith her data and dropped analysis of the variable.

***Political Information Efficacy Scale*** (Tedesco, 2007)
(First three identical to internal political efficacy measure)
*PIE1: I consider myself well-qualified to participate in politics*
*PIE2: I think I am better informed about politics and government than most people*
*PIE3: I feel I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country*

*PIE4: If a friend asked me about the presidential election, I feel I would have enough information to help my friend figure out who to vote for*

Voters who demonstrate low political information efficacy are less likely to vote than those who feel more efficacious (Kaid et al., 2007a). It has also been shown that viewing debates and paid political advertisements can increase an individual's political information efficacy (Kaid et al., 2007b) and that interactive Web-based sources of political information such as chats, surveys, and games can significantly increase political information efficacy, but static, non-interactive, online political communication such as brochure-ware type Web sites do not demonstrate the same results (Tedesco, 2007).

<u>Problems with Constructs and Measures</u>

While the concepts of internal and external political efficacy are well-validated by dozens of studies using the variables and the continued use in the NES surveys (Converse, 1972; Balch, 1974; Morrell, 2003), political information efficacy is not, and its utility and validity as a separate concept is questionable due to the extreme closeness of its measurement instrument to the measurement instrument of IPE. Political knowledge is an precursor to increased levels of all three constructs, but all three constructs currently neglect to measure the political learning one must undertake to become knowledgeable. Thus, they do not yield a measure that can accurately evaluate the effects of interaction with political communication tools, especially social network sites. Political uses of SNS seem to combine all the behaviors known to increase these forms of efficacy, such as interactivity, political participation, and learning, so their impact is expected to be significant.

RQ3: *Is there evidence for political information efficacy existing as a separate construct or is it an extension of internal political efficacy?*

With these conceptual issues in mind, we will look to Social Cognitive Theory

(Bandura, 1986; 1988; 1989; 1997; 2006) for guidance in both developing a new measure

of political efficacy focused on learning and for building hypotheses related to effects of

political social network sites. Research used to build a measurement tool for the

improved construct and to determine the value of these concepts as separate constructs

will first be described, and then survey research used to investigate the effects of previous

and continued political social network use by young people will be detailed.

Applying Social Cognitive Theory

According to Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), an individual is both the product

and the producer of his or her own environment. This theory examines learning in terms

of the interrelationship between behavioral, environmental, and personal factors (Bandura,

1986) and results in a triadic model where each factor influences the other factors bi-

directionally (Figure 1). The environment in which an individual operates influences

cognitions, which in turn can effect the environment, and so on with each factor.
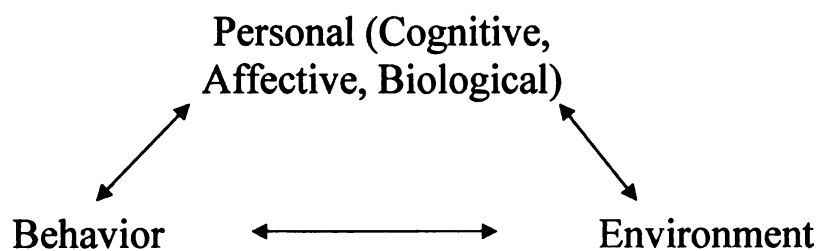


Figure 1. The triadic reciprocal causation model of Social Cognitive Theory

Bandura (1986) posits that SCT comprises a complex causal structure that

establishes the development of competency and the regulation of behavior through

knowledge accrual. SCT is noted for its emphasis on an individual learning vicariously

or through personal interactive experience. Given the observational (through status and

news feed updates of friends) and interactive nature of social network sites, SCT is a highly relevant theory for the study of the impacts of social networks. In addition, SNS allows individuals to both produce and react to their online environments, fitting nicely into the model of SCT.

*Self-Efficacy*

Along with expected outcomes, the very core of SCT is comprised by the notion of self-efficacy, a cognitive component that Bandura (1986) describes as "people's judgments of their capabilities (of which knowledge is only one) to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances" (p. 391). Self-efficacy has been shown to be a strong indicator of a person's willingness to engage in a certain behavior (Bandura, 1997), thus, as in Figure 2, a cognition (feelings of self-efficacy in this case) is influencing behavior. A resulting inability to perform said behavior will further reduce self-efficacy. A person's environment, which could include supportive, involved and/or persuasive friends who can serve as a model for the individual's behavior, also impacts self-efficacy.

## Self-Efficacy

Behavior ⟷ Environment
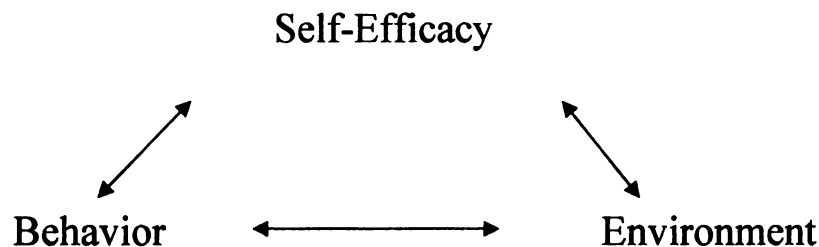
*Figure 2.* Self-efficacy's effect on both behavior and environment within the model of SCT

Self-efficacy beliefs derive from four principle sources: enactive mastery experiences, vicarious (observational) experiences, persuasions and social influence, and

physiological and affective state (Bandura, 1997). Enactive mastery experiences, in which the individual successfully completes a task, can build a strong sense of efficacy. Other efficacy sources, such as comparison with peers, persuasion, and a positive affective state, provide weaker levels of self-efficacy. Additionally, a lower-level source of self-efficacy, such as observational learning, can lead to an action that would result in a stronger sense of self-efficacy, such as enactive learning (LaRose & Eastin, 2004). It is not a stretch to imagine a teen unwilling to attempt an intense skateboard trick until he sees his peer successfully complete said trick and learning from their observations.

It is on these four self-efficacy sources (Figure 3) that we will first focus our discussion of the theoretical development of the concept of political learning efficacy. Theoretically, PLE is a larger self-efficacy concept contributed to by each of these four sources, and the end goal of the construct development being a construct that predicts both political knowledge and participation. The relation to political communication in a SNS environment will also be noted, and hypotheses related to the theorized relationship presented.

Self-Efficacy

Enactive Learning

Vicarious Learning    Affective State    Persuasion
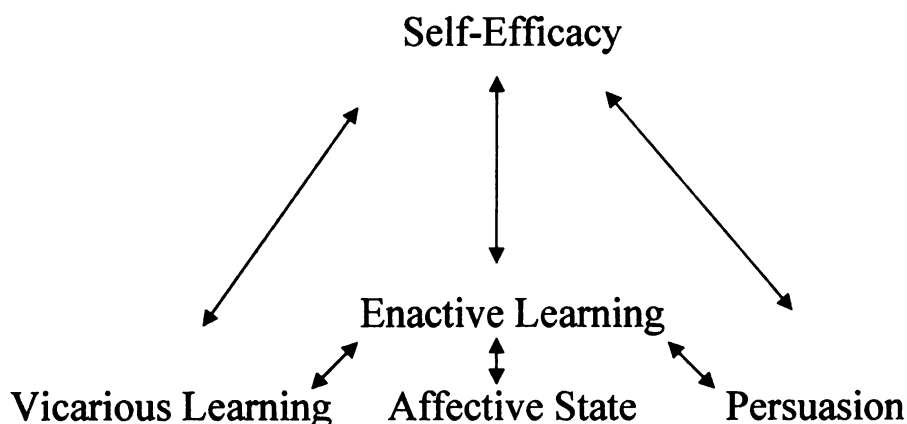
*Figure 3.* Sources of self-efficacy

*Vicarious (Observational) Learning*

The vicarious learning function of SCT states that people learn by observing others and model their behavior based on those expectations (LaRose & Eastin, 2004). Kaid et al. (2007a) found that while some young people feel they lack political information, many young people *are* politically informed and thus those individuals could serve as models to others. Other young people actively seek out a "smart" friend to find out what happening politically and base their judgments on what that friend thinks (Hayes, 2009). These model young people could have a positive effect on the political confidence of their friends through the vicarious learning mechanism.

Both leading social network sites, Facebook and MySpace, have a status update function where activity is recorded and displayed to friends, and recorded activities can include political actions such as becoming a supporter of a candidate or a cause, adding a "bumper sticker" or button, donating to a candidate, and encouraging others to register to vote. This activity could contribute to vicarious learning on the part of uninvolved individuals, as in the example of the young people looking to their "smart" friend for political guidance, and could encourage the observing individual to investigate the candidate or issue further, resulting in enactive learning.

*Hypotheses in this section are noted by HT, Theory Hypothesis as they are guided specifically by Social Cognitive Theory and will be tested by the model of political learning efficacy.*

*TH1: Political vicarious learning will be positively associated with political learning efficacy*

*Enactive Learning*

While a failed attempt can undermine it, a successful enactive mastery experience is the most important source of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994). Individuals are likely to avoid situations they feel they cannot master and view them as threats, so getting a person to interact with a task, political participation, for example, in a non-threatening and familiar environment may have a great impact on political learning and confidence.

Social network sites provide this familiar and non-threatening environment for young people and the ability to discuss the task at hand with others in the same situation, which may reduce the anxiety associated with a new task. Also, candidate social network sites provide a base to begin political exploration and then provide links to other sources of candidate information, such as the official candidate Web site and civic Web sites such as Rock the Vote.

*TH2: Political enactive learning will be positively associated with political learning efficacy*

*Affective State*

An individual's belief in their ability to cope affects how much stress and depression they experience in new or threatening situations, as well as their level of motivation. Individuals who believe they will not be able to deal with threats experience high anxiety arousal and dwell on their coping deficiencies, viewing the situational environment as fraught with danger (Bandura, 1994).

Young people encountered mixed messages about registering to vote and voting in the 2008 election; strong support and encouragement from a variety of sources to register to vote, and a media and some nefarious political groups that tried to reinforce

the idea that the voting process is difficult, time-consuming, and potentially threatening. These mixed messages combined with the anxiety normally associated with performing a complex behavior (registering and voting in this case) for what was likely the first time, may have produced a troubled affective state in some individuals. Bandura (1994) noted these individuals may "magnify the severity of possible threats and worry about things that rarely happen" (p. 75). This worry could potentially reduce participation and turnout unless it is addressed.

Candidate social networks have the opportunity to address this problem through both information dissemination in a familiar and accessible environment and the ability to link users to organizations that can provide accurate state-by-state information on poll locations and assistance.

*TH3: Political affective state will be positively associated with political learning efficacy*

*Persuasion*

Social persuasion is the final way of strengthening a person's belief that they can succeed at a given task. Individuals who are persuaded verbally that they possess the ability to master a task are more likely to participate in that task and are much less likely to focus on personal deficiencies when something goes wrong (Bandura, 1994). Persuasion boosts perceived self-efficacy as well, as it may lead people to try harder to succeed than they normally would, thus promoting the skill development that leads to increased self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994).

A frequent encounter during a political season is the activist who seeks to involve other people. This may include organizations such as Rock the Vote, or it may be a friend encouraging another friend to find out more on an issue. As with vicarious learning,

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contact with politically involved people may increase efficacy, but this time through another mechanism, persuasion.

Social networks have included many opportunities for individuals to encourage their friends to become involved in various things, including politics. You may invite friends to join you in a group, become a supporter of an issue or candidate, or to get together to discuss something. This function of social networks may contribute to the persuasion factor in political confidence building.

*TH4: Political persuasion attempts will be positively associated with political learning efficacy*

Political Learning Efficacy (Tentative Construct Definition)

The research related to internal political efficacy, political information efficacy and self-efficacy indicates that knowledge, learning, or experience is key to efficacy gains. How is this accomplished, though? Through a combination of persuasion to seek out information, modeling of politically informed individuals, either low anxiety about an individual's ability to manage a new situation or subsequent information searches to cope with this anxiety, and finally enactive experiences with the sources of information, just as SCT predicts (Figure 4).

**Personal**
*Political Learning Efficacy*

**Behavior**
Enactive Political Learning

**Environment**
Vicarious and Persuasive Factors
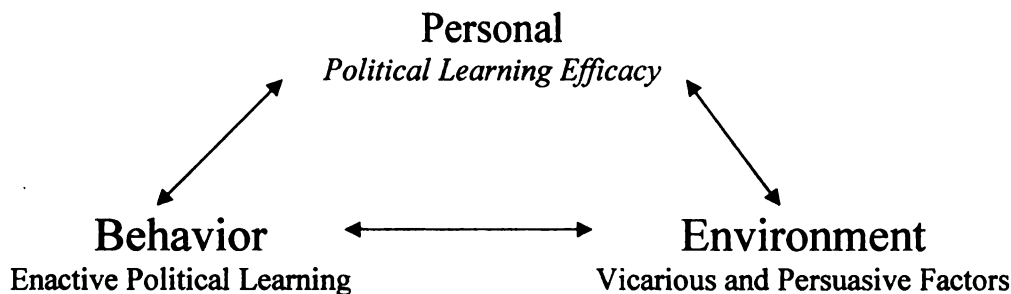
*Figure 4.* The implementation of sources of self-efficacy and political learning efficacy into the triadic model of SCT.

Political learning efficacy is a person's confidence that they can seek out, obtain, and process information relevant to a political decision. This construct definition differs from internal political efficacy ("a person's beliefs about their competence to understand and to participate effectively in politics") and political information efficacy ("a voter's confidence in his or her own political knowledge and its sufficiency to engage in the political process") in its focus on the probable causal mechanism of political efficacy, learning, and on the information accrual needed in order to make a decision and act on it. This construct is likely an antecedent to internal political efficacy as demonstrated by the strong association between internal political efficacy and knowledge (Kim, 2004), thus a strong positive association between knowledge and PLE is expected. As knowledge and the previous efficacy constructs have been positively related to political participation, it is also expected that increased political learning efficacy will lead to increased participation.

*RQ4: Is there evidence for political learning efficacy existing as a distinct construct?*

*TH5: Political learning efficacy will be positively associated with internal political efficacy*

*TH6: Political learning efficacy will be positively associated with political knowledge*

*TH7: Political learning efficacy will be positively associated with political participation*
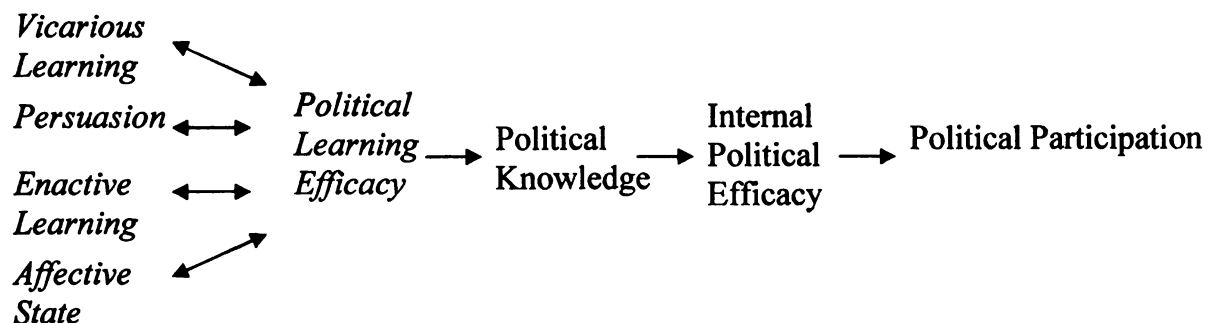


*Figure 5.* Hypothesized relation of PLE, its sources, and its dependent variables

# CHAPTER 4

## METHOD

### Multi-Method Scale Development

The following research was completed in order to: 1. Develop a measurement tool for the new construct of political learning efficacy and for its sources, enactive and vicarious learning, persuasion, and affective state, 2. Confirm the theoretical propositions and research questions set forth, and 3. Investigate the impacts of political social network use on political learning efficacy and participation.

A multi-method study first involving qualitative methods in the form of focus groups (n=36) to further define the construct and inform the development of scale items for both the construct and its sources (enactive and vicarious learning, persuasion and affective state), followed by a pilot test (n=358) to evaluate the proposed scale items, was undertaken. Finally, utilizing the new construct and its measure, a nationally representative survey (n=625) of American 18-25 year-olds was completed to evaluate the effects of prior and continued use of political social network sites. From this research two highly valuable outcomes emerge: A new discipline-spanning construct and scale for the measurement of political learning efficacy and its sources, and an evaluation of the impact of political social networks on young voters in terms of efficacy outcomes and participation. Each stage in the research will be detailed separately here.

### Qualitative Research to Inform Construct and Scale Development

A recognized weakness with current scale development practice is the lack of attention given to the development of accurate construct definitions (Rossiter, 2002; MacKenzie, 2003 Mowen & Voss, 2008), and that may be the root of the problem that is

seen with the overlapping constructs of internal political efficacy and political information efficacy. MacKenzie (2003) argued that a good construct definition should specify the construct's conceptual theme in unequivocal terms so it is clearly distinguished from other constructs. From the initial qualitative research completed here, a precise construct definition of the new concept is developed. "Without adequate construct definitions, it is impossible to adequately specify relationships among the constructs. Moreover, a precise definition provides clear guidance for the selection of items and specifies how the items relate to the construct" (Mowen & Voss 2008, p. 488).

Padgett (1998) discusses a multi-method qualitative technique to inform quantitative efforts in developing scales. Utilizing qualitative methods first to explore constructs, develop hypotheses, and then inform scale development can be of particular value as it will elicit responses and data not available in the more common forms of scale item development such as discussion with experts and theory-based item development (which were also both completed for this study). Validity of constructs and scales in quantitative research can be improved through the involvement of real-life situations and observations through open-ended surveying, interviews, or focus groups with members of the target population (Rowan & Wulff, 2007). By conducting qualitative research prior to larger quantitative studies, fundamental insights from participants in specific social/behavioral circumstances (e.g., young people making the decision to participate in politics or not) can enhance the quality of the research (Rowan & Wulff, 2007). Used to both improve the construct definition of PLE and to develop the scale items to measure it, this initial qualitative research will help build a stronger and more valid construct and measurement tool.

*Focus Groups*

Focus groups are a well-established research method for examining both political communication and political constructs. While focus groups are an established research method in social science, there are some significant drawbacks, notably that of external validity. Validity is addressed, and achieved to the best of the method's ability, through achievement of saturation of responses across groups, or simply by repetition of findings across multiple groups (Krueger & Casey, 2000; Kern & Just, 1995). The minimum number of focus groups given varies by source, but most state either two or three groups as a minimum for valid results.

Four focus groups of one hour each and consisting of 5-11 participants (n=36) were conducted with members of the undergraduate student population at Michigan State University. The average age of the participants was 21.9 with a range from 20-24 years old. Twenty participants were female (55.6%) and 16 male (44.4%), and they received extra credit for participation. While this is obviously a convenience sample, a student sample is well-justified to address the initial goals of this study, which specifically concern how young people, 67% of whom are enrolled in colleges throughout the nation (U.S. Census, 2006), gain political efficacy through learning. A moderator and one assistant taking notes were present for each group. Each session was recorded and later transcribed by the assistant.

The type of focus group undertaken for this study is similar to a depth interview where the individual opinions or statements are the unit of analysis. While the dynamics of group discussion have an impact on the opinions expressed in any focus group, questions were worded way to directly access the opinions of each individual

participating. The questions asked were grounded in Social Cognitive Theory, specifically related to the four sources of self-efficacy and how these might help an individual learn during a political campaign. For example, a question related to vicarious learning might ask if the participant had observed their friends on Facebook (through the Facebook Feed function) interacting with a political campaign. An affirmative answer to that question would receive a follow-up question based on enactive learning, in which the participant would be asked if they clicked on the link provided by the Feed and checked out the candidate or cause. Other questions included general political warm-up questions and inquiries into social networks and how they might have impacted participants' political participation (Appendix A).

*Data Analysis*

Focus groups were recorded and transcribed, and transcriptions were the source of ideas for both refinement of the construct definition and for proposed scale items.

*Focus Group Results*

In a heartening finding, compared with results from a focus group study of similar size and demographic profile conducted in early 2007, politics and political participation were viewed in a much better light in early 2009. In the 2007 data, nearly 85% of participants reacted with negative words when asked to play word-association with the word "politics" (Hayes, 2009); in this sample, most reacted with neutral ("parties," "election," "voting," etc.) or positive ("cheering," "hope," etc.) words. A very few gave negative responses, such as "controversy" and "too many ads." As noted, this is a distinct shift from data taken only two years prior when negativity towards the political process dominated. Participants also indicated that they felt more involved than they did

in the previous presidential election in 2004, this may have been because some of them were not eligible to vote at the time, but others indicated that they had been turned off by the negativity in 2004, or had only been told to vote by their parents or teachers, so that they felt no real connection to either candidate.

*Sources of Self-Efficacy*

Examining answers to questions related to the hypothesized sources of political learning efficacy yielded interesting results. In terms of persuasion, participants noted that they had encountered multiple friends and acquaintances that both were encouraging them not only to vote, but to find out more about a candidate or cause through linking of articles, Web pages, and social network profiles. Some participants noted that these attempts sometimes got annoying, especially if the friend was particularly persistent. Annoyance was also caused by persuasion attempts by the actual campaigns, with an overwhelming number of emails or contacts coming after one signed up for updates online.

*"I was actually persuaded to join the official Barack Obama thing (Web site contact list), and I ended up quitting it quickly because I got so many messages saying 'go out and tell your friends', we're doing this, we're doing that, and got annoying." – Male, 22*

Few participants noted that on this particular campus it was unacceptable to be a supporter of anyone but the most popular candidate, and when they expressed support for the other candidate, it meant they were continually bombarded with negative information about him and probing questions about why they would not support the popular candidate. It was clear to many that discourse favoring the other candidate was not acceptable.

Experiences that this group had with enactive mastery experiences (learning by trying things out) were varied. Some noted that their first awareness of then-Senator Obama was likely online, and many detailed how their first exposure to him was not in a campaign-generated or SNS communication, but in a fan-produced viral video on video sharing site YouTube ("Crush on Obama," the Obama Girl video) Every participant in the two later focus groups had seen this video (the first two groups did not bring it up), and saw it early in the campaign. Some noted that viewing this video led to Web searches for the candidate to see who he was (when this video was released, in early 2007, Senator Obama had a much smaller name-recognition nationally than primary opponent Senator Clinton).

While a few participants mentioned that the first time they had interacted with anything related to the campaign was on Facebook, it was not the norm. Multiple participants did note that once they found an online source they liked and trusted, they would rely on that site and visit it repeatedly and occasionally follow their links. In this discussion, worries of trustworthiness and accurateness came up, with a few participants noting the perceived bias of many news sites online, and how they sometimes do not know which information to trust, especially when blogs enter the picture. A very few remarked that they were turned off from Web-based news entirely by this perceived bias. *(When asked if they went online to search for information) "Yeah, well, honestly, not too much because I didn't know which sites were going to be factual and what sites I could actually trust" – Female, 21*

While some were turned off by this perceived bias, more individuals noted the value of a variety of opinions they could find by bouncing around to different sites.

*"I liked to do them all because everyone has their own opinions so it's interesting to flip from CNN to MSNBC to even the BBC or the smaller sites. It was cool because everyone has their own way of broadcasting their own opinions. I wanted to be educated as I could be on every side" – Female, 21*

*"I just went to the most extreme sites from the mass media like Fox and then like CNN and thought it would be nice to see both sides and also went to Ralph Nader's site and Bob Bar's just to see their opinions...I mean yeah, they were negative towards the Republicans and Democrats...its useful to see it in the same way towards both parties" – Male, 22*

The vicarious learning function of social cognitive theory was in evidence through both online and offline activities. Many participants remarked on the activity they observed on Facebook and to a lesser extent, MySpace, during the later stages of the campaign (the campus where this research was conducted is a "Facebook campus" with most students choosing Facebook as their social media tool). News Feed updates (A response to the question "What's on your mind?" that appears on the top of profiles and then appears on your friends' feed) that included support for a particular candidate were the most observed political activity, but participants also noted that they saw their friends joining groups and that they had been the recipients of SNS "bumper stickers" and campaign buttons online.

Offline, participants mentioned that they saw some of their friends volunteering for the campaigns, and knew that those friends would be good sources of information about that particular candidate while realizing they might not be a great source of unbiased political information. Some participants lamented the fact that they were seeing

people who could not explain their reasons for voting for a particular candidate when asked – it was just the cool thing to do for some people, and they had no information behind their decisions.

Negative affective state impacting information seeking ability or participation was not an issue with this group. None said they had been nervous about where or how to vote, and that they had known how to check to see whether they were voting in the correct precinct or not. Many of them either voted absentee or skipped class and went home to their parents' residence to vote. The most anxiousness actually seemed to be the previously mentioned problem related to finding accurate or trustworthy information online, and a discussion of whether there would be a riot if Obama didn't win. None mentioned posting in discussion forums or having online conversations about the campaign, but the reasons why not were not explored. In the future, it would be interesting to examine whether any lack of posting is because of a fear of looking dumb or facing criticism, an affective problem.

The most frequently mentioned information sources for this group were parents and friends, online sources, and television news (both cable and broadcast), in line with previous findings about media preferences for this group (Wells & Dudash, 2007). None mentioned the newspaper, other than a brief mention of the campus paper. Very few participants said they didn't have enough information to make a decision, and nearly every focus group member reported voting (a result that may be slightly inaccurate due to social desirability), indicating that we had no individuals participating who experienced the problems observed in earlier election cycles where lack of information was reported as a reason for not voting (Kaid et al., 2007a). The one individual who admitted not

voting was concerned that neither candidate had really addressed the main issues he was concerned with (though he did not state what they were). The strongest information finding was the oft-mentioned angst about finding accurate or trustworthy information online or on television, a significant contributor to their affective state regarding information surrounding the election. Quite a few students said most of their political information came from their parents or friends and that they chose to ignore the news media and its perceived biases (CNN, MSNBC and Fox News were all mentioned).

*Discussion*

From these focus groups, a few distinct trends emerged that relate to SCT. First, young people perceive a problem with either accuracy or trustworthiness of information presented by a variety of news sources and that impacts their information gathering ability. In this same vein, some mentioned that once they had found information sources they perceived as trustworthy, they visited that source repeatedly. These trusted (higher status) sites are acting as role models for information. Second, persuasion by friends and the campaigns can go too far, to the point where annoyance (and possible tuning-out) kicks in. This persuasion could be both toward one particular candidate or, as SCT posits, persuasion toward a person's ability to complete a certain task, voting in this case. Third, this group perceived the bombardment of information they were receiving in the 2008 election as a bit much and it contributed to a negative affective state regarding the election, and some were happy when it was finally over. There was no perceived dearth of information as has been reported by members of this demographic in previous elections (Kaid et al., 2007a). And finally, fourth, many did think that SNS were an interesting media to learn about the election from and used them to learn vicariously

about their friend's political happenings. They had noticed their friends interacting with candidates and causes online, and some had participated themselves in SNS groups centered on election issues. This is a big change from focus group research from earlier in the election cycle which found members of this demographic ambivalent or even hostile to the presence of candidates on "their" turf. This illustrates the progression of SNS political profiles from a perceived effort by candidates to try to look cool to just another political communications tool (Hayes, 2009).

These focus group results will help form the basis, along with SCT, for scale items to be proposed, tested, and validated in the next section. The results of the focus group do not change the construct definition of political learning efficacy as presented earlier, but they do contribute valuable information toward the development of scale items.

Development, Refinement and Validation of Construct and Measurement

Scale item development was guided by theory and focus group discussions. The scale development procedure follows recommendations by DeVellis (2003) for clarity, redundancy, uniform level of specificity, and length, and by Bandura (2006) for valid self-efficacy scales. The resulting 34 items are 11-point strongly-agree to strongly-disagree scale questions and include 17 that measure the main construct of political learning efficacy and 17 that access the sources of self-efficacy: vicarious and enactive learning, persuasion, and affective state.

Bandura (2006) recommends as many response options as possible to make for a more sensitive scale, with his strongest recommendation being for a 100-point scale. This 100-point scale was not possible with the survey software available, so the 11-point

scale with a neutral middle point was settled upon. Bandura (2006) also recommends response options different than Likert's (1961) strongly agree – strongly disagree, and suggests those that represent levels of certainty, that is, how confident the respondent is that s/he can complete some task. As Bandura's suggested wording is not consistent with the political efficacy items under comparison, which are typically measured with Likert-type scales, wording for the new items included both confidence and "I can" (as a measure of capability and recommended by Bandura) in the text of the item rather than the response.. To further develop validity of items, they were discussed with a resident expert on Social Cognitive Theory (R. LaRose, personal communication, March, 2009).

*Main Construct and Proposed Scale Items to Measure*

Political learning efficacy (PLE) is a person's confidence that they can seek out, obtain, and process information relevant to a political decision, and it is significantly contributed to by the four known sources of self-efficacy, vicarious and enactive learning, persuasion, and affective state. Differing from internal political efficacy ("a person's beliefs about their competence to understand and to participate effectively in politics") and political information efficacy ("a voter's confidence in his or her own political knowledge and its sufficiency to engage in the political process"), PLE's focus is on the probable causal mechanism of political efficacy, learning, and on the information accrual needed in order to make a decision and act on it. The following scale items for both the main construct and its sources were constructed based on the construct definition, social cognitive theory and a discussion with an expert in it, and the focus groups. Some media-specific items were included to see if there was a difference in the tested group's ability

to gather information between media and if different media contributed disproportionally to PLE.

Proposed items to measure the overall construct of PLE:

*PLE1: I am confident that I can learn about political issues if I want to*
*PLE2: I am confident that I know where to go to locate good political information*
*PLE3: I am confident that I can seek out information related to a political decision in general*
*PLE4: I am confident I can find information related to a political decision online*
*PLE5: I am confident I can seek out information related to a political decision from my friends*
*PLE6: I am confident I can seek out information related to a political decision from my family*
*PLE7: I am confident I can seek out information related to a political decision in the newspaper*
*PLE8: I am confident I can seek out information related to a political decision on T.V.*
*PLE9: I am confident that I can understand most political information in general*
*PLE10: I am confident that I can understand most political information online*
*PLE11: I am confident that I can understand most political information in the newspaper*
*PLE12: I am confident that I can understand most political information on T.V.*
*PLE13: I am confident that I can find trustworthy political information*
*PLE14: I am confident that I can find accurate political information*
*PLE16: I am confident that I can find unbiased political information*
*PLE17: I am confident that I could ask an intelligent question during an election*

*Sources of Self-Efficacy: Vicarious and Enactive Learning, Persuasion and Affective State*

Vicarious learning is completed through the observation of peers and the modeling of behavior based on the actions of peers (LaRose & Eastin, 2004). Political behavior, including information seeking behavior, became much more visible to young people in the 2008 election because of social network participation and the status updates and news feeds that come with it.

Proposed items to measure vicarious learning:

*Vic1: I have friends who know where to find good political information*
*Vic2: I have friends who know where to find good political information online*
*Vic3: I have seen how my friends can find political information online*

A successful enactive mastery experience is the most important source of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994), and experimental interactions with a task, political learning in this instance, can encourage future interactions with it.

Proposed items to measure enactive learning:

*EnaL1: If I don't find the political information I am looking for in one source, I try to find another source*
*EnaL2: If a political information source does not have all the information I need, I will visit their recommended sources of more information*
*EnaL3: If I like a source of information I am likely to come back to it repeatedly to see if there are updates*
*EnaL4: I am confident I can learn to use a variety of political information sources*

Social persuasion can strengthen a person's belief that they can succeed at a given task. Individuals who are persuaded verbally that they possess the ability to master a task are more likely to participate in that task and are much less likely to focus on personal deficiencies when something goes wrong (Bandura, 1994). Having friends who encourage political knowledge building and participation could both serve as a model for enactive learning and encourage and convince individuals that they are capable of effective participation.

Proposed items to measure persuasion:

*Per1: My friends encourage me to find political information*
*Per2: My friends tell me that I should learn about the issues before I make a political decision*
*Per3: I have been persuaded by friends or family to find political information online*
*Per4: I am likely to read political information sent to me by a friend*
*Per5: I am likely to read political information sent to me by a family member*
*Per6: I am likely to check out a political candidate recommended by a friend*

An individual's belief in his or her ability to deal with stress effects their reactions in new situations as well as their level of motivation to try new things. Individuals who believe they will not be able to deal with new situations (perceived as threats) experience

high anxiety arousal and dwell on their coping deficiencies, viewing the situational environment as fraught with danger (Bandura, 1994). These individuals are experiencing a depressed affective state and are less likely to try new things (like participating politically) as a result.

Proposed items to measure affective state:

*Aff1: I am not apprehensive about finding the political information I need*
*Aff2: Political information is somewhat intimidating to me (reverse coded)*
*Aff3: When I think about looking for political information, I get nervous (reverse coded)*
*Aff4: When I am looking for political information, I get nervous (reverse coded)*
*Aff5: I am confident that I could overcome my anxiety about getting the information I needed to make a political decision*

*Pilot Test*

Following the methodology of Craig et al. (1990) and Niemi et al. (1991) established in the testing and validation of internal political efficacy and political trust for the National Election Studies Pilot Study, a pilot test with the developed scale items was conducted to help determine the best items for the final scales and to test the theory hypotheses (*HTs*). Test construction following this method, starting with a theoretically derived set of items and/or items derived from qualitative methods and then progressing to a pilot test with members of the survey instrument's target population to identify good items, is a commonly recommended scale construction practice (DeVellis, 2003; Spector, 1992).

A convenience sample (n =358) of Midwestern college students using Zoomerang's online survey software was conducted in March 2009. While not ideal, a large convenience sample is typically considered sufficient for a pilot test as long as the sample is representative of the population for which the scale is intended (DeVellis, 2003), and, as with the focus groups, a student sample is well-justified to address the

initial goals of this study, which specifically concern how young people, 67% of whom are enrolled in colleges throughout the nation (U.S. Census, 2006), gain political efficacy. Nunnally (1978) suggests that a pilot test involving a sample greater than 300 is likely sufficient and other sources note that there should be between five and ten times the participants as proposed scale items (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1994). In either case, a sample of size of 358 should be considered adequate for these pilot testing purposes.

In addition to the new PLE items detailed above, the pilot test included the established measures of internal political efficacy, external political efficacy, and political information efficacy in order to discriminate the new measure from these concepts and answer the research question of whether political information efficacy exists as a separate construct from internal political efficacy. To allow for accurate comparison among the scales, the 11-point response option with neutral middle point determined as best for the new PLE measure and the available survey software, was used for all efficacy scales. Established measures of political knowledge (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1994), opinion leadership (Shah & Scheufele, 2006), political cynicism (Austin & Pinkleton, 1995), and political trust (Miller, 1974), were also included as they are all concepts related to the political efficacy constructs. The inclusion of these measures will help determine validity through examination of expected correlations and follows the recommendations of Loevinger (1957), who implored those developing scales to "sample all possible contents which might comprise the putative trait according to all known alternative theories of that trait" (p. 659) (Appendix B). The inclusion of political behavior measures will also contribute to the development of the model political learning efficacy and its effects.

*Data Analysis*

The convenience sample (n=358) was disproportionately female (70.9%) and the mean age of participants was 20.8. While disproportionately female, the sample was ethnically representative of many Midwestern college campuses, comprised of 84.6% Caucasian, 6.7% Asian, 5.0% African American, and 3.1% Hispanic participants.

Exploratory factor analysis and measures of internal consistency were used to identify distinct measures, and correlations used to help validate the scales. Used to explore data when the nature or number of factors that account for covariation between variables is unknown, principle components analysis and exploratory factor analysis are noted for their helpfulness in theory or measure building exercises (Stevens, 1996) and they are considered an essential part of any scale development exercise involving a large sample (DeVellis, 2003). This procedure allows us to see how the different variables cluster into single factors, an indication that each item in the factor is measuring an overall concept. Sufficient factor loadings are somewhat subjective, but acceptable factor loadings are typically noted as +0.65 for an item to be accepted as a part of that factor. Factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 were included as the final factor solution (DeVellis, 2003). Finally, a common measure of internal consistency, Cronbach's alpha, is used to evaluate the quality and reliability of the scales, as it measures the extent to which items share a commonalty of participant response, i.e., correlate highly with each other, indicating a similar concept is being accessed by each item. Internal consistency of each scale is evaluated with alphas of +0.70 considered acceptable (Nunnally, 1978)

*Establishing Validity*

This exploratory factor analysis assists with establishing discriminant validity of the new measure. Clark and Watson (1995) note that a well-designed factor analysis can play an integral role in enhancing the discriminant validity of a new scale, suggesting that new and old measures of a construct or similar constructs be subjected to a joint factor analysis.

As discussed previously, IPE and PIE are very closely related measures, and it is expected that they will load on the same factor. A high correlation between PLE, PIE and IPE is also expected, as it is theorized that the new measure is an antecedent to IPE. Similarly, based on previous research we would expect relationships between PLE and measures of political knowledge (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1994), political trust (Miller, 1974), political cynicism (Pinkleton, Um, & Austin, 2002), and opinion leadership (Shah & Scheufele, 2006). These measures should load on different factors but the scales of each should be correlated with IPE and PIE, either positively (knowledge, trust, and leadership) or negatively (cynicism, which has been shown to have a direct negative relationship to efficacy (Austin & Pinkleton, 1995). The correlations establish construct validity, the extent to which a measure performs as it should in relation to other measures (DeVellis, 2003), as we anticipate the noted relationships.

It is expected that a number of the pilot-tested scale items will be discarded, and that utilization of the exploratory procedures described will help reduce the proposed measurement instrument of PLE to 4-7 items and the measurement of its sources (vicarious and enactive learning, persuasion and affective state) to 2-4 items each.

### Scale Development and Validation Results

*Political Learning Efficacy*

Exploratory factor analysis (principle components analysis with varimax rotation) revealed four distinct factors (eigenvalues > 1.0) from among the 16 items posed (Table 1). Factor I contained the first four items, and included one item (PLE4) related to online media, while all other items involving a specific media (PLE5-8 and PLE 10-12) held together on two separate factors, indicating that media use may be determining where these items load. All items related to the trustworthiness of media loaded on a final factor. All items performed well, loading strongly on one factor, with the exception of PLE17 which performed poorly and loaded loosely across three factors.

## Table 1: Factor Analysis of Proposed PLE Items[a]

| | Factor | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| PLE1: I am confident that I can learn about political issues if I want to | | .763 | | |
| PLE2: I am confident that I know where to go to locate good political information | | .710 | | |
| PLE3: I am confident that I can seek out information related to a political decision in general | | .832 | | |
| PLE4: I am confident I can find information related to a political decision online | | .715 | | |
| PLE5: I am confident I can seek out information related to a political decision from my friends | | | .609 | |
| PLE6: I am confident I can seek out information related to a political decision from my family | | | .644 | |
| PLE7: I am confident I can seek out information related to a political decision in the newspaper | | | .789 | |
| PLE8: I am confident I can seek out information related to a political decision on T.V. | | | .823 | |
| PLE9: I am confident that I can understand most political information in general | .815 | | | |
| PLE10: I am confident that I can understand most political information online | .788 | | | |
| PLE11: I am confident that I can understand most political information in the newspaper | .817 | | | |
| PLE12: I am confident that I can understand most political information on T.V. | .812 | | | |
| PLE13: I am confident that I can find trustworthy political information | | | | .761 |
| PLE14: I am confident that I can find accurate political information | | | | .814 |
| PLE16: I am confident that I can find unbiased political information | | | | .778 |
| PLE17: I am confident that I could ask an intelligent question during an election | .583 | .291 | .100 | .281 |
| Cumulative variance explained % | 42.34 | 56.66 | 62.24 | 69.73 |

[a] *Varimax rotation with Eigenvalues >1 specified, four factors extracted explaining 69.7% of the variance.*

This breakup among factors of media-specific items precipitated a rethinking of whether this scale should include media-specific items. Both theoretically and practically, it made more sense to develop a scale that could be used in a variety of settings, not just in media-effects research. Thus, a second factor analysis was completed, this time with the media-specific items removed. In this case, two distinct factors emerge: one closely related to the PLE construct definition as proposed, and one related to accuracy and non-bias of the media (Table 2).

Table 2: Factor Analysis of Non-Media PLE Items[a]

|  | Component | |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | 1 | 2 |
| PLE1: I am confident that I can learn about political issues if I want to | .823 | |
| PLE2: I am confident that I know where to go to locate good political information | .800 | |
| PLE3: I am confident that I can seek out information related to a political decision in general | .866 | |
| PLE9: I am confident that I can understand most political information in general | .641 | |
| PLE13: I am confident that I can find trustworthy political information | .434 | .766 |
| PLE14: I am confident that I can find accurate political information | .371 | .840 |
| PLE16: I am confident that I can find unbiased political information | | .866 |
| Cumulative variance explained % | 56.74 | 73.94 |

[a] *Varimax rotation with Eigenvalues >1 specified, two factors extracted explaining 72.9% of the variance.*

While the second factor is interesting and issues of accuracy and bias were certainly important to the focus group participants who brought it up, it does not fit well enough to be included currently. Therefore, a scale composed of PLE 1, 2, 3, and 9 emerges.

When constructed, the new PLE scale shows strong reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of .840 and strong correlations between the items (Table 3). PLE9 is the weakest item and does not seem to contribute as much to alpha, but its value as a theoretical contributor to the construct definition of PLE (as the "understand" component) is high. Thus, it will remain in the scale and its value will be reassessed in the next stage of the study.

**Table 3: Correlations and Scale Reliability for PLE Items[a]**

|  | PLE1 | PLE2 | PLE3 | PLE9 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| PLE1: I am confident that I can learn about political issues if I want to | 1.000 | .568 | .612 | .463 |
| PLE2: I am confident that I know where to go to locate good political information |  | 1.000 | .748 | .505 |
| PLE3: I am confident that I can seek out information related to a political decision in general |  |  | 1.000 | .513 |
| PLE9: I am confident that I can understand most political information in general |  |  |  | 1.000 |
| Item-total correlations | .641 | .730 | .763 | .566 |
| Alpha if item deleted | .808 | .766 | .754 | .840 |
| Alpha (for PLE scale) | **.840** |  |  |  |
| Average correlation | .583 |  |  |  |

[a] *All figures are Pearson's r (p >.05) unless otherwise noted*

As constructed, the PLE scale correlates in the expected direction and significantly with opinion leadership, political knowledge, and internal political efficacy, providing support to *THs 5 & 6* There was no significant relationship between PLE and political trust or cynicism (as these two measures are considered opposites of each other and have a strong negative correlation here, it is not unexpected that if one shows no significant correlation, the other also will not) (Table 4).

**Table 4: Correlations Between PLE Scale and Related Variables**

|  |  | PLE | Political Cynicism | Opinion Leadership | Political Trust | Political Knowledge | IPE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| PLE | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .042 | .341** | -.058 | .367** | .510** |
| Political Cynicism | Pearson Correlation |  | 1 | .117* | -.632** | .120* | .121* |
| Opinion Leadership | Pearson Correlation |  |  | 1 | -.144** | .124* | .333** |
| Political Trust | Pearson Correlation |  |  |  | 1 | -.095 | -.040 |
| Political Knowledge | Pearson Correlation |  |  |  |  | 1 | .249** |
| IPE | Pearson Correlation |  |  |  |  |  | 1 |

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

*Sources of Political Learning Efficacy*

Factor analysis for the four sources of PLE was a challenge to interpret, with one source, persuasion, splitting across two factors (Table 5). Similar research relating to the sources of self-efficacy has also noted problems in identifying good measures for the sources (R. LaRose, personal communication, March, 2009). Distinct measures emerge and are discussed below, but further changes may have to be made in future implementations.

## Table 5: Factor Analysis of Proposed PLE Source Items [a]

| | Component | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| ViCL1: I have friends who know where to find good political information | | .816 | | | |
| ViCL2: I have friends who know where to find good political information online | | .817 | | | |
| ViCL3: I have seen how my friends can find political information online | | .686 | | | |
| EnaL1: If I don't find the political information I am looking for in one source, I try to find another source | | | .792 | | |
| EnaL2: If a political information source does not have all the information I need, I will visit their recommended sources of more information | | | .757 | | |
| EnaL3: If I like a source of information I am likely to come back to it repeatedly to see if there are updates | | | .693 | | |
| EnaL4: I am confident I can learn to use a variety of political information sources | .428 | | .548 | | |
| Per1: My friends encourage me to find political information | | .450 | | | .673 |
| Per2: My friends tell me that I should learn about the issues before I make a political decision | | .333 | | | .662 |
| Per3: I have been persuaded by friends or family to find political information | | .259 | | .280 | .630 |
| Per4: I am likely to read political information sent to me by a friend | | | | .838 | |
| Per5: I am likely to read political information sent to me by a family member | | | | .811 | |
| Per6: I am likely to check out a political candidate recommended by a friend | | | | .734 | |
| Aff1: I am not apprehensive about finding the political information I need | .498 | | .219 | | |
| Aff2: Political information is somewhat intimidating to me | .736 | | | | |
| Aff3: When I think about looking for political information, I get nervous | .880 | | | | |
| Aff4: When I am looking for political information, I get nervous | .863 | | | | |
| Aff5: I am confident that I could overcome my anxiety about getting the information I needed to make a political decision | | | .429 | | .507 |
| Cumulative variance explained % | 29.68 | 45.86 | 53.57 | 60.34 | 66.1 |

[a] *Varimax rotation with Eigenvalues >1 specified, five factors extracted, explaining 66.1% of the variance. Aff items were re-coded to account for direction of wording.*

As the vicarious learning dimension contains two media-specific items, this scale will be reduced to a one-item measure as the decision to remove media-specific items extends to the PLE sources as well. VicL3 is a valuable item if one removes the "online" qualifier, however, and it will be included in the later stage of the study to reassess fit.

Enactive learning demonstrated three strong items out of four on the factor analysis, with EnaL4 showing some multi-dimensionality. However, when one examines the scale reliability (Table 6), EnaL4 shows itself to be a strong contributor to the alpha of the overall scale and thus will remain and will be reassessed later.

**Table 6: Correlations and Scale Reliability for Enactive Learning Items[a]**

| | EnaL1 | EnaL2 | EnaL3 | EnaL4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| EnaL1: If I don't find the political information I am looking for in one source, I try to find another source | 1.000 | .575 | .467 | .552 |
| EnaL2: If a political information source does not have all the information I need, I will visit their recommended sources of more information | | 1.000 | .468 | .400 |
| EnaL3: If I like a source of information I am likely to come back to it repeatedly to see if there are updates | | | 1.000 | .406 |
| EnaL4: I am confident I can learn to use a variety of political information sources | | | | 1.000 |
| Item-total correlation | .677 | .597 | .546 | .553 |
| Alpha if item deleted | .689 | .731 | .756 | .753 |
| Alpha (for EnaL Scale) | **.786** | | | |
| Average correlation | **.478** | | | |

[a] *All figures are Pearson's r (p >.05) unless otherwise noted*

The persuasion dimension demonstrated a different problem, with the items splitting into two factors, and one of those factors being relatively messy. On closer inspection, it is obvious that the wording of Per1-3 and Per 4-6 are causing them to access entirely different concepts, the first measuring whether friends are actively trying

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to persuade, and the second being whether someone is likely to "cave" to a persuasion

attempt. Thus, the first set of items more accurately captures what Bandura (1997)

intended when he discusses persuasion as a source of self-efficacy. These three items

correlate well and seem to form a relatively strong scale (Table 7).

**Table 7: Correlations and Scale Reliability for Persuasion Items[a]**

|  | Per1 | Per2 | Per3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Per1: My friends encourage me to find political information | 1.000 | .580 | .550 |
| Per2: My friends tell me that I should learn about the issues before I make a political decision |  | 1.000 | .425 |
| Per3: I have been persuaded by friends or family to find political information |  |  | 1.000 |
| Item-total correlation | .699 | .566 | .545 |
| Alpha if item deleted | .596 | .708 | .732 |
| Alpha (for EnaL Scale) | **.763** |  |  |
| Average correlation | .518 |  |  |

[a] *All figures are Pearson's* r *(p >.05) unless otherwise noted*

Finally, enactive learning may be showing the effects of a response set problem –

the three items that were reverse coded (Aff2-4) held together. Nonetheless, these three

items form a strong scale (Table 8) and provide value in a cognitive shake-up to survey

participants in their reversed wording.

**Table 8: Correlations and Scale Reliability for Affective Items[a]**

|  | Aff2 | Aff3 | Aff4 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Aff2: Political information is somewhat intimidating to me | 1.000 | .529 | .474 |
| Aff3: When I think about looking for political information, I get nervous |  | 1.000 | .868 |
| Aff4: When I am looking for political information, I get nervous |  |  | 1.000 |
| Item-total correlation | .518 | .822 | .775 |
| Alpha if item deleted | .929 | .641 | .691 |
| Alpha (for EnaL Scale) | **.832** |  |  |
| Average correlation | .624 |  |  |

[a] *All figures are Pearson's* r *(p >.05) unless otherwise noted*

In order to fully vet the chosen sources of self-efficacy items, one last factor

analysis was completed. As demonstrated in Table 9, each scale, with one exception,

loaded on its own factor. The lone vicarious item loaded with the persuasion items,

likely due to its emphasis on the behavior of friends. This reinforces the decision to add

VicL3 back to later surveys, omitting its media-specific wording.

**Table 9: Factor Analysis of Final PLE Source Items** [a]

| | Component | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | Enactive | Pers | Affective |
| ViCL1: I have friends who know where to find good political information | | .605 | |
| EnaL1: If I don't find the political information I am looking for in one source, I try to find another source | .817 | | |
| EnaL2: If a political information source does not have all the information I need, I will visit their recommended sources of more information | .805 | | |
| EnaL3: If I like a source of information I am likely to come back to it repeatedly to see if there are updates | .742 | | |
| EnaL4: I am confident I can learn to use a variety of political information sources | .610 | | .402 |
| Per1: My friends encourage me to find political information | | .864 | |
| Per2: My friends tell me that I should learn about the issues before I make a political decision | | .793 | |
| Per3: I have been persuaded by friends or family to find political information online | | .738 | |
| Aff2: Political information is somewhat intimidating to me | | | .731 |
| Aff3: When I think about looking for political information, I get nervous | | | .910 |
| Aff4: When I am looking for political information, I get nervous | | | .890 |
| Cumulative variance explained % | 37.5 | 55.51 | 66.18 |

[a] *Varimax rotation with Eigenvalues >1 specified, three factors extracted explaining 66.2% of the variance. Aff items were recoded to account for direction of wording.*

Bandura posits that these four dimensions are sources of self-efficacy, and, as such, should be related when regression is applied. Three of our four antecedents to political learning efficacy demonstrated substantial and significant standardized $\beta$ coefficients, affective state ($\beta$ = .258), vicarious learning ($\beta$ = .156) and enactive learning ($\beta$ = .440). Persuasion was more problematic, with an insignificant $\beta$ of .005. The model explained 41.9% of the variance in PLE. $F(4, 353) = 63.616, p < .05, R^2 = .419$. PLE was also able to predict 13.5% of the variance in political knowledge, with a standardized $\beta$ of .367 (Figure 6). This supports *TH6*. The replacement of the first group of persuasion items with the second group does not make for a better model. Theory hypotheses *1, 2, & 4* are supported, *TH3* is not. The full model of PLE as shown in Figure 5 in the theory section will be tested with the results of the nationally representative survey. In the pilot test survey, whether or not someone voted in 2008 was chosen to measure participation. This was a poor decision, as over 77% reported voting, a number too high to accurately test the relationships in the model, and significantly higher than the nationally-reported 53% turn-out among this demographic. In the full survey another measure of participation will be used.
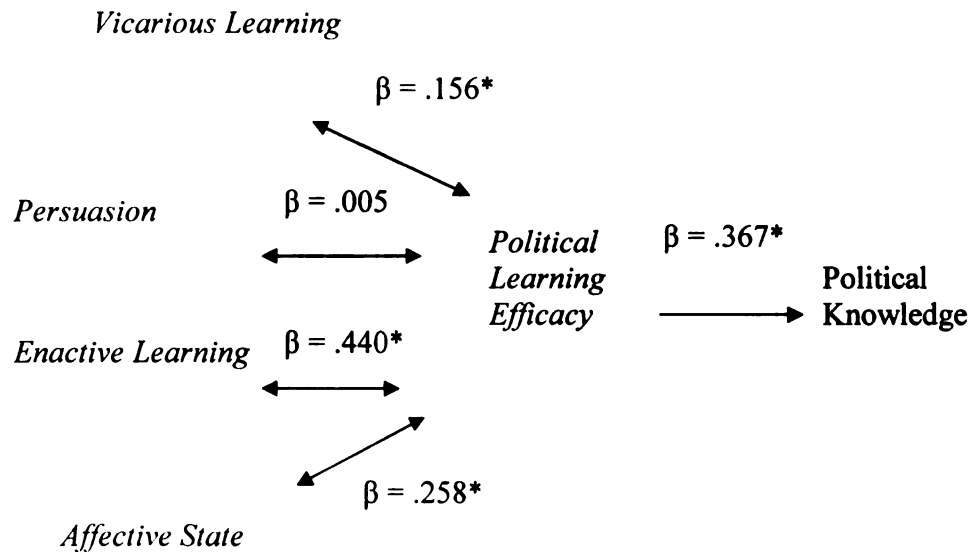
*Vicarious Learning*

$\beta = .156^*$

*Persuasion*      $\beta = .005$

*Political*      $\beta = .367^*$
*Learning*                      Political
*Efficacy*      ———→      Knowledge

*Enactive Learning*   $\beta = .440^*$

$\beta = .258^*$

*Affective State*

*Figure 6.* A Social Cognitive Model of Political Learning

*Pilot Test Research Questions Results*

The first theory research question of this study asked whether there was evidence

for political information efficacy existing as its own construct separate from internal

political efficacy. This research strongly indicates that PIE as measured is not a separate

concept from IPE (Table 10). The three items shared by both scales and the two

exclusive items all load on the same factor and have an excellent Cronbach's alpha

of .890 as a combined scale (Table 11). Thus, it is concluded that while the current

construct definition of PIE touches on some worthy questions of a person's confidence in

their political knowledge, the current measurement instrument does not access anything

much beyond what the original IPE scale already accessed. IPE is a well-validated,

parsimonious construct and scale, and there can be little advantage in adding and

subtracting from it without a thorough investigation of proposed items and any changes

to the construct definition.

The second theory research question asked whether political learning efficacy

stood alone as its own construct, and, as shown in Table 10, its items load strongly on

their own factor separate from IPE, PIE and items of external political efficacy. PLE is a

separate construct.

### Table 10: Factor Analysis of Efficacy Scales[a]

| | Component | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | IPE | PLE | EPE |
| IPE1PIE1: I consider myself to be well qualified to participate in politics | .792 | | |
| IPE2PIE2: I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country | .787 | | |
| IPE3PIE3: I think that I am better informed about politics and government than most people | .847 | | |
| IPE4: I feel that I could do as good a job in public office as most people | .810 | | |
| PIE4: If a friend asked me about the presidential election, I feel I would have enough information to help my friend figure out who to vote for | .777 | | |
| PLE1: I am confident that I can learn about political issues if I want to | | .845 | |
| PLE2: I am confident that I know where to go to locate good political information | | .798 | |
| PLE3: I am confident that I can seek out information related to a political decision in general | | .857 | |
| PLE9: I am confident that I can understand most political information in general | | .605 | |
| EPE1: People like me don't have any say about what the government does | | | .876 |
| EPE2: I don't think public officials care much what people like me think | | | .884 |
| Cumulative variance explained % | 49.94 | 71.62 | 80.05 |

[a] *Varimax rotation with Eigenvalues >1 specified, three factors extracted explaining 80.1% of the variance. EPE items were recoded to account for direction of wording. Items shared by the IPE and PIE measurement instruments are noted*

## Table 11: Correlations and Scale Reliability of IPE and PIE as a Combined Scale[a]

| | IPE1PIE1 | IPE2PIE2 | IPE3PIE3 | IPE4 | PIE4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| IPE1PIE1: I consider myself to be well qualified to participate in politics | 1.000 | .716 | .625 | .551 | .580 |
| IPE2PIE2: I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country | | 1.000 | .697 | .533 | .658 |
| IPE3PIE3: I think that I am better informed about politics and government than most people | | | 1.000 | .613 | .686 |
| IPE4: I feel that I could do as good a job in public office as most people | | | | 1.000 | .511 |
| PIE4: If a friend asked me about the presidential election, I feel I would have enough information to help my friend figure out who to vote for | | | | | 1.000 |
| | | | | | |
| Item total correlations | .728 | .777 | .785 | .641 | .715 |
| Alpha if scale item deleted | .860 | .852 | .847 | .884 | .863 |
| Alpha (IPE - PIE combined scale) | **.890** | | | | |
| Average correlation | .617 | | | | |

[a] *All figures are Pearson's r (p >.05) unless otherwise noted*

## Discussion of Pilot Test

This exercise produced a seemingly valid scale for the measurement of political learning efficacy and also for its antecedents, with the exception of the problematic measurement of persuasion. Factor analysis is able to discriminate between the new measure of PLE and related measures of IPE, EPE, and PIE and correlations show a strong relationship between three of five expected correlates. In addition, PLE was able to predict political knowledge, which it was intended to do. The ability to predict political knowledge was not as strong as anticipated, likely due to easy access to answers to the political knowledge items online, no monitoring of whether participants stayed with the survey page, and no time limits for completion.

The results of analysis of the PLE sources are very similar to what Bandura (1997) posits, with enactive learning being the strongest determinant of self-efficacy. The problematic persuasion items may be accessing what came up repeatedly in the focus groups: That individuals get annoyed and may tune out persuasion attempts when they become too frequent. Participants may have experienced this in the 2008 election (four months prior to the pilot test) and be under-reporting their responses as a result; the mean of the scale responses for persuasion was significantly smaller than that of either enactive learning or affective state (5.92 vs. 8.62 and 8.20 respectively). It also may be attributable to who the item is asking about; the enactive learning and affective state items are asking about the participant themselves, and the persuasion items are asking about the behavior of friends and family.

In addition to the development of the PLE scale and the measures of its antecedents, the pilot test was also able to show that the measure of political information efficacy either does not exist as its own construct or that the measurement instrument used does not accurately access the construct. The findings reinforce earlier work noting the robustness of the internal political efficacy scale (Craig et al., 1991; Morrell, 2003) and also of the underused external political efficacy scale.

This pilot test has some distinct limitations, notably those of sample selection, social desirability (77% of this sample reported voting, nationally only 53% of the sample demographic actually did), and test length; survey fatigue on a 74-item survey could easily have been an issue. Overall, this was an effective exercise however, as indicated by the strong measure of PLE that emerged, and the unequivocal answers to both research questions. The scale of PLE can be used together or separately from the

measures of its sources, and it should provide a valuable new addition to the political communication literature.

Survey Research

In order to test the hypothesized relationships between young people, political learning efficacy, political knowledge, participation and political social network site use, a survey was conducted in April 2009, six months after the 2008 election. This creates a potential problem of fading memory of political actions taken during the election; however, this time frame includes the significant benefit of a "cooling-off" period from the media hype and social pressure associated with the election. This added benefit may mitigate some the social desirability and priming problems associated with many political efficacy studies (including this study's pilot test). In addition to hypotheses testing, this survey also allowed for further testing and validation of the measurement and model presented in the pilot test. An extremely common method in the social sciences, survey research allows for the examination of relationships between variables.

*Sample and Procedures*

In early April 2009 an online panel of 5000 Americans aged 18-25 were invited to access the survey through the online survey Web site Zoomerang. This panel is managed by MarketTools, the parent company of Zoomerang, and participants receive points towards merchandise for participating. The survey was automatically closed after 625 individuals completed it, which took approximately three days to achieve. Due to this close-out procedure, an accurate completion rate is not calculable.

Of these 625 individuals, 64.5% were female, 34.1% male (1.4% gave no answer), 71.7% were Caucasian, 9.6% Hispanic, 8.5% African American, 6.2% Asian, and 3.6%

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multi-racial. The average age was 22.9 years old. Almost 11 (10.9) percent reported not being registered to vote, and 65.1% reported voting in the 2008 election (somewhat higher than the 55% reported nationally for this age group). Twenty percent of the sample identified as Independent, 22.1% Republican, 36.3% Democrat, and 17% didn't know their affiliation. More than 36 % of the sample had attended at least some college, and 23% had only a high school diploma, 6.4% never graduated. Twenty percent had a four-year degree, 8.2% a two-year degree. Use of both dominant social network sites was represented (39.4% preferred Facebook, 27.7% preferred MySpace and 16.5% use both) and only 16.5% of the sample reported not using either Facebook or MySpace (one should note, however, that this sample only includes individuals with Internet access). As other sources have reported, the average educational level for Facebook users was significantly higher than it was for MySpace users, $t(417) = 9.883$, $p < .05$, but there is no significant difference in age between the two dominant SNS.

Measures

*Dependent variables*

Knowledge was measured in the same manner as in the pilot test following Delli Carpini & Keeter (1994). Five general political knowledge items form an index on which one can score from 0 to 5 (Appendix C).

Political learning efficacy and its sources are measured following the results of the pilot test. A few items noted for further review during the pilot test were also included to help further establish that the correct scale was chosen. VicL3, which previously included media-specific wording, was included with the online mention omitted.

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Political participation was measured following a scale adapted and updated from Rosenstone and Hansen's (1993) common index of political participation, which includes items about donating money, serving in public office, displaying yard signs, etc. This index was expanded to include items related to online participation, such as posting to a political blog or watching a debate online, to update the scale to reflect current media habits. One error was made in coding this item: no "none" option was given, and it was a forced-response question, so individuals who did not participate politically at all were required to report doing something they may not have done. Results on this variable may be somewhat higher than they should be.

*Independent Variables*

Use of social network sites for political purposes was subdivided into three different measures, two indices and one scale. Each index or scale accesses political actions one might take on a SNS, but with increasing levels of commitment needed to take the action. For example, the first index, SNS political usage, asked if participants had become a supporter of a candidate on an SNS, a very general action requiring of only one click and taken by literally tens of millions of people during the 2008 election cycle. On the other end of the spectrum, SNS political engagement asked about actions much more indicative of true political engagement, such as participating in "real world" political events learned about on an SNS or continued participation in political groups on SNSs after the election was over. SNS political activity formed the middle ground, asking about small political actions one might take on an SNS, from posting a wall message regarding politics to taking a political quiz (Appendix C). This subdivision of use of SNS for political purposes was both to look for differences between those taking actions that

require little commitment and involvement, and may be more indicative of a bandwagon effect than anything else, and actions that take more thought, time and commitment to undertake. This will also enable us to report on what young people were actually doing on SNSs during the 2008 election.

SNS political usage (SNSPolUsage) was measured with four items describing the most common political actions a person might take in a social network environment during the recent election, from becoming a supporter of a candidate to posting a status update that mentions something political. It was implemented as an index, with a binary yes/no answer and each individual's total score indicating the average number of actions they took during the 2008 election.

SNS political activity (SNSPolAct) was implemented as an nine-item index added to and adapted from Vitak et al. (2009). It included small political actions indicative of a higher level of involvement with politics on SNSs, such as posting a status update mentioning something political. Different than SNSPolUsage, SNSPolAct specifically asked about activities undertaken in the past month and not during the election, to access continued online involvement. Responses were provided in a list and participants could check off what they had completed.

Political social network engagement (SNSEngage) went farther to ask about specific and continued political actions taken in or because of an SNS environment. Adapted and added to from Vitak et al. (2009), this seven-item scale asked, in 11-item response (strongly disagree to strongly agree) format, whether individuals were more interested in the election because of political SNS, or if they were continuing to stay involved with the groups they joined during the election, among other things.

# CHAPTER 5

## RESULTS

### Political and Media Behavior

The first research question of this study asked what political behaviors young people were engaging while on social network sites. To answer this question, only the self-reported users of social networks sites will be considered (n=522).

Low levels of usage of SNS for political purposes were reported. SNSPolUsage ($\alpha = 0.818$) had a mean of 1.70 (Max = 5.0, $SD = 1.75$), SNSPolAct ($\alpha = 0.529$) $M = 1.67$, Max = 9.0, $SD = 1.51$, and SNSEngage ($\alpha = 0.912$, a scale rather than an index) displayed a mean of 3.97 (Max = 11.0, $SD = 2.47$). So, the average person was engaging in less than two forms of specific political action on SNS, and disagreed with most statements regarding engagement on and political usefulness of SNS.

Of the uses made and actions taken on SNS taken by individuals, the most frequent was becoming the supporter of a political cause (35.4%) or taking a quiz about politics (33.5%). Other actions and uses are detailed in Table 12.

**Table 12: Political Uses and Actions on SNS**

| Uses (SNSPolUsage) during 2008 election | Percent |
| --- | --- |
| Became supporter of cause | 35.4 |
| Visited SNS site of candidate | 29.3 |
| Became supporter of candidate | 26.6 |
| Joined a political group | 25.5 |

| Actions (SNSPolAct) in past month | Percent |
| --- | --- |
| Took a quiz | 33.5 |
| Added/deleted political info from profile | 23.9 |
| Posted political status update | 23.6 |
| Became a supporter of a candidate or cause | 22.0 |
| Discussed politics in a message | 19.7 |
| Added application or bumper sticker | 13.8 |
| Posted political wall comment | 12.5 |
| Joined or left a political group | 11.7 |
| Posted a link about politics | 7.3 |

$n = 522$

SNSEngage was found to be internally consistent ($\alpha = 0.912$), though underlying distribution of responses to SNSEngage was moderately positively skewed (.553). The means on each item ranged from 3.46 to 4.51 (Max = 11.0), meaning that generally, this sample was not engaging in the behaviors described and do not report finding political SNS useful (Table 13). These results help in addressing *RQ2*, which asked whether young people would indicate more interest in the 2008 election because of social network sites. When asked specifically whether they were more interested in the election because of information they encountered on SNS (SNSEngage5), the answer was a resounding no (Table 13). Additionally, only 29.1% agreed with the statement that they use SNS to share their political views. More than 84% of this sample use social network sites, yet less than 40% of SNS users report any use of SNS for political purposes, even during a high-profile election.

**Table 13: SNSEngage Responses**

| | Mean | Std. Dev. |
|---|---|---|
| SNSEngage1: I use social networking sites to share political information with my friends | 4.01 | 2.830 |
| SNSEngage2: I have participated in "real world" political activities (like attending a rally or meeting) because I heard about them on a social networking site | 3.46 | 2.883 |
| SNSEngage3: I was more likely to vote because of political or candidate information I saw on a social networking site | 3.66 | 2.880 |
| SNSEngage4: I still check out or participate in political groups I joined during the 2008 election on social networking sites | 4.01 | 3.148 |
| SNSEngage5: I was more interested in the 2008 election because of information I received on social networking sites | 3.62 | 2.859 |
| SNSEngage6: I use/have used social networking sites to share my political views with others | 4.51 | 3.267 |
| SNSEngage7: I have found additional sources of political information through social networking sites | 4.51 | 3.171 |

$n$ = 522, max = 11.0, strongly agree, min= 1.0, strongly disagree

*Hypothesis 1* posited that young people will prefer online sources for their political information. While 60.5% report using online news sites like CNN.com, only 36.3% report that online sources of any kind are their *preferred* source of information, thus, this hypothesis is not supported. "Old" media, televised news and newspapers, are still viable news sources for this demographic, and televised news is significantly preferred over other news sources, $\chi^2(6, N = 625) = 662.72, p > .05$. Only a small number report using political blogs (11.5%) and social network sites (17.5%) for ANY of their political information. This runs counter to the media's conventional wisdom about this demographic.

**Table 14: Preferred News Sources**

| | Percent |
|---|---|
| Televised news | 43.5 |
| Online news sites | 29.4 |
| Newspaper | 9.8 |
| Radio | 6.4 |
| Social Networking Sites | 5.3 |
| Political Blogs | 1.6 |
| Other | 4.0 |

$n = 625$

*Political Learning Efficacy and PLE Model*

All four scales for the sources of self-efficacy held up well in further testing. Alphas are as follows: Enactive learning $\alpha = 0.876$, vicarious learning $\alpha = 0.817$ (VicL1 & 3) persuasion $\alpha = 0.851$, and affective state $\alpha = 0.882$. Under additional factor analysis, the items loaded strongly on their specified factors, and vicarious learning exhibited none of the problems it did in the pilot test when it loaded with persuasion. The PLE scale also performed well, with an alpha of 0.870. The item in question in the pilot test, PLE9, held well with the other items in this factor analysis (one factor loaded with an eigenvalue > 1, total variance explained = 72.1%), so it will remain a part of the scale along with PLE1-3 for a four-item measure.

The data, with one exception, fit the model of PLE well and in a similar fashion to the pilot test data (Figure 2). Standardized $\beta$ coefficients are reported to account for differences in measurement. The persuasion contributor to PLE performed poorly as it did in the pilot test, and it should be reevaluated. While the persuasion items have face validity, they may not be accessing truly what Bandura intended when he discussed persuasion. It also may due to the recency of the 2008 election and the social pressure

this group reported encountering in the earlier focus groups; participants might not want to admit that anyone else might have had any influence over them or they continue to have some level of annoyance over the actions and pressure they experienced. Vitak et al. (2009) found a similar aversion to persuasion in that attempting to persuade friends politically via Facebook was not considered an appropriate behavior.

Of the sources of PLE, vicarious learning (.219**), persuasion (.203**) and enactive learning (.183**) correlated the most strongly with political social network use, and affective state correlated insignificantly. This corresponds to what was heard in the focus groups, that participants remembered seeing their friends acting politically on SNS and some ended up clicking on the links and following the links around the SNS, sometimes supporting a candidate as a result.

There was no significant difference between genders in level of PLE, and, while there was a significant relationship between educational level obtained and PLE, $F(1, 623) = 14.985, p < .05, R^2 = .023, \beta = .153$, and educational level had only a small impact, specifically and only between those who had less than a high school diploma and a four-year college degree. Four-year degree holders had a significantly higher PLE ($M = 8.651$) than non-high school graduates ($M = 7.160$), and had the highest PLE of all educational levels, but none of the other direct comparisons were significant, ANOVA post-hoc with Scheffe, $F(5, 619) = 4.205, p < .05$.

The relationship between political learning efficacy and political participation is of significant interest as increased participation is the goal of many engagement efforts involving young people. The standardized $\beta$ of 0.282 reported in Figure 2, which appears somewhat low on first glance, is actually reasonably good considering the distribution of

the data regarding political participation - participation was logarithmic, heavily skewed toward the left. Nearly 49% of the sample reported only one or fewer units of participation (an additive index, max = 11), and the mean participation was only 2.07. Even this low number is likely slightly elevated, as this is where the instrument error, the omission of the "none" option, occurred. From an analysis of the distribution of responses, it appears that if anything was over reported, it was debate viewing (75.4% of the sample and the first option presented on the list).

The model helps answer *TH7* (unanswerable in the pilot test due to over-reporting of voting), that political learning efficacy will be positively associated with political participation. A linear regression produced a significant association with a somewhat small $R^2$, $F(1, 624) = 53.9$, $p < .05$, $R^2 = .080$, $\beta = .282$, VIF = 1.0. This small $R^2$ may be due to the distribution of the participation data, which was strongly positively skewed (1.81) around low levels of participation. *TH7* is supported.
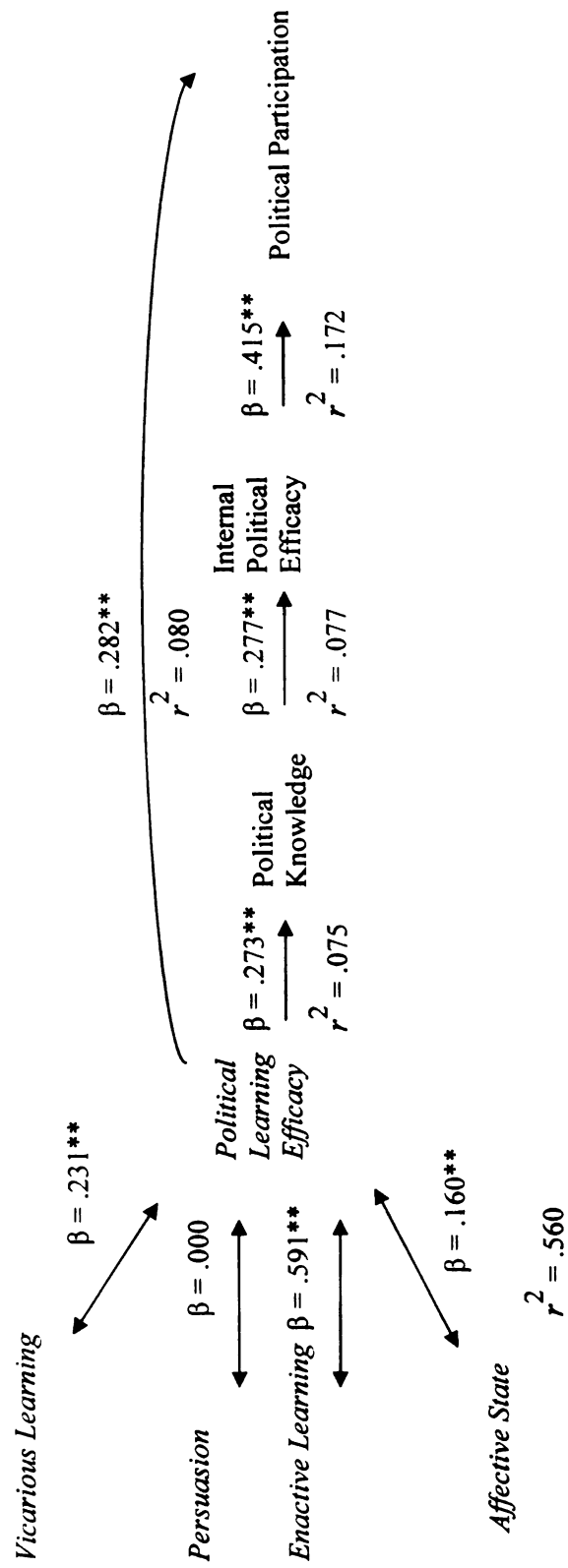
*Figure 7*: Full PLE Model

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*H2-H4* involved the relationship between use of social network sites for political

purposes and levels of participation and knowledge. As shown in Table 15, both

measures of political uses of social network sites are positively and significantly

correlated with knowledge, participation, and political learning efficacy.

**Table 15: Pearson Correlations of Expected Relationships**

|  |  | PLE | SNS Political Usage | SNS Political Activity | Knowledge | Particip ation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| PLE | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .223** | .227** | .293** | .303** |
| SNS Political Usage | Pearson Correlation |  | 1 | .503** | .225** | .537** |
| SNS Political Activity | Pearson Correlation |  |  | 1 | .200** | .539** |
| Knowledge | Pearson Correlation |  |  |  | 1 | .324** |
| Participation | Pearson Correlation |  |  |  |  | 1 |

n=522 (SNS
users only)

More specifically, it was hypothesized in *H2* that use of social network sites for

political purposes would be positively associated with political knowledge. This

hypothesis is supported for both measures of political uses of SNS. SNSPolUse, $F(1,$

$520) = 27.664, p < .05, R^2 = .051, \beta = .225,$ VIF = 1.0; SNSPolAct, $F(1, 520) = 19.674, p$

$< .05, R^2 = .036, \beta = .191,$ VIF = 1.0. Standardized $\beta$ is reported to account for

measurement differences. In an interesting finding, Facebook users ($M = 4.301$) had a

significantly higher political knowledge than MySpace users ($M = 3.31$), $t(417) = 8.546,$

$p < .05$. This difference is likely due to the previously noted differences in educational

attainment between the two SNSs.

*Hypothesis 3* put forward that usage of SNS for political purposes would be positively associated with political participation. The strong correlations observed in Table 15 between participation and both measures of usage are an indication that this relationship works both ways, and this hypothesis is supported. Similar to the knowledge finding, participants who preferred Facebook had a significantly higher level of participation ($M$ = 2.756) than did MySpace users ($M$ = 1.867), $t(417)$ = 4.977, $p$< .05.

*Hypothesis 4* suggested that the use of social network sites for political purposes would be positively associated with political learning efficacy. This was also supported, SNSPolUse, $F(1, 520)$ = 27.264, $p$ <.05, $R^2$= .050, $\beta$ = .223, VIF = 1.0; SNSPolAct, $F(1, 520)$ = 19.981, $p$ <.05, $R^2$= .037, $\beta$ = .192, VIF = 1.0. Again, Facebook users ($M$ = 8.566) had a significantly higher PLE than MySpace users ($M$ = 7.961), $t(417)$ = 3.019, $p$< .05.

Finally, as internal political efficacy is strong a strong predictor of political participation in the PLE model, IPE is theorized as having an antecedent in PLE, and IPE is such a prominent construct in the political communication field, its relationship to political social network usage was examined in *H6*. A significant relationship was found between both SNSPolUse, $F(1, 520)$ = 72.726, $p$ <.05, $R^2$= .123, $\beta$ = .350, and SNSPolAct $F(1, 520)$ = 55.826, $p$ <.05, $R^2$= .097, $\beta$ = .311, VIF = 1.0. There was no significant difference between Facebook and MySpace users on this variable.

# CHAPTER 6

## DISCUSSION

This study attempted to develop and validate a new construct, make a theoretical contribution to the social cognitive theory and political communication literature, and shed light on a timely issue in political uses of social networks. This research allowed the value of political information and candidate presence on social networks to be measured and the new construct of political learning efficacy to be developed and tested in a large, representative sample. Existing literature in this area is presently sparse, and most is conducted on small, student samples, so these data provides an excellent snapshot of the media preferences, participation, and knowledge levels of American youth during and after the 2008 presidential campaign.

The media choices being made by American 18-25 year olds (specifically, the strong preference for televised news over other, online, choices) are not consistent with the conventional wisdom regarding this demographic. Anecdotally, particularly in traditional news media concerned with their own demise, the assumption has been that this demographic strongly prefers online media and is eschewing "old" media. That assumption does not play out in this research, a finding consistent with Wells and Dudash (2007) who found, in a large national focus group study, that only 15% preferred online sources of information. While this 15% was greater than the percentages preferring any other information source except for family and friends in their sample, it is not a huge number by any means. Additionally, during the 2004 campaign, Rainie et al. (2005) found that 28% of 18-29 year-olds received most of the their campaign information online, so the finding here that only 29% prefer online sources of information in 2008 is

only notable in that it may be indicative of a slowing of the adoption rate of online news sources. In addition, these are self-reported preferred news sources and this self-report may be slightly different from actual use.

While all relationships between political SNS use and political outcome variables were significant, and all SNS hypotheses supported, the impact of social network use for political purposes is surprisingly low, contrary to high expectations put forward by both the scholarly community and the news media. While it is not remarkable that someone might not want to admit that a SNS had played an important role in a political decision, one would think that, given the strong affinity individuals seem to have for their chosen SNS, if they had found valuable elements related to the election on their SNS they would report it. This result is both similar and different to what the Pew Internet and American Life Project found in their study of the 2008 election and Internet and new media use. They found that across all age groups, 14% of Internet users used SNS for a political purpose, which is in line with the findings of this study. Among users under 30, they found higher usage; nearly half of their sample reporting using SNS for political purposes (Smith & Rainie, 2008). This second number is higher than what was found in this study, which may be partially attributable to the wider age range included in "younger" (18-25 in this study, 18-30 in the Pew study).

The strong positive correlation (Table 15) found between both forms of political SNS usage and political participation likely indicates a bidirectional relationship; political social network sites may be of great value to those who are already politically engaged or those who are just fired up on a particular issue. SNSs could serve as an outlet for their views, providing a voice and a medium to individuals who previously have struggled

both to find an audience and to feel that their views mattered to those in power, as indicated by the historically low political efficacy demonstrated by this demographic. In fact, two of the strongest positive associations of this study were between political SNS use and internal political efficacy (IPE), and IPE and political participation. In future research it would be worthwhile to investigate those linkages further as they may indicate an impact of SNS use separate from persuasion or information accrual benefits, such as political empowerment and political social capital building.

While there does seem to be some informational benefit to political social network use, the impact on political learning efficacy and knowledge are small. Perhaps most troubling is an examination of those who prefer social network sites for most of their political information: these individuals have the lowest political knowledge of any group, significantly less than the next group, newspaper readers (who may be over-reporting readership of the newspaper because it is a socially desirable action). While it may seem obvious that someone who uses SNSs exclusively for his or her political information might not be particularly politically engaged, and this may cause a lack of knowledge; the data do not support this. There was no significant difference in participation between the SNS-preferring and those preferring other media for their political information, only in knowledge.

Boulianne (2009) notes in her recent meta-analysis of studies examining the impact of the Internet on engagement that political interest should be controlled for in studies that consider engagement or participation. She found that studies that control for political interest found few significant effects of Internet use on engagement, but studies that do not control for this variable are more likely to find effects. Political interest was

not measured in this study, thus, this issue may be involved, as the effects found were relatively small. In future research regarding SNS use and engagement or PLE and engagement, this variable should be included.

In a positive finding, it seems that any use of political social networking is related to these small, but significant, increases in political knowledge, PLE, and participation. Both measures of social network site use for political purposes produced similar results, so it seems that just completing some of the simple actions included under SNSPolUse, such as supporting a candidate or cause, can either cause increases in information gathering or may lead to other actions that do. In future research, however, the two measures of use of SNS for political purposes should remain as separate scales, as they do not hold together well under exploratory factor analysis and have stronger alphas when treated as separate scales. From the low level of agreement with the SNSPolEngage items, it does seem that only small numbers were truly politically engaged in a social network setting.

Limitations

The limitations of this study lie first in the problems of self-report and social desirability. Voting and civic participation are actions that this group is strongly encouraged to take part in through a variety of sources in media, on campuses, at home, etc., but it has been shown that they do not participate as they should and this may be personally embarrassing. Previous studies have encountered relatively serious problems with self-report among this age group, but all possible steps were taken to minimize its effects here. Though the problem of social desirability cannot be completely eliminated, steps such as ensuring anonymity and value of honest responses, indicating that there is

no "right" answer, and urging participants to answer honestly, were taken (Oskamp & Schultz, 2005). Additionally, it was fairly obvious from the questions that this was a study looking for a connection between social networks and political outcomes; participants could have been primed to answer in a certain way, and participants may have been inclined to look up answers to the political knowledge items online.

Second, the sample for the main survey was purchased from a market research firm. While there are problems with all samples, these individuals likely have taken repeated surveys and some may know ways to quickly complete a survey without giving much consideration to the questions. This may have some impact on the variance of the scales used, as individuals could repeatedly be selecting one value as they head down the items making up a scale. In addition, as this is an online survey research firm, participants are likely to be Internet-savvy with few individuals who are just learning what resources are available on the Internet. As a result, levels of participation in online politics may be elevated due the online experience level of participants, though considering the extremely low online participation rates found, this seems unlikely.

Third, there was some error in some of the survey creation. As mentioned, the "none" was omitted from the participation scale, resulting in a lack of a zero-point for that variable. While this is a problem to be considered and resulted in what may be a slightly elevated participation variable, research conducted by Vitak et al. (2009) during the 2008 election found slightly higher political participation than this study did using the same scale and the same demographic, though all the participants in that study were current college students. Thus, the problem caused by this error may be minimal. In addition to the omission of this response category, in a later analysis of the pilot test data

it was noticed that PLE17 ("I am confident that I could ask an intelligent question during an election") had not been included in the non-media specific exploratory factor analysis (Table 2) that determined the PLE scale as administered in the final survey. Thus, it was left out of further data collection. When the factor analysis was redone after the survey had been completed, it was found that PLE17 loaded strongly with the four variables selected to make up PLE, and its addition bolstered the alpha for the scale. In future research, it should certainly be included.

<u>Implications for Campaigns</u>

The findings indicate that while social network sites can provide some value to users in the form of slightly increased political learning efficacy and political participation, they seem to be only a supplement to other sources of information. This may indicate that they are just another political communications tool in the arsenal of candidates, not quite the game-changing super weapon the media espoused. We have seen, in the years between the 2004 and 2008 elections, resistance to political candidate presence on SNS decrease and became accepted, even welcomed (Hayes, 2009; Utz, 2009; Vitak et al., 2009). We may be approaching a point where it has just become part of standard political practice to include a social media campaign in your strategy.

What was not tested here was affinity toward candidates who use social network sites. It has recently been shown that SNS may have some value in creating a connection between a candidate and the public (Utz, 2009). Perhaps the real value of political social network site use is by and large *social,* not entirely informational, as was put forth by this study. These sites were originally intended to provide a social connection between

individuals, and that may be reflected in the positive relationship between political trust and social network use for political purposes reflected in this data.

For candidates, this may be the most valuable take-home message. Having a viable presence on SNS is important, both for the need to look tech-savvy, but also to make a connection and build trust with your constituents and/or potential voters. It is so easy for the public to generalize all politicians as crooks, unresponsive, or, frankly, old and out of touch. Putting a human face to your public presence through social networks and generating an affinity, as Utz (2009) found, may help to defray the negative stereotypes associated with being a politician. Simply providing campaign information that an individual could find elsewhere online, is likely not going to help generate this feeling of affinity. Thus, the true social connectors that SNS do such a good job in promoting, such as alumni status, taste in music or books, and family photos and relationships, should be focused on by the candidate and his or her staff. In addition, SNSs give individual users a voice, an easy way to express themselves politically. This could be both a problem and an opportunity for candidates, as one needs to devote the resources to manage a feedback wall on an SNS, and if you don't have someone to manage the feedback, controlling what shows up on that wall while still providing access to supporters can be difficult. Still, if one can manage the wall and even provide responses to users, the chance to build affinity and additional support is even greater.

Conclusion

This study provides a significant contribution to an area where limited research exists, and provides a new construct for use in political communication research. It gives us a better picture of the effects of political social network site use, and has helped to

answer the question of whether young voters derive any value from them. It seems that they do have value informationally, but their true value may be in a more social sense than is fully examined here. The media hype over the potential of these sites should be tempered and they should be investigated further.

As Mark Twain might say, the reports of the death of traditional media among this demographic are greatly exaggerated. It is obvious that participants in this study still respect traditional media enough to report preferring them as news sources, even if they might not actually use them in them daily. As the traditional media evolves to include and integrate online techniques (even social networking), this demographic may increase their use of the content offered by traditional media outlets. Traditional media will fuse and partner with new media and there will be less distinction between the two.

While some may deride the presence of candidates on social network sites as pandering, this age group feels ignored and turned off by traditional communication methods, and SNSs seems to be a way for young people to form connections with candidates and issues. While their impact on political learning and participation may not be great, given the high usage rate of SNS among this demographic, there is still potential for SNSs to provide issue relevant information to young people in a manner that gives them an active voice, a chance to participate in their own way, and a way to build affinity with those seeking or in power. Their use in politics should be examined further as they become normal and accepted routes for communication between a candidate, potential voters, and constituents.

## FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

### I. Introduction (5 minutes)

We would like the discussion to be informal, so there's no need to wait for us to call on you to respond. In fact, we encourage you to respond directly to the comments other people make. If you don't understand a question, please let us know. We are here to ask questions, listen, and make sure everyone has a chance to share.

If we seem to be stuck on a topic, we may interrupt you and if you aren't saying much, we may call on you directly. If we do this, please don't feel bad about it; it's just our way of making sure we obtain everyone's perspective and opinion is included.

We do ask that we all keep each other's identities, participation and remarks private. We hope you'll feel free to speak openly and honestly.

As discussed, we will be tape recording the discussion, because we don't want to miss any of your comments. No one outside of this room will have access to these tapes and they will be deleted after our report is written.

Helping me is my assistant, Evan. He will be taking notes and be here to assist me if I need any help.

### II. Discussion Generation (50 minutes)

We are holding these groups to better understand how you gather political information and make political decisions, and if you feel like you have enough information to make a good decision. We are really interested in how you decided who to vote for in the 2008 election. I know this might be a little embarrassing to talk about, but even if you didn't vote, the reasons why are really, really important to us, so please speak freely, no one is judging you.

Let's get started!

Let's go around and introduce ourselves, just give me your first name and age, and then, to make things fun, tell me the first thing that comes to your mind when I say the word "Politics"

That was all really interesting. Tell me, how involved you all feel in the American political process?

Did that change with the last election? Did you feel the same way before the election?

What were candidates doing that helped you feel involved?

How did you all go about making a decision in the last election? You don't have to tell us your choice, just how you chose the best candidate for you?

*-(if online not mentioned):*

Did any of you use the Internet to find out more about candidates or issues?

*-(if online mentioned):*

You mentioned (YouTube, web sites, Facebook, whatever)-how did this site help you?

Did this site or similar sites help any of the rest of you?

*-(if SNS not mentioned):*

What about social network sites like Facebook and MySpace? Were you aware that the candidates were using them?

Did you ever see a friend interacting with a candidate on their news feed?

Did a friend ever try to get you to support a candidate on one of these sites?

What do you think of the candidates being on these sites?

Ok, slightly different topic-did you feel like you had enough information to make a good decision? Why or why not?

What could have helped you make a decision?

Did you ever discuss the election with friends?

Did that help you make your decision? Or did you try to persuade your friends?

Where you ever nervous or anxious about voting, especially with all the press about incorrect registrations and fraud?

Ok, and please answer this honestly, because it really helps us. Did you vote in 2008?

Why or why not? Again, it really helps us to be honest. Not everyone votes and it is really interesting to know why, even if it is just because you didn't feel like it.

*(depending on responses-gently pursue people who say they didn't know enough/didn't have enough info)*

What could candidates do to help people like you?

Thanks, everyone; that was really helpful. Do any of you have anything to add that I might have missed or you just thought of?

# APPENDIX B

## PILOT TEST MEASURES

*Political Knowledge:*
(Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1994)
Do you happen to know what job or political office is now held by Joe Biden?
Whose responsibility is it to determine if a law is constitutional or not...is it the president, the Congress or the Supreme Court?
How much of a majority is required for the U.S. Senate and House to override a presidential veto?
Which party is generally more conservative?

*Political Trust:*
(Miller, 1974)
How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right? (Just about always, Most of the time, Only some of the time)
Would you say the government is: (Pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves; Run for the benefit of all of the people)
Do you think that people in government: (Waste a lot of the money we pay in taxes; Waste some of it; Don't waste very much of it)
Do you feel that: (Almost all of the people running the government are smart people who usually know what they are doing; Or do you think quite a few of them don't seem to know what they are doing?)
Do you think that: (Quite a few of the people running the government are a little crooked; Not very many of them are; Hardly any of them are crooked)

*Political Cynicism:*
(Pinkleton, Um, and Austin, 2002)
"Politicians lose touch with the people once elected"; "candidates for office are only interested in peoples' votes, not in their opinions"; "too many politicians only serve themselves or special interests"; "it seems our government is run by a few big interests who are just looking out for themselves"; and "politicians lie to the media and the public."

*Opinion Leadership:*
(Shah and Scheufele, 2006)
"I have more self confidence than most of my friends"
"I like to be considered a leader,"
"I am the kind of person who knows what I want to accomplish in life and how to achieve it,"
"I am influential in my neighborhood." (modify for college kids)

*Political Uses of Social Networks*
(Vitak, Smock, Zube, Carr., Ellison, & Lampe, 2009)
In the past week, which of the following have you done in Facebook?

(Check all that apply).
Posted a status update that mentions politics
Joined or left a group about politics
Become a "fan" of a political candidate or group
Posted a Facebook Note that has something to do with politics
Posted a wall comment about politics
Posted a photo that has something to do with politics
Discussed political information in a Facebook message
Discussed political information using Facebook's instant messaging system
Added or deleted an application that deals with politics
Posted a link about politics
Took a quiz that is about politics
Posted a photo of myself or others at a political event
RSVPed for a political event
Added or deleted political information from my profile

# APPENDIX C

## FULL SURVEY

NOTE: Implemented through Zoomerang.com, appearance slightly different online

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this survey, it will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

Your honesty is highly valued, so please answer truthfully.

**(Political Learning Efficacy Scale Questions)**
Now, please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the statements that follow by recording a number from 0 to 10 using the scale below

| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| Strongly Disagree | | | | | Neutral | | | | | Strongly Agree |

*I am confident that I can learn about political issues if I want to

*I am confident that I know where to go to locate good political information

*I am confident that I can seek out information related to a political decision

*I am confident that I can understand most political information in general

I am confident that I can find trustworthy political information

I am confident that I can find accurate political information

(*PLE Scale)

**(Sources of Political Learning Efficacy)**

*(Vicarious Learning)*

I have friends who know where to find good political information

I have seen how my friends can find political information

*(Enactive Learning)*

If I don't find the political information I am looking for in one source, I try to find another source

If a political information source does not have all the information I need, I will visit their recommended sources of more information

If I like a source of information I am likely to come back to it repeatedly to see if there are updates

I am confident I can learn to use a variety of political information sources

*(Persuasion)*

My friends encourage me to find political information

My friends tell me that I should learn about the issues before I make a political decision

I have been persuaded by friends or family to find political information online

*(Affective State)*

Political information is somewhat intimidating to me

When I think about looking for political information, I get nervous

When I am looking for political information, I get nervous

*Extra items (just curious)*
My friends can help me make good political decisions

**(IPE/EPE/PIE)**

| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| Strongly Disagree | | | | | Neutral | | | | | Strongly Agree |

*(Internal Efficacy)*

I consider myself to be well qualified to participate in politics

I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country

I think that I am better informed about politics and government than most people

I feel that I could do as good a job in public office as most people

| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| Strongly Disagree | | | | | Neutral | | | | | Strongly Agree |

*(External Political Efficacy)*

People like me don't have any say about what the government does

I don't think public officials care much what people like me think

| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|

Strongly                              Neutral                              Strongly
Disagree                                                                    Agree

*(Political Information Efficacy Scale (Tedesco, 2007))*

I consider myself well-qualified to participate in politics

I feel I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country."

I think I am better informed about politics and government than most people

If a friend asked me about the presidential election, I feel I would have enough information to help my friend figure out who to vote for

**(PLE Predictors/Outcomes)**

Now, a slightly different format, please answer the following from the listed choices; don't be embarrassed if you don't know!

*(Political Knowledge)*

Do you happen to know what job or political office is now held by Joe Biden?
1. Secretary of State   2. Vice President   3. Senator   4. Governor   5. State Representative

Whose responsibility is it to determine if a law is constitutional or not?
1. The President  2. Congress  3. The Supreme Court?

How much of a majority is required for the U.S. Senate and House to override a presidential veto?
1. one half  2. three-quarters  3. two-thirds

Which party is generally more conservative?
1. Republicans  2. Democrats

Thank you so much for continuing this far, we are more than halfway done. Your continued accurate and honest answers are a huge help to us.

*(Opinion Leadership)*
Please rate your agreement with the following statements on the 11-point scale, below

| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| Strongly | | | | | Neutral | | | | | Strongly |
| Disagree | | | | | | | | | | Agree |

I have more self-confidence than most of my friends

I like to be considered a leader

I am the kind of person who knows what I want to accomplish in life and how to achieve it

I am influential in my group of friends

*(Political Participation)*
We are interested in your actions during the 2008 election season. This is a list of some things people do regarding government and politics, please let us know if you have done any of the following in the past year (Check all that apply)

Watched a 2008 election debate on television
Watched a 2008 election debate (clips or entirety) on the Internet
Signed an online or paper petition
Attended a public meeting on town or school affairs
Wrote my congressional representative or senator
Served as an officer of a club or organization
Wrote a letter to the newspaper regarding a political issue
Volunteered or worked for a political organization or candidate
Held or ran for political office (including student government)
Posted comments on a political blog or political website
"Friended" a candidate online

**(Social Networking Site Use)**
Some final questions...

Are you member of a social networking site like Facebook or MySpace?
Yes  No

Which social networking site do you use for MOST of your online social networking?
Facebook  MySpace  Both  Other

How many times do you visit your favored site per week?
0-2 times

3-5 times
6-10 times
More than 10 times

How much time do you spend on your favored site each time you visit?
1-30 minutes
30 minutes-1 hour
1-2 hours
More than 2 hours

Have you ever visited the social networking site profile of a political candidate?
Yes  No

Have you ever joined a political group on a social networking site?
Yes  No

Have you ever become a friend or a supporter of a political candidate on a social networking site?
Yes  No

Have you ever become a supporter of a political causes on a social networking site?
Yes  No

Have you ever noticed a friend becoming a supporter or fan of a political candidate or cause on a social networking site?
Yes  No

Please indicate your agreement with the following statements

| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly Disagree | | | | | Neutral | | | | | Strongly Agree |

I use social networking sites to share political information with my friends

I have participated in "real world" political activities (like attending a rally or meeting) because I heard about them on a social networking site

I was more likely to vote because of political or candidate information I saw on a social networking site

I still check out or participate in political groups I joined during the 2008 election on social networking sites

I was more interested in the 2008 election because of information I received on social networking sites

I use/have used social networking sites to share my political views with others

I have found additional sources of political information through social networking sites


In the past month, which of the following activities have you done on a social networking site? (check all that apply)

Posted a status update that mentions something political
Joined or left a political group
Become a fan or supporter of a candidate or cause
Added an application or bumper sticker that mentions politics
Took a quiz about politics
Posted a wall comment about politics
Discussed politics in a message
Posted a link about politics
Added or deleted political information from my profile
None

Which news/information sources do you use for information? (check all that you use)

Newspaper
Televised news
Online news sites (CNN, FoxNews, MSNBC, etc)
Political blogs (Politico, Wonkette, Drudge Report, etc)
Social networking sites (Facebook, MySpace, etc)
Radio (NPR, talk radio)
Other, please specify

Of these news and information sources, which do you use most often? (select one)
Newspaper
Televised news
Online news sites (CNN, FoxNews, MSNBC, etc)
Political blogs (Politico, Wonkette, Drudge Report, etc)
Social networking sites (Facebook, MySpace, etc)
Radio (NPR, talk radio)
Other, please specify

Finally, just a few personal questions

Were you eligible to vote in the 2008 Presidential Election?
Yes  No

People don't vote for a variety of reasons.  Were you able to vote in the 2008 Presidential Election?
Yes  No

What is your gender?
Male    Female  Prefer not to say

What is your age?

What is your ethnicity?

African American   Asian  Caucasian  Native American  Pacific Islander   Hispanic or
Latino Other, please specify

What is your educational level?

Some High School
High School
Some College
2-year Degree (Associates)
4-year Degree (Bachelors)
Graduate Degree

In general, do you consider yourself a

Republican   Democrat   Independent  Green  Don't know

Thank you so much for participating!

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