CAN POLITICAL CANDIDATES USE FACEBOOK TO INFLUENCE REAL WORLD

OUTCOMES? AN ANALYSIS OF USES AND GRATIFICATIONS NEEDS,

ONLINE PARTICIPATION AND OFFLINE OUTCOMES

ON CANDIDATE'S FACEBOOK PAGES

by

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ABSTRACT

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Facebook pages are becoming an ever-increasing way to market and promote people, products and ideas on social media. This thesis explores whether or not political candidate's Facebook pages can influence real world offline outcomes. In this study the uses and gratifications theory is applied to explain the needs satisfied when users interact with a political candidate's pages to determine if online participation can be predicted based on those needs. Additionally, this study examines the relationship between online participation and offline participation with the candidate's campaign. This study lays the groundwork for future research to test how online participation can influence specific offline participation related to the goals of the candidate's Facebook page. The results show a relationship between the needs satisfied by political candidate's Facebook pages and different levels of online participation as well as a relationship between online participation and offline participation.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Social networking websites, like Facebook, provide opportunities for users to share information about their personalities, activities, and their location with their friends, the community at-large, and depending upon their privacy settings, the entire world.

Facebook's monthly active users now exceed 800 million and their daily active users, exceeds 400 million (Facebook a, 2012). There is no doubt that the social networking site plays an important role in people's lives.

According to Facebook, the average user creates 90 pieces of content a month, is connected to 80 community pages, groups and events, and has access to more than 30 billion pieces of content (web links, news stories, blog posts, notes, photo albums, etc.) each month (Facebook a, 2010).

The implications of the number of users and the volume of content being created and shared provides great opportunities for brand managers, businesses, non-profit organizations, artists, and political candidates to connect with audiences in a more interactive form of brand management than traditional integrated marketing communication (IMC) tools allow.

Pages are an important feature of Facebook and are integral to their business plan, and include celebrities, sports franchises, corporate bands, small business, educational institutions, non-profits, entertainers, elected officials, and political candidates. Users can 'like' a page, which is an interactive feature of Facebook that shows support or agreement with content posted on the site. Facebook's 2012 SEC filings report that as of December 2011 there are more than 37 million pages with ten or more likes (Securities and Exchange Commission

Facebook Registration Statement, 2012).   The largest Facebook pages top 50 million likes. Lady Gaga, Justin Bieber, and Coca Cola top 40 million likes. At the time of this writing, Barack Obama's page has more than 25 million likes placing him at the top of the political candidate heap and ranked as the 49th most liked Facebook page (Socialbakers.com Facebook Page Rankings, 2012).

Beginning in 2006, when Facebook added politician pages for Congressional and gubernatorial candidates, campaign managers were given the ability to reach out to Facebook users, with little or no costs, making Facebook an important campaign strategy. In the 2008 presidential election, the McCain, Hillary Clinton, and Obama campaigns used social media in a way that was intended to inform and mobilize supporters to vote and donate money (Dalsgaard, 2008).

1.1 Politics on Facebook

The advent of political mobilization on Facebook made sense both for the company and users. The constant sharing of ideas among users has been likened to a virtual public forum, and social networking sites are capable of spawning interest in politics and current events, (Putnam, 2000). Social networking sites have been touted for their ability to mobilize users behind issues and have been likened to a public sphere. The public sphere is a physical or conceptual space where public discourse can occur free from the fear of political persecution and is a cornerstone of democratic society.

Online public spheres have been studied for their ability to encourage discourse and their ability to affect policy at all levels of government (Auer, 2011). Politics and political issues on Facebook know no boundaries either, even their impact at the local bureaucratic level have been explored for their ability to create these online public spheres for discourse and citizen engagement (Hand & Ching, 2011).   Content analysis of patterns of Facebook wall posts during the 2008 presidential election further support that the website serves as a public sphere, well-suited for political discourse (Daalsgard,2008).

It is no surprise then that political campaigns got into the action, as Daalsgard (2008) explained. In 2008, political campaigns across the country created official "fan pages" for their candidates or auxiliary groups. These pages provided content about the campaign's activities, about who the candidate was, what he/she was doing, and informing the public about the candidate's stance on policy issues.

Some candidates garnered large followings. For example, Barack Obama's campaign page became the largest Facebook page on the network during the 2008 election (Facebook a, 2010). By the 2010 midterm election online campaign presences were firmly ensconced in the political process.

During the 2010 gubernatorial race in Texas, the two central candidates amassed more than 203,000 fans on their two pages. Bill White had more than 153,000 fans and Rick Perry had more than 50,000 fans (Facebook b & Facebook c, 2010). However, Rick Perry was reelected Governor of Texas with 54.97% of the vote over Bill White who garnered only 42.29% (Texas Election Results, 2010), in spite of White having amassed triple the number of Facebook fans as Perry.

Today on Facebook, Barack Obama outdistances his closest rival, Mitt Romney, by more than 24 million likes, while early polls provide mixed information about who is more likely to win the White House in 2012.

Despite the importance of Facebook pages, both to Facebook's business model and the millions of users who like pages, little is known about how users interact with pages, why they interact with them, and if there are any offline effects of that interaction. The goal of this study is to begin exploring those relationships by specifically examining political candidate's pages.

Political campaign managers, generally assume that social media can affect the election in a tangible way, despite a lack of empirical evidence (Grossman, 2009). However, even in the face of a lack of empirical evidence that Facebook can impact elections, political

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campaigns continue to make social media operations like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube a critical part of their strategy.

To bridge existing research void and address practical concerns, this study examines how users interact with political candidate's pages and examines the outcomes of that usage in order to provide empirical justification for the continued use of Facebook pages by political candidates' campaigns.

1.2 Research Goals

This study was undertaken with two clear goals. The first goal is to examine the antecedents of online participation on a candidate's Facebook page. In other words, why are users engaging with these pages and do these reasons have any bearing on the kinds of online participation?

The second goal investigates online participation and its relationship to outcome variables that might be expected by campaign managers. In other words, if users are participating online, does any relationship exist between what happens online and what happens offline, in the real world, that could influence the election?

To that end, this study uses and extends Uses and Gratifications theory to explain users' variability in online behaviors with a candidate's Facebook page, and poses research questions to study the effects of online participation with a candidate's page on their offline political participation and their intent to vote for the candidate.

To test the hypotheses and research questions, this study collected survey data from Facebook users who like political candidates' pages. The study proposes a conceptual model that explains the antecedents and anticipated outcomes of online participation.

1.3 Research Value

Facebook's usage among political campaigns is extensive and shows no signs of slowing. A candidate's Facebook page is as tightly crafted as their webpage. The value of a study such as this is to provide empirical data related to the usage of candidate's pages, the

kinds of online participation that exist, and initial statistical testing of the relationships between the two. Secondly, this study will go an extra step in trying to show there is a relationship between online participation and specific offline outcomes.

In considering the value of this study there are tangible factors of importance for both practitioners of social media and academic researchers concerned with what impact social networking sites have on communication and human behavior. From a practitioner's standpoint understanding the antecedents to online participation can help social media managers create content that drives users to participate online by meeting their expectations, while working to increase the influences of any relationships that may exist between online participation and offline outcomes. From an academic standpoint the goal is to uncover evidence that online participation can impact the offline world in a tangible and measureable way that is specifically related to the online participation. From a theoretical standpoint the project extends the uses and gratifications theory into social media by exploring another form of media that can be explained by evaluating the needs of users. Furthermore, the exploration of the relationship between online participation and offline participation provide new insight into how social media can impact human communication.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Studies regarding social media and political campaigns, much like the actual tools, are still in their early stages. The relative youth of social networking sites mean there is not a rich history of academic research on the role the medium can play in political campaigns. There is a lack of cogent theories related to Facebook pages and offline effects, so the work here will suggests a logical extension with which to begin examining offline effects of participation on Facebook pages. While additional research is limited, there have been some relevant studies related to the topic. Before examining the literature regarding the antecedents and outcomes of online participation, a general understanding of social media studies and political engagement will be a helpful foundation.

2.1 Growth of Social Media Usage

There are some studies that show the role social media managers and social media presences play in engaging online audiences. These are largely related to the advancing adoption rate of social media by brand or campaign managers in recent years and how non-profits use social media.

The adoption of a social media presence is increasing among profit and non-profit companies (Eyrich, Padman & Sweetser, 2008; Curtis, Edwards, Fraser, Gudelsky, Holmquist, Thornton & Sweetser, 2010). Even though many non-profits are making the jump to social media according to a content analysis of 275 non-profit Facebook pages, their usage is limited to disclosing basic information, while information dissemination and engagement of users were less widely used (Waters, Burnett, Lamm & Lucas, 2009). Furthermore, while some Facebook

pages may engage users, research also shows local government pages also fail to encourage true online citizen engagement with their pages (Hand & Chin, 2011), similarly to their non-profit counterparts.

Much of the current literature examines strategies for engaging users and the ways in which those strategies can benefit brand managers or public relations managers (Waters, et al., 2009; Taylor & Kent, 2010). Spaeth (2005, 2009) specifically examines emerging technologies, message production and public relations in presidential politics concluding that both medium and message impact the way candidates are perceived and campaigns operate, thus she recommends careful attention be paid to engaging constituents online.

It is also important to clarify some of the terminology associated with Facebook's page application. Simply, a page is a variation of the user profile available made available to organizations. Pages are the evolution of the fan page concept, with Facebook dropping the "fan" moniker in 2009. Furthermore, Facebook replaced the act of "becoming a fan," with the term 'like." Likes and fans are still often used interchangeably by Facebook users and page operators, and should be treated interchangeably in this text. The "like" button replaced the "become a fan" button to bring this functionality more in line with Facebook's concept of liking status posts, photos, comments, and other content on the site.

Pages are categorized by type and include consumer brands, musicians, celebrities, companies, non-profits, and of course political candidates or campaigns. There are many types of pages available, but these always remain separate from user's personal profile.

Lastly, the page has undergone numerous redesigns, the most recent on March 30, 2012. Facebook moved pages to the new timeline layout. Timeline layout had been rolled out for user profiles in 2011. The timeline layout also saw the deprecation of the use of the term "wall" on Facebook. Because the timeline layout was introduced for pages during data collection for this study you may also see timeline and wall used interchangeably.

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2.2 Political Engagement

Political engagement from a campaign manager's standpoint relates to two key components, voter mobilization and campaign participation (Dale & Strauss, 2009; Michelson, Bedolla & McConnell, 2009; Campbell & Kwak, 2010; Gillespie, 2010). Voter mobilization is often measured either by actual voter turnout or through the intent to vote.

Campaign participation refers to the level of engagement a potential voter has with the campaign, either through volunteer work or participation in their events. Evidence shows that campaign activities like door-to-door canvassing (Gillespie, 2010) or phone-banking (Michelson, et al., 2009) can impact voter turnout or intent to vote. From a practical standpoint, campaign managers have long engaged in mobilizing supporters in the hopes to strengthen their intent to vote and to help the campaign spread that message to other potential supporters.

In modern political campaigns, technology has played a significant role in helping to mobilize voters. Primacy and recency are key components in voter mobilization (Panagopouluos, 2011). Primacy refers to the salience of the issue or candidate to a potential voter. Recency refers to the time component surrounding the act of voting, suggesting that time impacts the effectiveness of a message or call to action and messages received more recently have a stronger impact, especially closer to the election. Previous research suggests that communication technologies can impact primacy and recency more directly because communication technology enables campaign staff to target messages to specific users (influencing primacy) and to bridge time/distance (influencing recency) more effectively (Panagopoulous, 2011; Dale & Strauss, 2009; Michelson, et al., 2009).

Political organizations have been quick to adopt technological tools to increase political engagement including social media, phone calls, and text messaging (Dale & Strauss, 2009; Michelson, et al., 2009). Phone banking is a popular campaign technique that relies on technology and has been shown to have an effect on voter response (Michelson, et al, 2009).

In addition, there is a relationship between mobile technology usage and civic and political engagement (Campbell & Kwak, 2010). Some social media studies have examined different ways social networking sites can affect voter mobilization and campaign participation such as alternative (non-campaign) communication channels and post traffic on social networking sites with mixed results (Gueorguieva, 2008; Robertson, Vatrapu & Medina, 2010)

With a basic understanding of social media usage and the concepts of voter mobilization, it is possible to begin building a conceptual model that explains the antecedents and outcomes of online participation Facebook candidates' pages.

To understand the antecedents of online participation it is necessary to examine why users engage with candidate's pages in the first place. The theoretical mechanisms that drive online participation must be examined in order to help explain how the antecedents impact online participation behaviors. This study utilizes and extends Uses and Gratifications theory to understand what factors lead to users' online participation on political candidates' pages. This mass media theory explains why users make certain choices related to choosing media, making it well-suited to explain the mechanisms at work in this topic.

2.3 Uses and Gratifications Theory

Uses and Gratifications theory is often used to determine why people choose to use specific media and has been previously applied to explain the usage of computer mediated communication and social media (Kaye & Johnson, 2002; Ancu & Cozma, 2009; Leung, 2009; Parke, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009).

Uses and Gratifications theory states that media users are active in choosing and using different types of media for different reasons (Blumler & Katz, 1974). There are five basic tenets and assumptions of the theory: audiences are active in their media choice; audiences' choices are goal-driven; media choices fill multiple needs; audiences are aware of their needs when choosing; and the needs are specifically related to a specific media (McLeod & Becker, 1981).

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Blumler & Katz (1974) determined that users are goal-oriented in selecting media by choosing sources to fulfill their needs, assuming alternatives exist. Uses or needs for choosing media were broken into five categories by Katz, Gurevitch, & Haas (1973). This theory can be used to explain which needs drive users to participate online with political candidate Facebook pages.

According to this schema, people choose a medium based on cognitive needs to acquire information or knowledge; affective needs to satisfy emotions or feelings, personal integrative needs to enhance personal status or credibility; social integrative needs in order to connect with family, friends or to meet like-minded people; and tension release needs to escape or have their attention diverted (Katz, et al., 1973). It is from this schema that the operational definitions for the uses and gratifications for this study were derived.

Other researchers have identified other categories of needs based on the media type they study. Uses and gratifications theory has been applied to traditional media like newspapers, magazines and television beginning in the 1970s (Ruggiero, 2000), with much of the seminal work applied to traditional media (Armstrong & McAdams, 2011). More recently the theory has been applied to computer mediated communication including the internet and websites. These researchers often create their own categories of needs by assessing respondent's answers to series of statements and applying factor analysis with a varimax rotation (Kaye & Johnson, 2002; Bonds-Racke & Racke, 2010; Park, et al., 2009). These new schema of categories still relate to the schema proposed by Katz et al.

For simplicity, this study will uses four of the five needs proposed by Katz et al. (1973), cognitive needs, affective needs, social integrative needs and personal integrative needs. These needs are well suited to describing why people would use Facebook political candidates' fan pages and eliminated the need to create categories specific to this study using factor analysis.

2.4 The Four Uses and Gratification Needs

Cognitive needs relate to the acquisition of knowledge or information. A quick look at any candidate's page will show these sites are rich in information about the candidate, events, activities, issues, and other campaign related information. Information is released continuously and aggregated on the page's timeline. Users motivated by cognitive needs would have no shortage of content available.

Affective needs relate to the satisfaction of feelings or emotions. Users looking for a sense of belonging or who have emotional attachments to political candidates, particular issues, or the campaign may feel satisfied by their connection to and participation on these pages. For example, a user may participate online because they feel an emotional connection to the candidate that motivates their online participation.

Personal integrative needs relate to enhancing personal status or credibility. The opportunity to create content by sharing their thoughts and opinions on particular issues would resonate with a user motivated by personal integrative needs. Users satisfying this need may also participate more frequently because they enjoy the status they receive from being participants in online discussions or in order to serve in a role as a subject matter expert within their own social network. These needs could further be enhanced if the candidate acknowledged this users participation publicly on the page.

Social integrative needs are satisfied by connecting with friends, family or other like-minded individuals. The social nature of websites like Facebook, are designed to meet the needs of these kinds of users. Users may participate because their friends and family are participating or they may be looking to meet new people.

Tension release needs will not be considered in this study. This need is often identified by either a need to escape reality or to be entertained. Those ideas are not well-suited for this study and so the tension release need will be eliminated from consideration for two reasons.

First, the concept of escapism does not match well with the public nature of Facebook usage. Facebook's default privacy settings make all of the online participation behaviors examined in this study public to everyone in your Facebook networks. In this sense, the idea of using Facebook political pages to escape reality is mitigated by the fact that everyone within a user's network can see how they are interacting with the page unless they have made specific adjustments to their privacy settings. The public nature of social networking sites is starkly different from other mediums. For example, watching television may be motivated by a user's tension release need, but the television, at least for now, doesn't notify everyone in a user's network when they watch television or what they were watching.

Secondly, needs related to entertainment purposes are often classified as tension release needs. Content consumption and creation on social networking sites are meant to be shared with the user's friends and networks and opportunities for sharing information are either threaded through every piece of content or set by default to be shared automatically. Users may find these activities enjoyable, but this enjoyment cannot really be separated from the social features that are tightly integrated into the way people use Facebook. Furthermore, users who simply enjoy content about political candidates or campaigns would not likely choose a social networking site to find this content over other online or offline sources. For these reasons, it will be assumed that users who enjoy using Facebook political candidates' pages do so in ways that relate more precisely to the other needs. For example, users may enjoy learning about the candidate's activities which would satisfy a cognitive need or they may enjoy connecting with other supporters which would satisfy a social integrative need.

The foundational studies in uses and gratifications literature have led to the operational definitions of the needs described above. As previously stated, many studies that apply uses and gratifications theory adapt the framework to meet the operation needs of their individual studies. As other studies are examined it should be noted the categories of needs and gratifications identified by other researchers will not exactly match the operational definitions for

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this study. In those cases, care has been taken to show how the operational definitions for those studies relate to the operational definitions for this study.

<div align="center">2.5 Uses and Gratifications and the Internet</div>

Uses and Gratifications theory has been applied to the internet and political communication. These studies are relevant to justify applying the theory to this project, specifically because there is a resurgence of the application of this theory with new media (Ruggiero, 2000). New media, especially internet-based media, requires a deliberately active audience (Ruggiero, 2000) and navigating the web requires users to be specifically goal-directed (Lin & Jeffres, 1998). The theory has been applied to websites, blogs, discussion boards and other social media websites like YouTube. Additionally, these studies have examined political topics or tried to measure political outcomes.

Kaye & Johnson (2002) studied users of political information sites to determine the uses and gratifications for using these sites and to measure their intent to vote. This study showed significant correlations exist between the uses and gratifications and interest in politics, strength of party support, likelihood of voting, self-efficacy and trust in politics (Kaye & Johnson, 2002).

The study also examined the strength of the predictive relationship between self-efficacy and the uses and gratifications for using the web for political information. By using a factor analysis of 16 statements, four factors behind using the internet for political information were identified: guidance, information/surveillance, entertainment, and social utility (Kaye & Johnson, 2002).

The results showed the strongest motivations for using online political information sites were linked to seeking guidance about who to vote for and issue and information gathering versus entertainment (Kaye & Johnson, 2002). These findings best relate to the cognitive needs discussed earlier, even though Kaye & Johnson (2002) chose to alter the category names of gratifications described by Katz, et al. (1973) to better fit their study.

Kaye and Johnson (2002) determined that the web was a viable source of political information for users with cognitive or information gathering needs, which extended the uses and gratifications theory to online media.

Several studies have extended the reach of the theory further by applying them to blogs. Blogs are websites where individuals publish their opinions, ideas, or information on a regular basis. In addition to clarifying the uses and gratifications needs for reading political blogs, studies have looked for a link between consuming that content and voting behaviors (Eveland & Dylko, 2007; DeZuniga, Puig-I-Abril, & Rojas, 2009). Users who read blogs related to online political discussions are more likely to vote that non-readers (Lewis, 2011).

Uses and Gratifications theory has also been applied to explain online participation and behaviors on the video website YouTube. Cognitive needs influence private viewing of videos, but entertainment needs and social needs influence sharing videos and co-viewing (Haridakis & Hanson, 2009).

Previous research also examined online participation in terms of content creation like wall posts, link sharing, commenting, and likes. Studies show that psychological empowerment associated with creating content on social media sites is related to both the uses and gratifications and the offline participation of users in civic and political processes (Leung, 2009).

Online content creation was motivated by needs for recognition, cognitive, social and entertainment and a correlation existed between all the uses and gratifications and content creation (Leung, 2009). Leung's results showed that, the greater recognition and social needs were gratified, the more content a user would create (2009). In Leung's study, user-generated content was measured in time per day spent on content creating activities like personal webpages, blogs, forums, posting videos on YouTube and contributing information on Wikipedia (2009). Although Facebook content was not measured specifically, similar assumptions can be

drawn about the satisfaction of personal integrative and social integrative needs through creating content on Facebook.

In fact, many of these studies provide support for the extension of the uses and gratification theory to explain online political content, online participation and offline outcomes that are germane to this study.

<u>2.6 Uses and Gratifications and Facebook</u>

Specific studies that apply uses and gratifications theory to Facebook and other social media are newer and the research is still emerging, but there are several relevant studies that attempt to explain why people use social networking sites. Fewer specifically related to offline political outcomes.

General research has identified uses and gratifications needs for using social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace. These needs include an information dimension, a friend dimension, and connection dimension (Bonds-Racke & Racke 2009). These categories were identified through a factor analysis and varimax rotation of 59 statements about why people use social networking sites (Bonds-Racke & Racke 2009). The dimensions from the general study are still easily related to the cognitive, social-integrative, and affective needs outlined earlier.

Park, et al., (2009) studied the usage of Facebook groups among college students to determine the uses and gratifications for using groups and their impact on civic and political engagement. Groups are another feature of Facebook, separate from pages or user profiles. This research showed the highest uses and gratifications that motivated Facebook group usage were to satisfy social and entertainment needs (Park, et al., 2009). While Park et al (2009) didn't use the same category names for uses and gratifications, their research supports previous studies.

They further found when the uses and gratifications for using Facebook groups were for informational purposes (cognitive needs) versus recreational (tension release needs) or meeting

new people (social integrative needs) there was a stronger correlation to offline civic and political engagement (Park, et al., 2009). The research also showed significant correlations between users' demographics and their gratifications (Park, et al., 2009). The study used a factor analysis to determine Facebook group uses and gratifications. The results of the Park, et al. study provide strong support for the application of uses and gratification to this study because although the civic and political engagement was not related specifically to the Facebook group content, it did measure offline outcomes.

Uses and Gratifications theory has also been applied to explain why people befriend political candidates. Ancu & Cozma (2009) discovered that social needs accounted for the largest need for befriending political candidates on MySpace in the 2008 presidential primary campaigns. This study also used a factor analysis to determine uses and gratifications for befriending candidates. While it dealt specifically with MySpace, there were similarities in the functionality of the two sites during the 2008 election.

Uses and gratifications theory has been applied to Facebook generally to assess reasons for usage have also examined other political variables like political cynicism, of which Facebook is not a significant contributor (Haridakis, Wagstaff Cunningham, Sharma, & Ponder, 2010).

2.7 Uses and Gratifications Needs and Online Participation

Based on the literature review, it should be possible to not only determine the kinds of needs that are satisfied by using a candidate's page, but it should also be possible to predict how those needs will affect the type of online participation. Uses and gratifications theory requires users to be actively engaged in their media choice, which previous research extends to social media users.

The previous literature does not make distinctions among variations of online participation, but online participation on Facebook consists of many activities of varying levels of interactivity. Therefore, this study logically extends uses and gratifications theory to

operationalize two categories of online participation. The specific feature set of Facebook and Facebook pages led to the operationalization of participation into two categories: active and passive participation.

Passive online participation requires minimal participation or interaction from the user. It lacks the interactivity and social aspect of online participation associated with the concepts of Web 2.0. Content consumption behaviors like reading posts, notes, or other written information, viewing photos or watching videos would be classified as passive online participation.

In contrast, active online participation is more interactive and social. The behaviors associated with active online participation would be commenting on posts, sharing posts authored by the Facebook page, or composing posts in support of the candidate that appear either on the Facebook page's wall or on their personal profile.

It is important to understand that passive and active online participation are not exclusive categories of users' behaviors on Facebook and other social media, but rather two independent dimensions for describing users' behaviors and participation online. It is possible, even likely, for users to exhibit both active and passive behaviors with varying frequency.

Furthermore, it is important not to confuse the designations of active and passive online participation with the concept that audiences must be active in choosing a type of media. Even users engaged in passive online participation behaviors have still made a distinct choice to use the media, thus satisfying the core assumptions of the uses and gratifications theory. It is only helpful for this study to categorize online participation because of the specific feature set of Facebook.

2.8 Hypothesis Development for Online Participation

Cognitive and affective needs are more individualistic and should be satisfied simply by being a content consumer and exhibiting passive online participation. Active online participation behaviors like commenting or posting can facilitate the satisfaction of cognitive and affective

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needs, but those activities are not explicitly required to satisfy them. Simply put, it is possible to satisfy cognitive and affective needs exclusively by reading or looking at content online with minimal interaction with a candidate's page, which has been operationalized as passive online participation.

On the other hand, personal integrative and social integrative needs are more social in nature and require behaviors that are more interactive. In the satisfaction of those needs content creation behaviors like commenting on posts or creating their own posts intended to stimulate conversation would be required to fully meet users' needs.

The uses and gratifications being sought by users will determine the significance of the relationship between each gratification and the type of online participation. The predictions are illustrated in the hypotheses below.

Hypothesis 1: The more users visit a political candidate's Facebook page for social integrative needs, the more frequently they will engage in active online participation on that page.

Hypothesis 2: The more users visit a political candidate's Facebook page for personal integrative needs, the more frequently they will engage in active online participation on that page.

Hypothesis 3: The more users visit a political candidate's Facebook page for cognitive needs, the more frequently they will engage in passive online participation on that page.

Hypothesis 4: The more users visit a political candidate's Facebook page for affective needs, the more frequently they will engage in passive online participation on that page.

Based on the previous research and the predictions made in the above hypotheses, it is also possible to develop a conceptual model that explains the relationship between uses and gratifications needs and online participation in two dimensions: active and passive. This model explains the first phase of the issues addressed by this study.

U/G Needs   Online Participation on Facebook

```
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│ Social Integrative Needs (H1)        │
│                                      │
│ Personal Integrative Needs H2)       │──────────────▶      Active Participation
│                                      │        +
└─────────────────────────────────────┘

┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│ Cognitive Needs (H3)                 │                     Passive
│                                      │──────────────▶
│ Affective Needs (H4)                 │                     Participation
│                                      │        +
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
```
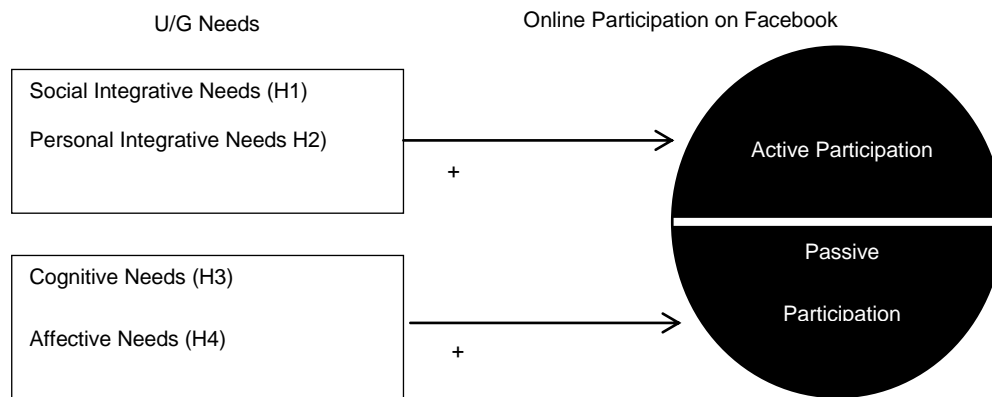
Figure 2.1 Uses and Gratifications Needs Influence over Online Participation. A conceptual model of antecedents to candidate's page usage and outcomes of users' needs on online participation.

2.9 Facebook and Offline Political Participation

There is limited support in the literature for using online media and Facebook usage to predict offline outcomes like political participation. There has been a call to examine how certain online behaviors can influence offline political activities (Dahlgren, 2005).

Two relevant studies that tie online participation to offline political participation support the link between online participation and offline participation that this project makes.

Evidence supports the idea that online participation in politically radical discussion groups was a significant predictor of offline political activities like volunteering and fundraising (Wojcieszak, 2009).

Another study of Facebook users found online participation in the 2008 election was highly correlated to offline participation (Vitak, et al. 2011). Political activities on Facebook like writing political status posts or posting a political message on another users wall were correlated to 12-point index of general political participation that include activities like watching a debate, attending an event or meeting, writing a letter to the editor of a newspaper.

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2.10 Facebook Pages as Persuasive Communication

As some of the studies above illustrated, user participation can extend beyond Facebook into the real world. Campaign managers actively work to convince supporters to participate offline through various behaviors and by encouraging them to vote. The purpose for creating and managing a social media presence for political campaigns is to help persuade people to engage in offline political participation and impact their intent to vote for the candidate.

The persuasive messages that occur on candidate's pages are meant to encourage online participation, offline participation, and intent to vote depending upon the specific message.

These pages use many different persuasive techniques. Individual messages may be for informational purposes or building relationships, however when the messages are considered in aggregate, the goal of the sum of all this communication is to persuade users to support the candidate.

This study assumes that candidate's pages primary concern is persuading people to support the candidate and to vote for the candidate. That support can be expressed through offline participation and intent to vote. While a full content analysis of these pages was not undertaken, a cursory examination of the kind of content supports this assumption.

For example, some sample posts include appeals for donations like, "We now know Mitt Romney's our opponent—and President Obama needs you on his side. Chip in $3 today," (Facebook d, 2012).

Another example encourages users to share information with their friends on Facebook like "Share this to make sure your friends know exactly what Mitt Romney would do as president—and what pieces of our progress he'd roll back [sic image]," (Facebook d, 2012).

Political candidates often use their pages to encourage people to take offline action, like reminding people about elections or to vote. Mitt Romney's campaign posted a link to find their

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polling places in Alabama, Mississippi, and Hawaii (Facebook e, 2012). Ron Paul not only reminded supporters in Super Tuesday states to vote, but also encouraged them to volunteer.

"Please remember to vote today if you are in a super Tuesday state. Please encourage your friends and family to vote as well. If you have already encouraged your friends and family, please consider making phone calls today. http://phone.ronpaul2012.com," (Facebook f, 2012).

In addition to these direct appeals, candidate's pages also post campaign videos, information about issues, and other persuasive information that is supportive of the campaign and/or critical of their opponents.

Candidates are actively trying to persuade users. The above messages utilize various persuasive techniques. The logical assumption is to conclude that these messages are meant to affect users and influence their attitudes, opinions and behaviors, which this study operationalizes as offline participation and intent to vote.

When studying the effect of persuasive messages on people, communication scholars typically focus on how individual messages are processed. In this study, it was not feasible to study the effects of how individual messages are processed. Rather, it assumes that these persuasive messages do affect the user, related to their online participation (i.e., their interaction and exposure to these message), thus providing a key linkage between online participation and offline participation.

Many of the uses and gratifications studies examined earlier have identified relationships generally between online participation and general offline participation. In addition to the above mentioned extension of uses and gratifications theory, there could be other possible theoretical explanations.

One possible explanation, the Elaboration Likelihood Model explains the information processing of persuasive messages based on motivation and ability (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986)

and can be used as the theoretical framework to explain how exposure to persuasive messages online could affect offline participation and intent to vote.

ELM explains that motivation, defined as the personal relevance of a topic to someone, and the ability to process messages free from interference, determine how critically persuasive messages will be processed (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Petty & Cacioppo (1986) determined that high motivation and ability lead to centrally processed messages, messages that are processed using critical thinking skills, which lead to a higher likelihood of attitude, opinion and behavior change. It might logically be assumed that online participation, as operationalized for this study, might lead to central processing that would impact offline participation and studies have linked ELM to offline participation through online shopping (Lin, et al. 2011).

ELM represents a possible theoretical explanation, but testing motivation, ability and the processing routes of messages in this study was not possible.

Without an explicit theoretical framework to help explain whether or not a relationship should exist between online participation and offline participation, this project proposes two research questions to investigate the relationship between these variables.

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between online participation and offline participation?

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between online participation and a user's intent to vote?

By examining any linkages between online participation and offline participation and intent to vote, data may become available that could help identify theoretical explanations for any relationships that are discovered.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD AND ANALYSIS

This study employed a quantitative approach to test the proposed hypotheses. Survey data was collected from respondents about the uses and gratifications satisfied by visiting candidate's Facebook pages, their online participation, their offline participation, and their intent to vote for the candidate in the election.

3.1 Sample and Procedure

Data for this study was collected from purposive sample of 67 Facebook users who stated they liked a political candidate's Facebook page. A total of 122 users began the survey, but only 70 were qualified based on their relationship with a political candidate's Facebook page. Survey respondents were recruited from the 2012 presidential candidate's official Facebook pages and through users sharing the survey link on Facebook. Posts advertising the survey were placed on Ron Paul, Herman Cain, Newt Gingrich, Jon Huntsman Jr., and Rick Perry's Facebook pages. Rick Santorum, Mitt Romney, and Barack Obama's pages did not allow wall posts from users.

55.6% of the respondents were male, 61.7% had at least a bachelor's degree, and 81% indicated they were very proficient at using Facebook. Respondents had an average age of 37.19 years (SD = 15.027).

3.2 Measures

3.2.1. Uses and Gratifications Needs

The independent variables for H1 – H4 in the conceptual model are the uses and gratifications needs satisfied by using political candidate's Facebook pages. Using and adapting the measurement instruments established in the current literature (Kaye and Johnson,

2002; Park et al., 2009) as a guide, this study developed a series of 16 statements to measure four types of uses and gratifications needs related to Facebook use: cognitive, affective, personal integrative, and social integrative. Respondents were presented with four groups of four statements. Each grouping related to a category of the uses and gratifications needs. Respondents were asked to choose the answer that best describes how much they agreed with statements about why they use a political candidate's Facebook page. The response set for each statement included strongly disagree (coded as 1), disagree (2), neutral (3), agree (4), and strongly agree (5).

Table 4.1 lists the uses and gratifications needs measured by the survey, but for example, the statements related to cognitive needs included four statements:

> To learn more about the candidate/campaign
>
> To learn more about issues that are important to me
>
> To keep up to date with this candidate's campaign and events
>
> To help me decide who to vote for in the election

Each category was calculated by measuring the mean of the four statements for each U/G needs to create a variable for that category.

3.2.2. Active and Passive Online Participation

The dependent variables for H1 – H4 in the conceptual model are active online participation and passive online participation. Respondents were asked to report the frequency with which they participated in various online activities by providing the number of times per week they exhibited the behaviors. Behaviors were measured individually and the categorized into active and passive online participation.

The behaviors measured were: reading content; viewing or watching pictures/videos; liking a post authored by the Facebook page; commenting on a post authored by the Facebook page, sharing a post authored by the Facebook page; composing a post in support of the

candidate/campaign on the Facebook page's wall; and composing a post in support of the candidate/campaign on their personal wall.

Active and passive online participation were separated based on the activity level involved in completing those behaviors. Reading status posts and comments, viewing pictures or videos, and liking a post are all low-activity behaviors on Facebook. These behaviors require minimal interaction with the page, relying on zero or one mouse click to complete. Therefore, the mean frequency of those three behaviors combined make up the measure of passive online participation.

Commenting, sharing, and posting on Facebook are all behaviors that require higher interaction with the website requiring at least two clicks and composing a message. Active online participation was calculated by combining the means for the frequency per week of each of the active behaviors into a single variable consisting of the mean of all four behaviors per respondent.

3.2.3. Online Participation

The independent variable in RQ1 and RQ2 is online participation. This variable is measured by combining the mean frequency all seven online behaviors collected from the survey.

3.2.4. Offline Participation

The dependent variable in RQ1 is offline participation. Respondents reported the frequency in which they performed seven offline behaviors during a typical campaign season. The behaviors that were measured were: volunteering to work for the campaign; attending a campaign event; donating money; wearing campaign marketing materials like buttons, hats or t-shirts; writing "letters to the editor" (LTE) in support of the candidate; speaking in favor of the candidate at community groups/events; speaking in favor of the candidate with family or friends. The mean frequency of all types of offline participation activities were combined as the final measure of users' offline participation.

3.2.5. Intent to Vote

The dependent variable in RQ2 is intent to vote. Respondents were asked to respond to with the likelihood with which they would vote for the candidate after they liked the Facebook page. The responses were coded on a 5-Likert scale from *not very likely* (1) to *very likely* (5).

The survey also collected basic demographic information including gender, age, education level, political identification, and proficiency with Facebook.

3.3 Analysis

A standard bivariate correlation analysis was performed to assess the existence of interrelationships among all nine variables.

Linear regression analysis was employed to test each hypothesis and answer each research question in this study. To test H1, the independent variable (social integrative needs) was regressed on the dependent variable (active online participation). To test H2, the independent variable (personal integrative needs) was regressed on the dependent variable (active online participation).

To test H3 the independent variable (cognitive needs) was regressed on the dependent variable (passive online participation). To test H4, the independent variable (affective needs) was regressed on the dependent variable (passive online participation).

To investigate RQ1, the independent variable (online participation) was regressed on the dependent variable (offline participation). Finally, to investigate RQ2, the independent variable (online participation) was regressed on the dependent variable (intent to vote). For each regression model, the F-statistics of the regression equation and standardized Beta coefficients of each predicting variable will be assessed to test the hypotheses.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Tables of descriptive statistics for the 16 statements that comprised the uses and gratifications categories, the seven online participation behaviors, and the seven offline participation behaviors have been provided. This data is non-parametric, but the mean has been reported as is common among research, but it should be noted that with non-parametric data the mean reports a decimal value that does not strictly exist in parametric terms.

The highest ranked need satisfied by the uses and gratifications survey was wanting to learn more about the candidate or campaign with a mean of 4.10, (SD = .819). The lowest ranked need satisfied by the candidate's page was to meet new people or make new friends with a mean of 2.06, (SD = 1.013).

Table 4.1 Descriptive Statistics for Uses and Gratifications Statements

Category	Statement	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Deviation
Cognitive	To learn more about the candidate/ campaign	67	2	5	4.10	.819
Cognitive	To learn about issues that are important to me	67	1	5	3.76	.889
Cognitive	To keep up to date with this candidate's campaign and events	67	2	5	4.04	.944
Cognitive	To help me decide who to vote for	67	1	5	2.87	1.358
Personal Integrative	To have the opportunity to have my voice heard on the issues by commenting or posting my opinions	65	1	5	3.17	1.140
Personal Integrative	Because I like to be a part of online discussions	64	1	5	3.09	1.151
Personal Integrative	Because I like that my participation with these pages appears on my profile for friends to see	64	1	5	2.92	1.325
Personal Integrative	To stay current on the candidate and issues to serve as a resource to my friends	66	1	5	3.94	.959

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Table 4.1 – *Continued*

		N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Affective	To show my support to that candidate	67	1	5	4.28	.950
Affective	To show my support for that candidate's political party	67	1	5	3.60	1.349
Affective	Because it helps me feel connected to the candidate	67	1	5	3.57	1.076
Affective	Because the candidate and I agree on issues that are important to me	67	1	5	3.97	.984
Social Integrative	To meet new people or make new friends	67	1	5	2.06	1.013
Social Integrative	To connect with friends I had before joining the page who are also fans	67	1	5	2.22	1.085
Social Integrative	To connect with friends because I joined the page	67	1	4	2.10	.987
Social Integrative	To connect with like-minded people.	67	1	5	2.87	1.325

The most frequent online behavior was reading the page's posts, with a mean frequency of 6.71 times per week, (SD = 8.565). The second most frequent behavior was viewing photos or videos posted by the page with a mean of 4.75 times per week, (SD = 8.793). The highest online behavior operationalized as active online participation was commenting on a page's post with a mean frequency of 2.27, (SD = 5.982). The least frequently reported online behavior was posting on the page's timeline with an average of 1.19 times per week, (SD = 2.694). Table 4.2 provides the results for all seven online behaviors measured and includes minimum values, maximum values, means, and the standard deviation.

Table 4.2 Descriptive Statistics for Online Participation Behaviors

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Read Posts	62	0	50	6.71	8.565
View Photos or Videos	60	0	50	4.75	8.793
Like a Page's Post	59	0	25	3.29	5.275

Table 4.2 – *Continued*

Comment on a Page's Post	59	0	40	2.27	5.982
Share a Page's Post	60	0	25	1.45	3.387
Post on the Page's Timeline	59	0	15	1.19	2.694
Post on Personal Timeline about the Page	59	0	25	1.32	3.501

The most frequent offline behavior reported was talking about the candidate with family of friends, which had a mean of 29.43 times per campaign, (SD = 130.696). Wearing campaign materials, like buttons or shirts had a mean frequency of 3.65 times per campaign, (SD = 9.683). Volunteering with the campaign had a mean frequency of 2.73 times per campaign, (SD = 8.332). The least frequently reported behavior was writing letters to the editor, occurring only .036 times per campaign, on average, (SD = .924).

Table 4.3 Descriptive Statistics for Offline Participation Behaviors

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Volunteer	60	0	60	2.73	8.332
Attend Campaign Event	61	0	50	2.30	6.996
Donate Money	62	0	20	2.11	4.339
Write a Letter to the Editor	59	0	5	.36	.924
Wear Campaign Materials	60	0	60	3.65	9.683
Talk about the candidate at a public event	59	0	20	1.34	3.412
Talk about the candidate with family or friends	60	0	1000	29.43	130.696

Descriptive statistics and correlations among all variables are reported in Table 4.4. Means for each variable have been provided. Active online participation had a mean of 1.562 times per week, (SD = 2.720). Passive online participation had a mean of 4.922 times per week, (SD = 6.864). Offline participation had a mean of 5.879 times per campaign season, (SD = 20.978). Intent to vote had a mean of 4.31, (SD = 1.139). The correlation showed overall support for the conceptual model laid out in this project with several significant correlations

between variables. Based on the results of the correlation, regression analysis was completed

in order to test the hypotheses.

Table 4.4 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for all Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Cognitive Needs	-	.333**	.337**	.190	.290*	.266*	.294*	.211	.201
2. Affective Needs		-	.207	.327**	-.059	-.118	-.106	-.008	.591**
3. Personal Integrative Needs			-	.455**	.548**	.354**	.436**	.334**	.195
4. Social Integrative				-	.335**	.109	.201	.112	.090
5. Needs									
6. Active Online Participation					-	.789**	.905**	.751**	-.007
7. Passive Online Participation						-	.974**	.709**	-.048
8. Online Participation							-	.759**	-.031
9. Offline Participation								-	-.081
10. Intent to Vote									-
Mean	3.694	3.854	3.309	2.313	1.562	4.922	3.036	5.879	4.31
SD	.694	.831	.877	.979	2.720	6.864	4.252	20.978	1.139

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

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

The first set of hypotheses (H1-H4) examined the relationship between the four

categories of U/G needs and their effect on either active or passive online participation. Linear

regression analysis was used to test these hypotheses with the uses and gratifications needs

acting as the independent variable and active and passive online participation serving as

dependent variables. Results for active and passive online participation are provided for each

need, even though the hypotheses predicted relationships between only on dependent variable.

The results are summarized in Table 4.5. The beta coefficient for each variable has been reported.

Table 4.5 Linear Regression of Uses and Gratifications Needs Predicting Online Participation

	Dependent variable (Standardized Coefficient)	
Independent variable	Active online participation	Passive online participation
Social integrative needs	.335**	.109
Personal integrative needs	.548**	.354**
Cognitive needs	.266*	.290*
Affective needs	- .118	- .059

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

The first hypothesis predicted a positive relationship between users' perceived social integrative needs and active online participation. This hypothesis was supported because social integrative needs showed a significant positive influence on active online participation (β = .335, $p < .01$, F = 7.320, r^2 = .112, see Table 4.5).

The second hypothesis predicted a positive relationship between users' perceived personal integrative needs and active online participation. This hypothesis was also supported. Personal integrative needs showed to have a significant influence on active online participation (β = .548, $p < .01$, F = 24.407, r^2 = .300 see Table 4.5). The high *r-square* shows a very high percentage of the variance is explained by this model.

The third hypothesis predicted a positive relationship between users' perceived cognitive needs and passive online participation. This hypotheses was supported because cognitive needs showed a significant positive influence on passive online participation (β = .290, $p < .05$, F = 4.574, r^2 = .071, see Table 4.5).

Lastly, the fourth hypothesis predicted a positive relationship between users' affective needs and passive online participation. This hypothesis was not supported. Affective needs did

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not show an influence on passive online participation (β = -.059, p > .05, F = .842, r^2 = .014, see Table 4.5).

Although the model did not hypothesize about the effects each U/G need would have on the opposite dependent variable, these were also tested as a way to determine the strength of the conceptual model. As predicted by the model, social integrative needs did not have significant effects on passive online participation and affective needs did not have significant effects on active online participation, as described in Table 4.5. However, cognitive needs (β = .290, p < .05, F = 5.312, r^2 = .084, see Table 4.5) and personal integrative needs (β = .354, p < .01, F = 8.437, r^2 = .125) did have significant effects on active and passive online participation respectively.

The second phase of this research examined the relationship between online participation on offline participation and intent to vote in two research questions.

Table 4.6 Linear Regression of Online Participation Predicting Offline Participation and Intent to Vote

Independent variable	Dependent variable (Standardized Coefficient)	
	Offline participation	Intent to vote
Online Participation	.759**	- .031

* p < .05. ** p < ..01

The first research question examined the relationship between online participation and offline participation. The results show a significant positive relationship between online and offline participation exists (β = .759, p < .01, F = 81.492, r^2 = .576, see Table 4.6). The high *r-square* shows a very high percentage of the variance is explained by this model.

Lastly, the second research question examined the relationship between online participation and intent to vote. The results show that because there is no significant

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relationship between online participation and a user's intent to vote (β = -.031, p > .05, F = .056,

r^2 = .001, see Table 4.6).

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The major distinction between this study and previous research is the attempt to tie specific online interactions with specific Facebook pages to specific offline participation. Where previous research has applied the uses and gratifications framework to online participation and tied online participation generally to broad categories of political participation, political engagement, or intent to vote, the offline outcomes measured here relate directly to the online participation with specific candidate pages. In other words, our results don't show using a political candidate's page might make a user more likely to participate offline with any political group, but rather they test the relationship to a user's likelihood of participating offline for a specific candidate's campaign.

The analysis yielded promising results toward exploring the relationship between online participation and specifically related offline participation. It is important to examine the hypotheses and research questions individually in order to assess their importance.

5.1 Driving Online Participation

The results provide a list of 16 possible needs for using a political candidate's page and the mean scores for each usage. These averages alone provide rich detail for some of the common reasons that users might consider using a candidate's page in the first place.

When examining the conceptual model, significant relationships were discovered among three of the four categories of uses and gratifications needs that serve as independent variables. In addition, two unexpected outcomes were also significant with two of independent variables.

One important consideration to remember about the categories of needs is they are not exclusive. Respondents could, and did, indicate they were drawn to political candidate's pages to satisfy a multitude of needs.

First, it is important to note that significant correlations between the needs were observed. The strongest of these correlations was between social integrative and personal integrative ($r = .455$, $p < .01$, see Table 4.4). This justifies the decision to use these needs to predict the same dependent variable. Cognitive and affective needs also had a significant positive correlation ($r = .333$, $p < .01$, see Table 4.4). These correlations provide support for the decision to group the independent variables together when pointing them toward the dependent variables, even though each need was tested individually. The unexpected outcome in the correlation results was the strong correlation between cognitive and personal integrative needs ($r = .337$, $p < .01$, see Table 4.4).

The first three hypotheses were all strongly supported, but H1 and H3 had low *r*-squares indicating a large percentage of the variance was not accounted for in the model and is potentially attributable to controlling variables that were not tested. H2 had a higher percentage of variance explained by the model.

The conceptual model, and H2 and H3, predicted that personal integrative needs would influence active online participation and cognitive needs would influence passive online participation. While those hypotheses were supported, positive relationships between personal integrative needs and passive participation and cognitive needs and active participation were also supported.

When the regression analysis and the correlations are considered together they imply a relationship between cognitive and personal integrative needs and the online behaviors measured in the outcomes. Personal integrative needs are related to status-seeking or improving an individual's social standing (Katz, et al. 1973).

In terms related to a political candidate's page this included needs like wanting to have their voice heard on issues, being a part of online discussions, enjoying that their activity on a candidate's page would appear on their news feed, and to serve as a subject matter expert on the candidate or issues among their own circle of friends. There is an implied surveillance function related to those needs which could explain the strong correlation with cognitive needs.

It is not possible to determine causation with the available data. For example, whether satisfying personal integrative needs drove people to develop cognitive needs or satisfying cognitive needs drove people to also develop personal integrative needs, is unknown. However, the data does show a relationship between these two sets of needs that was not predicted.

There is some support for the idea that cognitive needs can drive offline participation in (Park, et al., 2009, Lewis, 2011), but those studies measured offline participation generally and not directly associated to online participation.

The discovered relationship between personal integrative and cognitive needs explains why both needs influenced both active and passive online participation. The existence of this relationship could also be used to help account for the strength of the positive correlation between active and passive online participation (r =.789, p<.01, see Table 4.4). It suggests that the passive and active online participation behaviors could be cumulative. Meaning it is unlikely that an active online participant wouldn't also be engaged in passive participation.

The significance of the relationships between social integrative needs and personal integrative needs to active online participation affirm the model and are supported by previous literature (Ancu & Cozma, 2009; Leung, 2009). Leung's 2009 study adds particular weight here because of the connection that research found to personal integrative and social integrative needs and content creation. This study is able to tie that content creation specifically to the candidate's page or to content about the candidate on the user's personal page.

Similarly the significance of the relationships between cognitive needs and passive online participation also strengthen the model and react according to the results of previous related research by Ancu & Cozma (2009) and Leung (2009).

The fourth hypothesis, which predicted a significant relationship between affective needs and passive participation, failed the significance test. Even though the affective needs had the highest overall mean (3.854) on a scale of 1 –5 among all the U/G needs, there correlation and regression analysis yielded no significant results.

The high mean of affective needs shows that users certainly felt motivated to use a candidate's page to satisfy emotional needs like showing their support to the political candidate/party, feeling connected to the candidate, or because they share important issues with the candidate. However, these needs failed to manifest any relationship to participation. One possible explanation, supported by previous research, is that these feelings were satisfied simply by liking the candidate's page and no other action was necessary to sustain that satisfaction. (Ancu & Cozma, 2009) While candidate's pages are intended to help users develop a sense of relationship with the candidate and campaign that need could be satisfied without any online participation. If that is the case it explains the lack of support for that hypothesis.

<u>5.2 Synthesizing the Conceptual Model</u>

Overall the results support the general spirit of the model in so much as specific needs can be linked to specific usage outcomes. This vein of research is particularly interesting for both academic and applied reasons.

Academically there is new evidence that Uses and Gratifications theory is relevant in computer mediated communication and explains how the needs of users actually affect usage. The common criticism that Uses and Gratifications theory places too much emphasis on the audience of mass media is less relevant in online social networking sites because the medium deliberately blurs the lines between mass media and audience (Ruggiero, 2000). While the

conceptual model needs revisions and further rigorous testing, it does help explain how user's needs influence how they will use Facebook pages.

While the lack of evidence in the relationship between affective needs and online participation damages this version of a conceptual model, if the same effects are replicable it may lead to a more robust model that helps distinguish not only active and passive participation, but non-participation or other levels of participation.

The results could also help social media managers by understanding which needs lead to the kind of participation that matters. Table 4.2 should be highly relevant for social media managers as it provide examples of the weekly frequency in which certain online participation behaviors were exhibited. The means for active and passive online participation are also worthy of examination. While passive participation was more frequent, the relationship between online and offline participation in the next section suggests that any action on the page that increases online participation will have offline benefits.

If social media managers have a clear understanding of what needs motivate their users they can create content specifically designed to satisfy those needs such that they could drive participation in specific and measurable ways. By providing content that appeals to particular needs they might also be able to strengthen the influences observed here.

5.3 Driving Offline Participation

The second phase of the study examined the relationship between online participation and offline participation.

The results showed online participation positively influenced offline participation, examined by RQ1, (β = .759, p < .01, F = 81.492, r^2 = .576, see Table 4.6), with an extremely high percentage of the variance explained by the model. This is an important finding because it ties offline participation not just to the uses and gratifications needs that drew people to the page in the first place, but also to the behaviors identified as online participation.

Also, unlike previous literature which have shown a link between specific U/G needs to civic or political engagement generally (Ancu & Cozma 2009; Leung 2009) this study links the needs and online participation to offline participation specific to the candidate's page and during a specific campaign season.

These findings are important to extending the understanding of how online participation can influence specific offline participation associated or related to the online participation behaviors. That understanding is crucial for communication researchers and social media managers alike.

In communications research, and in popular culture, there is a sense that online social networking is changing the way we store and share information and ideas. Because the technology is so new, there has not been a lot of time to explore how online social networking is influencing communication. These tool calls into question things like literacy and orality and lends credence to the concepts of secondary orality (Ong, 1982). The findings in this study suggest that online participation can influence offline behavior. In other words, the effects of what happens on a Facebook page in the digital world is no longer confined to 1's and 0's stored on a server, but rather can influence what is happening offline, in the physical world.

For political social media managers these findings present some very practical information that can be applied in the management of their pages. First, it presents a list of specific behaviors that make up online participation and offline participation that are related to their specific missions. Tables 2 and 3 provide the mean frequencies of these behaviors.

Closer analysis of individual online behaviors could be correlated to individual offline behaviors so that social media managers could target messaging such that it could influence specific desired outcomes like volunteerism and fundraising. In this way they could truly manage their social media presence and measure the ROI in specific outcomes rather than clicks, return rates, or time spent on a page.

Political races are expensive and competitive endeavors and political social media managers have been playing with a set of "best practices," that don't account for the types of real world outcomes that influence their operations.

While these findings are statistically significant, it is important to temper expectations about their larger implications to larger populations or to social networking sites in general. These results are promising, as an initial examination of this topic. Furthermore, the model reinforces the popular idea that maintaining a Facebook presence for a political candidate, or other types of organizations, is worth the time and effort.

5.4 Driving Intent to Vote

The second research question examined the relationship between online participation and intent to vote. No significant relationship between online participation and intent to vote was found.

There are two plausible explanations to consider, whether these pages play a role in the decision-making process of who to vote for and whether that decision-making process was ongoing during their usage of the page.

First, the mean of user's intent to vote for the candidate was very high, 4.31 (SD = 1.139) on a scale of very unlikely (1) and very likely (5). The respondents had a high intention to vote for the candidate, but this intention was unrelated to online participation.

A user's intent to vote is certainly an outcome of particular interest to a candidate and his/her campaign, but that doesn't mean that undecided voters are using candidate pages in the decision-making process. The study assumed that fans of the Facebook pages were considering the information presented there in their decision-making process and that the process began at the time of liking the page. However, this was not measured specifically. It is plausible the page did not play a role in the decision-making about who to vote for, or it could have played a role of varying importance among other variables not considered (like political advertisements, party affiliation, or prior voting history).

Alternatively, the political page could have played a role in users' decision-making processes about who to vote for, but that process may not have been ongoing during their time as a fan of the page. This second explanation relates to this study's sample.

A political candidate's pages are not private. They are public-facing and all their content is available to users whether they like the page or not. Since this study only considered people who like the page, and not everyone who had ever visited a page, there is a possibility that undecided voters (those who were actively engaged in the decision-making process about who to vote for) were not adequately represented in the study or even adequately represented among fans of the page.

This idea is supported by some of the data collected. Users were asked to indicate their intent to vote before the liked the page and after having liked the page. The intent to vote variable in the regression analysis was the mean of the responses for a user's intent to vote after they liked the page. The means for the pre-intent to vote (n=64, mean = 4.05, SD = 1.090) and the post-intent to vote (n=62, mean = 4.31, SD = 1.139) were very similar, indicating a very small change in intent to vote after the users liked the page.

This suggests that respondents had already completed their decision-making process and their intent to vote was not dependent on their online participation, but rather their inclusion in the group of fans a political candidate acquired.

If this explanation is valid, a user could have a high intent to vote, but no inclination to participate online. When you consider the respondents who indicated their usage of the candidate's page satisfied affective needs, this explanation gains traction. For those users, the affective needs satisfied by making an emotional association had no influence on online participation. They had simply made up their mind to like the candidate and were not enticed to participate online in any other meaningful way. Similarly groups of voters could have come to the page having already decided their intent to vote. Consider the strong correlation between affective needs and intent to vote, $r = .591$, $p < .01$. The correlation between affective needs is

stronger than any correlation between the other uses and gratifications needs and any of the other outcome variables.

<p style="text-align:center">5.5 Synthesizing Phase 2 of the Study</p>

The lack of support for the influence of online participation on intent to vote still has value to these findings. When considering the implications of this finding on communication research it helps delineate that online participation influences some outcome variables and not others. As research of online participation on Facebook pages continue, these findings will help refine future models that explain what kinds of outcomes can be expected by online participation.

The applied outcomes of these findings would also still be beneficial to political social media managers. It certainly affirms the anecdotal evidence stated earlier about the 2 to 1 advantage Bill White's Facebook page had over Rick Perry's in the 2010 Texas gubernatorial election and the landslide victory Perry handed White on election night. Armed with the understanding that people who like a candidate's page may already have a positive intent to vote, political social media managers need to develop other strategies to influence voter turnout. Unless elections will be decided by the number of users who click the "like" button, there is no correlation between likes and actual election results. Social media managers will need to use Facebook to influence other behaviors that might have a significant statistical relationship with intent to vote or actual voter turnout.

<p style="text-align:center">5.6 Limitations and Future Research</p>

The most significant limitation of this research was the usable sample size, n = 67. While the sample was large enough for the regression analysis needed to test the single predictors in this model, the effects of typical controlling variables like sex, age, and educational level could not be considered. A larger sample size would also have added power and external generalizability to the results of this study. Additionally, a purposive sample limits the generalizability of the results.

The findings of this study are an important first step, but without being able to control for other variables it difficult to assess the overall significance of these findings to the field. It is impossible to state what role controlling variables may play in influencing active online participation, passive online participation, offline participation, and intent to vote.

One of the most important aspects of this study was tying specific online behaviors on the candidate's page to specific offline behaviors with the campaign. While statistical significance was achieved for these relationships, we must be careful not to assume causation. Additional testing and future research are needed to assess whether the results presented here will carry weight moving forward.

The conceptual model proposed a dependent variable of passive or active online participation, while the second phase of the study proposed and independent variable of online participation. These variables were calculated using 7 online behaviors that were measured in the online survey. The validity of these measures rely on the ability of respondents to accurately estimate the frequency which they exhibit those behaviors in a typical week. While this is a standard survey measure for this type of variable, there could be inaccuracies introduced into the study due to users not accurately recalling information. The same issue would also relate to the behaviors in offline participation, where users were asked to recall how many times they performed a behavior within a typical campaign season. Additionally, the sample size prevented examining the individual behaviors of online participation as independent variables and analyzing the results with a multiple regression.

This study assumed Facebook users who were fans, i.e. liked, the political candidate's page actually did like (support) the candidate. Although It is important to note that there are no qualifications to clicking the like button on Facebook and not all users will do so in order to be supportive to a candidate. It is possible for a user to like a candidate's page for the purpose of being critical, unsupportive or against the candidate. Any participation by these users would

misrepresent the outcome variables. The U/G needs tested did not address those looking to be critical of the candidate.

Another limitation is the nature of Facebook pages themselves. The structure, function, and features of pages have changed rapidly since 2006 when political pages were first introduced. After the planning phase of this project, but before data collection Facebook began allowing page managers to turn off the ability for people to post on the page. Originally the intent was that the platform would be totally open. Some political candidates, including Barack Obama, Rick Santorum, and Mitt Romney closed their wall for posting by fans or other users. Rick Perry's page changed during data collection. This also contributed to difficulties collecting data.

As mentioned previously, Facebook recently completely redesigned pages, bringing them into line with their new timeline features in a mandatory switch on March 29, 2012. Some campaigns migrated their pages to the timeline format before the deadline and some waited until after the mandatory switch. The layout of the timeline format affects the prominence in which information posted by users is displayed, giving the most real estate to the page manager, which also affected data collection and will affect the importance of some of the active online participation behaviors measured here in future studies.

Additionally, the constant changes to pages call into question the staying power of the findings of this study. As pages evolve, so do the way users interact with them. The ability to replicate these results will, in part, depend upon what features and improvements Facebook has for pages in the future and the impact those features have on the uses and gratifications needs and online participation.

Future research should pursue multiple directions. Facebook, and social networking sites, are an entirely different medium than the Uses and Gratifications theory was developed to study. For simplicity, this study chose to employ a classic interpretation of the categories of needs laid out by previous research, an entire new schema might be appropriate for this type of

research (Bonds-Raacke & Raacke 2010). It would be entirely appropriate to begin to develop more accurate needs that are satisfied for users on social networking sites and specifically related to Facebook pages. The ever-changing usage of social networking sites likely results in different use cases for fan pages than for using the site in general.

Secondly, future research on this topic might consider measuring how users interact with political candidates pages regardless of whether they are fans or not. This may provide better data for a model that explains how the antecedent variables affect the outcomes, as well as provide better information related to the decision-making processes at play in helping determining for whom a person intends to vote. By broadening the sample to include not just fans, but also visitors to political candidates pages, it may yield further insight to the differences between how a fan participates versus a non-fan.

This study included only two dimensions of online participation, active and passive. The findings related to affective needs suggest that a third dimension, no online participation, should be considered. These findings only examined outcomes that were influenced by user participation, but there could be outcomes influenced by users who like a page but choose not to participate.

Other outcome variables should also be considered besides simply offline participation and intent to vote. Certainly the results suggest, at the very least, a refinement of intent to vote is necessary. However, there may be other outcome variables that would be relevant to political candidate's pages such as money donated in dollar or actual voter turnout.

Finally, in order for studies related to online participation's influence on offline outcomes it will be necessary to broaden the scope of this project. An effective theoretical model would want to consider more than just political candidates' pages. The utility of this kind of research to other kinds of brand managers would also be easily justified.

It would be interesting to apply the lessons learned here to other types of Facebook pages like those for consumer brands, entertainers, or sports franchises. Outcome variables

that might be influenced could include brand loyalty or offline participation behaviors like purchasing products or attending events.

The study of online participation on offline outcomes in social media is so varied that there are often more questions than there are answers, an issue that is confounded by the quick evolutionary changes to the technology and how it is adopted by users.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This study shows that uses and gratifications theory can be extended to explain how people interact with political pages on Facebook. More importantly, those needs influence how people interact with the page. Lastly, online participation influences offline participation and impacts actual outcomes in the real world.

The hypotheses tested and illustrated by the conceptual model laid out in this study, along with the investigation of the relationship between online participation and offline participation in the research questions, help explain why a social media strategy matters in political campaigns today. While not all of the hypotheses were supported, the ground work has been laid for future studies to refine the way we think about the influences of interaction on social media and their potential outcomes in the real world.

A re-thinking of the uses and gratifications needs for social networking sites may be needed to fully test and understand what motivates usage of political candidates' pages, but there is evidence that the original precepts of the theory have application to this medium.

Similarly, a re-thinking of the outcome variables that specific Facebook pages hope to influence may also be necessary.

Despite the need to retool the predictions of this study, with additional research it should be possible to build a working theoretical model for how online participation on Facebook pages could influence real-world, offline outcomes.

If future testing proves those relationships continue to exist, then the possibilities for utilizing Facebook pages for political or marketing purposes are strengthened for social media managers. Through continued examination and understanding of the needs that draw users to

Facebook pages, social media managers can create content that drives certain users' participation toward specific measurable offline outcomes.

APPENDIX A

USING FACEBOOK POLITICAL CANDIDATE FAN PAGES SURVEY

This is a copy of the online survey instrument used to collect date from respondents, not including the informed consent section.

1. Are you currently a fan of a political candidate's official Facebook fan page?
To be considered a fan of a Facebook page means you have clicked the "like" button on the page.

      Yes
      No

2. Choose the answer that best describes how much you agree with the following statements about why you use a political candidate's Facebook page.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
To learn more about the candidate/campaign					
To learn about issues that are important to me					
To keep up to date with this candidate's campaign and events					
To help me decide who to vote for in the election					

3. Choose the answer that best describes how much you agree with the following statements about why you use a political candidate's Facebook page.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
To have the opportunity to have my voice heard on the issues by commenting or posting my opinions					
Because I like to be a part of online discussions					
Because I like that my participation with these pages appears on my profile for my friends to see.					
To stay current on the candidate and issues and serve as a resource to my friends.					

4. Choose the answer that best describes how much you agree with the following statements about why you use a political candidate's Facebook page.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
To show my support for that candidate					
To show my support for that candidate's party					
Because it help me feel connected to the candidate					
Because the candidate and I agree issues that are important to me					

5. Choose the answer that best describes how much you agree with the following statements about why you use a political candidate's Facebook page.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
To meet new people or make new friends					
To connect with friends I had before joining the page who are also fans					
To connect with friends because I joined the page					
To connect with like-minded people					

6. During a typical campaign season, how many times per week did you spend doing the following activities on Facebook?

    You read status posts and comments posted on the candidate's page
    You viewed pictures or watch videos posted on the candidate's page
    You liked a post authored by the candidate's page
    You commented on a post authored by the candidate's page
    You shared a post authored by the candidate's page
    You posted a message of support on the candidate's page
    You posted a message of support on your personal profile

7. During a typical campaign season, after your participation on a political candidate's fan page on Facebook, approximately how many times did you participate in the following activities?

    Volunteered with the campaign
    Attended a campaign event
    Donated money
    Wrote a letter to the editor in support of the candidate
    Wore campaign materials like a button or t-shirt
    Speaking in favor of the candidate at community/group events
    Speaking in favor of the candidate with family or friends

8. What was the likelihood you would vote for the candidate before and after you became a fan of (liked) the candidate's Facebook page?

	Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Neutral	Likely	Very Likely
Before you became a fan of the page					
After you became a fan of the page					

9. What is your sex?

> Male
> Female

10. What is your current age in years?

11. In which U.S. State do you currently reside?

> Users selected a state from a drop down menu

12. Are you currently eligible and/or registered to vote in the State where you reside?

> Eligible and registered to vote
> Eligible, but not registered to vote
> Ineligible to vote based on age restrictions
> Ineligible to vote based on citizenship requirements
> Ineligible to vote for other reasons

13. What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? If currently enrolled mark the previous grade or highest degree received.

> No schooling completed
> 8th grade
> Some High School
> High School Graduate or equivalent
> Some College
> Bachelor's degree
> Some graduate work
> Graduate or Professional Degree

14. Generally speaking, do you consider yourself to be a(n):

> Strong Democrat
> Not so strong Democrat
> Independent leaning Democrat
> Independent
> Independent leaning Repunblican
> Not so strong Republican
> Strong Republican
> Other
> Don't Know

15. Generally speaking, how comfortable do you feel using Facebook

    Not at all proficient
    Not very proficient
    Neutral
    Somewhat proficient
    Very proficient

16. Which political candidates Facebook pages are you a fan of?

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