

Toward Developing a More Appropriate Measure for Motivations of Political Use of Social Media During Elections

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ABSTRACT: Social media use in political communication has risen to a critical mass in recent years. However, scholars have yet to fully understand and gauge users' motivations for political use of social media, as most previous measures failed to fully capture the affordances of social media. Using a modified measure in a series of surveys, the present article finds that surveillance, guidance, political/social utility, entertainment, attachment/identity, and a need for expression drive people's political use of social media.

Keywords: Factor Analysis; Political Participation; Presidential Elections; Social Media Affordances; Uses and Gratification

Introduction

Political participation and engagement received sustained interest in a variety of academic fields including communication and political science for a simple reason: without robust citizen engagement the democratic system cannot function properly. Media historically played primary role to disseminate political and public affairs information and therefore different forms of media came under scholarly scrutiny as to how much those media were able to inform citizens about the political processes and boost citizen participation and engagement. Various forms of social media have experienced tremendous growth for the past few years and those forms of media have become major sources of political information quickly (Smith, 2014). Social media received enthusiastic welcome in political space not only by the politicians and political consultants but by scholars, and subsequently received considerable research interest. One key impetus for that research is to examine whether social media generate political interest among young people—a demographic group that use social media heavily and is historically less interested in political affairs. Survey data indicated that young people paid substantial attention to social media for campaign information in

the 2008 Presidential election and every election since then. It should be noted that the 2008, 2012, 2016 and 2020 US Presidential elections were held amid a huge number of people using the Facebook—right before the 2008 election Facebook had 100 million users (Facebook 2010) and nine million users voted in the election (Facebook 2012). In 2008 US presidential elections, voters shared links of media, made comments, and engaged with political actors' sites, suggesting that Social Networking Sites (SNS) is becoming a potent tool for political communication (Robertson et al, 2010). The Internet-based social media's roles in political processes received considerable research attention but academic research is yet to fully connect various political uses of social media with consequential and theoretically grounded variables such as political efficacy and participation. Especially, it has been a challenge to isolate political use of social media and correlate that use with consequential variables such as political efficacy and political participation. In order to do that, researchers must identify motivations for social media use for political reasons and measure those motivations. However, identifying and measuring political uses of social media pose a challenge as researchers are yet to

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agree on a unified measure to gauge the political use of social media.

Identifying and Measuring Political Use of Social Media

Scholarly attempts of identifying the political use of media began as early as in 1940s when a group of sociologists systemically attempted to study the effects of media campaigns in Presidential election of 1940. The Columbia Study (Lazarsfeld, Berelson & Gaudet, 1948) on the 1940 Presidential election and another study on the 1948 election (Berelson, Lazarsfeld & McPhee, 1954) looked into people's voting decision-making processes and the effects of mediated campaign messages on voters' decision-making. Since powerful effects models were abandoned, communication scholars began to understand the usage of media from audiences' perspectives. In the new paradigm, audiences were conceptualized as active users who have needs and motivations that drive their media use. Early researchers used measures, initially developed to study interpersonal communication, to study mass media, especially television. Researchers continued to adapt those measures to study newer media such as the Internet and social media. Researchers are yet to devise a unified measure to capture various uses of those media with all of their nuances and complexities. Communication scholars adapted measures that were developed to study the use of electronic media, especially television, in order to study the Internet and digital social media. Those measures, drawn from the uses and gratifications perspectives, are methodically sound but might not be adequate to gauge the political use of social media primarily for two reasons: they cannot measure a variety of media that fall under the umbrella of social media, and they cannot adequately measure the new features and affordances of those media.

Uses and Gratifications and the Measure of Political Use of Social Media

Uses and gratifications (U&G) theory suggests that people have needs and motivations that drive them to engage in different forms of communication. Researchers utilized this theoretical perspective to study the uses patterns and effects of communication. U&G inspired and guided volumes of research across the world since 1970s, primarily because of the wider scope of this theoretical premise. As Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1974) posit, U&G outlines the links among people's psychological and social needs, the motivations that those needs create, and the communication/media they use to fulfill those needs. Using this broader theoretical framework, researchers

studied specific media use (TV, radio, for example) and specific content (political news, for example). Majority of U&G research employed quantitative methods and used measures to gauge users' motivations. It's interesting to note that almost similar measures were used to study a wide variety of mediated and face-to-face communication. Earlier measures were developed based on the interpersonal communication models and explored such needs as relationship, social interaction, passing time, relaxation. Researchers studied mass media such as television using modified version of measures that were developed for interpersonal communication. Not surprisingly, they have found that people watched television to fulfill some needs that can also be met by interpersonal communication. Later, it was found the people might have used social media to obtain gratifications they used to receive from interpersonal and mass communication. The aim of this paper is to explore the motivations of using social media for political purposes, therefore the following section will exclusively focus on the political use of media and gratifications users might expect to obtain from those media.

Political Use of Media and Gratifications

One traditional function of mass communication—surveillance—has received significant attention from scholars who studied political use of media, because it captures an important aspect of media in a democratic society: keeping an eye on government and other political entities. Therefore, surveillance emerged as a key motivation for using media for political use and surveillance-related items appeared in early measures of political use of media including the Internet (McLeod & Becker, 1974; McLeod and Becker, 1981, Kay 1998, Kay & Johnson, 2002). Even though entertainment does not have much relevance on political use of media, entertainment also appeared as a motivation of politically driven use of media to capture the entertainment-related functions of those media. Measures of political use of media also included items that captured what was referred to as guidance function (how to vote, how to decide on issue, etc.). Media generally provide audiences “social fodders” that can be used to carry on conversations. Politically interested users might be motivated to find information in media that can help them carry on political conversations. That function of media can be termed as a utility.

McLeod & Becker (1974) extracted five motivations of using television use for political gratification. They were: surveillance (judging candidates and keeping up with political issue), vote guidance (making voting decisions, develop more interest in campaigns), anticipated communication (using information as

“ammunition” for political arguments, becoming more politically active), excitement (excitement of watching candidates, anticipation of the winners) and reinforcement (remembering chosen candidates’ strong points). These typologies of gratifications, or their variants were used in subsequent research on media uses and gratification. Vote guidance had one item in McLeod & Becker (1974) study and the factor dropped out when surveillance was brought in, but McLeod & Becker decided to keep it as a distinct factor because it was conceptually different from surveillance. McLeod & Becker (1974) found that when other variables were controlled, excitement’s association to campaign interest and activity reduced to zero. Kay and Johnson (2002) used an 18-item measure and identified four motivations of Internet use for the politically interested participants. They are: (a) information seeking/surveillance, (b) guidance, (c) entertainment, and (d) social utility. Other research also used similar measures and extracted similar factors. Chang Sup Park (2015) isolated Information (obtaining election information and keeping up with social issues), Social Interaction (communicating with friends and family and feeling connected) and Recreation (killing time and gratifying entertainment). Earnheardt (2013) identified the following motivations: Information-seeking/guidance, escape, entertainment

Information and entertainment emerged as important part of Internet users’ motives but other important factors also surfaced. For instance, social interaction and self-expression appeared in Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) study of website users’ motivations. Self-expression also reported as a motive for SNS users in other studies (Jung, Youn, and McClung 2007). Those studies did not poll politically interested users but nonetheless self-expression remains an important factor in political use of media, especially social media. Song-In Wang (2007) reported opinion expression as a motivations for using the Internet for political information. Even though the Internet and social media are not synonymous, they share some common attributes (audience-generated content, interactivity, etc.), therefore items loaded in those factors could be used in the scale to measure political use of social media.

Based on the reviews presented above the following broad Research Question is posed:

RQ1: What were users’ motivations for political use of social media during 2012 and 2016 Presidential elections? The objective of asking this research question is to isolate items from previous measures as well as to create new items for the proposed measure of political use of social media.

Methods

In order to gauge the political use of social media, measures were developed and tested in multiple samples. Three datasets (two during the 2012 Presidential and one during the 2016 election) were used to identify users’ motivations for using social media for political purposes. Multiple factor analyses were conducted to identify the items and the underlying factors of the proposed measure of political use of social media.

Development of Measures

The scale for measuring motivations for using social media for 2012 Presidential election was developed based on the existing instruments (Hanson, et al., 2010; Kaye and Johnson, 2002). Some items were dropped while a couple of items were added to the scale. Respondents answered 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree to the statements included in the measures. Negatively worded statements were recoded. The 20-item (2 more items added in the post-election survey) scale in the 2012 surveys obtained high level of reliability ($\alpha=.95$). The scale was modified substantially and was incorporated in the questionnaire to collect data prior to 2016 Presidential election. The 33-item new scale also obtained very high level of reliability ($\alpha=.97$). The modification was done in accordance with proposed items by Sundar and Limperos (2013). As Sundar and Limperos argue, measures originally designed to gauge traditional media use were largely used to capture the gratifications of new digital media. The problem is: digital media outlets are significantly different from traditional media as those media offer affordances, which significantly alter audience use and gratifications. Four class of affordances—modality, agency, interactivity, and navigability—were identified and items to measure them were proposed in their model. Out of these modalities, agency-enhancement modality has direct relevance in political use as this makes references to users’ ability to express themselves and their ability to network with others. Agency-enhancement affordances are those features of digital social media that enable users to act as the source of information as well as to convey others’ perceptions in their own posts (Stavrositu & Sundar, 2012). Therefore, four items proposed to measure this modality have been added to the scale that was used the 2016 election survey. Three items related to community building were also added because users may use social media to connect other political actors to organize and pursue political events. In Sundar and Limperos’ model, a few items designed to capture users’ attachment with social media were incorporated. They are: Once I use it, I feel like it is mine; it features content that is a true

reflection of myself; it allows me to customize so that I can make it my own. Those items were added to the scale.

Surveys

The first survey was conducted at a rural small liberal arts college two weeks prior to the 2012 Presidential election. A wide variety of classes representing different majors at all levels (freshmen to senior) were selected for the survey. All the students of the select classes were asked to complete the survey. Most of the surveys were distributed in classes during class times but about 10% of the surveys were conducted online, by posting the survey links in course management site Sakai. A total of 557 usable surveys were returned.

The second survey was conducted immediately after the 2012 Presidential election was held. The survey remained posted in various social media sites for about a month (November 8, 2012–Jan 8, 2013). Participants were also recruited via advertisement campaigns in Facebook and Google. Participants were also recruited through viral social media marketing, targeted email blasts and posting survey on the politically oriented blogs and discussion forums. A total of 235 useable surveys were collected for analysis.

The third survey was conducted at the same institution where 2012 survey was conducted. A similar sampling technique was utilized for recruiting participants. A significant difference was that while most of the surveys in 2012 were conducted using paper and pencil, most responses in 2016 came from online participation. Survey links were made available to the instructors of the select classes who posted the link in the course management software (Sakai). A total of 718 survey responses were collected and were downloaded in SPSS for analysis. Responses concerning the motivations for political use of the social media were isolated from the surveys. Factor analysis was conducted to assess participants’ motivations for each dataset.

Table 1. 2012 Pre-Election Survey Factors

Items	1	2	3	4
<i>Factor 1: Surveillance</i>				
to judge the personal qualities of the candidates.	.804	.163	.148	.092
to see what candidates will do if elected.	.804	.127	.201	.097
to help me decide about important issues.	.801	.073	.147	.197
to help me decide how to vote.	.747	.118	.161	.227
because information is easy to obtain.	.744	.358	.249	.000
because it is easy to use.	.704	.400	.204	-.017
because it is easier to get information on social media websites.	.637	.426	.227	.065
to find specific political information I am looking for.	.626	.268	.172	.197
for unbiased viewpoints.	.611	.229	.047	.246
<i>Factor 2 Coolness/Entertainment</i>				
because it is entertaining.	.186	.805	.210	.017
because it is exciting.	.238	.795	.254	.095
because it helps me relax.	.126	.764	.115	.157
because I am comfortable using it.	.493	.630	.204	-.022
because it is cool to use social media.	.245	.626	.240	.193
<i>Factor 3 Social Utility</i>				
The election gives me something to talk about with others on Facebook or Twitter.	.167	.305	.738	.126
It helps me to encourage other people to participate in the election.	.263	.317	.693	.000
The information I get on social media helps me during debates with others.	.434	.215	.646	.179
Social media turns the 2012 Presidential Election into a fun event.	-.017	.045	.604	.174
<i>Factor 4: Attachment</i>				
I do not know how to get information on the 2012 Presidential Election with traditional media.	.134	.093	.154	.822
Social media is the only media I use to educate myself about the candidates.	.270	.092	.105	.805
Eigenvalue	7.63	4.85	3.61	1.92
Variance explained	25.41	16.16	12.04	6.41
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization				

Table 2. 2012 Post-Election Factors

Items	1	2	3	4	5
<i>Factor 1: Surveillance</i>					
It is easier to get information on social media websites	.759	.192	.248	.250	-.051
Candidates in the 2012 Presidential Election utilize social media heavily to communicate with their constituents	.746	.228	.120	.199	-.043
I am good at finding political information on social media	.686	.353	.170	.281	.155
I can keep up with main issues of the day	.644	.351	.402	.096	-.046
Information is easy to obtain	.632	.388	.464	.030	-.105
Social media covers the 2012 Presidential Election well.	.597	.235	.265	.521	.137
I can get my questions answered quickly using social media.	.593	.214	.166	.477	.176
It helps me to encourage other people to participate in the election.	.583	.387	.256	.198	.015
I can find specific political information I am looking for.	.581	.227	.494	.296	.015
It gives me an opportunity to discuss the election with my friends.	.557	.536	.236	.115	-.004
<i>Factor 2: Entertainment/Coolness</i>					
It is entertaining.	.210	.819	.169	.182	-.020
I am comfortable using it.	.412	.730	.314	-.008	-.023
It is exciting.	.266	.674	.258	.422	.174
Social media lets me express my opinions.	.400	.666	.116	.070	-.171
It is cool to use social media.	.312	.567	.306	.361	.078
<i>Factor 3: Guidance/Surveillance</i>					
It helps me decide about important issues.	.257	.216	.775	.285	.077
It helps me decide how to vote.	.130	.210	.761	.269	.010
It allows me to see what candidates will do if elected.	.294	.256	.719	.297	.085
It allows me to judge the personal qualities of the candidates.	.323	.383	.671	.241	.181
<i>Factor 4: Attachment</i>					
Social media is the only media I use to educate myself about the candidates.	.121	.140	.254	.776	-.107
I do not know how to get information on the 2012 Presidential Election with traditional media.	.130	.062	.158	.672	.492
Social media is my primary source of information for all issues including politics.	.338	.191	.432	.574	.037
Variance explained	20.65	16.82	15.39	13.93	4.57
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization					

Table 3. 2016 Election Factors

Items	1	2	3	4	5
Factor 1 Need for expression					
It allows to send my thoughts to many	.823	.184	.134	.021	.121
It allows me to give my input	.819	.216	.137	-.020	.103
It allows me to have my say	.811	.130	.160	.111	.065
It gives me the power to broadcast to my followers	.793	.198	.107	.040	.112
It lets me participate in discussion	.791	.231	.212	-.035	.190
It allows me to assert my identity	.765	.171	.093	.159	.114
I can connect with others	.749	.267	.093	.009	.167
I can express myself freely	.725	.023	.137	.134	.166
It allows me to expand my network	.721	.269	.094	.054	.160
Social media lets me express my opinions.	.667	.246	.083	.153	.229
It makes me realize that I am part of a community	.658	.207	.225	.196	.039
It allows me to customize so that I can make it my own	.649	.353	.047	.216	-.018
I enjoy answering other people's questions	.602	.030	.069	.301	.110
It helps me to encourage other people to participate in the election.	.552	.242	.166	.290	.067
Factor 2 Ease/Convenience					
It is easier to get information on social media.	.238	.705	.080	.197	.261
Information is easy to obtain.	.337	.670	.309	-.025	.223
It is easy to use.	.326	.657	.269	-.104	.373
I can keep up with main issues of the day.	.340	.650	.329	.077	.150
I can find specific political information I am looking for.	.169	.628	.333	.289	-.070
I am comfortable using it.	.329	.605	.173	-.009	.497
I am good at finding political information on social media.	.303	.570	.168	.387	.087
I can get my questions answered quickly using social media.	.365	.510	.180	.376	.012
Factor 3 Surveillance/Guidance					
It allows me to see what candidates will do if elected.	.227	.222	.729	.192	.140
It helps me decide about important issues of the election.	.260	.295	.713	.196	.042
It helps me decide how to vote.	.104	.154	.709	.156	.089
It allows me to judge the personal qualities of the candidates.	.185	.333	.650	.245	.128
Factor 4 Attachment/Identity					
Social media is the only media I use to educate myself about the candidates.	.029	.096	.184	.761	.073
Of its unbiased viewpoints.	.083	-.105	.403	.635	.074
Once I use it, I feel like it's mine (my kind of media)	.377	.421	.054	.583	.089
Social media is my primary source of information for all issues including politics.	.061	.449	.262	.529	.159
It features content that is true reflection of myself	.465	.287	.106	.509	-.003
Factor 5 Entertainment/Coolness					
It is entertaining.	.309	.216	.113	.106	.800
It is exciting.	.274	.250	.173	.191	.747
Variance explained	26.77	14.04	8.97	8.61	6.21
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.					
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization					

Results

2012 pre-election Survey

Consistent with previous studies, four factors emerged, which were surveillance, coolness/entertainment, social utility, and attachment. Nine items were loaded under the surveillance factor. Items that are intended to check on the candidates and the issues clearly belong to the surveillance category. Items dealing with the ease/convenience of finding information on social media about the 2012 Presidential election also coalesced in this factor perhaps because respondents could not differentiate the functions from the media. Respondents found social media's viewpoints unbiased and therefore respondents associated social media with surveillance. Surveillance factor explains 25.41% variance.

Item loadings for the second factor, coolness/entertainment, were conceptually consistent as all the items highlighted the entertainment aspects of social media. The item "I am comfortable using it" fits in the coolness category perhaps because of this simple reason: the more comfortable users are the more relaxed they will be in using those media. The coolness factor explains 16.16% of the variance.

All the items in the social utility factor match neatly except the following: "social media turns 2012 Presidential election into a fun event." However, the loading of this item in the social utility category makes sense when read in the context of other items. It seems young people polled in the survey did not want to see election as boring event; rather they considered election as a fun event and social media provided them with tools they could use to celebrate the festivities created by the election. As Table 2 shows, social utility factor explains 12.04% of the variance.

The attachment function has only two items loaded to it, so the robustness of this factor can be questioned. However, the attachment factor makes a critical point about the young generation that grows up with social media and social media define who they are. The attachment factor explains only 6.41% of the variance.

2012 Post-election Survey

Four factors emerged, which were surveillance/utility, entertainment, guidance, and attachment. Ten items were loaded under the surveillance/utility factor of social media. Items that are intended to check on the candidates and the electoral processes are loaded under the utility/surveillance function. The surveillance/utility factor explains 20.65% of the variance. All the items fit nicely in the entertainment factor except this item: "social media feature of letting users express their opinions." The item "I am comfortable using it" fits in the entertainment category because of the simple reason: the more comfortable users are the more relaxed they will be in using those media. The entertainment factor explains 16.82% variance. Four items were loaded under the guidance factor. As shown in the Factor table, items clustered around guidance generally deal with guiding people in issues related with voting (how to vote, decide on issues and judging personal qualities of the candidates.) The guidance factor explain 15.39% variance. The attachment function has only three items loaded to it, so the robustness of this factor can be questioned. The attachment factor explains only 4.57% of the variance.

2016 Pre-election Survey

Five factors—need for expression, ease/convenience, political utility, attachment/identity and entertainment/coolness—emerged. Need for expression emerged as a new factor to which 14 factors loaded. All the items coalesced conceptually except one item—"it allows me to customize so that I can make it my own." The need for expression factor explain 26.77% of the variance. Eight items loaded under the ease/convenience factor, all the items coalescing conceptually. This factor explains 14.04% of the

variance. The surveillance/guidance factor has four items loaded to it—all conceptually congruent with the underlying theme of the factor. The surveillance/guidance factor explains 8.97% of the variance. Attachment/identity factor has five items loaded to it. All items fitted nicely except two—“of its unbiased viewpoints” and “social media is my primary source of information for all issues including politics.” Attachment/identity explains 8.61% of the variance. Entertainment/Coolness has two items loaded to it—both fitted nicely. This factor explains 6.21% of the variance.

Discussion and Conclusions

Consistent with previous studies, surveillance emerged as a major motivating factor for the political use of social media. Surveillance has been recognized as a major function of mass media. Media Uses and Gratifications inspired research consistently found surveillance as a major motivation for media use. In political communication, surveillance boils down to citizens' ability to follow the political issues, candidates' stand on issues and their personal qualities. As mentioned previously, surveillance was reported as a major motivation for political use of mass media in one of the earliest studies that utilized Uses and Gratifications perspectives (McLeod & Becker (1974). Even though surveillance appeared as a robust factor in the pre and post 2012 election studies, some items in that factors do not seem to fit conceptually in that factor. For instance, in 2012 pre-election survey, the following items loaded under the surveillance factor: because information is easy to obtain; because it is easy to use; because it is easier to get information; to find political information I am looking for; for its unbiased viewpoints. Similar items were loaded in the 2012 post-election survey. Some of those items were loaded under the surveillance factor in previous studies (Kaye and Johnson, 2002). However, Kaye and Johnson expanded the factor adding “information-seeking” with surveillance to explain the loading of those items. It is clear that the underlying theme of the mismatched items is ease or convenience. Interestingly, ease/convenience emerged a separate factor in the 2016 election survey data. Eight items including the items mentioned above were loaded under the ease/convenience factor.

Kaye and Johnson (2002) had the following items loaded under a factor they labelled “guidance”: it helps me decide how to vote; it helps me decide about important issues; to see what a candidate will do if elected; to judge personal qualities of candidates; for unbiased viewpoints. Most of those items were loaded under the surveillance factor in the pre-2012 dataset. In

the post-2012 election dataset, guidance emerged as a separate factor with identical items loaded to it. In the 2016 dataset, those items except “for unbiased viewpoints” were clustered under one factor, which was labelled as surveillance. While Kaye and Johnson (2002) labelled the factor “guidance,” it can be argued that as a whole the underlying theme of the factor is surveillance. Four items were loaded under the surveillance/guidance factor in the 2016 election data, with all the items coalescing with the underlying theme of the factor. Even though some researchers distinguished surveillance and guidance (Kaye and Johnson, 2002), the boundary between the two blurs. Even though in the pre-2012 survey, surveillance and guidance appeared as separate factors, the items loaded under surveillance do not address the surveillance the way it is traditionally understood. Most of the items under surveillance factor refer to political information, especially how conveniently users can obtain information and how the information can help them keep up with the issues of the day. However, in more specific sense, surveillance in the field of politics refers to our ability to monitor closely the issues that matter, candidates' stands on the issues and whether they follow through once they are elected. All those attributes should not be labelled as guidance because guidance refers to more technical aspects of electoral and political participation (how to vote, for instance). So, the surveillance and guidance overlap and more conceptual clarity is warranted.

Social/political utility emerged as a motivating factor in the 2012 pre-election survey data. This is consistent with previous research; Kaye and Johnson (2002) found this as a motivation for using the Web for political information. Kaye and Johnson had only two items—to give something to talk about with others and to use as ammunition in arguments with others—loaded under the social utility factor. Additional items such as “it helps me to encourage other people to participate in election” and “social media turns the 2012 Presidential Election a fun event” were loaded under the utility factor in the 2012 pre-election study. The inclusion of the first item in the social/political utility factor can be justified because users found social media as a tool that they could use to encourage others to participate in election. Therefore, to them social media was a utility instrument.

Entertainment/coolness emerged in all the datasets with almost identical items loaded under the factor. Consistent with Kaye and Johnson (2002), items such as social media is exciting, entertaining and they help users relax were loaded in the 2012 datasets. Only two items—it is entertaining and it is exciting—were loaded in the 2016 dataset. Identity/attachment emerged as a

weak factor with only two items loading in the 2012 pre-election dataset. Those items are: social media is the only media I use to educate myself about the candidates and I do not know how to get information on the 2012 Presidential election using traditional media. Another item—social media is my primary source of information for all issues including politics—was loaded under this factor in the 2012 post-election survey. As discussed in previous section, the measure has been significantly revised based on suggestions put forward by Sundar and Limperos (2013) before conducting the 2016 survey. Especially plethora of items which they put under the subtitle “ownness” were added to the measure. Consequently, the attachment/identity emerged as a strong motivation for participants’ social media use for political information in the 2016 survey. Two items—once I use it, I feel like it’s mine (my kind of media) and it features content that is true reflection of myself—clearly tie social media use and the users’ sense of attachment or identity.

Some previous studies identified users’ need for expressing their voices as a motivation for political use of social media. The 2016 survey added items that speak to the expressive need of social media users. Those items were taken from “agency-enhancement” and “community-building” items proposed in Sundar and Limperos model (2013). Need for expression emerged as the strongest motivation for political use of social media with 14 items loaded under this factor in the 2016 survey. All the items are thematically consistent that inform users’ need to express their opinions and feeling and their desire to reach out to others on political issues and actions. Opinion expression was found to be a motivation for Internet use in previous studies (Wang 2007). Expressive information sharing was found to be a motivation of using the Facebook (Smock, Ellison, Lampe and Wohn (2011).

Data that were gathered in three different time periods shed light on users’ motivations for using social media for political purposes. Two datasets—the pre and post 2012 Presidential election, used almost identical measures but polled different users—the pre-election survey polled college students and the post-election survey polled social media users online. The 2016 survey polled college students but used a modified measure to capture their political use of social media. The analysis reinforced a set of motivations for political use of social media that previous studies reported. At the same time, they shed lights on some relatively

unexplored motivations for political use of social media. Surveillance, guidance, social/political utility and entertainment have been discussed widely in previous studies and they have been established as stable motivations for political use of social media. The present analysis supported those findings. Previous studies conducted on the use of television and Internet also found those as the primary motivations of users. Thus, social media partly met those political needs that traditional mass media used to fulfill. However, the need for expression and attachment/identity factors have not been explored fully in previous studies. It might seem that attachment/identity may not be directly tied with political motivation, but it can be a powerful motivator for social media use. Because users, especially young users’ identity strongly with social media and they also get comfortable with the political content of those media. Thus, they are being exposed to politics through social media. The attachment/identity motivation needs to be explored further, maybe by adding items that speak to political identity (not liberal vs. conservative or other political affiliation, but liking/disliking of the political processes).

It can be argued that the need for expression is the most consequential motivation for the political use of social media. This motivation appeared to be a strong factor in the 2016 Presidential election survey that used a modified measure with items concerning social media’s agency enhancing and community building features (Sundar and Limperos, 2013). It is well-known that social media affordances enable people to express themselves, but it is relatively unexamined to what extent the expressive need drives social media use for political purposes.

The surveys conducted during the Presidential elections of 2012 and 2016 reveal that surveillance, guidance, political/social utility, entertainment, attachment/identity and a need for expression drive people’s political use of social media. Surveillance, guidance, political/social utility and entertainment have been previously reported, discussed and tested but attachment/identity and need for expression should be examined thoroughly in future studies. The measure that revealed those factors obtained high reliability but it was administered in a convenient sample. Even though the need for expression emerged as a strong motivating factor, the number of items in it (14) is too large.

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