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The Intended Political Behaviour of the First “Internet
Generation”: The Relationship between Media News
Exposure and Political Participation

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Abstract

The present study examines the relationship between media news exposure and political participation in a sample of Dutch and German college students with a special focus on the multiple functions of online news. A combination of the theory of planned behaviour from Ajzen (1988) and variables of interpersonal communication laid the foundation of a conceptual model whereby the influence of media news exposure on political participation is mediated by cognitive and environmental factors as well as political self-efficacy. The results of the self-administered online questionnaire show that there was no general significant influence of the type of news source used (television, newspapers, Internet). Further, whether the participants gather online news by means of online videos or articles from serious or non-serious news sources seem to have no significant moderating effect, although a stronger negative magnitude when using online videos and non-serious news sources can be detected. When testing the conceptual model, the two interpersonal communication variables of political community integration and political reflective integration have a significant mediating influence on the relationship.

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News Media and Political Participation

Most people seek relevant information about current events and affairs from the mass media. Graber (1998), as cited in Sotirovic and McLeod (2001), pointed out the important role mass media has as a source of political information. Mass communication researchers argue that due to the privileged position of mass media in the society, they have the responsibility to enhance the political process through monitoring the environment for several relevant events. Through the dependency on these sources for information gathering, it is their duty to provide the consumer with accurate and credible information. However, the economic realities are that mass communication serves as a profitable business controlled by large conglomerate corporations with the primary goal of generating profits. The potential for prosocial media is often conflicting with this drive of duplicating profit by means of attracting a larger audience (Perse, 2001). This study intends to examine the relationship between different types of media news sources that are used and the political engagement an individual is involved in.

This study outlines the present literature over the differential effects of several types of media news exposure on the intended political behaviour. Due to the new emergent importance and multiple functional possibilities of the Internet, the effects of the serious and non-serious kinds of online news sources as well as the influence of online videos and articles on the before mentioned relationship were investigated. Due to the focus on online news, a sample of college students was chosen who are reflecting the new “Internet generation”. Additionally, a conceptual model was constructed by taking the influence of environmental factors, cognitive factors and levels of self-efficacy into account. It is assumed that these variables have a strong mediating impact on the relation between media news exposure and the degree of political participation a person indicates. Thus, the study starts with an

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overview over existing literature concerning the assumed influence of media on political participation.

Research indicates that an individual’s pattern of media use has an influence on the political participation. On the one hand, the media can increase voter participation through the interacting relationship between political interest, voting and learning from the media. A study by McLeod & McDonald, as cited in Sotirovic & McLeod (2001), found that media use was related to an increase in political knowledge, efficacy, and even voter turnout. The media provides the voter with sufficient information to make reasoned voting decisions and thereby stimulates the political interest (Tolbert & McNeal, 2003). Even horse race media can have a positive effect while stimulating greater political involvement and reflection through an increasing perception of the political actors. This is especially related to an increase in donating money to parties (Mutz, 1997).

On the other hand, the media is often blamed for the decline in both political knowledge and participation levels (Sotirovic, & McLeod, 2001). Studies show that media coverage of certain elections has led to a decrease in voter turnout due to the emphasis put on the entertainment value of events rather than its political relevance. Therefore, the news content may limit the understanding of the political domain as a result of lacking background information (Perse, 2001). Further, research by Crotty & Jacobson (1980) speculates that through the lack of substantive information as a basis for voting decisions, many interested individuals turn away from the political process (as cited in Tolbert & McNeal, 2003).

The different results of the studies reveal that a separation between the different types of media is important to examine the effects of media use on political participation. Research shows that the impact of newspaper use on voter turnout differs from the impact of television use. Newspaper seems to have a positive effect on voter turnout while television use has a negative impact (Perse, 2001). Further, it is shown those who gather political information in

newspapers learn relatively more than those watching television (Tolbert & McNeal, 2003).

A lot of concerns exist against television as a political source due to several reasons.

Television news are said to concentrate primarily on the horse race aspect of elections, rather than the qualifications of candidates and substantive political information for making informed voting decisions (Mutz, 1997). Additionally, the personalization of news with the focus on human interest, rather than issues, may lead to less interest in politics. Iyengar (1991) shows that the emphasis on visual images and the use of episodic framing simplifies the represented political problems (as cited in Perse, 2001). However, the political participation of an individual is influenced by the content that people watch on television as well as by the amount of television viewing generally (Norris, 1996). Thus, the content people watch on television could act as an important mediator to compensate for the negative effects of the sheer amount of watching time (Putnam, 1995). Here, the prosocial approach of mass media is obvious; if the content of television news would be more issue-oriented and provide more substantive political information, television could be a positive political source which may enhance the political participation. However, the above named conflict between the profit-oriented news organizations and the high costs of providing prosocial media content hinders the achievement of such an effort.

Therefore, the following research hypotheses are assumed:

Hypothesis 1: the exposure to newspaper news is positively related to political participation.

Hypothesis 2: the exposure to television news is negatively related to political participation.

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The Internet as a New Potential for Political Participation

A new medium with a great potential for facilitating higher levels of political participation emerged in the last decades, namely the World Wide Web. The appearance of this new communication technology has led to an alteration in the way many people gather news and participate in politics. The Internet combines the audiovisual element of traditional media such as television with the fast interactive actions of media such as telephones. It provides the user with a new kind of communication flexibility by means of which the individual can choose the preferred information anywhere and anytime regardless of geographical distance. The society is shifting from traditional news sources to a greater reliance on new media, such as Internet (Tolbert & McNeal, 2003). The Internet emerged for the first time as a major non-traditional medium in 1996, where it was used in political campaigns. Candidates promote their political programs on web pages and non-profit organizations provide the public with solid political information. During the period of 1996 and 2000, the Internet was increasingly used as a source for political information. In 2000, around 18% of Americans reported that they went online for elections news while in 2004 already 24% of the American public used the online information (Kenski & Jomini Straud, 2006). The increasing Internet access is related to declines in television and newspaper use for election news as well as sources for election information. The trend towards the Internet as an important source for political information could be due to the low satisfaction citizens experienced with the information provided by traditional media (Tolbert & McNeal, 2003).

There are several suggestions that electronic media may have the potential to enhance democracy and increase political participation (Anderson, 2003). The Internet enables citizens to have easy access to information about politics in a more convenient way at any time, which may stimulate voter turnout (Tolbert & McNeal, 2003). Further, with the help of hyperlinks and search engines, the user can dig deeper into certain issues of special interest.

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Additionally, it enables the public to get into contact with public officials and to hold them accountable (Kenski & Jomini Straud, 2006). Through the anonymity of the Internet, it is assumed that users are less embarrassed about their possible lack of political competence. They can seek information about topics without admitting publicly that they have not known these topics before. The Internet offers greater possibilities to engage in political actions, not only by being informed but also by participating in civic and political discussions.

However, there are also some concerns regarding the role of the Internet in political participation. The sheer volume of information that can be found, might be overwhelming, which may lead to complications in finding accurate and accessible political information. Further, citizens might be discouraged when addressing a public official and only receiving a formal letter response or even no response. These factors could lead to a lower perceived efficacy with regard to the competence of the political actors and their own. Delli Carpini & Keeter (2003), as cited in Kenski & Jomini Straud (2006), assume that the Internet reinforces the division between activists and non-activists. Thus, individuals who seek political information by means of the Internet are those who are already knowledgeable and politically interested. Additionally, the new information technology might lead to an increase in voters' turnout, but only among those citizens who are already predisposed to vote in elections due to former political interest. Also one must consider that the unequal access to technology may lead to limited opportunities of information gathering (Tolbert & McNeal, 2003). A further problem is the easy and uncontrolled distribution of all kinds of information. The public can find full texts of daily newspapers, which are published by the best professional journalists and editors worldwide, as well as unfiltered news items provided by search engines and unreliable rumours and speculations in news chat rooms (Diddi & LaRose, 2006).

The findings of several studies reflect the differing opinions about the role of the Internet in the political process. On the one hand, studies show that Internet usage contributes

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to increases in political participation as well as to political knowledge. Further, individuals who are active Internet users were found to be more likely to engage in a variety of political activities and most online activities are positively related to political participation (Weber, Lurnakis, & Bergman, 2003). On the other hand, results indicate that the Internet may not be sufficient to overcome low public interest for elections, which are not receiving much attention. Online election information seems to enhance voter participation only in elections with the highest visibility, such as presidential elections (Tolbert & McNeal, 2003). However, Kenski & Jomini Stroud (2006) only find small associations between online exposure to information about a presidential campaign and political efficacy, knowledge and participation. The inconsistent findings may be due to the differing methodology used in the various studies. The studies have used differing definitions of important mediating variables, not distinguishing between the different purposes of watching television and using the Internet and have a low external validity. Therefore, it is important to separate the multifunction of online news into different categories. On the one hand, online news can be published by means of online videos that share the visual characteristics of television news. Here, the same negative consequences such as a reliance on visual images and entertainment framing methods are present. On the other hand, online news can be presented by means of published articles. In this case, the reader can choose from different articles. The higher degree of self-selection stimulates the personal interest and the collection of facts important to make political decisions (Giles, 2003). Therefore, it can be assumed that online news gathered by means of articles share similar characteristics with gathering news from newspapers resulting in a higher degree of political engagement. A further distinction must be made due to the several sources of online news the Internet provides. De Vreese & Boomgaarden (2006) pointed out the importance of news content and channel preference. In their study, it was found that exposure to commercial news has a positive effect on political

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knowledge and on turnout. In general, it is suggested that public news contain more relevant information content about a specific political topic, which might promote knowledge gains. In contrast, commercial news are often blamed for their reliance on entertainment issues with a lower level of proliferation of important political facts to make about a political choice. Therefore, several studies found negative correlations between the use of commercial and tabloid news and political knowledge and mobilization (Newton, 1999; Holtz-Bacha & Norris, 2001). However, these studies do not take the Internet as a news medium into account. Therefore, this study investigates the effects of the moderating variables of serious vs. non-serious news sources as well as news provided by means of videos vs. article to examine if the same patterns of television news can be obtained by online news.

The following hypotheses will be tested:

Hypothesis 3: the exposure to online news will be positively related to political participation.

Hypothesis 3a: the exposure to online news by means of videos has a more negative impact on the relationship between media news exposure and political participation than the exposure to online news by means of articles.

Hypothesis 3b: the exposure to non-serious online news sources has a more negative impact on the relationship between media news exposure and political participation than the exposure to serious online news sources.

Characteristics of the New “Internet Generation”

The Internet is a fairly new phenomenon with an increasing population of users that is changing in numbers as well as characteristics (Tolbert & McNeal, 2003). Mostly young people are highly involved in the usage of the Internet as a new medium and source for information. Today’s college students are actually the first “Internet generation” who rely on the Internet for both academic and general information gathering, such as entertainment purposes as well as news (Metzger, Flanagin, & Zwarun, 2003). When young people leave for college and live on their own, mostly for the first time, important patterns develop. In this lifespan, college students form their individual patterns of voting as well as news consumption that may persist for a lifetime (Diddi & LaRose, 2006). College students are more likely to gather political news from the Internet as well as to read more news magazines in comparison to young people without tertiary education. Through spending much time and effort online for both entertainment purposes and necessary information gathering for their study, they are most familiar with this kind of new technology

In general, it is suggested that the civic and political engagement of the youth is steadily decreasing, which is facilitated by extensive media use (Putnam, 1995). However, some studies claim that this decline is more related to negative or critical attitudes and ideas young people have about politics (Henn, Weinstein, & Wring, 2002). Obviously, the Internet offers a vast amount of opportunities to engage oneself politically. This is particularly the case for the youth who is often politically engaged at local levels and in less traditional forms of political participation (de Vreese, 2007). Young people can take part in civic as well as political discussions and inform themselves about current political actions and backgrounds (Dahlgren, 2000). Especially the domain of building social networks seems to be responsible for increases in political participation. Most online activities are positively related to political participation, such as attending online communication forums and service use. De Vreese

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(2007) pointed out the creation of a “digital citizenship”, whereby online communication and online service use among young people correlates with online political participation. There were some concerns that the higher amount of spending time online may lead to abandon the social environment, whereas others stress the potential of electronic media to strengthen social relationships (Wellman et al., 2001). All in all, social networks seem to play an important role in the processes underlying political participation.

Community integration is considered to be a necessary condition for (local) political participation. Only when people can identify themselves with the community, they are living in, they can feel responsible to make about a change in their political environment. A lack of social networks and special ties to the community makes the political participation undesirable and uninteresting for the individual because he or she does not feel the necessity to be part of it. The important mediating factor in the relationship between community integration and political participation is communication. Interpersonal discussions are the primary mechanism underlying community integration. Through communication, citizens gain information about the political actions undertaken and possibilities to be engaged in the political process. A study by McLeod et al. (1996) shows that interpersonal discussion was the strongest predictor of participation in a civic forum. Here, the media plays also an important role. With the help of media or interpersonal forms of communication, citizens may be mobilized to participate in the local political area. While community integration provides the framework for participation, the media and interpersonal communication determine the knowledge to use the different opportunities. Even when social networks fail to give information about sufficient opportunities, different forms of communication can restore the lack through provision of alternative forms of participation. A study by Robinson & Levy (1986) indicates that conversations with others can lead to better understanding of the news,

which might lead to a higher degree of political interest (as cited in McLeod, Scheufele, & Moy, 1999).

Of special interest are interpersonal discussions in which disagreement occurs. Researchers claim that such discussions provoke the greatest cognitive activity when individuals are confronted with differing opinions. These confrontations offer individuals the opportunity to learn about each other and to reason about their different ways of thinking. The exposure to different ideas through interpersonal discussions can not only increase the understanding of their own positions on the issues, but also differences to other point of views (Gamson, 1992). When young people leave their familiar environment for going to the college, a lot of new experiences are made with regard to meeting other students coming from different backgrounds. Therefore, a lot of different personalities are converging, which eventually results eventually in diverse discussions.

Through interpersonal communication, the process of reflective integration can be stimulated. Reflective integration is the tendency to think about certain topics, recall them later and seek more information about them. Through the process of reflective integration, the process of information-seeking could be stimulated, and thereby enhancing the political activity of an individual. Especially when different kinds of news and information from various sources are used, the individual is provided with a more contextualized understanding of the political domain, which might lead to higher degrees of political participation. Further, the tendency to gain a better insight into news stories might be due to the scepticism about news accuracy and correctness (Sotirovic & McLeod, 2001). Especially among college students, the reflective integration of news plays an important role because of their general sceptic perception of the political domain as mentioned above (de Vreese, 2007). Research shows that reflective integration not only enhances the effect of newspaper public affairs use on political participation but also seems to attenuate the negative effect of television

entertainment use on political participation. Further, the effects of media seem to be modulated by the processing strategies people use. When a medium encourages people to put some effort into finding accurate information, it can provide them with a lot of politically useful content (Sotirovic & McLeod, 2001). This could be especially interesting in the case of the Internet due to its self-selecting character.

The Concepts of Self-Efficacy

The self-efficacy of people regarding their perceived ability to participate in the political process as well as with regard to the use of different types of media can have a powerful impact on the individual behaviour. Self-efficacy comprises beliefs about two aspects of personal behaviour, namely the belief that a person can perform a specific behaviour successfully and the belief that if successfully performed, the outcome will have positive consequences (Bandura, 1977). Thus, the likelihood of performing a specific behaviour in the future is depending on the amount of prior success with performing the behaviour together with the amount of perceived benefits resulted from the performance. Important to note is that self-efficacy is domain-specific insofar perceptions are associated with specific types of behaviour. Two different concepts of self-efficacy are here important, namely media self-efficacy and political self-efficacy who are suggested to moderate the ongoing processes of political behaviour and respectively media news exposure. Media self-efficacy can be understood by the confidence individuals have to engage in the use of certain types of media to achieve a specific goal. Regarding the concept of media self-efficacy it could be hypothesized that people who think that they can seek information effectively will use media more than others. Due to its task-specific character, it can also be assumed that people who are more convinced about the usage of a specific type of media for news gathering will use this type of news source more often than other media (Hofstetter, Zuniga,

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& Dozier, 2001). Further, media self-efficacy is suggested to be positively related to political self-efficacy as well as political participation. A study by Hofstetter et al. (2001) shows that media self-efficacy has an indirect positive influence on political self-efficacy as well as political participation, moderated by the amount of media exposure and engagement.

According to Conway (1985), political self-efficacy is defined as “the extent to which people think that they can influence the political situation by means of personal engagement and the attention governmental institutions pay to public concerns” (as cited in Hofstetter et al., 2001). Thus, the concepts of media and political self-efficacy are closely interrelated and both influence the amount of political participation an individual engages.

The theoretical background

The research goal of this study is the explanation and prediction of the media technology behaviour in relation to general human behaviour. The focus is here on the different media news sources and how they are related to the political participation in the collegiate population taken into account their special characteristics. A conceptual model was conducted which is shown in Figure 1. The general social cognitive theory of Bandura (1986) suggests that the human behaviour is influenced by the interaction between the environment, the cognitive processes of the individual, and the individual itself. The environmental factor is mediated by the amount of political community integration an individual has (Brug et al., 2005). As mentioned before, community integration describes the intent of social networks and the integrity within a community with a special focus on the political communication patterns between the members of a community (McLeod et al., 1999). Because the actual act of political participation takes place in the local environment, we assume an important relationship between the political community integration within its communication patterns and the political behaviour of an individual. The factor community integration includes the

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following four variables: The first determinant concerns the likelihood of moving since the willingness to leave the community can be related to a lower degree of integration and the individual’s state of well-being in this community. Second, the satisfaction with actual political events and the system may be an indicator for the degree of community integration. If you are unsatisfied with the political structures in your country of residence, you may not feel being affiliated to the community. Next, the extent of discussion is of certain importance to the understanding and reflection of opinion. If you are exposed to different political directions through communication with other members of the community, your understanding of your own positions on certain political issues may be enhanced as well as the differences with regard to the other opinions (Gamson, 1992). When you are well integrated in a community, the discussion diversity may be enhanced due to a higher

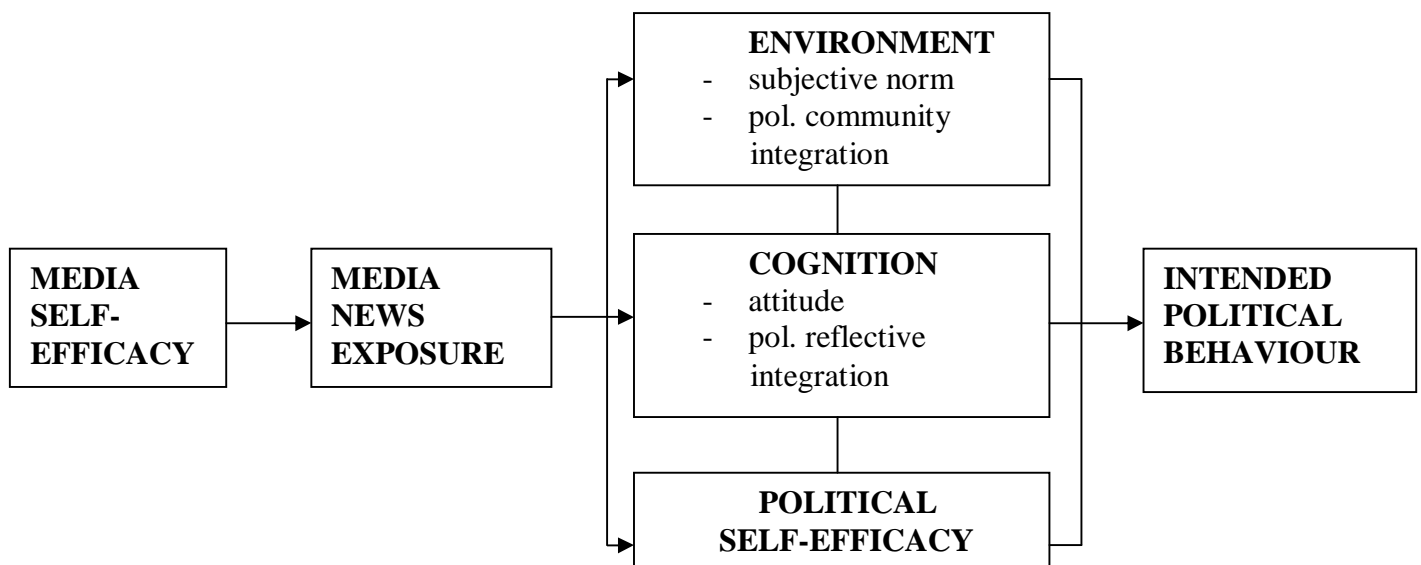


Figure 1. Description of the conceptual model.

possibility of being exposed to different point of views. Fourth, the access to media additionally determines an extent of integration because it is supposed that it shows the motivation to be informed about important national issues and to feel at home. All in all, it can be assumed that a higher degree of community integration has a positive impact on the political behaviour of an individual by means of a higher interest in community matters.

The cognitive factor is determined by an individual’s political reflective integration. The reflective integration is defined as “the amount of time people invested in talking with friends or others about political issues, recall political events later and think about them and try to find additional information about a certain political topic” (Sotirovic & McLeod, 2001). The assumption is that a higher degree of reflective integration has a positive influence on political behaviour because the individual is actively engaged with political issues.

The last determinant that Bandura mentioned is the individual itself. Self-efficacy comprises the perceived control a person has about the outcomes of his or her behaviour. Thus, a positive perceived outcome leads to a higher possibility to operate in this way (Bandura, 1977).

To fulfil the purpose of measuring the intended political behaviour, the study combines the general social cognitive theory of Bandura with a more tailored social cognitive theory, namely the theory of planned behaviour of Ajzen (1988). Bandura mentioned the interacting nature of the factors of environment, cognition, self-efficacy and behaviour. The theory of planned behaviour specifies these determinants for intended behaviour as attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control.

According to Ajzen, the first determinant attitude is defined by opinions people have about certain topics. These attitudes are relatively stable and are formed by prior learning experiences. They are not only based on logical and rational considerations, but also on habits and irrational convictions. In the model, attitudes are constructed through the repeated

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reflection and evaluation of one’s own opinions about specific themes. Thus, to specify the concept of attitude, the opinion people have about, their prior experiences they have with as well as the personal extent of importance to political actions is measured.

The second component subjective norm is defined as the individual’s perception of social normative pressures or relevant others’ beliefs that he or she should or should not perform a specific behaviour. This motivation to comply with the wishes of specific persons is modulated by the importance that one ascribes to the referents. Thus, the concept of subjective norms is measured by means of the variables normative beliefs people have about others and the motivation to comply with the perceived beliefs.

The third determinant behavioural control is defined as one’s perception of the difficulty of performing a special behaviour and it stems from the concept of self-efficacy originated in the social cognitive theory of Bandura (Brug et al., 2005).

According to Bandura, self-efficacy plays a major role in the intended behaviour and is specific in its nature and can vary on three dimensions, namely magnitude, generality and strength (Bandura, 1977). Therefore, the concept can be divided into political and media self-efficacy. Political self-efficacy was measured by asking whether respondents thought that they can influence a variety of political situations and tasks (generality) and how confident they were that they can influence each situation or task (strength). To cover the dimension ‘magnitude’ it is asked about the estimated degree of difficulty to perform a specific task. Media self-efficacy can be understood by “the confidence individuals have to engage with certain media to achieve a specific goal” (Hofstetter et al., 2001). In the present study, we define this specific goal as finding political information on certain issues. To measure media self-efficacy, respondents were asked how they estimated the degree of difficulty to deal with a specific kind of news media, how they estimated the amount and extent of emerging

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problems when interacting with a specific kind of news media in certain situations, and how confident they are when interacting with a specific kind of media.

The research focuses on political behaviour and participation, which are estimated by means of the intended behaviour. Of certain importance is here the distinction between traditional and non-traditional participation. Traditional participation can be understood in terms of voting and contacting a public official. Non-traditional forms of participation include participation in demonstrations, collecting signatures, donating money or attending a civic forum to get attention for an issue of special interest (McLeod et al., 1999). For both forms, the intent to participate by means of duration and extent of participation as well as the motivation to maintain political engagement is measured.

To reveal the relationship between certain types of media news exposure and the intent of political participation, three types of media news were distinguished, namely newspapers, television news and Internet news. For each type, the extent of specific used media, the regularity of certain news sources, the content of the source (e.g. serious vs. non-serious), the duration of use and whether it was used for additional background information is measured.

Based on the previous mentioned research, the following hypotheses are tested:

Hypothesis 4: The relationship between media news exposure and political participation is mediated by environmental (i.e. community integration and subjective norm) and cognitive factors (i.e. reflective integration and attitude) as well as political self-efficacy.

Hypothesis 4a: Political participation is predicted by community integration, subjective norm, reflective integration, attitude and political self-efficacy.

Hypothesis 4b: Media news exposure acts as a predictor for community integration, subjective norm, reflective integration, attitude and political self-efficacy.

Hypothesis 4c: Media self-efficacy acts as a predictor for media news exposure.

Method

Participants. To test the relationship between news consumption patterns of college students (as the first “Internet generation”) and their intended political behaviour, Dutch and German students from different universities are included. Both countries show a high degree of similarity in their political structure with regard to their multi-party systems, similar voting procedures and distinct leadership positions. However, in terms of their political history, there are some differences which should be acknowledged. In the Netherlands, there is a much older democratic tradition than in Germany with greater attempts to include different social classes and minorities in the process of decision-making. Further, the composition of the Dutch parliament is characterized through a broad majority with several ideologically different positions. Unlike Germany, the Netherlands do not have a required threshold for parties to participate in the government (referred to as the “Fünf-Prozent-Hürde”), which consequently resulted in a greater composition of parties in the Dutch Tweede Kamer than in the German Bundestag. Furthermore, the media patterns are comparable between the two countries. In both countries, public-service channels co-exist along with commercial stations, but with a greater number of commercial channels available in Germany. The Dutch and the German voters ascribe to the same degree television news as a major source of information for election campaigns, especially for undecided voters (Schoenbach, de Ridder, & Lauf, 2001). Therefore, it is assumed that the sample of Dutch and German college students is comparable representing a sufficient sample of the population of interest.

Design. By means of the free survey software provided on the web site www.thesistools.com, an online survey was conducted to reveal the relationship between the media news consumption patterns of college students and their political participation including the

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exogenous variables of interest which are assumed to have an influence on the relationship. Based on previous mentioned literature, the influential variables of the environment, the cognitive structures of an individual and the self-efficacy are measured in relation to the dependent variable of political participation. To ascertain the reliability of the composed survey from several literal sources, it was decided to carry out a pre-test for a higher degree of confidence that the created items are sufficient to assess the underlying constructs. The pre-test was started with several questions from the studied literature with ten college students (six females, four males) from the University of Twente. A principal reliability analysis was performed, which was followed by a varimax rotation. In general, the pre-test revealed high reliability rates for all measured concepts indicated by a Cronbach’s alpha between $\alpha = .75$ and $\alpha = .97$ for all eight variables of interest. In addition, feedback was retrieved from the participants concerning the length of the survey as well as the high amount of similar questions which could lead to a degree in motivation levels, resulting in decreased response rates. Therefore, it was decided to select the highest loading items for each variable to shorten the survey and to minimize the possibility that participants do not fill in the questionnaire completely.

Exogenous variables

Despite the homogeneity of the sample due to the focus on college students, socio-demographic factors such as age, gender, income and nationality are assessed as well as their highest educational level, the type of current study and their current country of residence indicating the duration of residence. Deriving from the pre-test, 10 questions with several categories are designed to assure a certain level of homogeneity in the present sample.

Media variables

The variable of *media news exposure* is assessed with three multiple-choice questions concerning the amount of time spent on using each media news source and one multiple-choice question in which participants are asked to indicate the most used source for news gathering (e.g. “How much time do you approximately spend on reading newspapers per day?”). Additionally, two Likert scales with five dimensions (0 hours, 0-2 hours, 2-4 hours, 4-6 hours, and 6-8 hours) were constructed assessing the weekly average time spent on using the sources for newsgathering and respectively for searching background information about a specific political issue of interest. The sources are separated into public and private television news programmes, serious and tabloid newspapers, serious and tabloid online news which are additionally divided into visual or printed form of occurrence. The separations were made according to typical representatives of the respective variables of interest which is further founded on the basis of previous literature and the feedback received from the pre-test. For each mentioned media news source, examples of German and Dutch news providers are included to assure comprehensibility (e.g. “public television news programmes like Tagesschau/NOS Journaal”) for both nationalities.

Environmental variables

The environmental variables are separated into the categories *subjective norm* and the *political community integration*. As mentioned before, the theory of planned behaviour assumes that the normative beliefs and the motivation to comply determine the level of *subjective norm* a person has. Normative beliefs in the actual context are defined as the individual’s perceptions about political engagement, which is influenced by the opinions of significant others. Therefore, two items on a five-point scale were constructed (e.g. “In my country there are a lot of people who vote”). The motivation to comply is defined as the

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individual’s perception of specific social normative pressures represented by the opinions important others have to be or not be politically engaged. Therefore, four items on a five-point scale were created to assess whether a person is influenced by the political positions important others around him have (e.g. “Despite the lack of political interest of my family/friends I am engaged in the political process”).

Based on the previous mentioned literature, the interpersonal communication variable of *political community integration* can be assessed through the underlying constructs of likelihood of moving, the satisfaction with actual political events and the system, the extent of discussion as well as the access to local media offers. The likelihood of moving comprises four items on a five-point scale concerning the personal feeling of comfortableness in the country of current residence as well as the number of family members and friends living nearby (e.g. “Sometimes I feel like I belong to where I currently live” and “I do not see my family/friends often because they are living far away”). The satisfaction with actual political events and the system is measured with 3 questions asking for example “I have trust in the national political system”. The extent of discussion is of certain importance because it is assumed that a broad diversity of discussions with differing opinions can strengthen the understanding between similarities and differences of several positions. Therefore, three questions on a five-point scale are constructed asking about the interest, frequency and position of talking with someone with a differing political opinion (e.g. “I am interested in the political opinion of other people”). The access to local media offers should reflect the degree of integration in the current residence. Further, it assured that the questions about the media use were appropriate because participants had the required news sources available. Thus, five statements with two answer possibilities (yes/no) are created to determine the access to the three media news sources of interest (television, newspaper, Internet).

Cognitive variables

The cognitive dimension of *attitude* is measured with six five-point Likert scale items examining the personal opinion about political actions, the prior experiences made with political actions and the extent of personally ascribed importance of political action (e.g. “Being politically active (e.g. voting) is the only possibility of influencing the political structures in a country”).

Ten five-point scale items are used to assess the variable of *political reflective integration* by asking about the amount of conversations concerning important political issues with others, recalling political events, reflecting political topics and searching for background information on political topics (e.g. “I spend much time thinking about politics”). According to McLeod et al. (1999), it is expected that this interpersonal communication variable is related to political knowledge acquisition and therefore stimulates political activity.

Self-efficacy variables

Self-efficacy is separated into *political self-efficacy* and *media self-efficacy* with questions regarding the generality, the strength and the magnitude of self-efficacy. Consequently, *political self-efficacy* is measured by asking about their perception of being able to influence the political situation, the degree of confidence they have and the degree of perceived difficulty to influence the political situation with a total of six items on a five-point Likert scale. The specific political situation is separated into traditional (asking about elections) and non-traditional (asking about participating demonstrations/collecting signatures) participation to cover both forms. *Media self-efficacy* is measured on the three dimensions of self-efficacy as well as with questions about the degree of success they have while using media to achieve a specific goal, the degree of confidence they have while

interacting with a specific media type, and the degree of perceived difficulty they are confronted with while dealing with a specific type of media. The specific media types of interest are separated into the three media sources of interest, namely television news, newspapers and online news.

Dependent variable

The variable of interest is the intended political behaviour in the form of traditional and non-traditional *political participation*. Traditional participation is separated into voting behaviour, contact to political instances and joining a political party. Non-traditional forms of participation are defined as participating in demonstrations, engagement in political citizens’ groups and donating money to specific parties. All forms of participation are measured by means of asking about the past, present and assumed future behaviour of the specific political engagement with seventeen items on a five-point scale (e.g. “I am active in a political party”).

Data Analysis. During Summer 2009, a total of 120 participants filled in a self-administered questionnaire, which is shown in Appendix A. 14 participants need to be excluded due to their educational level, type of nationality or because they did not completely fill in the questionnaire. Therefore, a sample of 104 participants is analysed. The sample consists of 58.7% males and 41.3% females with a median age of 21 to 23 years. 88 participants are from Germany and 16 are Dutch.

Data analysis was performed using SPSS (Version 16). A reliability analysis of the performed for all 8 subscales was conducted to test the application of the measure. The results are presented in Appendix B. The reliability for the eight variables lies between Cronbach’s $\alpha = .594$ and $\alpha = .861$, with the highest reliability for the subscale of *political reflective integration*. All in all, the reliability indicates a moderate to high value. However,

for the variable of *political community integration*, three items needed to be excluded to achieve a new Cronbach’s alpha of $\alpha = .582$. Bivariate Pearson product-moment correlations and Linear Regression Analyses are computed to preclude possible interaction between certain independent variables. The significance level is $\alpha = .05$. A model generating approach using LISREL (Student Edition 8.80) as suggested by Jöreskog & Sörbom (1993) tests the direct and indirect paths in our conceptual model via path analysis. Convergent validity was established by examining the significance by means of t-values. To test the overall fit of the conceptual model, fit indexes such as the chi-square per degree of freedom and the Criterium Fit Index are used.

Results

The results of the Bivariate Pearson product-moment correlations and Linear Regression Analyses are presented in table 1. The subscales of the variables *political community integration*, *subjective norm*, *political reflective integration*, *attitude*, *media self-efficacy*, *political self-efficacy* and *media news exposure* seem to have an influence on the subscale of *political participation*. Concerning our research question, the results indicate a positive significant relationship between *media news exposure* and *political participation* ($R = .219$, $p = .026$) with 48% of the variance of political participation explained by media news exposure. Several specific political activities were separated. Their respective statistical descriptives are presented in Appendix C. The mean score and standard deviations reveal that almost all participants are engaged in the voting process ($M = 4.449$, $SD = .921$) whereas the participation in demonstrations and political citizens’ groups are not common ($M = 2.071$, $SD = 1.072$; $M = 1.869$, $SD = .936$).

Table 1

The Linear Regression Analyses of the Relationships between the Subscales of the Variables.

Variable Y	Variable X	R	R ²	Sig.
PP	RI	0.584*	0.341	0.000
PP	A	0.560*	0.314	0.000
PP	SN	0.555*	0.308	0.000
PP	PS	0.343*	0.118	0.000
PP	CI	0.259*	0.067	0.008
PP	M	0.219*	0.048	0.048
PP	MS	0.201*	0.040	0.040
CI	RI	0.531*	0.282	0.000
CI	A	0.434*	0.188	0.000
CI	PS	0.417*	0.173	0.000
CI	SN	0.344*	0.118	0.000
CI	MS	0.290*	0.084	0.003
CI	M	0.207*	0.043	0.035

Note. M = *media news exposure*, CI = *political community integration*, SN = *subjective norm*, RI = *political reflective integration*, A = *attitude*, PS = *political self-efficacy*, MS = *media self-efficacy*, PP = *political participation*

*p < .05.

Table 1(continued)

The Linear Regression Analyses of the Relationships between the Subscales of the Variables.

Variable Y	Variable X	R	R ²	Sig.
SN	RI	0.639*	0.409	0.000
SN	A	0.607*	0.368	0.000
SN	PS	0.218*	0.048	0.026
SN	M	0.139*	0.19	0.160
M	RI	0.279*	0.078	0.004
M	PS	0.147	0.022	0.136
RI	A	0.682*	0.464	0.000
RI	PS	0.277*	0.077	0.004
RI	MS	0.253*	0.064	0.010
A	M	0.181	0.33	0.066
A	PS	0.380*	0.145	0.000
A	MS	0.242*	0.059	0.013
PS	MS	0.377*	0.142	0.000

Note. M = *media news exposure*, CI = *political community integration*, SN = *subjective norm*, RI = *political reflective integration*, A = *attitude*, PS = *political self-efficacy*, MS = *media self-efficacy*

*p < .05.

The lowest rated political activities in this sample are the membership in a political party and the likelihood of donating money to a political party ($M = 1.481$, $SD = 1.462$, $SD = .829$). However, the minimum and maximum values indicate that all rating possibilities are included. Thus, the responses of the participants range from being highly politically active individuals to participants who do not show any political action at any time.

Sources of news media and political participation

Data analysis was performed using SPSS (Version 16) to test the research hypotheses about the relations between different sources of *media news exposure* and *political participation*, the variable of *media news exposure* is separated into television news, newspapers and online news according to the question “What kind of source would you rate as most used for news gathering?”. The resulting correlation matrix, as presented in Appendix D, suggests that the exposure to television news and newspapers as the most frequently used source for news gathering has no impact on the levels of *political participation* ($r = .114$, $p = .548$; $r = .195$, $p = .543$). In fact, the exposure to online news seem to correlate positively with *political participation* ($r = .295$, $p = .02$). Striking is here that only 30 participants indicate television news and only 12 participants newspapers as the most frequently used source for news gathering. 62 participants seem to gather news mostly from online news, which could reflect the previous assumed relevance of the Internet as a new media news source.

To assess the significance of the difference between the correlation coefficients of television news, newspapers and online news, the Fisher r-to-z transformation was used. This test shows that the measured results are not transferable to the population under study.

Table 2

Z- Transformations of the Pearson Product-Moment Correlations (Z) and p-Values for each Combination of the three Media News Sources used.

Sample A	Sample B	Z	Sig.
Television	Newspapers	-0.22	0.4129
Television	Internet	-0.82	0.2061
Newspapers	Internet	-0.3	0.3821

As shown in table 2, all differences between the correlation coefficients of the three sources are not significant ($z = -.22$, $p = .413$; $z = -.82$, $p = .206$, $z = -.3$, $p = .382$). Thus, it can not be concluded that the measured results of the college sample are representative for the college population as a whole. However, the research hypotheses are investigated further to examine the relations between the variables in this special sample.

The variables of online news

First, new variables were conducted with regard to the separation between serious and non-serious news sources and between online news gathered by means of videos or articles.

Therefore, mean scores for the items measuring the respective variables were conducted together with their means and standard deviations. It is assumed that these variables do have a moderating effect on the relationship between media news exposure and political participation. For examining the moderator effect, three Linear Regression Models were

conducted. The first model examines the relationship between *media news exposure* and *political participation*. All in all, the first models show the previous detected significant relationship ($F(1,102) = 5.124, p = .026$). The second model tests whether or not the moderator variable combined with the initial variable have a mediating influence on the dependent variable. The third model adds the interaction between the moderator variable and media news exposure to test the moderating impact on political participation. The results of the second and third model for each variable of interest are summarized in table 3. When the moderator variable *online videos* is included in the second model, the standardized coefficient indicates that *online videos* do not have a mediating influence on the relationship between *political participation* and *media news exposure* ($\beta = -.166$). The interaction effect in the third model seems to have no significant impact on the relationship as well ($\beta = .252$). The second variable of interest is gathering news by means of *online articles*. The results of the second model show that neither the moderator variable ($\beta = -.168$) nor the interaction effect between the moderator and the independent variable seem to act as predictors of *political participation* ($\beta = .158$). For the variable of *non-serious news sources* as a moderator, it is shown that the assumed predicting effect of both the moderator variable ($\beta = -.201$) and the interaction effect ($\beta = .194$) is not significant. The same pattern is observable in the case of *serious news sources* where the standardized coefficient for the moderator variable is $\beta = -.042$ and for the interaction effect $\beta = .141$. It is noticeable that the t-test reveals a negative unstandardized coefficient for all assumed moderator variables. However, the unstandardized coefficients for *online videos* and *non-serious news sources* ($B = -.198; B = -2.44$) are more negative than the unstandardized coefficients of *online articles* and *serious news sources* ($B = -.168; B = -.035$), although all of them attain no significance.

Table 3

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Models for the Variables of *online videos*, *online articles*, *online non-serious news sources*, and *online serious news sources* and their respective Interaction Effect.

Variable	B	SE B	β
OV	-0.198	0.152	-0.166
IntOV	0.054	0.031	0.252
OA	-0.168	0.169	-0.168
IntOA	0.042	0.033	0.158
ON	-2.44	0.143	-0.201
IntON	-0.412	0.186	-0.34
OS	-0.035	0.118	-0.042
IntOS	0.04	0.034	0.141

Note. OV = *online videos*, IntOV = interaction effect of *online videos*, OA = *online articles*, IntOA = interaction effect of *online articles*, ON = *online non-serious news sources*, IntON = interaction effect of *online non-serious news sources*, OS = *online serious news sources*, IntOS = interaction effect of *online serious news sources*.

Testing the Conceptual Model

A model generating approach using LISREL (Student Edition 8.80) as suggested by Jöreskog & Sörbom (1993) is the most appropriate method to test both direct and indirect paths between variables. The structural equation model is tested by means of a path analysis to specify the relationships. As mentioned earlier, convergent validity was established by examining the significance by means of t-values. To test the overall fit of the conceptual model, fit indexes such as the chi-square per degree of freedom and the Criterion Fit Index are used. Figure 2 indicates the standardized β -values of the assumed relationships as well as the fit indexes. Overall, the model fits the data not exceptionally well. The conceptual model indicates a value of $X^2(15, N = 104) = 127.48, p \leq .01$ and the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = .62. In consideration of the small sample size, the value of the chi-square is very high. The criterion for an acceptable model fit by means of the CFI is generally indicated by a value greater than .95. In this case, a CFI of .62 suggests a relatively unsuitable fit of the model. The obtained LISREL output reveals that 43% of the variance of *political participation* is explained by the variables of *subjective norm* ($\beta = .59$), *political community integration* ($\beta = -.33$), *political reflective integration* ($\beta = .56$) *political self-efficacy* ($\beta = .57$) and *attitude* ($\beta = .24$). Thus, all variables, except *attitude*, are significant predictors of *political participation*. The indirect influence of *media news exposure* on *political participation* is only mediated significantly through *political reflective integration* ($\beta = .22$) and *political community integration* ($\beta = -.06$). Further, *media self-efficacy* has no significant direct influence on *media news exposure* ($\beta = .047$). Direct relationship from *media news exposure* to *political reflective* ($\beta = .39$) and *community integration* ($\beta = .19$) can be detected, but not to *subjective norm* ($\beta = .063$), *attitude* ($\beta = .089$) and *political self-efficacy* ($\beta = .093$).

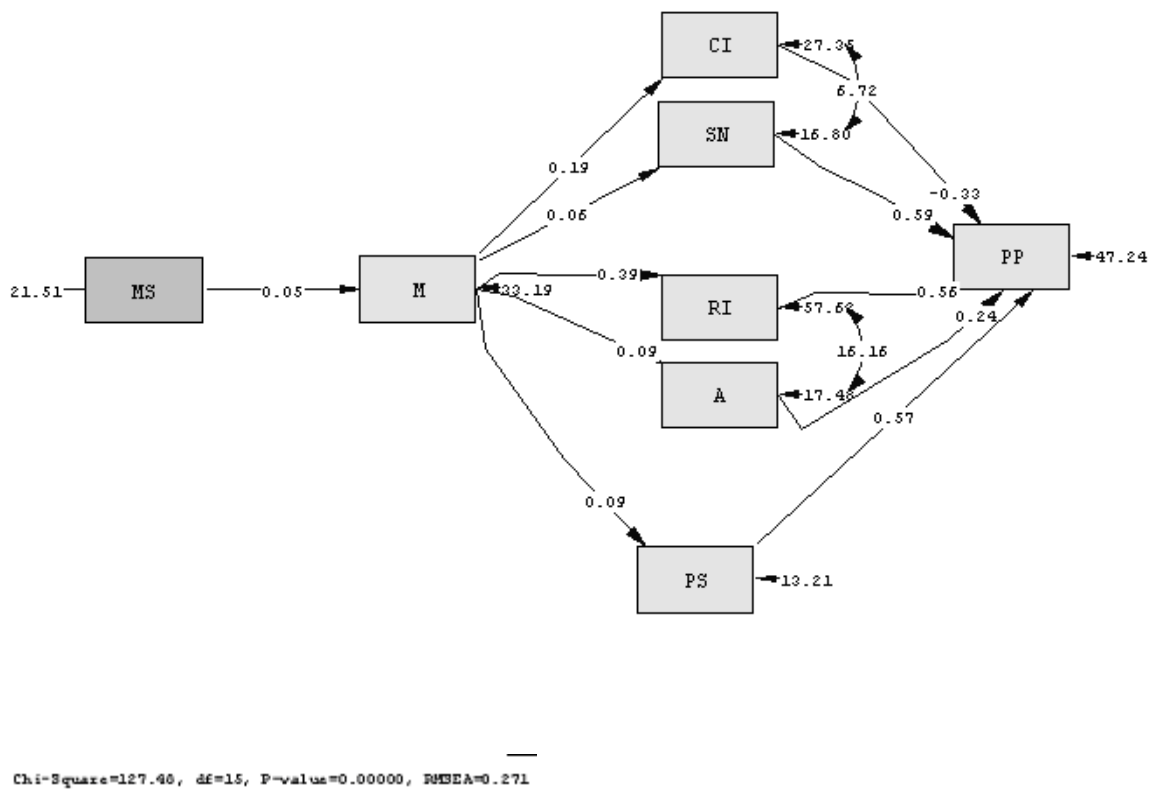


Figure 2. The conceptual model with the standardized β –values and fit indexes, as the chi-square and the root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA).

The error covariance of the environmental ($t = 3.02$) and the cognitive factors ($t = 4.58$) correlates quite well, indicating an interconnection between *subjective norm* and *community integration*, and respectively *attitude* and *political reflective integration*.

LISREL suggests to add several paths and to correlate certain error covariance between variables to decrease the value of the chi-square. Thus, the model is modified by adding a direct path from *attitude* to *subjective norm* as well as from *political community integration* to *political reflective integration*. Furthermore, the error covariance of *attitude* and *political community integration* are correlated and between *media news exposure* and *media self-efficacy*. The obtained LISREL output reveals that the model fits with $X^2 (12, N = 104) = 62.06, p \leq .01$, and $CFI = .84$. These results show that the value for the chi-square is reduced in half. Despite the CFI does not reach the desirable value above .95, an

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improvement in model fit can be found. In the modified model, *political participation* is explained by the variables of *subjective norm*, *political community integration*, *political reflective integration*, *attitude* and *political self-efficacy* by 45% of the variance, whereas only *attitude* does not attain the significance level ($\beta = .24$). *Attitude* ($\beta = .63$) and *media news exposure* ($\beta = .007$) are explaining 42% of the variance of *subjective norm*. However, only the t-value of *attitude* reaches significance. *Political reflective integration* can be predicted by the variables of *political community integration* ($\beta = .74$) and *media news exposure* ($\beta = .25$) with an explained variance of 32%. Both t-values of the variables are significant. Further, the regression coefficients show that *media news exposure* is no significant predictor of *attitude* ($\beta = .089$) and respectively *political self-efficacy* ($\beta = .093$). The error covariance between *attitude* and *political community integration* is 8.53 with a t-value of 3.63. Thus, there is a high correlation between both variables.

Conclusion

The research question examines the relationship between media news exposure and political participation. The study shows that the subscale of *media news exposure* has a positive significant impact on the subscale of *political participation*. The first three hypotheses intend to detect the differing effects of the type of news source used. Thereby, it is hypothesized that newspapers and online news have a positive influence on political participation, whereas the relationship between television news and the political participation is negative. It is shown that only 12 participants mention newspapers as the most frequently used source. 30 participants rate television news as the most frequently used source, but the majority of our sample considers online news as the most frequently used source. The bivariate correlations reveal that neither newspaper nor television have an impact on the political behaviour the participants indicate. However, the exposure to online news seems to

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correlate significantly with the dependent variable. As a next step, it needs to be tested whether or not the observed correlation coefficients of the sample can be generalized to the population under study. Therefore, the Fisher-r-to-z transformation is used to test the significance of the coefficients. The results of the transformation indicate that none of the calculated correlations is significant. All in all, hypothesis 1 and 2 can not be confirmed. The bivariate correlation shows partial support for the third hypothesis in the sample, but it is not transferable to the population under study.

The third hypothesis was separated according to two different categories of variables. First, it was assumed that gathering news by means of online videos has a more negative impact on the relationship between the two variables of media news exposure and political participation than gathering news by means of online articles. Therefore, regression equations are constructed to examine a potential moderating effect. Unfortunately, both variables of *online videos* and *online articles* have no significant impact. However, interesting is here to look at the direction of the relationship and the magnitude of the significance. Both variables seem to have a more negative influence on *political participation*, whereas the negative influence is stronger for *online videos* than for *online articles*. *Online videos* seem to have a more negative influence than *online articles* on *political participation*, although significance is not attained. Second, it is assumed that gathering news by means of non-serious news sources has a more negative impact than serious news sources on the relationship between media news exposure and political participation. Here, the same pattern can be observed. The moderator effect of both variables is negative, although not significantly. The moderator effect of *non-serious news sources* is indicated by a higher negative value than the moderator effect of *serious news sources*. In general, online news gathered from *non-serious news sources* seem to have the highest negative impact on the relationship between *media news exposure* and *political participation*, whereas online news gathered from *serious news*

sources seem to have the lowest negative influence. Thus, the hypotheses can not be fully confirmed, but the assumed directions and magnitudes are visible.

The conceptual model was tested with LISREL. The basic structural equation model specifies that environmental factors (i.e. *political community integration* and *subjective norm*), cognitive factors (i.e. *political reflective integration* and *attitude*) and *political self-efficacy* mediate the impact of *media news exposure* on *political participation*. Further, direct positive relationships from the environmental factors, cognitive factors and political self-efficacy towards political participation were assumed. In this connection, *media news exposure* acted as a predictor for the environmental and cognitive factors as well as *political self-efficacy*. Finally, it was suggested that *media news exposure* can be predicted by means of *media self-efficacy*. In general, the values of the chi-square and the CFI show that the conceptual model does not fit the data exceptionally well. However, the direct relationships from *political community integration*, *subjective norm*, *political reflective integration* and *political self-efficacy* to *political participation* are confirmed. 43% of the variance of *political participation* can be explained by these variables. Only *attitude* is no significant predictor of political participation. Furthermore, *political community integration* has a negative influence on *political participation*, whereas its contributor *subjective norm* has a positive influence just like the other variables. The direct positive relationships from *media news exposure* to *political community integration* and *political reflective integration* are confirmed as well, but the paths to *subjective norm*, *attitude* and *political self-efficacy* do not reach the significance level. Therefore, only *political community integration* and *political reflective integration* mediate the relationship between *media news exposure* and *political participation* significantly. In addition, the error covariance of the environmental and cognitive factors shows a positive and significant correlation between them. This indicates that *political community integration* and *subjective norm* are related as well as *political reflective*

integration and attitude. Finally, *media self-efficacy* does not act as a significant predictor of *media news exposure*.

In summary, the results do not confirm the conceptual model and the stated hypotheses completely. However, the hypothesized direct and indirect paths between the variables do partially reach significance. Therefore, the model is modified whereas a path from *subjective norm* to *attitude* and from *political reflective integration* to *political community integration* is added. Further, the error covariance of attitude and community integration correlates as well as the covariance of media self-efficacy and media news exposure. The values of the chi-square and the CFI show an improved model fit of the data. The increase in explained variance of the variables *subjective norm* and *political reflective integration* indicates that the environmental and cognitive factors are highly related. *Attitude* has a significant influence on *subjective norm* as well as *political community integration* on *political reflective integration*. It seems that the variables are more interrelated than previously assumed which asks for further modification of the presented model.

Discussion

This study explores the relationship between media news exposure and political participation in a sample of college students. Based on previous literature, the assumed differences between certain types of media sources are examined with a special focus on the Internet as a new emerging source of political information. The study investigates the differential influence of online videos and articles as well as information gathered by serious and non-serious news media sources. Therefore, it was chosen for a college population as the first “Internet generation” taken their special characteristics into account. A combination of the theory of planned behaviour from Ajzen (1988), variables of interpersonal communication and self-efficacy laid the foundation of a conceptual model whereas the

influence of media news exposure on political participation is mediated through cognitive and environmental factors as well as levels of self-efficacy.

In general, our study shows that media news exposure is positively related to political participation. Previous literature assumes that television news has a negative impact on levels of political participation (Putnam, 1995) whereas newspapers have a positive impact (Perse, 2001). The present study was not able to confirm these hypotheses. Both, television news and newspapers have no significant influence on political participation. For instance, several other variables could be influential. Weaver (1996), as cited in Tolbert & McNeal (2003) states that media could reinforce political interest and voting intentions because of the reinforcing interconnection between political interest, voting and learning. Further, whether or not people learn something from one of the two sources is not only determined by the salience and complexity of the news but also through someone’s cognitive skills and the degree of interest (de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006). The present study shows that among college students, the Internet is the major source for news gathering which emphasizes its important function in the proliferation of political information. In fact, a positive relationship between online news and political participation was found, although not significantly when tested with the Fisher *r*-to-*z* transformation. The small sample size of our study ($N = 104$) as well as the unequal distribution of news sources used for information gathering lead to some complications in achieving a general conclusion. However, this result partially provides support for the hypothesis that the Internet contributes to an increase in levels of political participation (Weber, Lounakis, & Bergman, 2003). The Internet has changed the way people are seeking information in substantial ways. People are more self-selective in their attempts to gather information. The Internet is under the control of the user which differs in several ways compared to the traditional media sources which is likely to have a major impact on the effects of its content. To gain a better insight into the electronic possibilities

offered by online news, the differing impact of the type of multimedia (i.e. video and article) and news source (i.e. non-serious and serious) used are observed.

It was hypothesized that gathering online news by means of videos would have a more negative impact on the political participation. The results show that the differences between gathering news by means of online videos or online articles can be partially detected, although not significantly. The exposure to online videos seems to have a more negative impact on the relationship between media news exposure and political participation than the exposure to online articles. On the one hand, due to the reliance on visual images and the sequential structure, online videos are comparable to television news in their effect on political participation. There is much less time available to present more than the essential facts. Further, the structural format constrains the possibility to select specific news bulletins of interest or return to certain parts of a news story to update the absorption of information (Giles, 2003). On the other hand, the interactive functions allow the user to dictate the content of news stories as well as tailoring information due to personal interests at any time (Giles, 2003). The user is able to select specific online videos he or she is interested in and watch them several times. However, it is important to consider the kind of online news source used (serious vs. non-serious) which could be influential for the level of trust a person has in the provided information.

The study provides partial evidence that the content of the news gathered has a crucial influence, although not significantly. The study shows that *non-serious online news sources* seem to mediate the relationship more negatively than *serious online news sources*. Further, it is shown that the kind of online news source seem to be more influential than the type of medium used for online news gathering. Whereas the exposure to *non-serious online news sources* reveals the highest negative impact on the relationship between *media news exposure* and *political participation*, the exposure to *serious online news sources* has the lowest

negative influence of the four variables of interest. This result supports the findings from previous literature about the importance of the content which individuals are confronted with. Research shows that the focus on entertainment values and human interest stories simplifies political issues (Perse, 2001). Further, de Vreese & Boomgaarden (2006) found that whether media news exposure is positively related to knowledge gains is determined by the relevance and substance of the news content. Due to its dramatic growth in numbers of users and facilities, the Internet and especially its effects on human behaviour, should be a topic in future research. There should be investigations by means of content analyses to detect crucial indicators of stimulating knowledge, interest and participation. However, both findings do not reach significance which could be due to the small sample size. College students resemble not only a great number of potential political actors they are also able to learn more from the media due to their higher educational level (de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006). Although the media is held responsible for a decline in knowledge and participation levels, the new electronic technology used mostly by college students could act as a new possibility to stimulate political participation. Advocates of the Internet argued that it would reinvigorate the interest of the public in politics since people see the potential for acquiring political information and expressing their political opinion (Norris, 2001). Due to a general critical attitude, supported by the confrontation with a lot of differing opinions in the college environment, young people could be supported with the help of the media to develop an informed and active role in the political process. The Internet provides new opportunities to engage in the political process, especially for young people who are more active in untraditional forms of participation, such as political online forums (Tolbert & McNeal, 2003).

The study looks at the political participation due to traditional and non-traditional forms of participation. The results show that most of the participants are engaged in the

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voting process and a moderate participation in demonstrations and political civic groups. However, indicators of being active in a political party or donating money were general low. Apparently, these activities are not common in this age group due to low connections to certain parties and the absence of a fixed salary to give money to a certain party on a regular basis. Therefore, future research should look more closely to the expanding range of possible political activities, which are particular diverse in the online environment. There are several digital modes of political participation, such as forums, or organizing web sites for a specific political issue as well as more traditional forms of Internet usage, such as downloading election programs or sending e-mails to elected officers. However, Rosenstone & Hansen (1993) argue that the mere existence of a communication technology does not lead automatically to politically interested people. Due to the wide range of multimedia possibilities provided by the Internet, it could be interesting to specify certain political activities which could stimulate the political engagement of students.

Generally, researchers agree that the media plays a major role in the process of engaging in politics (de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006), but several variables seem to be influential whether this effect is negative or positive. According to Ajzen’s theory of planned behaviour (1988), environmental and cognitive factors as well as self-efficacy mediate the effects of exposure. The study takes the limitations of previous literature into account and a conceptual model was created to include the specific characteristics of the first “Internet Generation” under study. When testing the conceptual model, the stated hypotheses receive some support. Although the model does not fit in general, some relations between variables can be detected. Indirect relationships between *media news exposure* and *political community integration* as well as *political reflective integration* can be obtained. Further, *political participation* is directly related to *political community integration*, *subjective norm*, *political reflective integration* and *political self-efficacy*. Direct relationships between *media news*

exposure and *political reflective integration* and *political community integration* can be detected. It was suggested that media news exposure is determined by the amount of self-efficacy someone has while using a certain type of medium. This hypothesis can not be confirmed. However, it is obvious that the population under study is quite confident in the usage of all kinds of media. Especially in the case of the Internet, students use media for both entertainment and educational purposes (Metzger et al., 2003). Therefore, the overall level of *media self-efficacy* should be relatively high.

McLeod et al. (1999) points out that a lack of social networks makes the political participation undesirable because the actual act of participation takes places in the community. Further, research shows that the reflection about news and integrating information from various diverse sources reinforces a better understanding of the political domain and thus, provide a stronger cognitive base for political actions (Sotirovic & McLeod, 2001). The present study offers additional support for the importance of interpersonal communication patterns in the relationship between media news exposure and political participation. However, the other variables result from the theory of planned behaviour which was not tested earlier in this context. In accordance with this theory, it was suggested that the more positive an individual’s attitude and subjective norm towards politics are, the more he or she is willing to be engaged in political actions (Morton & Koufteros, 2009). Unfortunately, this assumption can only be partially confirmed. Whereas *subjective norm* is the strongest predictor of *political participation*, the *attitude* towards politics has no significant influence. The proposed modification with regard to add relationships between *subjective norm* and attitude and *political reflective integration* and *political community integration* leads to an improvement of the fit indexes of the model. Thus, the connections between the variables of interest seem to be more complicated than assumed previously. Further, Hoffman and Thomson (2009) pointed out that the environmental or cognitive

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factors and political behaviour could also be mediated by the exposure to media. Despite the high intercorrelation of the environmental and cognitive factors which combine the variables of the theory of planned behaviour and those from previous literature, future research should investigate the differences and similarities more specifically.

Unfortunately, the results are limited due to a number of methodological issues. First, the moderate reliability of the questionnaire makes any interpretation of the results only speculative. Although the survey was mostly based on previous literature, items measuring the variables of the theory of planned behaviour must be specified more carefully to provide significant results. Second, the use of an online-survey has several methodological limitations. This chosen design makes self-selected and non-random responses possible. Therefore, participants in this study might participate more often in general. Additional research methods, such as a previous named content analysis, should be included to reveal more significant and detailed results. Finally, as mentioned earlier, the limited number of participants ($N = 104$) put some restrictions on the interpretation of the results. Future research must be aware that a greater number of participants need to be included to extract significant conclusions, especially in studies taking a lot of variables into account. The demographical structure of country of residence and nationality should be balanced to accomplish a more accurate generalization of the results. The recruitment takes place by means of e-mails and German Internet forums for students to obtain a snowball-effect, but the demographics show that mostly German students living in the Netherlands participated. This could be a limitation for the representativeness regarding their special position. In addition, socio-economic factors, such as income and education, seem to be influential for the individual decision whether or not to vote (Tolbert & McNeal, 2003). Even Tichenor et al. (1970) demonstrated in their classical studies about differential knowledge effects that better educated people are advantaged compared to individuals with lower socio-economic status

because they can pick up more relevant information from news. Especially the political knowledge seems to be one of the main mediators of the relationship between gathering political information and being politically active (Sotirovic & McLeod, 2001). In their detailed analysis of the differential effects of television and newspapers as sources of knowledge, Neuman et al. (1992) demonstrate that whether or not people learn about high salience issues is determined by the educational level as well as the type of news source provided. Therefore, college students with their higher cognitive skills are able gain more knowledge by means of articles from serious news sources, where they additionally have the opportunity to select news items of interest and re-read certain parts (Giles, 2003). However, political knowledge is interrelated with political interest. The political interest of an individual drives the need to gain further information about specific political topics he or she is interested in. These variables have to be taken into account for revealing the effects of the media on the intended political behaviour. Therefore, future research should include additional educational levels as well as the variables of political knowledge, political interest and news content.

The present study provides an overall approximation to the research about the relationship between media and political behaviour. The conceptual model offers a great opportunity for future research to take the previous mentioned limitations of this study into account and look closer at the connections and effects of the explored variables.

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Appendix A The Online Survey

1.	Indicate your gender
	<input type="checkbox"/> man <input type="checkbox"/> woman
2.	Indicate your age
	<input type="checkbox"/> 18-20 <input type="checkbox"/> 21-23 <input type="checkbox"/> 24-26 <input type="checkbox"/> older
3.	How much money do you have available for personal matters per month ?
	<input type="checkbox"/> 0-200 Euro <input type="checkbox"/> 200-400 Euro <input type="checkbox"/> 400-600 Euro <input type="checkbox"/> 600 Euro and more
4.	Indicate your highest educational level
	<input type="checkbox"/> VBO/Hauptschulabschluss <input type="checkbox"/> MAVO/Realschulabschluss <input type="checkbox"/> HAVO/Fachabitur <input type="checkbox"/> VWO/Abitur
5.	Type of study
	<input type="checkbox"/> Social Science <input type="checkbox"/> Humanities <input type="checkbox"/> Natural Science <input type="checkbox"/> Technical Science <input type="checkbox"/> Political Science <input type="checkbox"/> Others

6.	Where do you study?
	<input type="checkbox"/> Netherlands <input type="checkbox"/> Germany <input type="checkbox"/> Others
7.	How long have you been studying at your current institution?
	<input type="checkbox"/> 0-1 year <input type="checkbox"/> 1-2 years <input type="checkbox"/> 2-3 years <input type="checkbox"/> 3 years and longer
8.	What is your nationality?
	<input type="checkbox"/> Dutch <input type="checkbox"/> German <input type="checkbox"/> Others
9.	Where do you currently live?
	<input type="checkbox"/> Netherlands <input type="checkbox"/> Germany <input type="checkbox"/> Others
10.	How long have you been living at your current residence?
	<input type="checkbox"/> 0-1 year <input type="checkbox"/> 1-2 years <input type="checkbox"/> 2-3 years <input type="checkbox"/> 3 years and longer

11.	I have a television access
	<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no
12.	I have access to private television channels at home, for example RTL
	<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no
13.	I have access to the Internet at home
	<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no
14.	I have got a newspaper subscription
	<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no
15.	I have access to cost-free newspapers
	<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no
16.	How much time do you approximately spend on watching television news per day?
	<input type="checkbox"/> 0-10 minutes <input type="checkbox"/> 10-20 minutes <input type="checkbox"/> 20-30 minutes <input type="checkbox"/> 30 minutes and longer

17.	How much time do you approximately spend on reading newspapers per day?
	<input type="checkbox"/> 0-10 minutes <input type="checkbox"/> 10-20 minutes <input type="checkbox"/> 20-30 minutes <input type="checkbox"/> 30 minutes and longer
18.	How much time do you approximately spend on reading/watching online news per day?
	<input type="checkbox"/> 0-10 minutes <input type="checkbox"/> 10-20 minutes <input type="checkbox"/> 20-30 minutes <input type="checkbox"/> 30 minutes and longer
19.	What kind of source would you rate as most used by you for news gathering?
	<input type="checkbox"/> Television <input type="checkbox"/> Newspapers <input type="checkbox"/> Internet

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20.	How much time do you spend on using these sources for newsgathering per week?					
		0 hours	0-2 hours	2-4 hours	4-6 hours	6-8 hours
	public television newsprogrammes like Tagesschau/NOS Journaal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	private television newsprogrammes like RTL aktuell/RTL nieuws	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	newspapers like Süddeutsche (FAZ, die Welt)/ de Volkskrant etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	newspapers like BILD/ de Telegraaf etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	online news like sueddeutsche.de (faz.net etc.)/volkskrant.nl etc. by means of videos	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	online news like sueddeutsche.de (faz.net etc.)/volkskrant.nl etc.by means of articles	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	online news like BILD.de/telegraaf.nl or e-mail services (msn.nl, gmx.de etc.)by means of articles	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	online news like BILD.de/telegraaf.nl or e-mail services (msn.nl, gmx.de etc.)by means of videos	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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21.	On a weekly basis, how much time do you spend on using these sources for searching background information about a specific political issue you are interested in?					
		0 hours	0-2 hours	2-4 hours	4-6 hours	6-8 hours
	public television newsprogrammes like Tagesschau/NOS Journaal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	private television newsprogrammes like RTL aktuell/RTL nieuws	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	newspapers like Süddeutsche (FAZ, die Welt)/ de Volkskrant etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	newspapers like BILD/ de Telegraaf etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	online news like sueddeutsche.de (faz.net etc.)/volkskrant.nl etc. by means of videos	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	online news like sueddeutsche.de (faz.net etc.)/volkskrant.nl etc. by means of articles	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	online news like BILD.de/telegraaf.nl or e-mail services (msn.nl, gmx.de etc.)by means of videos	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	online news like BILD.de/telegraaf.nl or e-mail services (msn.nl, gmx.de etc.)by means of articles	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

22.					
	disagree				agree
In my country there are a lot of people who vote	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A lot of my family members/friends live nearby and visit me quite often	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Being politically active (e.g. voting) is the only possibility of influencing the political structures in a country	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
There are a lot of political topics I am concerned with in my free-time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Politics is an often discussed topic in the conversations I have with my family/friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have trust in the national political system	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My family/friends are politically interested	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Democracy is the best type of governance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
In the past I was engaged in a lot of political actions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A big part of my family is politically active	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometimes I feel like I belong					

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<p>to where I currently live</p> <hr/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<p>I think as a member of a society it is your responsibility to engage in political action</p> <hr/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<p>My experiences with political actions are mostly negative</p> <hr/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<p>I am unsatisfied with the national political system in the country I currently live in</p> <hr/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<p>I find the political domain really interesting</p> <hr/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<p>Despite the lack of political interest of my family/friends I am engaged in the political process</p> <hr/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<p>In the past my political engagement offers successful results</p> <hr/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<p>I do not spend much time thinking about politics</p> <hr/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<p>I am interested in the political opinion of other people</p> <hr/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<p>My family/friends can often give me additional information about an important political issue which I am confronted with</p> <hr/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<p>The country I currently live in is not the place where I actually want to stay for the next years</p>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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I do not discuss political issues with my family/friends a lot	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Despite the high political interest of my family/friends I am not motivated to be engaged in the political process	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I often discuss important political issues with others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I do not like to argue with people whose political opinion differs from mine	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Me and my family/friends are not really engaged in the political process	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I do not see my family/friends often because they are living far away	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I spend much time thinking about politics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The political interest of my family/friends has motivated me to be engaged in the political process as well	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My family/friends can not give me additional information about political topics often	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I seek for further information whenever I am confronted with an interesting political event	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am not motivated to search					

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for further information whenever I am confronted with a political event	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If I go to elections, I am convinced that I can influence the political situation this way	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am uncertain if I can influence the political situation by going to demonstrations/collecting signatures	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Relative to the success of going to demonstrations/collecting signatures, the related efforts are too huge for me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Elections are an easy way to influence the political situation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I think I can influence the actual political situation by going to demonstrations/collecting signatures	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel uncertain about finding information by means of television news	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know how to find information about a specific topic by means of television news	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am highly confident in searching for information by means of newspapers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
By going to elections I cannot					

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	influence the political situation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	When I am searching for a specific topic on the Internet I know where I have to look for it	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	I do not know how to find information about a specific topic by using newspapers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	I do not know where I can find information about a specific topic by means of newspapers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	I feel uncertain about finding information by means of online news	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	When I am searching for a specific topic on television news I know where to look for it	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	I know how to find information about a specific topic by means of online news	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Appendix B Reliability of the subscales

	M	CI	SN	RI	A	PS	MS	PP
Cronbach's α	0.717	0.582	0.65	0.861	0.594	0.662	0.747	0.854

Note. M = *media news exposure*, CI = *political community integration*, SN = *subjective norm*, RI = *political reflective integration*, A = *attitude*, PS = *political self-efficacy*, MS = *media self-efficacy*, PP = *political participation*.

Appendix C Statistical Descriptives of *political participation*

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Vote	1.33	5	4.4487	0.92054
Demo	1	5	2.0705	1.07203
Group	1	5	1.8686	0.9364
Party	1	5	1.4808	0.79348
Money	1	5	1.4615	0.82935

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Appendix D Bivariate Correlations with *political participation*

	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
Media News Exposure	0.219*	0.026	104
Television	0.114	0.548	30
Newspapers	0.195	0.543	12
Internet	0.295*	0.020	62

*p < 0.05.