

Background

This paper reports on findings from a case study investigating community involvement in the town of Blacksburg, Virginia.



Objectives

- To investigate whether social media may represent a break through in broadening community involvement, especially among young adults.
- To test whether social media for civic purposes is less strongly correlated to education than the use of traditional internet for civic purposes.

Methods

- Purposeful sampling
- Focus group interviews
- Sample size was 222.

Measures

External Variables

- Education
- Extroversion
- Age

Mediating Variables

- Discussion Networks
- Membership
- Staying Informed

Outcome Variables

- Traditional Internet for civic purposes
- Social Media for civic purposes

Data Analysis

- Used confirmatory structural equation (SEM) to run path models
- Used SPSS for regression, correlations etc.

Results

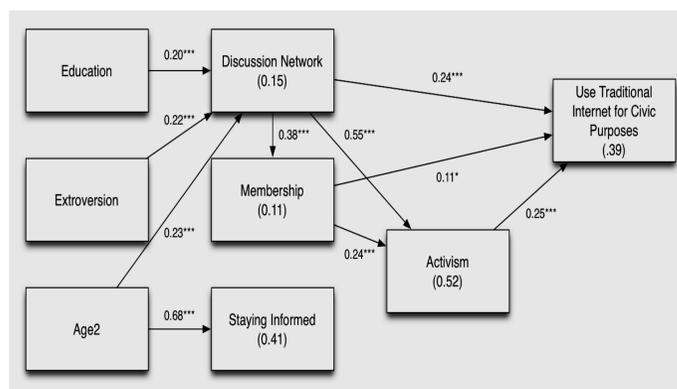
Demographics

- Average age was 47.
- Most participants had higher education
- Median income was above \$50,000.
- 90% used internet, averaging 14 years.
- 80% used Social Media.
- Correlations showed that education is not associated with the use of social media for civic purposes.

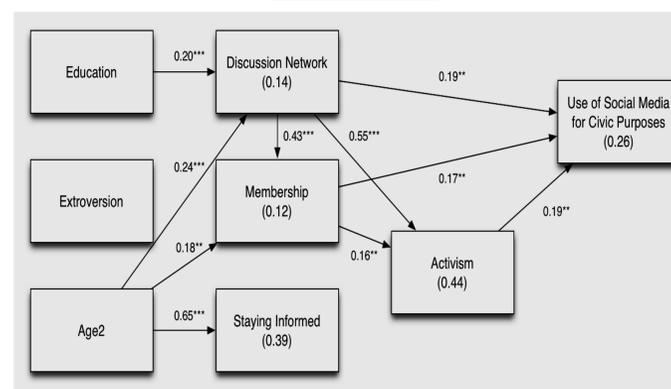
Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	SD	N (sample size)	%
Location (Blacksburg)			211	34.6
Gender (male)			194	35.6
Age (recoded)	47.00	19.86	194	
Last Grade Completed	5.34	1.35	197	
Marital status (married)			196	57.7
Income (Household Median)	2.00	0.58	195	
Years lived in Community	14.75	15.47		
Number of Local Groups	2.57	2.40	220	
Use Internet			214	95.3
Years Using Internet	14.46	5.28	185	
Use SN Site			193	80.3

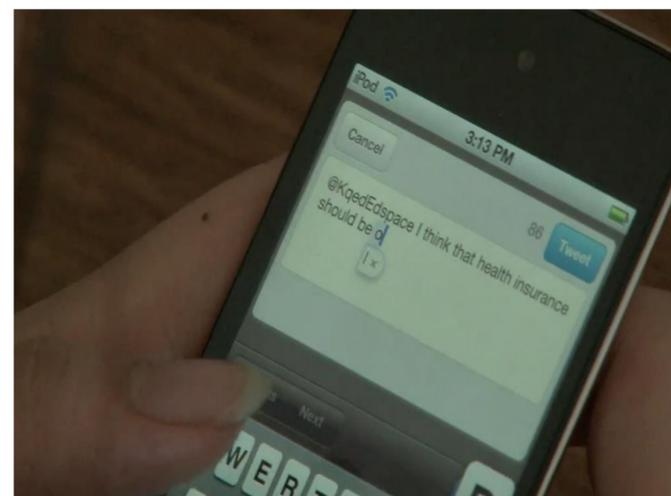
Path Model with Traditional Internet for Civic Purposes



Path Model with Social Media for Civic Purposes



- 18-39 year olds likely to use social media for civic purposes vs. older age groups
- The indirect effect of education is greater for traditional internet compared to social media for civic purposes.
- Group membership strongly associated with use of social media for civic purposes.
- 39% of the variance in the use of traditional internet for civic purposes is explained by the mediating variables.
- Only 26% of the variance in social media use for civic purposes is explained by the mediating variables



Conclusion

- Education is not as strongly correlated with the use of social media for civic purposes as it is with the use of traditional internet for civic purposes.
- Being outgoing and talkative, one of the defining characteristics of opinion leaders is not significant in explaining the use of social media for civic purposes.
- Our findings indicate the highly social nature of the civic involvement of people who use social media -18-39 year olds.
- Social media does lead to increased civic involvement especially for younger adults, who traditionally have not been involved in local issues as older adults.

Future Directions

- To conduct a second wave survey in Fall, 2013.
- To recruit non-college young adults for focus groups through our partners, Literacy Volunteers of the NRV and Dorsett Publications (Christiansburg and the County).
- To use some questions in the survey to analyze the effects of internet vs. social media on online health seeking behaviors.
- To use our focus groups to help improve our Virtual Town Square website which is based on an automated, continuous aggregation of locally relevant online content generated elsewhere by others.

