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Pathways to political (dis-)engagement: motivations behind social media use and the role of incidental and intentional exposure modes in adolescents' political engagement

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Abstract: Based on the Social Media Political Participation Model (SMPPM), this study investigates the relationship between four key motivations behind the use of Social Network Sites (SNS) and political engagement among adolescents. We collected our data in a paper-pencil survey with 15- to 20-year-old adolescents (N=294), a highly underexplored group, which is most active on social media. We theorize that adolescents' user motivations are related to political engagement via two modes of exposure: The intentional mode, which is related to active information seeking, and the incidental mode, in which adolescents run into politics only by accident. We found that political information and self-expression motivations were positively related to political engagement via the intentional mode. By contrast, entertainment motivations were negatively related to offline, but not to online engagement via the incidental mode.

Keywords: SMPPM, adolescents, political engagement, user motivations, social media, intentional exposure, incidental exposure

Introduction

Young people have increasingly shifted their informational activities to social network sites (SNS). Hence, the question has been raised whether SNS increase or dampen adolescents' political engagement. On the one hand, SNS provide

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adolescents with new channels to engage with political issues and to develop their political identities (Middaugh, Clark, and Ballard, 2017). On the other hand, adolescents do not always use SNS for political purposes, and some may never use SNS on the basis of such motives. In fact, there is reason to believe that other motivations such as entertainment and social exchange are even more important than political information seeking (Ekström, Olsson, and Shehata, 2014). Hence, it seems debatable whether SNS use always increases political engagement. In the remainder of the article, we thus propose that adolescents use SNS in different ways. Furthermore, the specific way or mode of use depends on adolescents' current gratification needs. Eventually, the mode of use determines whether adolescents become more or less engaged in politics (Theocharis and Quintelier, 2016).

Based on the theoretical outline of the Social Media Political Participation Model (SMPPM) (Knoll, Matthes, and Heiss, 2018), this study investigates how four key motivations behind SNS use drive political engagement by modeling their relationship via two pathways: an *intentional* and an *incidental mode of exposure* to political information. The intentional mode of exposure refers to actively seeking and processing political information. In the incidental mode, users stumble upon political content only by accident, for example, when political content is shared by acquaintances in their networks. According to the SMPPM, strong political motivations lead to frequent intentional exposure, which affects political engagement via systematic processing, called the explicit route. Non-political motivations, by contrast, lead to mere incidental exposure to political news, in which individuals process the encountered political information peripherally or sub-consciously. The effects of this implicit route are expected to be much smaller compared to the effects induced by the explicit route.

Besides providing first evidence on the relationships outlined in the SMPPM, we contribute to the literature as follows: First of all, there is a clear lack of research on how user motivations fuel political engagement through SNS. Only few studies looked at this topic. In addition, those few studies mainly explored single motivations for engaging in specific political activities, for instance, posting a message or liking a profile (Ancu and Cozma, 2009; Baek, Holton, Harp, and Yaschur, 2011; Macafee, 2013). However, no study has investigated a comprehensive set of SNS motives stimulating political engagement. Second, research on incidental exposure is still scarce, and existing research has primarily outlined the positive potential of *frequent* incidental exposure (e. g., Kim, Chen, and De Zúñiga, 2013; Valeriani and Vaccari, 2016). However, adolescents who are *only* incidentally exposed to political content may never properly engage in politics leading to no or reduced effects on political engagement. Hence, negative effects are likewise conceivable and may have been overlooked by previous studies. Finally, earlier

research on social media use and political engagement mostly focused on adults (Boulianne, 2015). This gap seems particularly pressing because nurturing political involvement in adolescence is a prerequisite for future political engagement (Gerber, Green, and Shachar, 2003; Middaugh et al., 2017; Plutzer, 2002). Furthermore, SNS are discussed as *the* means to reengage adolescents. Yet, whether this means actually works has hardly been tested.

Adolescents' political engagement

Political engagement is a key ingredient of successful democracies (see Boulianne, 2015; Dimitrova and Matthes; Matthes, 2013). To ensure a sufficient degree of participation, citizens need to develop democratic attitudes and participatory behaviors in adolescence. In this period, young people begin shaping their political identity, and participatory habits developed at this stage can determine future participatory engagement (Emmer, Wolling, and Vowe, 2012; Gerber et al., 2003; Plutzer, 2002). However, there is evidence that young people's engagement in institutional politics has been declining (Bastedo, 2015; Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins, and Carpini, 2006). This development is related to the increasing alienation of young people from traditional institutions of democratic governance. This alienation is indicated by decreasing levels of party identification or membership and low political trust (Henn and Foard, 2012). At the same time, some authors argue that young people may not be less involved. Instead, they engage in different ways to older cohorts. In the offline realm, they turn to less institutionalized types of engagement such as charity work and community volunteering (Zukin et al., 2006). In the online realm, they engage in new activities such as in self-organizing political events, sharing political causes, or discussing political issues on SNS (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012).

It should be noted that media use is only one factor among many, probably more important, factors in adolescents' socialization. Such factors include parental influence, school context or emerging extra-familial relationships (Steinberg and Morris, 2001). At the same time, adolescents are permanently online, and smartphones and social media have become important tools in their socialization process (Amy, 2018; Middaugh et al., 2017). According to Valkenburg and Peter (2011), social media may assist in accomplishing important socialization tasks, including identity formation and the establishment of independence from parental control. However, social media may also hinder important socialization goals, for instance, because they increase social comparison pressure and emotional stress. Moreover, social media provide a high-choice media environment in which mere entertainment content constantly competes with more beneficial content

such as educational or political information (Van Aelst et al., 2017). The way how young people use social media in their early lives may thus support or impede their path to become engaged and educated citizens.

Research on the relationship between social media and political engagement has primarily focused on the positive potential of social media so far. Specifically, research has shown that adolescents can increase their involvement by expressing political opinions on SNS (Moeller, de Vreese, Esser, and Kunz, 2013), come into contact with different political views (Bakshy, Messing, and Adamic, 2015), and may be driven to civic engagement through politically active friends within their networks (Valeriani and Vaccari, 2016). Also, some authors argue that less effortful online engagement can ultimately lead to more effortful offline activities, such as social movements, with a strong impact on political decision-making (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012). Moreover, SNS can potentially reduce the distance between political actors and young people because users can directly connect to politicians via their SNS accounts (Heiss and Matthes, 2016, 2017). In addition, disinterested adolescents may become more politically engaged when being incidentally exposed to political information on SNS (Valeriani and Vaccari, 2016). In such cases, SNS may function as levers, gradually closing the gap between lowly- and highly-involved users (Xenos, Vromen, and Loader, 2014). However, research on the potential of incidental exposure is still scarce and inexistent for adolescents. In addition, most of the existing research suggests that the positive effects of SNS use are dependent on the specific ways of using SNS (Ekström et al., 2014; Karnowski, Kümpel, Leonhard, and Leiner, 2017).

Although research has hardly looked at the negative effects of SNS use, there is some evidence from panel analyses of political engagement (Theocharis and Quintelier, 2016; Ekström et al., 2014). These analyses suggest that SNS may not per se increase young people's engagement and that SNS "offer environments which mainly draw young people's attention away from common concerns" (Ekström et al., 2014, p. 180). These findings indicate that only some adolescents may benefit from SNS, for example, by using SNS for political purposes. By contrast, other adolescents may get distracted by entertainment from such beneficial activities when using SNS. Similar results were found in psychological studies. They revealed that social media can negatively affect adolescents' socialization by distracting them from school-related activities or their offline contacts, which are particularly beneficial in terms of their well-being (Darcin et al., 2016; Rosen, Carrier, and Cheever, 2013). Moreover, there is some dissent about the effectiveness of SNS use in fueling political engagement. For example, Ekström and Östman (2015) found that expressive behavior on SNS was in fact positively related to political engagement. Yet, at the same time, it was negatively related to political knowledge. More specifically, Heiss and Matthes (2017) have shown

that less cognitively oriented personality traits and user motivations relate to less qualitative online engagement such as liking populist candidates. Vitak and colleagues (2011) draw the conclusion that many online activities may be characterized as 'slacktivist' or 'feel-good' types of political engagement, requiring little political involvement and exerting little influence on political processes.

Theoretical framework

A whole body of literature has investigated the relationship between SNS use and political engagement (e. g., Boulianne, 2015; Dimitrova and Bystrom, 2013, Koc-Michalska, Lilleker, and Vedel, 2016). While empirical findings are abundant, theoretical approaches to why and how SNS use drives engagement are scarce. One recently introduced model is the SMPPM, which integrates goal systems theory with the uses and gratifications approach, appraisal theory, and information processing (Knoll et al., 2018). The SMPPM aims to unveil the psychological mechanisms which determine the relationship between citizens' social media use and political engagement. One key assumption of this model is that individuals differ in terms of their initial motivations to use social media (also see Park, Kee, and Valenzuela, 2009). Such motivations may include political motivations (such as information seeking) and non-political motivations (e. g., entertainment or mere social interaction). Depending on individuals' motivations, they may either process political information via an intentional route, that is, through actively searching for and integrating political information in their newsfeed, or through an incidental route, in which they stumble across political information merely by accident. If individuals intentionally engage with political information, they are more likely to engage in explicit processing. Explicit processing means that they elaborate on the political content and activate or formulate political goals upon it. If they only engage with political news incidentally, they are more likely to process implicitly political posts in their newsfeed (i. e., heuristically or even unconsciously). Implicit processing means that they hardly think about the content they see, however, weak positive effects may still be induced through priming.

Relying on the two routes proposed by the SMPPM, we assume that the motivations behind adolescents' social media use influence whether they engage either more actively (intentional mode of exposure) or more passively (incidental mode of exposure) with political information. The mode of exposure, in turn, influences adolescents' level of political engagement (see Figure 1).

The influence of motivations on mode of exposure

The first proposed relationship between user motivations and intentional and incidental exposure as outlined in the SMPPM is based on research into users' gratification needs. According to the uses and gratifications approach, people have certain needs of which they are aware (Rubin, 2009). For instance, people may feel the need to relax or the need to become informed about a political issue. Among other opportunities, they may select specific media as means of gratification. As a result, media use is goal-directed. It can be explained by the existence of specific needs that lead to specific motivations for media use (Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch, 1973). Uses and gratifications researchers have established various kinds of media motive typologies. They mostly linked these motives to the use of specific media (Rubin, 2009). However, "overall, the literature consistently confirms a similar set of motivations for U&G regardless of media type" (Kim, Lee, Jo, Jung, and Kang, 2015, p. 183). These motives include fulfilling the need for (*political*) information, the need to form and *self-express* one's identity, the need for *entertainment* and the need for *social exchange* (McQuail, 1983). It is important to note that these motives are understood as broad categories encompassing various sub-motives. For instance, entertainment includes sub-motives such as escaping, relaxing, diversion, emotional release, filling time, or sexual arousal (see McQuail, 1983).

Depending on their motivation, social media users engage in a wide range of activities. When it comes to explaining political engagement, researchers have often distinguished two fundamental modes of political SNS use (see Boulianne, 2015; Karnowski et al., 2017; Mitchelstein and Boczkowski, 2010; Oeldorf-Hirsch, 2018; Tang and Lee, 2013; Xenos et al., 2014). The first one refers to actively seeking and actively processing political information, called the *intentional mode*. Users may, for instance, use the search function of their SNS, scan their own newsfeed for political content (Halpern and Gibbs, 2013), look at Facebook news sites, or access the profile of a political candidate (Tang and Lee, 2013). Although these activities are far from being identical, they have in common that users search, access, or process the respective political information actively. That is, users devote a rather large amount of cognitive effort to accomplish these tasks. Following dual-process theories in social psychology, users only tend to do this "when motivation to engage in message- and issue-relevant thinking is high, and at least a modicum of ability exists" (Chaiken, 1987, p. 8; see also Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). Specifically, the "motivation to be aware of the [political] happenings in one's environment and to have information available for decision making will lead individuals to engage in these effortful cognitive behaviors" (Eveland, 2001, p. 576). In other words, users are particularly likely to engage in the intentional

mode when they feel a strong need for political information that motivates such effortful cognitive engagement. We therefore assume that political information motivation is positively related to the intentional mode.

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Political information motivation is positively related to the intentional mode.

By contrast, we assume that non-political information motivations, like entertainment, self-expression, or social exchange, drive young people away from intentionally exposing themselves to political information. This is due to the fact that users' cognitive resources are limited (Lang, 2000). Hence they lack motivation and/or the ability to actively search, access, or process political information while striving for entertainment, self-expression, or social exchange (Chaiken, 1987; Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). In trying to fulfill their nonpolitical needs, adolescents shield themselves from engaging in competing activities, most importantly searching for political information (Shah, Friedman, and Kruglanski, 2002). Thus, if a user goal is entertainment, social exchange, or self-expression, intentionally looking for political information would be a competing goal. We therefore assume that – when controlling for political motivation – entertainment, self-expression, and social exchange motivations are negatively related or not related at all to the intentional mode of exposure to political information.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Entertainment, social exchange, and self-expression motivations are negatively or non-related to the intentional mode of exposure.

The second mode of political social media use refers to the *incidental exposure* to political information. Unlike classical news media, adolescents may be unintentionally exposed to political content via SNS. This may even be the case when users have not developed any political information needs (Valeriani and Vaccari, 2016). As outlined above, users that are relatively uninterested in politics may still be regularly presented with incidental cues about politics when they are connected to a handful of politically engaged others (Xenos et al., 2014). Such cues include messages or posts shared by friends (Tang and Lee, 2013), or posts from political actors or organizations (Ancu and Cozma, 2009). Users who are only incidentally exposed to such content usually try to fulfill other needs rather than actively processing the political information. As a result, they devote little or no cognitive effort to processing the information. Looking at the four key motivations for social media use (Kim et al., 2015), we assume that this incidental mode of exposure occurs primarily when adolescents spend time on social media seeking entertainment, when they self-express themselves, or when they want to engage with other people.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Entertainment, social exchange, and self-expressive motivations are positively related to the incidental mode.

Users who feel a need for political information are less likely to be in a mere incidental mode of exposure. Because they are politically motivated, these users *intentionally* search, access, and process political information instead of stumbling upon political information only by accident (Oeldorf-Hirsch, 2018). This is because people pursuing strong political goals may perform activities to reach their goals (e. g., search for political information), and may avoid other (nonpolitical) activities which inhibit their goal pursuit (Shah et al., 2002). However, at the same time, political motivation may not necessarily inhibit the incidental mode. For example, individuals who are highly motivated to engage with politics on social media may also feel the need to pursue conflicting goals, such as entertainment or social exchange (Knoll et al., 2018; Kruglanski et al., 2015). Thus, even though they may report a general political motivation, they may lack the resources to enact this motivation when browsing their newsfeeds. We therefore expect that political information motivation is either negatively or unrelated to mere incidental exposure.

Hypothesis 4 (H4): Political information motivation is negatively or unrelated to the incidental mode.

The influence of mode of exposure on political engagement

If SNS users are in the intentional mode, they are expected to engage in explicit processing, that is, they may elaborate on the political information and carefully evaluate the content based on their previous knowledge (Knoll et al., 2018). If SNS users are in the incidental mode, it is assumed they only process the political information implicitly. For example, they may evaluate the information unconsciously or heuristically at best (Eagly and Chaiken, 1993; Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). Due to these differing levels of information processing, the two modes are assumed to have distinct effects on young people's political engagement.

According to the SMPPM, explicit processing occurs when a political post in a SNS newsfeed is appraised as relevant. Following the relevance appraisal, individuals evaluate whether the new information contains a discrepancy between a current political state and a desired future state. If this is the case, they develop a wanting, form participatory goals upon it and assess the dominance of these goals in applicable behavioral situations (Knoll et al., 2018; Kruglanski et al., 2015). Individuals in an intentional mode are more likely to appraise political messages they have encountered as relevant and process them more deeply compared to

others (Karnowski et al., 2017). This in turn can increase individuals' knowledge (Jensen, 2011; Sotirovic and McLeod, 2004) and strengthen their attitudes (Petty, Haugtvedt, and Smith, 1995; Moon, 2013). Both political knowledge and attitude strength have been found to be important predictors of political engagement (Johann, 2012; Visser, Krosnick, and Simmons, 2003). Summing up, adolescents who are intentionally exposed to political information are more likely to elaborate on, and learn from, this information, to develop strong political attitudes, and hence to form and exercise participatory goals. We therefore assume that intentionally exposed adolescents are more likely to engage in politics.

Hypothesis 5 (H5): The intentional mode is positively related to online and offline political engagement.

By contrast, adolescents who are in a mere incidental mode hardly elaborate on the political information they encounter. If anything, they process the information unconsciously or heuristically (Eagly and Chaiken, 1993; Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). Such implicit processing may induce priming effects of existing political goals at best. However, individuals who are politically unmotivated, and thus in a mere incidental mode may have weak preexisting political goals which could be primed (Knoll et al., 2018). Furthermore, effects induced by mere implicit processing are expected to be considerably weaker compared to effects induced by explicit processing (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986; Petty et al., 1995). Hence, the more dominant the incidental mode, the less likely adolescents are to become politically engaged.

Hypothesis 6 (H6): The incidental mode is negatively related to online and offline political engagement.

The indirect influence of motivations on political engagement

Based on our previous hypotheses, we expect a positive indirect relationship between political information motivation and political engagement via the intentional mode. By contrast, we expect that entertainment, social exchange, and self-expression motivations are negatively related to political engagement via the incidental mode. This is in line with past research showing that informational activities on social media are consistently positively related to political engagement whereas other activities, such as mere social exchange, may dampen engagement (e. g., Ekström et al., 2014).

Hypothesis 7 (H7): There is a positive indirect relationship between political information motivation and political engagement (on- and offline) via the intentional mode.

Hypothesis 8 (H8): There is a negative indirect relationship between entertainment, social exchange, and self-expressive motivations and political engagement (on- and offline) via the incidental mode.

All hypotheses are summarized in Figure 1.

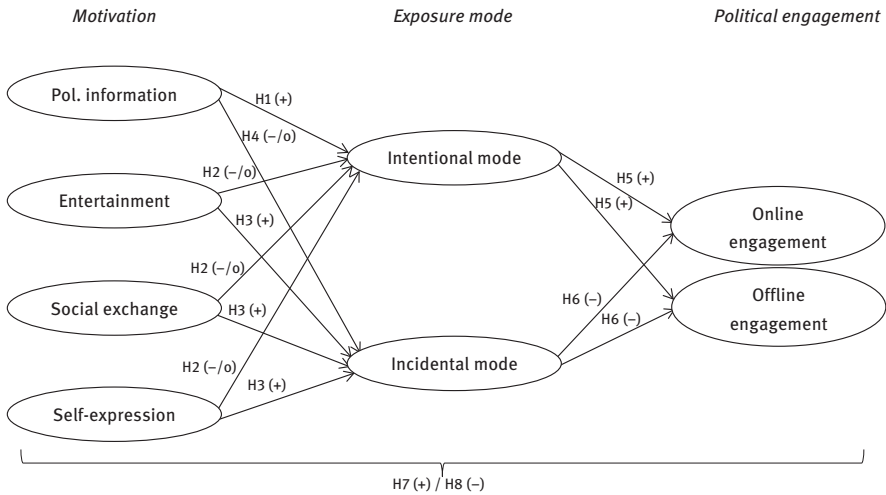


Figure 1: Hypothesized indirect relationship between user motivations and political engagement via mode of exposure. Notes: (+) hypothesized positive effect, (-/o) hypothesized negative or no effect, (-) hypothesized negative effect.

Method

Adolescents between 15 and 20 years old ($M_{Age} = 17.35$, $SD = 1.17$; 33.7% male; 32.3% non-academic high schools) from different high schools in Austria completed a paper and pencil questionnaire (also see Heiss & Matthes, 2017). We conducted the study as part of a research course, and students assisted in collecting the data. All data were collected in December 2015. We selected schools representing all three major school types in Austria (college-bound academic schools, vocational schools, and part-time vocational schools). Participants were recruited by contacting representatives of the schools, who were fully briefed about the study. Thus, our sample is a convenient sample which cannot represent the entire

population of Austrian adolescents. The students completed the questionnaire in class and under teacher observation. Thus, the response rate was high (close to 100 %). Participation was voluntary, and we did not provide any incentives. Eight questionnaires were incomplete and hence removed from the sample. The final sample size was 294. Some questionnaires still included single missing values (e. g., due to multiple choices in single-choice questions or skipped questions). We used structural equation modeling to analyze our data and full information maximum likelihood to estimate missing values in our data.

Measures

All items, except the demographic control variables, were measured on 7-point scales. To capture SNS user motivations, items were derived from previous studies investigating motivations for using the internet or social media (Ancu and Cozma, 2009; Baek et al., 2011; Kaye and Johnson, 2004; Macafee, 2013). For each item, participants indicated their level of agreement, from “I disagree” to “I agree”. Political information motivation ($\alpha = .93$; $M = 3.29$; $SD = 1.87$) was measured using three items that asked participants whether they use SNS (i) to obtain political information, (ii) to follow current political events, and (iii) to learn about interesting political perspectives. The entertainment motivation ($\alpha = .78$; $M = 5.53$; $SD = 1.45$) was measured using three items that asked participants whether they use SNS (i) to pass time, (ii) to find entertaining information, and (iii) to watch entertaining videos or pictures. Social exchange motivation ($\alpha = .76$; $M = 4.55$; $SD = 1.65$) was measured as whether participants use SNS (i) to stay in contact with other people, (ii) to show other people that they care about them, and (iii) to maintain existing friendships. Finally, self-expression motivation ($\alpha = .78$; $M = 3.62$; $SD = 1.68$) was measured as whether participants use SNS (i) to express their interests to others, (ii) to show others what they are doing, and (iii) to post pictures, videos and updates. Factorial validity was tested (see Carpenter, 2018).

The measures for the incidental and intentional modes of exposure were derived from Kim and colleagues (2013) and Valeriani and Vaccari (2016). Incidental mode of exposure ($\alpha = .81$; $M = 3.86$; $SD = 1.81$) was measured as whether participants agreed that they (i) stumble across news only by accident, (ii) only see political posts when other people from their network post about politics, and (iii) do not seek political information, but sometimes see political information by accident. Intentional mode of exposure ($\alpha = .83$; $M = 2.89$; $SD = 1.74$) was measured as whether participants (i) actively search for political information on SNS, (ii) follow political information sources, and (iii) take care to see political information on their newsfeed.

Engagement was measured as how often participants engaged in certain activities, reaching from “never” to “very often”. Online engagement ($\alpha = .69$; $M = 2.71$; $SD = 1.54$) was measured by asking participants how often they (i) write a comment on political issues (e. g., on Facebook), (ii) like or share political issues on social media, and (iii) comment on posts and engage in discussions (Velasquez and LaRose, 2014). Offline engagement ($\alpha = .73$; $M = 2.24$; $SD = 1.31$) was measured by asking how often participants (i) take part in protests and demonstrations, (ii) engage in non-profit or charity work, and (iii) are active in political organizations (e. g., in school; see Zukin et al., 2006).

Control variables. Political interest ($\alpha = .86$; $M = 4.23$; $SD = 1.46$) was measured using four questions concerning the level of interest, reaching from “not at all interested” to “very interested”, participants were in (i) political issues, (ii) elections, (iii) party programs, and (iv) societal challenges (for a similar approach, see Ekström and Östman, 2015). Age was measured as a continuous variable and gender as a dummy variable. To measure education, we created three dummies. The first dummy represents academic schools. The other two dummies represent part-time and full-time vocational schools, respectively.

Results

To test our hypotheses, we employed structural equation modeling. We ran our analysis using the lavaan package in R (Rosseel, 2012) and full information maximum likelihood (Arbuckle, 1996). Significance levels of path coefficients were calculated based on robust standard errors and scaled test statistics (Yuan and Bentler, 2000), because our data show signs of non-normality (see Finch and French, 2015). All variables, including political interest but except the demographic control variables, were entered as latent variables. Zero-order correlations of all latent variables are shown in Table 1. The final results are presented in Figure 2 (unstandardized path coefficients). The fit indices revealed good overall model fit (Byrne, 1989; Hu and Bentler, 1999): standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = .06; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .05; $\chi^2(419) = 755.37$, $p < .001$; $\chi^2 / \text{d.f.} < 2$; comparative fit index (CFI) = .91.

The path coefficients indicate support for the first hypothesis. Political information motivation was positively and significantly related to the intentional mode ($b = .47$, $p < .001$). In addition, the fourth hypothesis was supported. Political information motivation was negatively related to the incidental mode, but only at the marginal level of significance. Furthermore, the intentional mode was

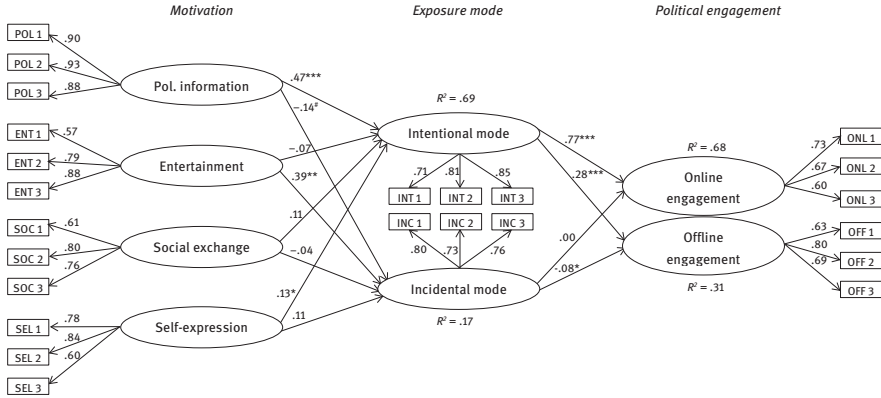


Figure 2: SEM results. Indirect relationship between user motivations and political engagement via mode of exposure. Notes: Each prediction controls for age, gender, education and political interest. Path coefficients represent unstandardized coefficients. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, # $p < .10$.

positively related to both, online ($b = .77, p < .001$) and offline engagement ($b = .28, p < .001$) supporting the fifth hypothesis.

In line with H2 and H3, entertainment significantly predicted the incidental mode of exposure ($b = .39, p < .01$) and was unrelated to the intentional mode (though pointing in a negative direction). However, we did not find any of the assumed relationships for social exchange and self-expression motivation. In fact, our data revealed an unexpected positive relationship between self-expression motivation and the intentional mode ($b = .13, p < .05$). In essence, the second and third hypotheses were only partly supported. Furthermore, the sixth hypothesis was only partly supported. The incidental mode was negatively and significantly related to offline engagement as assumed ($b = -.08, p < .05$). Yet, there was no effect on online engagement.

To test H7 and H8, we calculated biased-corrected confidence intervals around the assumed indirect estimates by means of 5,000 bootstrap samples. Political information motivation was indeed positively related to online ($b = .36, CI[.27, .48]$) and offline engagement ($b = .13, CI[.07, .21]$) via intentional mode. H7 was thus supported. Against our expectation, the same result was found for self-expression motivation. It was likewise positively related to online ($b = .10, CI[.01, .21]$) and offline engagement ($b = .04, CI[.005, .09]$) via the intentional mode. In line with H8, we found a negative indirect relationship between entertainment motivation and offline engagement via the incidental mode ($b = .03, CI[-.09, -.001]$). Yet, entertainment was not indirectly related to online engagement.

Furthermore, we did not find any significant indirect relationships between social exchange motivation and engagement. Hence, hypothesis H8 was only partly supported.

In an additional analysis, we also tested whether there were significant direct relationships between user motivations and engagement. We did not find significant results, except for self-expression motivation. Self-expression was also directly related to online ($b = .16, p < .05$) and offline ($b = .13, p < .05$) engagement.

Discussion

This study investigated the relationship between four key motivations for SNS use and political engagement via two modes of exposure. Responding to a pressing research gap, the study specifically looked at adolescents. In line with the SMPPM, our findings indicated that political information motivation was positively related to online and offline engagement via the intentional mode of exposure. Entertainment motivations, by contrast, were negatively related to offline (not to online) engagement via the incidental mode of exposure. Hence, adolescents may have to intentionally expose themselves to political content on SNS and elaborate on this content in order to increase their political engagement (Sotirovic and McLeod, 2004; Gil de Zúñiga, Weeks, and Ardèvol-Abreu, 2017). Individuals in the incidental mode may be less likely to develop strong participatory goals and thus reported lower levels of higher-effort offline engagement.

The reason for the negative effect of entertainment motivation might be that entertainment is hardly compatible with the formation of political goals and may thus distract adolescents from higher-effort political activities. In fact, entertainment may be primarily associated with non-political activities, leading to a trade-off between time spent on entertainment and time spent on political activities. Moreover, entertaining content may also affect individuals' mood management, so that high entertainment seekers may actively avoid political hard news in order to avoid threatening their positive mood (Zillmann, 2000). This finding is particularly relevant as entertainment motivation was found to be the strongest user motivation in our sample. Specifically, participants scored a mean of 5.53 on a 7-point scale, corroborating similar findings in previous studies (e.g., Quan-Haase and Young, 2010). Individuals who are highly entertainment-motivated may thus only stumble upon political posts by accident and process such posts superficially at best.

Contrary to our expectation, we did not find a negative indirect relationship between entertainment and lower-effort online engagement, including activities

such as liking, sharing, or commenting on political posts. These activities seem to be unaffected by entertainment motivation and mere incidental exposure, indicating that such activities might still be compatible with seeking entertainment. This is because adolescents can perform such activities with minimum effort and without engaging in elaborative processing. For example, users can quickly click and comment on a post while they are looking for other entertaining information. However, our findings clearly indicate that entertainment motivations are less compatible with more effortful offline activities such as protesting, volunteering, and engaging in political organizations.

Whereas we found a negative effect of entertainment motivation, self-expression motivation turned out to be positively related to both, on- and offline engagement, via the intentional mode. Again, the corresponding indirect effect turned out to be significant. One explanation might be that adolescents, who like to self-express, also make use of the political sphere when doing this. As a result, they are actively seeking political avenues for expression and thus intentionally expose themselves to political content (Correa, Hinsley, and Gil de Zúñiga, 2010). However, such activities may often be based on little cognitive engagement and knowledge and thus lead to superficial political engagement (Heiss and Matthes, 2017; Ekström and Östman, 2015). Superficial engagement, however, may hardly promote positive outcomes for adolescents' political socialization and the democratic society in general (Middaugh et al., 2017; see also Baumgartner and Morris, 2009).

By contrast, we did not find any significant results for social exchange motivation. There is reason to believe that the influence of social exchange might depend on the specific friends in one's network (Tang and Lee, 2013). For instance, it may matter whether one's friends post about politics or simply provide entertaining content. Future studies may therefore include network characteristics as a potential moderator in their research. Furthermore, future studies may also distinguish between political and non-political social exchange and expression motivations, as it is suggested in the SMPPM, and explore these motivations in longitudinal research designs.

To sum up, while self-presentational and social-exchange motivations may not involve apolitical SNS use per se, entertainment motivation excludes at least more serious, hard-news types of political information. Specifically, entertainment may thus distract young people from the intentional, explicit processing of political content. This is crucial because past research suggests that explicit processing of political information is a prerequisite for the acquisition of political knowledge and stable political attitudes (Moon, 2013; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2017). Both knowledge and confidence in one's attitudes are important prerequisites to developing participatory goals and acting upon them.

Although we found a negative relationship between entertainment and offline engagement, entertainment may still allow for lower-effort forms of online engagement. Over time, such lower-effort forms may gradually increase one's political involvement and ultimately lead to higher levels of offline engagement (Kim, Russo, and Amnå, 2017; Tang and Lee, 2013). However, the absence of a negative effect may also indicate that entertainment-motivated adolescents may only get involved with uninformed types of online engagement. That is, they may implement low-effort online activities based on heuristic cues, such as liking a post that stems from a friend, but do not engage in elaborated reasoning about its content. With regard to this, past research warned about increasing levels of so-called 'slacktivism' in the online realm (Vitak et al., 2011). Whereas positive effects of such activities in adolescents' political socialization are questionable (Baumgartner and Morris, 2009), there may even be negative effects on the macro level. For example, liking and sharing information based on mere heuristic processing might help to spread emotionalized and catchy messages of populist actors on SNS (see Engesser, Ernst, Esser, and Büchel, 2016; Heiss and Matthes, 2017).

Limitations

Even though this study has contributed to our understanding of the relationship between SNS use and political engagement, some limitations should be noted. First, even though our sample is composed of a highly important and under-explored target group, our findings are limited to the specific sample we used. For example, females and students from academic high schools are somewhat overrepresented in our sample. Thus, our sample is not entirely representative for the population of Austrian adolescents, and the findings should be replicated with more representative samples of adolescents. Replications may also include older participants and draw conclusions about differences between younger and older cohorts. Second, we used cross-sectional data and cannot draw causal conclusions. Thus, the model should be further tested using longitudinal data and experimental designs. Furthermore, more innovative designs are needed to gather real-experience data without the limitation of self-reported and memory-based measures, such as mobile experience sampling (Karnowski et al., 2017). Such methods will be specifically valuable in distinguishing more general user motivations from actual *in situ* exposure behavior. Finally, there is reason to believe that there might be a need for a more detailed taxonomy of political activities. Many online activities require only little effort, whereas most offline activities require

greater effort to become engaged. Future research should investigate what kind of motivations and media use drive these types of engagement and how they impact modern democracies.

Conclusion

Taken together, this study supports the notion of the SMPPM that the relationship between SNS use and political engagement may not be straightforward. In fact, adolescents' specific use of SNS may determine whether there are positive or negative consequences on political engagement. In other words, not all users do always benefit from SNS use in terms of their political engagement. As this study has shown, entertainment motivations may be positively related to mere incidental exposure to political information. However, being in a mere incidental mode was negatively related to higher-effort forms of offline engagement. By contrast, adolescents who feel a need for political information may further benefit from the positive potential of SNS. For instance, they may use this kind of media to follow mainstream news (Ekström and Östman, 2015), non-populist political actors (Heiss and Matthes, 2017), or to engage in political expression (Moeller et al., 2013). In essence, all of this indicates an increasing engagement gap between different groups of adolescents. To close this gap, it will be critical to increase adolescents' motivation to intentionally expose themselves to political content on SNS. In order to do so, young people need to acquire political knowledge and digital skills from early on. Only if adolescents know why and how to use SNS for political purposes may they turn to an active approach. That active approach means controlling the political information in their newsfeed, competently evaluating it, and acting upon it later on.

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Table 1: Zero-order correlations among latent variables.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 Pol. informa- tion motivation	–								
2 Entertainment motivation	.08	–							
3 Self-exp. motivation	.17**	.14*	–						
4 Social moti- vation	.16*	.37***	.56***	–					
5 Political interest	.40***	.03	.04	.18*	–				
6 Intentional mode	.77***	.10	.26***	.29***	.52***	–			
7 Incidental mode	–.21**	.27**	.06	.06	–.19**	–.25**	–		
8 Online enga- gement	.61***	.05	.30***	.24**	.42***	.81***	–.14	–	
9 Offline enga- gement	.40***	–.16*	.22**	.15	.25**	.46***	–.27**	.65***	–