



Demographics and Internet behaviors as predictors of active publics



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ABSTRACT

This study explicates online political activism (OPA); provides a short, reliable, and valid index for measuring OPA; and examines correlates that predict such active publics. A national probability sample of adult American Internet users was surveyed using random digit dialing. The study found OPA is more frequent among older, wealthier, and more liberal respondents. OPA increases with Internet self-efficacy and search engine usage.

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1. Introduction

Political public relations scholars have contributed to a growing body of research about the use and impact of digital and social media. Their research shows that digital and social media are indeed critical channels of communication for public relations practitioners, allowing direct interaction with key publics and their opinion leaders, bypassing legacy media gatekeepers (Dozier, Sha, Wellhausen, & Ray, 2009).

In the early days of digital political public relations, much hype emphasized how digital tools could connect publics directly to campaign organizations (Bimber & Davis, 2003; Tedesco, 2004). Further research confirms that digital and social media do provide publics with powerful tools to shift from latent to aware to active publics. Activist publics often spring up overnight online, as an organic response to organizational missteps, causing migraines for practitioners. However, despite growing research on publics and activism, few studies have provided a profile of online politically active publics.

Campaign managers and staffers use digital and social media to mobilize support (Bor, 2014; Cogburn & Espinoza-Vasquez, 2011; Gueorgieva, 2008). Political public relations practitioners search for effective ways to influence voters. They also seek a better understanding of online political advocates who shape voter attitudes (Lawrence, 2010). Such searches have resulted in mixed outcomes.

Following the classic S-curve for the diffusion and adoption of innovations (Rogers, 2003), research reveals greater use of social media with each election cycle. Studies of adoption (Kaid, McKinney, & Tedesco, 2007; Purcell & Rainie, 2014, 2012) and political motivations (Kaye & Johnson, 2002) indicate that some constituents use online tools with such frequency that

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they can be termed online political activists. Younger cohorts actively use social networking sites to talk about their political preferences with greater frequency than older adults (Rainie, 2012; Sweetser, Lariscy, & Tinkham, 2012). Yet, Dozier et al. (2009) argued that – while younger people may be more innovative – they nevertheless are not as involved and engaged in traditional forms of political activism as older people.

2. Literature review

The situational theory of publics (Grunig, 1989, 1997, 2003; Grunig & Hunt, 1984) provides the theoretical foundation for the present study. This study profiles and explores predictors of active publics in political public relations. According to Grunig's schema, *latent* publics face some kind of problem, but are not aware of it. *Aware* publics recognize a problem, but do not act on it. *Active* publics, the focus of the present study, consist of those who recognize the problem and take some kind of action. Specifically, the present study is concerned with those who use digital and social media as tools for political action. Who are they? What demographic characteristics and Internet attitudes and behaviors predict such digital political action?

2.1. An overview of digital political public relations

In the early days of digital political public relations, campaign organizations could easily discount the benefits technology afforded their campaigns (Sweetser, 2011). Tedesco (2004) noted early campaign websites were nothing more than online brochures, indicating an adherence to the one-way communication model that lacked original or targeted content. Bimber and Davis (2003) suggested that this early use of online content was simply a means to reinforce messages communicated through other traditional channels. Campaign communication staff seemed reticent to truly embrace the technology. Scholars like Stromer-Galley (2000) reported that campaigns did the bare minimum with online sites, in order to retain what they perceived as control over the campaign.

Online campaigning has evolved from its hesitant start in 1992 into a fully ubiquitous tool in the 21st century. However, the initial negative perspective among campaigners toward social media sites continued through several campaign cycles (Sweetser, 2011). Even though Pew Internet and American Life data showed greater adoption of the Internet as a means for information gathering and political discourse (Sweetser, 2011), Stromer-Galley and Baker (2006) argued that campaign websites were more of a dialogic façade than a true medium for two-way communication.

Cogburn and Espinoza-Vasquez (2011) examined candidate-constituent benefits from a political public relations standpoint. They found that online discourse among supporters could lead to local grassroots activities, as occurred among Obama supporters in 2008. In related research, Gueorguieva (2008) asserted that social network sites created an inexpensive venue for fundraising efforts and organizing volunteers during a 2005 election.

2.2. Online political activism (OPA)

A number of different concepts have been applied to the study of political activism, from civic engagement to political participation. Political activism is often described as the activities citizens undertake to influence the structure and selection of government (Putnam, 2000). Himelbiom, Lariscy, Tinkham, and Sweetser (2012) argued that this traditional definition tends to exclude political activities conducted online. Smith (2013) found that 49% of Americans took part in some sort of civic activity. Additionally, 39% of those same active adults took part in political activities online (Smith, 2013). Likewise, Bucy and colleagues (Bucy, 2005; Bucy, D'Angelo, & Newhagen, 1999; Bucy & Gregson, 2001) proposed the *media participation hypothesis*, arguing that involvement online could actually be perceived as a form of political participation. Pew Internet and American Life Project reported higher-than-ever political talk and activism in social spaces (Rainie, 2012). Not only did 22% of registered voters announce their vote choice for president on social media sites (Rainie, 2012), a reported 30% of Americans said that they had been encouraged in social spaces to support a particular candidate. Twenty percent of respondents said that they had actively used sites like Facebook or Twitter to encourage others to vote (Rainie, 2012). Non-traditional activities – such as building solitary – and private activities – such as reading a blog post or searching for candidate information online – were treated as behaviors similar to wearing a campaign t-shirt or door-to-door canvassing (Himelbiom et al., 2012; Sweetser et al., 2012; Weaver Lariscy, Tinkham, & Sweetser, 2011).

Lazarsfeld and Merton (2004) concept of the *narcotizing dysfunction* of media consumption runs counter the *media participation hypothesis*. Briefly, Lazarsfeld and Merton argued that the simple consumption of large quantities of information about social and political issues might actually substitute for social/political actions. We reconsider these theories in Section 5, based on the findings reported in this study.

2.3. Situational theory of publics

The situational theory of publics provides a theoretical foundation and practical tool for segmenting the general population into nonpublics, latent publics, aware publics, and active publics (Grunig, 1989, 1997, 2003; Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Pertinent to the present study are *active publics*: groups of people that communicate actively and organize to resolve an issue, because they problematize an existing issue (e.g., legalization of marijuana), see few obstacles that prevent them from

doing something about it, and feel personally involved and affected by the issue. In particular, digitally active political publics are engaged online about political issues, such as participating in online petitions and email campaigns, as well as donating money to support a political cause. Long before the ubiquity of digital media, active publics were known to communicate about issues because they felt those issues were of great concern and they felt they had the power to do something about those issues (Hamilton, 1992). Digital media provide additional tools for active communication and action. The term “online activists” is often used colloquially to describe active publics who take to the Internet to communicate about their issues in order to create change.

In discussing the importance of active publics in the context of political public relations, Strömback and Kiouisis (2013) noted that the number of active publics in politics is greater than in other settings. The scholars stated that politics includes all types of publics (e.g., nonpublics, latent publics, aware publics, and active publics). However, the sheer number of active publics is much greater for political public relations than the active publics that practitioners may find, for example, in corporate public relations (Strömback & Kiouisis, 2013).

2.4. Correlates of OPA

Conceptually, correlates of online political activism include demographic characteristics and Internet attitudes and behaviors that may facilitate or impede such online activities. These variables can interact to increase or decrease online political activism.

2.4.1. Demographic differences as predictors

Demographic predictors of online, politically active publics enhance our understanding of such activism. Research has identified differences in political information seeking across age, gender, ethnicity, and income. Purcell and Rainie (2014) found that younger Americans living in higher income households are more likely to feel that technology has a positive impact on their ability to learn new things. This includes obtaining online political information and using that information to advance their individual political agendas (Purcell & Rainie 2014). Similarly, Kaid et al. (2007) found that, during an election, more than seven in 10 young voters turned to online political information sources. Such online information seeking occurs much more frequently for younger voters than older voters. The 2012 elections provide additional evidence of these age trends. Age cohort data from a Pew Report supports the empirical findings of Weaver Lariscy et al. (2011) and Sweetser et al. (2012) that younger cohorts are more involved in online political persuasion. As argued in Section 5, however, online information seeking and online political activism are different constructs. Although one might expect a positive relationship between the two, a rival explanation argues that the consumption of information about a campaign may serve as a substitute – rather than a stimulus – for taking action in a campaign.

Tedesco (2011) found that men in general reported higher initial levels of political information efficacy. Political information efficacy is an individual’s self-assessment that they are well informed about politics and can help others who may be less informed with political choices. Efficacy increased as a result of campaign exposure for both genders; however, the gender gap remained. When voters of different cohorts go online for campaign information, and they engage with a campaign, it seems logical that they may then use the Internet to communicate about their political knowledge.

Wicks, LeBlanc Wicks, Morimoto, Maxwell, and Ricker Schulte (2014) reported that in the 2012 election, African Americans were less likely to be civically engaged than other groups. Zhang, Johnson, Seltzer, and Bichard (2010) found that males and those with higher education were more likely to participate in more traditional political civic activities such as volunteering within their community or attending a local protest. Based on prior research, the following research question is posed:

RQ1: What demographic characteristics predict online political activism (OPA)?

2.4.2. Internet attitudes and behaviors as predictors

Internet-savvy people often acquire new knowledge online. For example, a December 2014 Pew survey reported that most Americans believed their Web use helped them learn new things and stay informed on issues important to them (Purcell & Rainie 2014). Recent Pew data revealed that 87% of Americans feel more informed, thanks to the Internet. Regarding civic and governmental activities in their communities, 49% of respondents in the same survey said that digital technology has improved their knowledge (Purcell & Rainie 2014). This evidence suggests that knowledge acquired because of digital technology increases the online political participation of publics. Such knowledge gains include intentional gains (finding information the Internet user was specifically seeking) and incidental or serendipitous gains (finding information that the Internet user was not seeking). These gains, in turn, help the user develop more referent criteria.

Arguably, Internet user competencies and orientations mediate or moderate online political activism. Internet self-efficacy is the self-perception that one has the skills necessary to use the Internet effectively and the vocabulary to communicate with others about Internet usage (see Bandura, 1977). Frequency of Internet usage is arguably related the development of such skills and vocabulary. Satisfaction with online experiences may also mediate or moderate online political activism. Internet users may have differing levels of satisfaction with different aspects of their Internet experiences. In the present study, respondents were asked about their level of satisfaction with their search engine. Because online information seeking related to political issues invariably involves the use of search engines, we used satisfaction with the respondent’s

Table 1
Final sample distribution ($N = 1417$) by age, gender, and cell-only vs. landline households.

Age	Male		Female		Total
	Land line	Cell only	Landline	Cell only	
18–35	9%	5%	10%	5%	30%
36–47	11%	3%	11%	3%	27%
48–66	11%	1%	12%	1%	25%
67 & older	7%	>1%	10%	1%	17%
					100%

particular preferred search engine as the most relevant measure of Internet satisfaction. Based on the literature reviewed above, the following research question is posed:

RQ2: What Internet attitudes and behaviors – and, more specifically, search engine attitudes and behaviors – predict online political activism?

3. Methods

This study is part of a larger ongoing program of IRB-approved research into digital and social media conducted by the Digital and Social Media Task Force, School of Journalism & Media Studies, San Diego State University. The data reported here were gathered in July–August, 2012 using random digit dialing of a representative sample of 1417 Internet users throughout the United States. Calls to land lines were supplemented by calls to cell-only households. Cell-only households were stratified by age, since cell-only households are more common among younger Americans. Data provided by the Pew Research Center (2010) permitted stratification of cell-only supplemental sampling by age groupings (Millennials, Gen X, Boomer, and Silent). U. S. Census Bureau (2010) data were used for overall stratification by age and gender. Table 1 shows the distribution of the final sample by age, gender, and cell-only households vs. landline households.

Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish (the questionnaire was translated and then back-translated). If the respondent was bilingual in Spanish and English, the interview was conducted in English. Of the 1417 interviews, 1396 (98.5%) were conducted in English and 21 (1.5%) were conducted in Spanish. Block randomization and randomization within item sets were employed to reduce primacy and recency effects. The initial valid sample was 26,790. Of the valid sample, 19,610 were not successfully contacted, yielding a noncontact rate of 73.2%. Of the valid sample, 5763 refused to participate, a refusal rate of 21.5%. The remaining 1417 respondents completed the survey, for a response rate of 5.3%. To qualify for the survey, respondents had to be (1) 18 years old or older; have (2) lived in the United States during the previous 12 months as citizen, permanent resident, or visitor; have (3) personal access to the Internet by computer, smartphone and/or tablet; and (4) access the Internet at least once in a typical day.

Fig. 1 displays the flow of the telephone survey. After respondents were qualified, they were assigned to one of five blocks of questions on a rotating basis. The present secondary analysis focuses on the respondents that were asked detailed questions about their search engine usage ($n = 430$). Logically, individuals interested in online political activism are likely to use search engines to (1) look up information relevant to issues that interest them and (2) locate people, websites, and other online resources relevant to salient issues. After interviewers asked questions in each of the five blocks, all respondents were asked questions about Internet self-efficacy and demographics.

3.1. Measures

In order to encourage participation, the number of items included in the questionnaire was limited; nevertheless, interviews ran an average of 20 min. All items included in this study were closed-ended. Many used a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly agree (5) and strongly disagree (1). Scales were pilot tested prior the national survey with 281 undergraduate students; some item were modified to improve comprehension and reliability.

Respondents initially assigned to the search engine block were qualified by asking, “How often do you use search engines to look for documents or photos on the Internet that match the words that you type in?” Response choices ranged from “almost always” (5) to “never” (1). Respondents indicating that they use search engines, sometimes, often, or almost always qualified for further contingency questions. Those indicating that they never or almost never use search engines were excluded.

For all respondents, four items measured online political activism (OPA), the key dependent variable (see Table 2). After an exhaustive review of prior research, the first author developed these items deductively from the concept of online political activism, as explicated in Section 2. A simple index was constructed using the mean of the items to form an index, ranging from never (0) to once (1) to two times or more (2) for each of the four actions. Cronbach’s alpha for the index is 0.85 ($M = 0.30$, $SD = 0.43$). Regarding online political activism, 52% of respondents reported no online political activism at all. Only 3% reported multiple actions for each of the four specific indicators. As the data indicate, online political activities were infrequent (see Table 2).

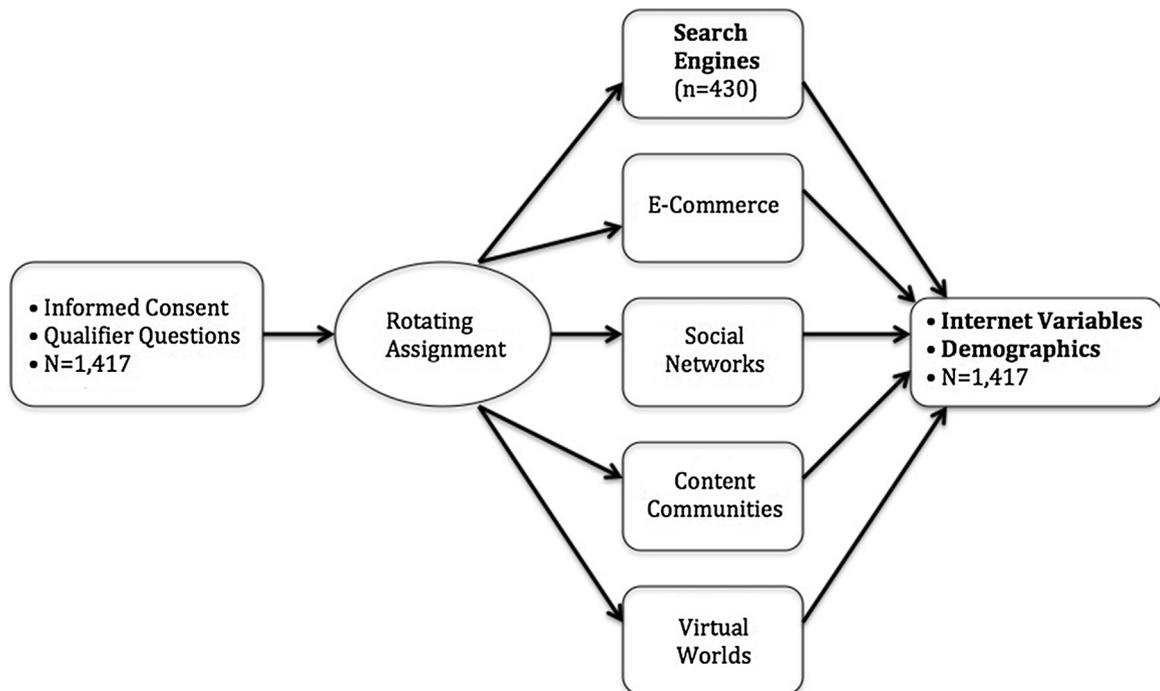


Fig. 1. Questionnaire flow for the 2012 Digital and Social Media Survey.

Table 2

Index of online political activism.

Activity	Frequency (last 12 months)		
	Never	Once	Twice
Sent an email to an official when asked to by a group you support	71%	26%	3%
Sent an email to an official all on your own	75%	23%	3%
Signed an online petition	65%	32%	3%
Donated money online to a political organization	84%	13%	3%

This dependent variable was correlated with demographic characteristics of respondents, Internet self-efficacy, and other characteristics related to search engine use. The demographic predictor variables included registered to vote (binary), age (nearest year), annual household income (nearest dollar), liberalism (a single item ranging from “very conservative” (1) to “very liberal” (5)), gender (where female = 2; male = 1), and ethnicity (a binary variable where White = 1; not White = 0). Search engine usage was measured with a single item ranging from “never” (1) to “almost always” (5).

Internet self-efficacy is the Internet user’s belief that he or she has the capacity to execute behaviors to attain desired outcomes (see Bandura, 1977). This concept was measured with a four-item index. Items measured agreement with such statements as: “I understand words related to Internet software” and “I can describe how different Internet hardware works.” Cronbach’s alpha was 0.92. This index was condensed from an 8-item index developed by Eastin and LaRose (2000).

Intentional knowledge gain is the perception that search engine users are successful in obtaining information that they were motivated to seek (see Barker, Dozier, Schmitz Weiss, & Borden, 2015). This concept was measured with a four-item index. Items measured agreement with such statements as: “Searches help me learn what I want to know” and “I often learn something I need to know when using search engines.” Cronbach’s alpha is 0.81.

Incidental knowledge gain from search engine usage is the serendipitous, unmotivated learning of information not initially sought in a search (see Barker et al., 2015). This concept was measured using a four-item index. Items included agreement with statements such as the following: “I enjoy learning new things by accident when using search engines” and “I often learn interesting things I was not looking for.” Cronbach’s alpha is 0.82.

Search engine satisfaction is the degree to which search engine users are pleased or happy with their choice of search engines, such as Google Search (see Dozier, Barker, Schmitz Weiss, & Borden, 2013). Items measuring this concept included agreement with such statements as: “I did the right thing in choosing this search engine” and “This search engine does a good job of satisfying my needs.” Cronbach’s alpha is 0.82.

Because the research questions in Section 2 do not specify hypothesized directions of relationships, two-tailed tests of statistical significance were used. Alpha was set at 0.05. Because of the cross-sectional nature of this study, the predictor

Table 3
Correlates of online political activism (OPA).

Demographic variables	Pearson <i>r</i>	Effect size	Valid <i>N</i>	Sig.
Registered to vote	0.12	1.44%	1348	<0.001
Age	0.09	0.81%	1373	0.001
Income	0.09	0.81%	1041	0.003
Liberalism	0.09	0.81%	1284	0.001
Gender (women = 2; men = 1)	−0.01	0.01%	1284	0.827
Ethnicity (White) ¹	0.02	0.04%	1360	0.402
Internet and search engine variables				
Internet self-efficacy	0.12	1.44%	1348	<0.001
Search engine usage (frequency)	0.08	0.64%	565	0.045
Intentional knowledge gain	−0.06	0.36%	271	0.314
Incidental knowledge gain	−0.13	1.69%	271	0.033
Search engine satisfaction	−0.14	1.96%	270	0.020

variables are best viewed as correlates of the outcome measure (online political activism). These correlates are necessary but not sufficient conditions of causality.

4. Results

The overall sample consisted of 1417 respondents. Of those, 52% were women. The vast majority was Anglo/White (80%), followed by Latino/Hispanic respondents (11%), multiethnic (9%), African Americans (7%), and Asian Americans (2%). Mean income was \$70,186 (median = \$60,000). Average age was 46.7 years (median = 45.0 years). Regarding marital status, 58% of respondents were married, 20% were single, and 16% were divorced, separated, or widowed. Regarding the subsample of search engine users ($n = 430$), 75% named the Google as their favorite search engine, followed by Yahoo (9%), and Bing (6%).

Table 3 displays the correlations of the demographic and Internet correlates with online political activism. The effect size of each predictor (e.g., R^2 or explained variance) is provided in percentage form in the column to the right of the Pearson correlation coefficients. The first demographic predictor is voter registration. Intuitively, individuals inclined to political activism would logically register to vote. Indeed, this relationship is confirmed. Age is significantly and positively correlated with online political activism. Annual household income is significantly and positively correlated with online political activism. More liberal respondents tended to engage in significantly more online political activities, when compared to less-liberal respondents. Neither gender nor ethnicity (White vs. non-White) was correlated with online political activism. Additional statistical analysis was conducted on all major ethnic groups to detect any variation among people of color. Treating each ethnic grouping as a binary variable (e.g., Latino = 1; not Latino = 0), no significant correlations were found between online political activism and self-identified Latinos, African Americans, Asian Americans, and multiethnic respondents in the sample. Regarding Internet attitudes and behaviors as correlates of online political activism, Internet self-efficacy was significantly and positively correlated with online political activism. Those who used search engines more frequently were significantly more likely to engage in acts of online political activism, when compared to those who use search engines less frequently. The remaining correlates are somewhat paradoxical, but are of considerable theoretical relevance. Online political activism is negatively correlated with intentional and incidental knowledge gain. This relationship is statistically significant for incidental knowledge gains but not so for intentional knowledge gain. However, the negative correlations of both indices with OPA make them worthy of discussion, since they represent the same trend. Conceptualized as the intended or accidental acquisition of new knowledge from Internet searches, one might expect – intuitively – that such knowledge gains would be positively correlated with online political activism. Further, satisfaction with one's preferred search engine is significantly and negatively correlated with online political activism. Intuitively, one might have expected the opposite.

5. Discussion

Using the concept of active publics from the situational theory of publics, the present study provided a profile of online political activists, taking a first step toward building a theoretical account of why and how people are politically engaged online. We found that online political activists tended to be *older*, *wealthier*, and *more liberal*. Gender and ethnicity were not related to online political activism. Furthermore, online political activists exhibited higher Internet self-efficacy and used search engine more frequently. Nevertheless, they reported lower levels of incidental or serendipitous knowledge gain while searching the Internet. These online political activists liked their search engine of choice less, when compared to those with lower levels of online political activism.

5.1. Nuanced online political activism profile

The study findings provide a more nuanced profile of online political activists, which contributes to the growing body of literature on activist publics. Organizations, including public relations agencies, try to better understand and more effectively

communicate with political advocates that largely shape national debates on public policies (Lawrence, 2010). This study challenges the popular stereotype of younger, Internet-savvy users as online political activists. Although younger people may be innovators and early adopters of digital technology, they lag older people in using digital and social media for online political activism.

5.1.1. Age

The finding that older cohorts are more politically active online mirrors a recent Pew study (Smith, 2014) which shows that once older adults embrace digital technology, such technology becomes an integral part of their lives. The current data confirm and extend prior research addressing the so-called “age paradox” in media use with regard to digital and social media activism (Dozier et al., 2009, p. 17). Dozier et al. (2009) found that although younger people are more innovative in terms of the Internet and new media adoption, their older counterparts are more involved and participate in traditional forms of political activism.

5.1.2. Income.

Our study added more evidence to the widely supported belief that more affluent Americans are more politically active (Cook, Page, & Moskowitz, 2011, Cook, Page, & Moskowitz, 2014; Sides, 2011). Prior aggregated polls by Gallup of those who make \$500,000 and more and surveys of the top 1% of rich Americans (median annual income = \$7.5 million) suggested that the rich vote more, donate more, contact government officials more frequently, and attend campaign events more often, when compared to the lower 99% (Cook et al., 2011, 2014; Sides, 2011). Our study of a representative cross-section of Americans identified a similar pattern for online political activism.

5.1.3. Political ideology

Pew’s yearlong study (Doherty, 2014) supports the conclusion that America is more ideologically polarized than ever. Online political activists in the present study turned out to be more liberal than those less active. However, the relationship is not strictly linear. Grouping political ideology into three groups, 61% of liberals engaged in at least one online political action. Liberals were followed by conservatives, with 48% of conservatives engaging in at least one online political action. Those self-classified as “middle of the road” were least active, with only 41% reporting that they engaged in at least one online political action. Further analysis indicated that liberalism is correlated with overall self-efficacy regarding the Internet, $r(1220) = 0.09$, $p < 0.01$. Once Internet self-efficacy was controlled, however, the relationship between liberalism and OPA remained essentially unchanged, partial $r(1219) = 0.08$, $p < 0.01$. Thus, U.S. liberals are somewhat more likely than U.S. conservatives to be more Internet savvy and to engage more frequently in OPA.

5.2. Online self-efficacy as a potential motivator for OPA

Of particular interest is the discovery of significant positive associations between digital self-efficacy and frequency of search engine usage with OPA and negative links between incidental knowledge gain and search engine satisfaction with OPA. Situational theory posits that perceived problem recognition, constraint recognition, level of involvement, and referent criteria could lead to communicative activism of publics. Our findings cautiously suggest that online self-efficacy, search engine usage and satisfaction, and incidental knowledge gain could be predictors of public activeness. Potentially, those who are more confident in their Internet capabilities and use search engine more frequently may perceive fewer constraints that limit their participation in online political activism. Their knowledge and decision frames to comprehend and engage in addressing political issues could increase as a result of their digital competency and usage.

Perhaps the most intriguing results from our study involve the counter-intuitive finding that online political activism is negatively correlated with serendipitous Internet knowledge gains. One way to resolve this theoretically intriguing issue is to resurrect Lazarsfeld and Merton (2004) concept of the narcotizing dysfunction of the media. Although originally applied to mass media in the 1940s, the concept may apply to online political communication. Lazarsfeld and Merton could very well have been writing about the Internet when they argued in 1948 that “exposure to this flood of [mediated] information may well serve to narcotize rather than to energize the average [media consumer]” (p. 22). As they argued back then, “the individual reads accounts of issues and problems and may even discuss alternative lines of action” (p. 22). However, those knowledge consumption activities, as indicated here by knowledge gains, do not activate organized social actions, as indicated by online political activism. One might argue, as do Bucy and colleagues (Bucy, 2005; Bucy et al., 1999; Bucy & Gregson, 2001), that online involvement – such as consumption of political information and political discussions – are, in fact, forms of political participation. However, this does not resolve the seeming paradox of online political activists as savvy Internet users who use the Internet more frequently than non-activists, but who report lower incidental knowledge gains from such usage. Clearly, further research is needed.

5.3. Limitations

The present study was based on a representative national sample, collected through telephone interviews over landlines and cell phones. In part because of the length of the interviews ($M = 20$ min), the response rate was less than desired. A second limitation is the effect size of the significant relationships detected and reported here. As shown in Table 3, the effect size for

all significant relationships is small. Further, the number of respondents engaging in online political activities is small. Thus, the chance of Type 2 error (for non-significant relationships) is high. Nevertheless, the findings are counter-intuitive and of heuristic merit. The true value of the present study is to stimulate further research in the area of online political activism.

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