

Bloggers and the Blogosphere: Motivation, Perception, and Mobilization



A Summary of the 2006 Blogger-Reader Survey*

A report by the Blog Club, a student-faculty collaboration involving researchers from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, University of Kansas, and University of Texas-Austin



State of the Blogosphere

- Technorati is now tracking over 70 million weblogs, with 120,000 new weblogs being created daily.
- Growth is slowing as blogosphere matures.
- Blog sites beginning to rival mainstream media, with 22 blogs among the 100 most popular sites.
 - David Sifry, CEO of Technorati



Fall 2006 Blogger/Reader Survey

- Collected data from a cross-section of the top political bloggers and thousands of blog visitors in Dec. 2006.
- Nested data allowed us to explore:
 - ...the thoughts and motives of top bloggers
 - ...the interplay between blog authors and audiences
 - ...the importance of perceptions, talk and action



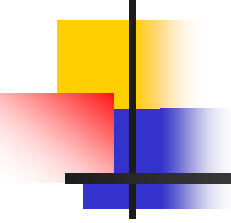
Fall 2006 Blogger/Reader Survey

- Collected data from a cross-section of the top political bloggers and thousands of blog visitors in Dec. 2006.
 - 66 bloggers from 58 blogs participated
 - Sampled from top 150 political blogs
- 3,909 readers from 40 blogs responded to reader survey.
 - 73.8% Male, 26.2% Female
 - 43.1% Dem., 30.7% Rep., 14.2% Libertarian, 1.7% Green
 - Mean age = 46; Median inc & ed = \$60-80K & some grad school
 - Mean time spent reading blogs = 3.7 years; 2.1 hours/day



Three Forthcoming Papers

- Three reports will be presented at the upcoming AEJMC (Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication) Meeting in Washington DC, August 9-12
 - Report 1: Changing Blogger Motivations
 - Report 2: MSM Disassociation and Blog Use
 - Report 3: Online Messaging and Activism
- The first paper uses survey data from the bloggers; the second and third use survey data from blog readers nested under blogger survey data



From Expression to Influence: Understanding the Change in Blogger Motivations over the Blogspan

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Theory/Rationale

- Political blogs can influence blog readers and MSM
 - (Johnson & Kaye, 2004; Drezner & Farrell, 2004; Perlmutter, 2007)
- Need to look beyond content into process of creating content/frames and the agents involved
 - (Carragee & Roefs, 2004; Scheufele, 1999; Edelman, 1993)
- Previous research on blogger motivations has not focused specifically on political bloggers
 - (McKenna, 2005; Nardi et al., 2004)



Method/Sample

- Survey of 150 top political bloggers (42.9% response)
 - 14 motivations (initial and current)
 - Open ended (“Why did you start blogging?”)
- Demographics
 - 74.2% male
 - 44.4 median age (youngest - 18, oldest - 66)
 - 52.6% liberal
 - Started blogging between January 1998 and May 2006
 - Bloggers from Daily Kos, Hullabaloo, Pajamas Media, etc.

Paired Sample T-Tests between Initial and Current Motivation for Blogging

	M (SD)	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
<u>To provide an alternative perspective to MSM</u>			
Initial motivation	6.23 (3.66)	4.3***	60
Current motivation	7.78 (2.43)		
<u>To help society</u>			
Initial motivation	5.37 (3.37)	4.092***	61
Current motivation	6.79 (2.98)		
<u>To influence public opinion</u>			
Initial motivation	5.59 (3.44)	3.268***	61
Current motivation	7.27 (2.69)		
<u>To help blogger's political party or cause</u>			
Initial motivation	4.58 (3.69)	3.161***	61
Current motivation	5.81 (3.17)		
<u>To influence mainstream media</u>			
Initial motivation	3.83 (3.34)	3.1***	62
Current motivation	5.25 (3.06)		
<u>To earn money</u>			
Initial motivation	.95 (2.5)	2.371**	60
Current motivation	1.84 (3.04)		
<u>To critique mainstream media</u>			
Initial motivation	5.24 (3.61)	2.253**	62
Current motivation	6.13 (2.33)		
<u>To let off steam</u>			
Initial motivation	7.00 (2.93)	-1.793*	59
Current motivation	6.57 (2.76)		



Results

- All motivations increase over time
 - Except “to let off steam” ($p < .1$)
- Greatest rise in motivations representing blogger influence
 - provide alternative perspective to MSM
 - to help society
 - to influence public opinion
 - to help your political party or cause
- 2 kinds of open-ended motivation responses:
 - 1) desire to write or express re: social/political issues
 - 2) communicate issues/POV not covered in MSM to larger audience



Blogging is Empowering

- Blogging has an empowering effect
 - all motivations increase over time
 - the longer they blogged, the more they believed in blogging
- Supported by...
 - t-tests
 - open-ended responses
 - “I was skeptical of them at first -- mostly saw them as vanity projects. Then I saw that they were capable of moving information around the traditional media bottlenecks and decided that it was something I could contribute to.”
 - belief that readers agree with them
 - belief in political efficacy of Internet



Δ in Motivations over Blogspan

- Initially, blogging is focused around *internal* goal through process of *expression*.
- Over time, and with the acquisition of wider audience, blogging is focused on *external* goal of *influence*.
- Supported by:
 - open-ended responses
 - increase of “influence” motivations (*external*)
 - decrease in “to let off steam” (*internal*)



Δ in Motivations over Blogspan

Open-ended Responses

- “I am a writer by nature. I have a lot of things to say because my mind never stops working. Blogging allows me to express myself and prevents me from being trapped under a mountain of half-formed ideas.”
- “I had been engaging in political debate via email for so long, I thought blogging might be a good chance to write at greater length, with more permanence and (maybe, if I was lucky) with a larger audience.”
- “Caught up in the excitement and chaos of the political season, since it was a presidential election year, I naively imagined I might exert political influence. So I started a blog.”



Future Research

- Why does this change in motivations occur?
- What impact does this change have?
- What other factors influence the blogging process?



Blogosphere and Participatory Democracy: Hostile Media Perception, Information Selection, and Political Participation

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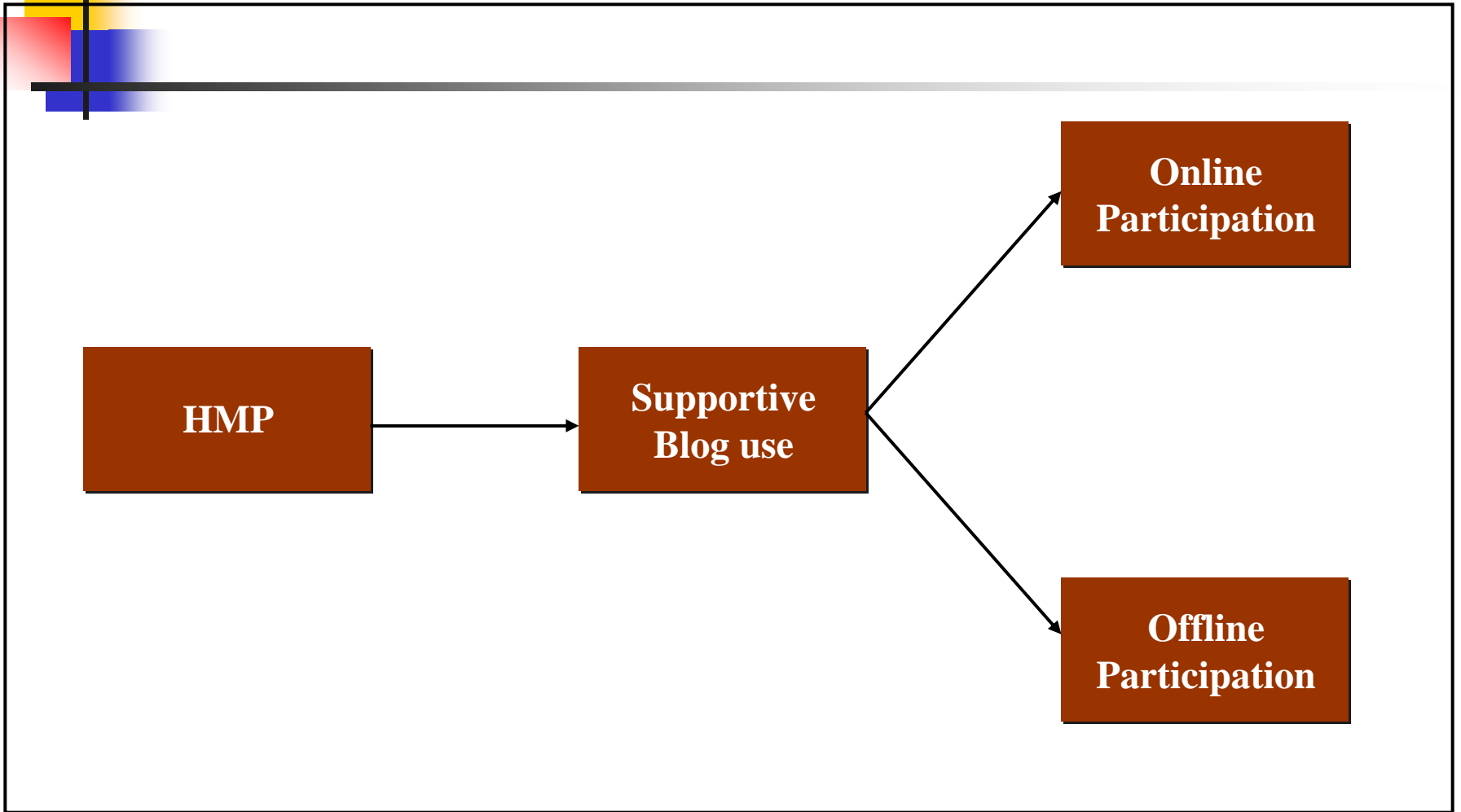


Purpose of the Study

- Examine how perceptions that MSM are hostile to one's views help to shape information source selection.
- Explore the paths from these hostile perceptions to like-minded blog use and political participation.
- Test whether like-minded blog use mediates the effects of hostile perceptions in online and offline participation.

Figure 1.

Hostile media perception, supportive blog use, and political participation.





Literature Review

- Hostile media perception refers to the tendency of partisans to judge mass media coverage as unfavorable to their own point of view (Gunther & Schmitt, 2004).
- Dissociation from the MSM encourages use of alternative sources such as the Internet (Hwang et al., 2006).
- When a person holding an opinion on a matter of importance is exposed to a contrary opinion, cognitive dissonance is produced (Festinger, 1957).
- Dissonance arousal is an important pre-condition for selective exposure (D'Alessio & Allen, 2002).



Literature Review

- Recent research has demonstrated the positive effects of Internet use on political participation (Hwang et al., 2006).
- Political blogs tend to be homogenous partisan information sources that generally do not include disagreeable views.
- Like-minded networks offer encouragement, reinforce ideas, and provide safe enclaves for expression (Mutz, 2006).



Hypotheses

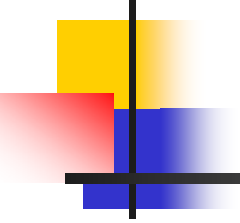
- H1: Hostile media perception will be negatively associated to print news media use.
- H2: Hostile media perception will be negatively associated to TV news use.
- H3: Hostile media perception will be negatively associated to use of MSM Web sites.
- H4: Hostile media perception will be negatively associated to unlike-minded blog use.
- H5: Hostile media perception will be positively associated to supportive blog use.
- H6: Supportive blog use will be positively associated to online political participation.
- H7: Supportive blog use will be positively associated to offline political participation.



Results

- Hostile media perception was negatively associated with uses of contrary information sources after controlling for demographic variables and political orientation variables.
 - Higher hostile media perception not only decreased print and TV news use but also use of mainstream news sites and blogs with which respondents disagreed.
 - Those who perceived the news media as hostile toward their views selected blogs that supported their views.
- Supportive blog use was positively associated to both online and offline political participation.

T1. Hostile media perception and information avoidance



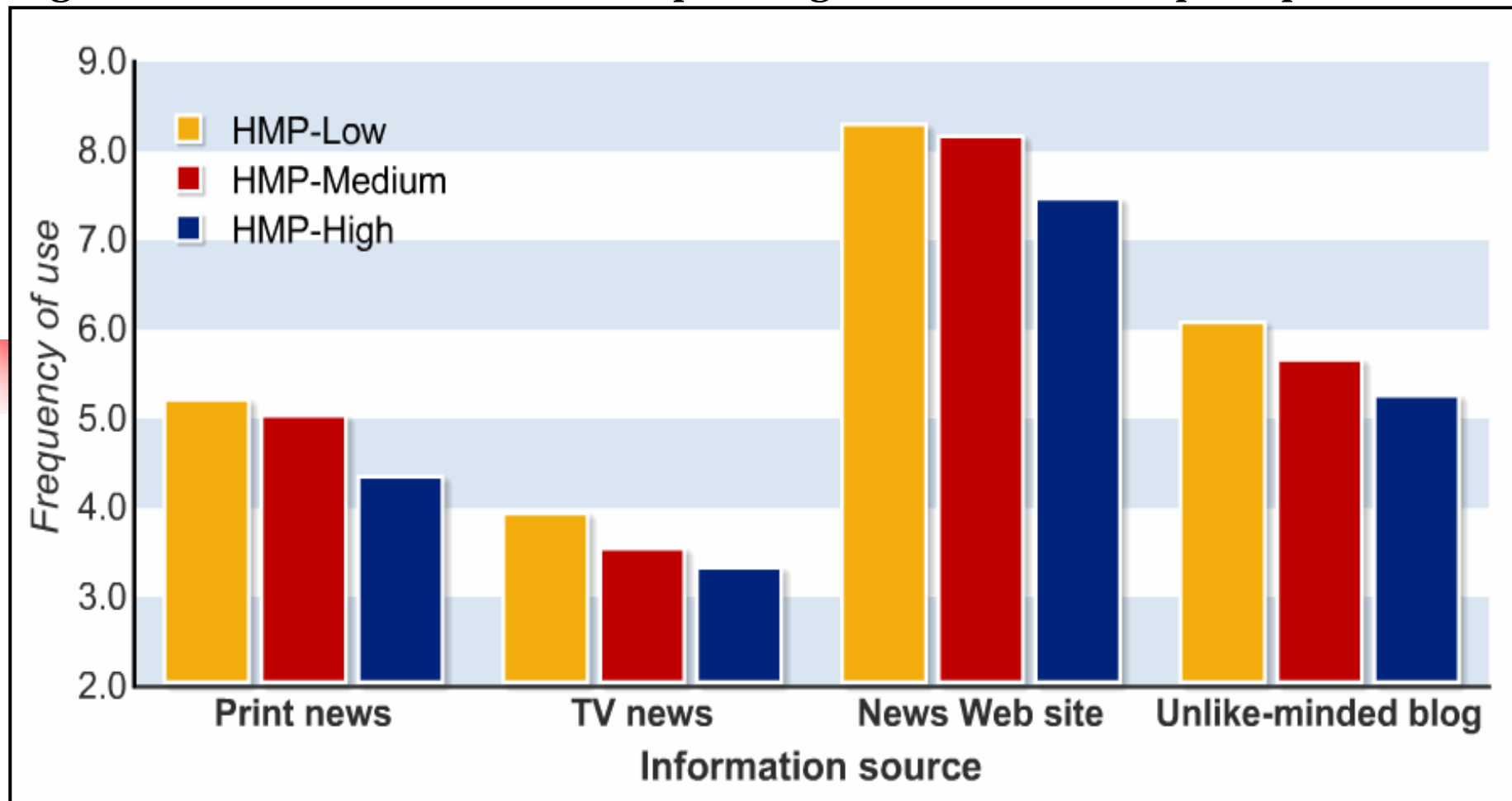
	Supportive blog use	Online part.	Offline part.
Hostile media perception	.17 ***	.07 ***	.06 ***
<i>R</i> ² Chg. (%)	2.6***	1.1***	.6***
Supportive blog use	--	.21 ***	.12 ***
<i>R</i> ² Chg. (%)	--	4.0***	1.3***
Total R² (%)	12.8** *	23.3* **	23.4** *

Note:

Demographics, political orientations, and media uses were controlled.

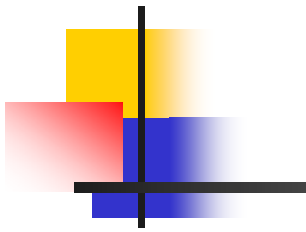
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Figure 2. Patterns of media use depending on hostile media perception (HMP)



Demographics and orientations (ideology, political interest, and efficacy) were controlled.

T2. Partial correlation between supportive blog use and heterogeneous information uses



	Supportive blog use		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Print News Use	-.04 *	-.06 **	-.04 *
TV News Use	.01	-.02	.00
News Web sites	-.03	-.04 *	-.03
Unlike-minded blog	-.12 ***	-.13 ***	-.10 ***

Notes:

Model 1: demographics (age, gender, education, income, and race) were controlled.

Model 2: demographics and orientations (ideology, political interest, and efficacy) were controlled.

Model 3: demographics, orientations, and hostile media perception were controlled.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$



Conclusions

- Perceptions of the mainstream news media drive the use of alternative information sources.
 - For those alienated from traditional news sources, supportive blogs provide a safe space to share views and elaborate on opinions without fear of social sanction.
- Use of these news sources may influence political attitudes and behavior, particularly political participation (Perlmutter, 2007).



Online and Offline Activism: Communication Mediation and Political Messaging Among Blog Readers

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Introduction

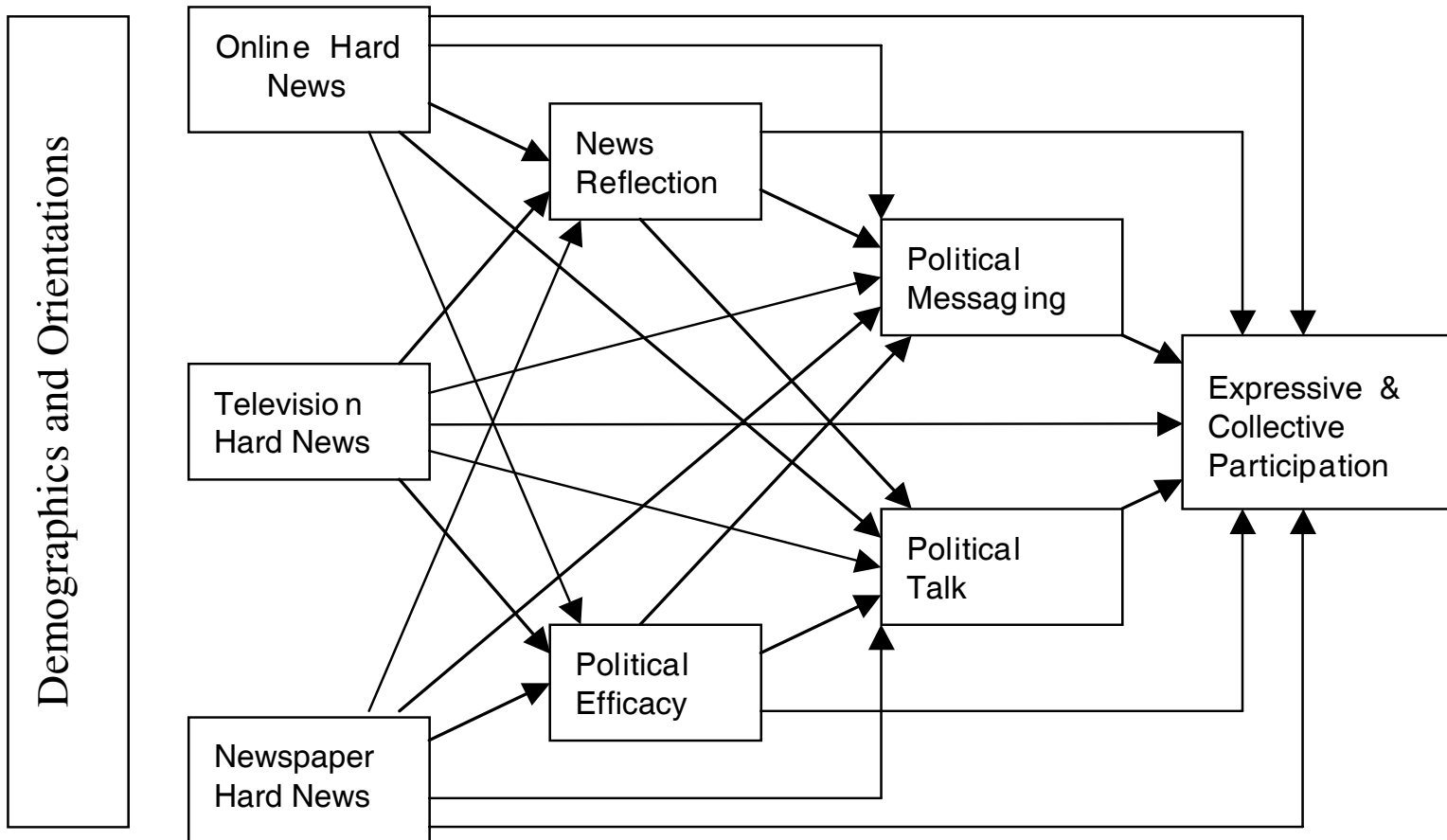
- Political blogosphere characterized as lonely voices disconnected from collective/group participation.
- Research has found that Internet use for information seeking and political expression facilitates participation.
 - Among population cross-sections, not hardcore blog readers.
- What role do informational and expressive uses of the Internet play for political behaviors among blog users?



Communication Mediation Model

- News consumption and interpersonal discussion spur civic participation (McLeod et al., 1996).
- News use leads to media reflection, political knowledge, and efficacy (Eveland et al., 2005).
- Online and offline expression channels media effects of civic and political engagement (Shah et al., 2005).

Theoretical Model





Methodology

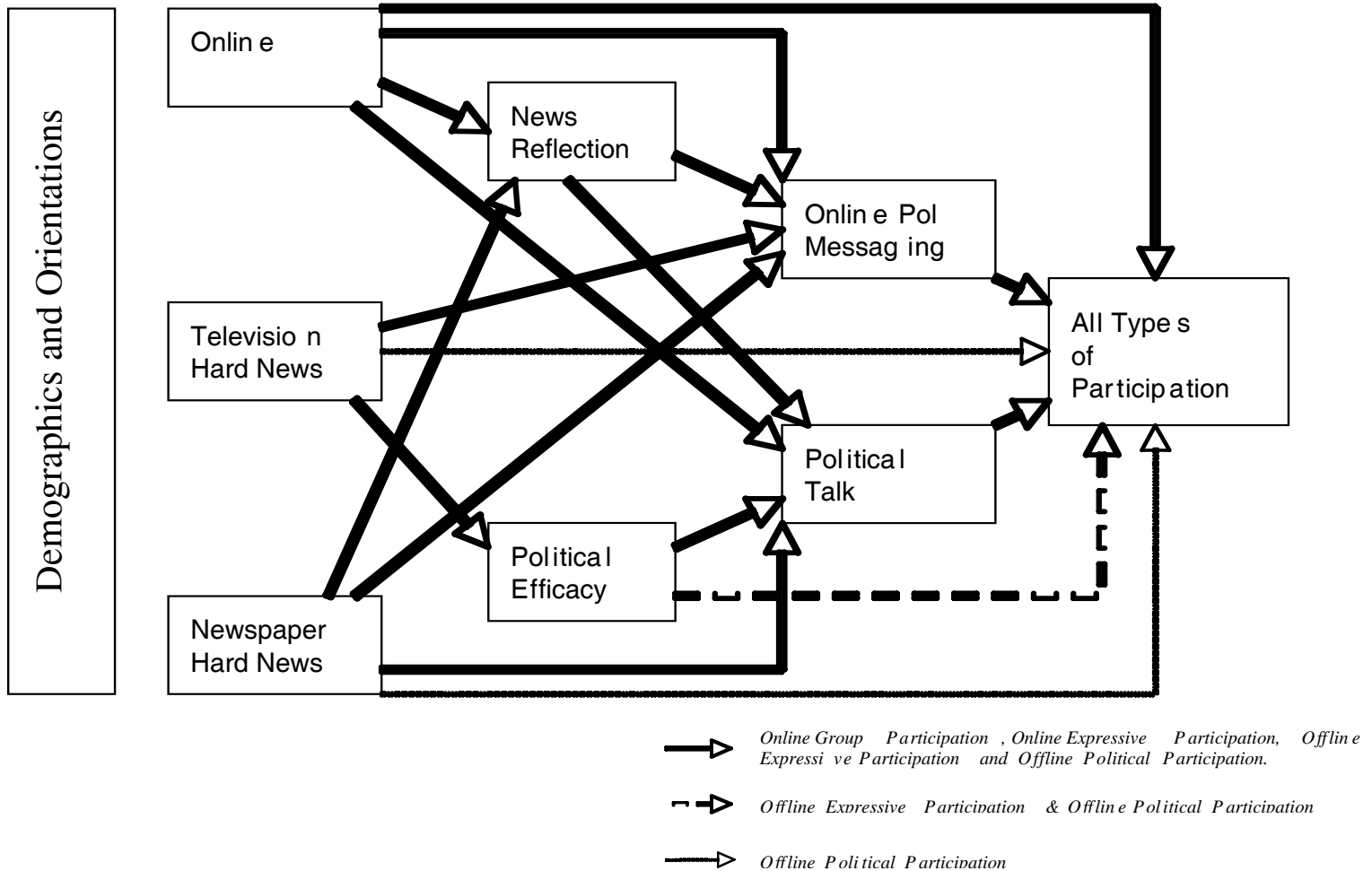
- Four participation DVs
 - Online group: 3 items, $a = .79$
 - Online expressive: 3 items, $a = .78$
 - Offline group: 3 items, $a = .82$
 - Offline expressive: 3 items, $a = .73$
- Endogenous predictors
 - Online political messaging: 2 items, $a = .79$
 - Political talk: No. of discussion partners in past week (0-20)
 - Political efficacy: 2 items, $a = .57$
 - Media reflection: 4 items, $a = .80$



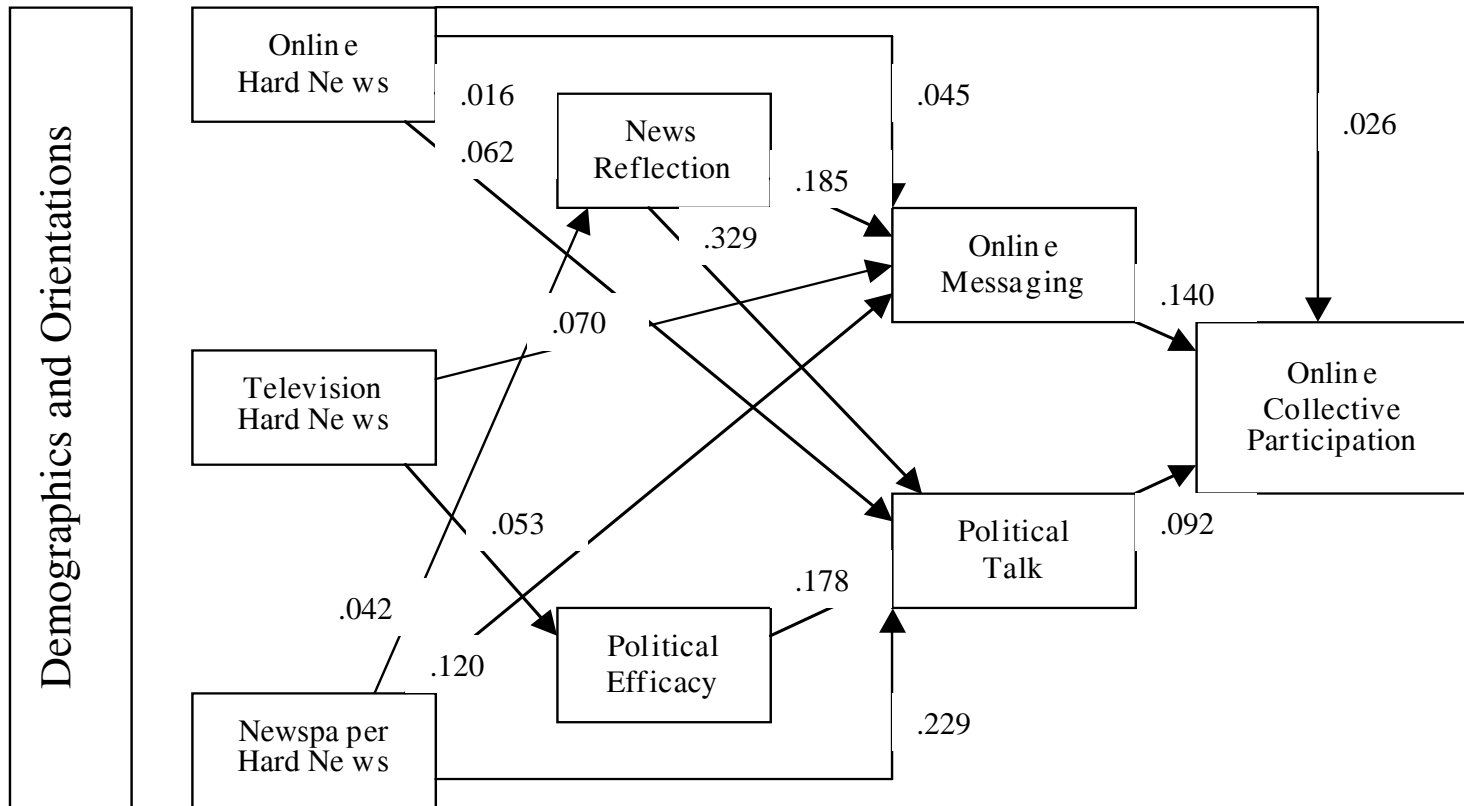
Methodology

- Independent variables
 - Online news use: 6 items, $a = .63$
 - Print news use: 4 items, $a = .73$
 - TV news use: 3 items, $a = .79$
- Control variables
 - News surveillance motivation: 2 items, $a = .84$
 - Partisanship: 1 (Strong Dem) to 7 (Strong Rep), mean = 4.31
 - Issue extremity: 6 items, $a = .93$, folded
 - Age, education, income, gender

Model Results Summary



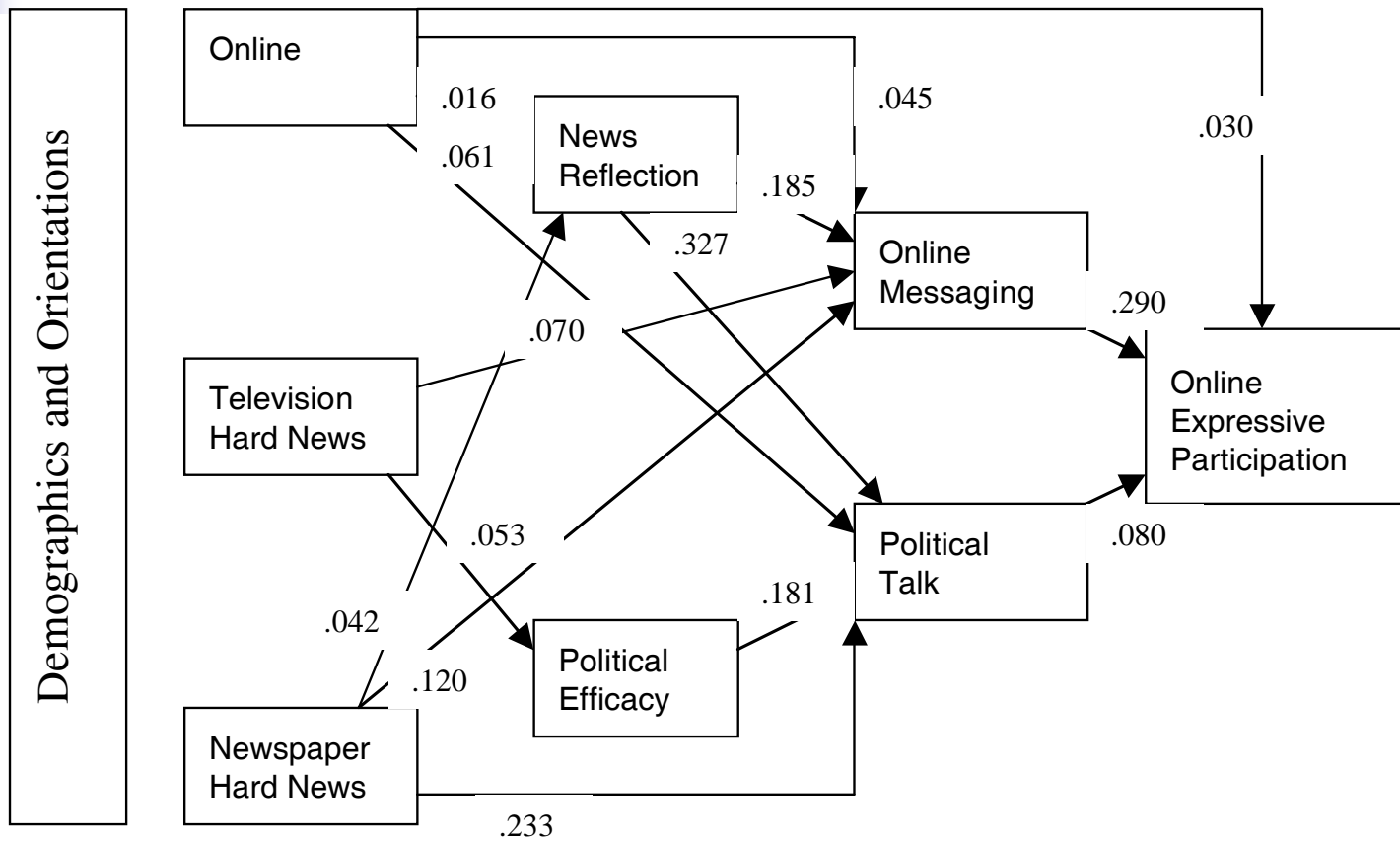
Model for Online Collective Participation



All Betas are standardized at $p < .001$.

Model Fit: NFI = .919, IFI = .923, RFI = .92 ($p < .001$). Chi-square = 188.55; df = 11

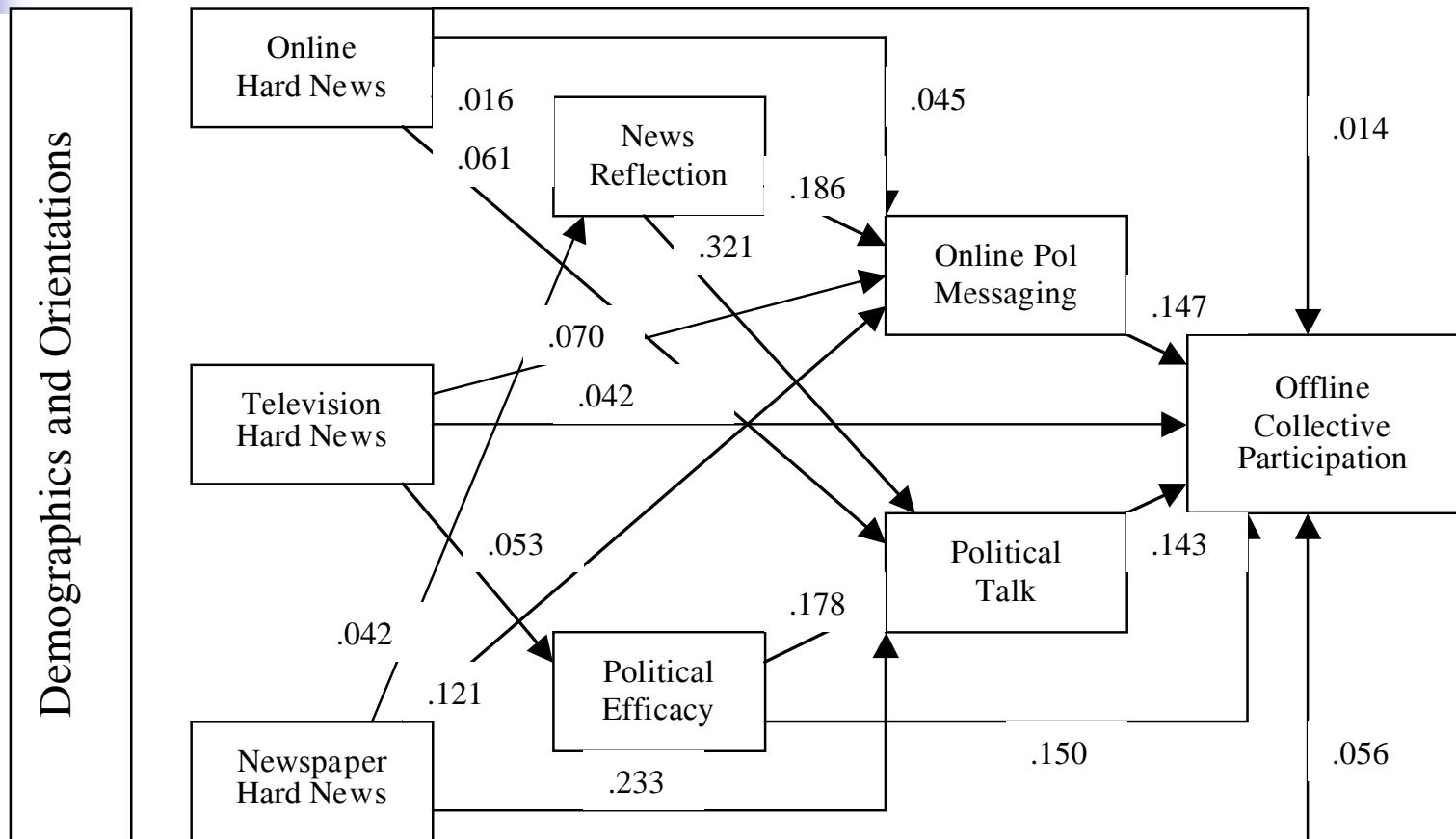
Model for Online Expressive Participation



All Betas are standardized at $p < .001$.

Model Fit: NFI = .928, IFI = .932, RFI = .93 ($p < .001$). Chi-square = 185.05; df = 11

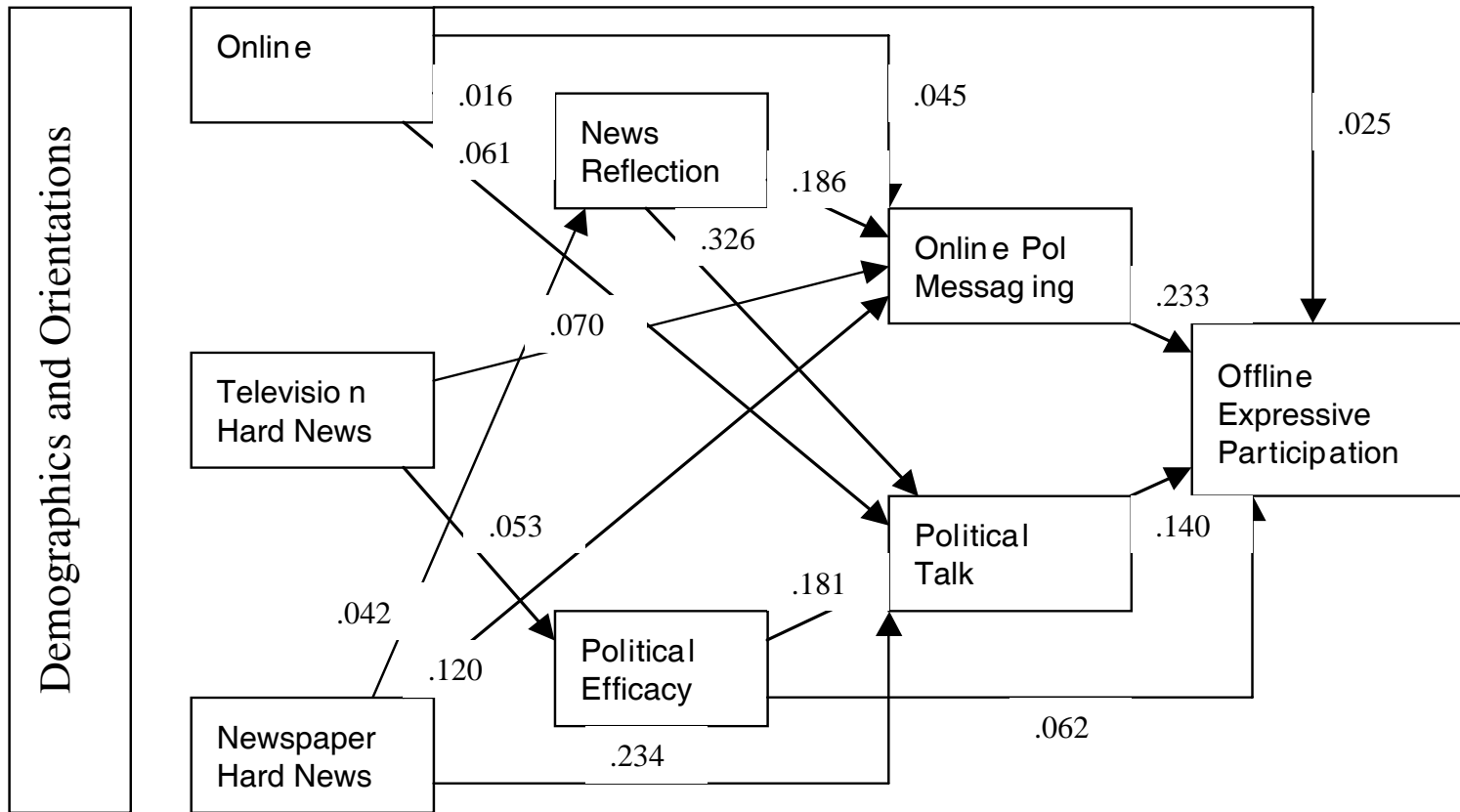
Model for Offline Collective Participation



All Betas are standardized at $p < .001$

Model Fit: NFI = .928, IFI = .931, RFI = .93 ($p < .001$). Chi-square = 174.62; df = 8

Model for Offline Expressive Participation



All Betas are standardized at $p < .001$

Model Fit: NFI = .926, IFI = .93, RFI = .929 ($p < .001$). Chi-square = 193.56; df = 10



Conclusion

- The Internet is creating new ways for citizens to participate
 - Different from conventional offline political participation.
- Need to discern between these two forms as well as between expressive and collective forms of participation.
- Effects of news reflection and efficacy are mediated through offline political talk and online messaging.
 - What will happen when blog use is ubiquitous and its use is mixed with more traditional forms of information?



Future Directions

- Annual surveys of bloggers and their readers
 - Examine how this relationship evolves as blogs mature
- Closer look at the interaction within blog communities
 - Multi-level analysis of readers nested within blogs
- Additional research on blog features and content
 - Experimental studies of structural and textual differences



General Contacts

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References for Reports

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