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America's Youth and Community Engagement

How Use of Mass Media Is Related to Civic Activity and Political Awareness in 14- to 22-Year-Olds

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This research examines the role of the mass media in young people's disengagement from politics. In a nationally representative telephone survey ($N = 1,501$), young people (ages 14 to 22) reported their habits for 12 different uses of mass media as well as awareness of current national politics and time spent in civic activities. Following Putnam's hypothesis about the beneficial effects of civic ties on political involvement, the authors predict and find that civic activity is positively associated with political awareness. Contrary to Putnam, they find that media use, whether information or entertainment oriented, facilitates civic engagement, whereas news media are especially effective in promoting political awareness. Although heavy use of media interferes with both political and civic engagement, the overall effect of media use is favorable for each outcome. The results are discussed in regard to the potentially greater use of the media to build community engagement in young people.

Keywords: *media use; youth; civic participation; political awareness; social capital*

The decline in Americans' political participation has been an issue of both academic and popular concern. Voter turnout in congressional and presidential elections has dropped since 1960 (Brody, 1978, p. 223; Cassell & Luskin, 1988; Keeter, Zukin, Andolina, & Jenkins, 2002), and Americans are less involved in political activities ranging from signing petitions to attending rallies (Miller, 1992; Putnam, 2000).

Attempts to explain the decline in participation focus on young people. Political engagement increases during the life course, but lower starting levels among youth have offset increases in older cohorts (Miller, 1992). Despite high hopes with the

passage of the Twenty-Sixth Amendment, young people have consistently lagged behind older Americans in terms of registration, voting, and most other forms of political involvement (Keeter et al., 2002; Lopez & Kirby, 2003; Soule, 2001). Furthermore, although participation measures have been dropping for all age groups, youth political engagement has been the most precipitous (see Delli Carpini, 2000).

A well-known explanation for the decline in political participation is Putnam's (1993, 2000) hypothesis regarding the relation between civic and political engagement. According to Putnam, civic engagement is an important precursor to political action by virtue of its role in building social capital. Social capital provides a fundamental ingredient for democratic action by facilitating cooperation and interpersonal trust (Coleman, 1990). In noting a steep decline in civic involvement during the past half century, Putnam (2000) contended that decreasing social capital may be an important source of political disengagement. Indeed, young people ages 18 to 29 in 1993 and 1994 were only half as likely to take part in any of a dozen different forms of civic activity as similarly aged youth 20 years earlier (Putnam, 2000, p. 252). The only measure by which young people today are doing better than prior generations is in community service (Galston, 2004).

Although Putnam's explanations have been challenged (see Skocpol & Fiorina, 1999; Winter, 2003), scholars have accepted the importance of civic involvement, and many have shared in Putnam's alarm at the decline in organizational affiliations (Galston, 2004; Keeter et al., 2002; Skocpol & Fiorina, 1999), even if Americans might be gaining social capital from other sources (Winter, 2003). In this research, we examine the role of the mass media as a potential source of the decline in political and civic engagement.

Role of the Mass Media

Although mass media have been lauded as a critical source of political knowledge (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; McLeod, Rush, & Friederich, 1968), the media, in particular entertainment television, have also been criticized as the cause of civic disengagement (Putnam, 2000). Studies relating media use to political awareness and civic engagement find mixed results (see review below). Media effects are often significant, but they vary by type of media and outcome (Chaffee & Frank, 1996; John, Halpern, & Morris, 2002; McLeod et al., 1968). In this study, we look at a wide range of media to determine their unique relations to civic engagement and awareness of national politics in a national sample of adolescents and young adults.

We conceptualize the effects of media use as involving three interrelated and potentially competing processes. The first is the role that media play in promoting social ties. One of the major impediments to engaging in social action is the "free-rider dilemma" (Marwell & Oliver, 1993; Olson, 1965). The dilemma results from competing influences facing persons who consider joining groups to achieve a collective goal. On one hand, individuals will not be motivated to join groups unless their action is seen as

instrumental to attaining the goal. On the other hand, group action by others diminishes the incentive to join because additional participation is not needed. Hence, motivating majorities of individuals to engage in social action is a serious challenge.

Putnam (1993), as well as other theorists (Ostrom, 1990; Taylor, 1987), suggested that one solution to the free-rider dilemma is the existence of community networks that provide individuals with incentives for group participation. Such networks need not involve political activity per se. As Putnam (2000) noted, even entertainment activities such as bowling can serve a civic function when they are regularly performed in groups. In a similar manner, Kim, Wyatt, and Katz (1999) noted that conversation about social and political issues often co-occurs with ostensibly nonpolitical content, such as “what is happening in sports, television, music, or the movies” (p. 369). We suggest that mass media may be a mechanism that can overcome the incentive to remain a free rider by its unique ability to create common interests and instill a sense of community.

Anderson (1991) focused heavily on the historical role of print media as a mechanism that fostered “imagined communities” of readers. These communities were never able to meet face-to-face, but they nevertheless made possible the development of the modern nation state. Dayan and Katz (1992) proposed that modern broadcast media also serve to build community when they cover unique events of major importance, such as the death of a president or the marriage of a prince. Although these are extreme cases, everyday use of the media may also serve the same function (Gitlin, 2001; Mutz, 1998). Adolescents and young adults are particularly drawn to the media for learning about current styles and fashions. Some cable channels, such as MTV, and programs, such as *The OC*, exist largely to entertain adolescents and young adults. Although these uses of media need not overtly promote civic engagement, they do provide shared experience that can facilitate collective action, whether it is for civic or other purposes. We would expect that all forms of mass media could serve to promote group activity by creating communities of similar users who can share their experiences when they engage in face-to-face interaction.

A second mediating process is the knowledge function that media serve. Paying attention to media inevitably provides information about common interests and agendas that can further motivate social participation. News media should be particularly able to provide information about important political and social issues, and we would expect textual (newspapers), auditory (radio news), and audiovisual (television news) channels to play a role through this mechanism (Chaffee & Frank, 1996; Kim et al., 1999). However, other media may also promote political knowledge. In a more traditional sphere, books that attract a large readership may promote both political awareness and civic interests, especially those that focus on current events. In the newer sphere of the Internet, popular portals for entering the Web also provide headlines and other news that can help users to learn about current issues.

A third mediating process is the inevitable time commitment that media use demands. To the extent that young people spend their time engaged in media use, they

will inevitably be less able to devote energy to civic or political activities (Putnam, 2000). Based on this time-replacement hypothesis, we would expect that media uses that absorb large amounts of time (such as television, the Internet, and book reading) will adversely affect political awareness and civic engagement, especially at the extremes of the media-use continuum. Hence, media use may not be monotonically related to indicators of political awareness and civic engagement.

Previous Research on Media Exposure and Political and Civic Engagement

Three forms of media have been heavily examined for possible correlations with civic engagement. Television entertainment as well as news, Internet use, and newspapers have been hypothesized to have varied relationships to political and civic engagement. Two other media that were included in this study have also received some attention: news radio and general book reading. Although magazines have received less recent attention, their use has been found to correlate with political knowledge and was also included in our analysis. Finally, we examined the role of film as a medium that potentially has great influence on young people.

In Putnam's (2000) initial analysis of civic engagement, television was the clear scapegoat. Putnam's study of aggregate trends since 1965 found that television accounted for as much as 25% of the decline in civic engagement (pp. 283-284). Putnam and others, however, have found positive correlations between use of televised news and civic engagement (Norris, 1996; Volgy & Schwartz, 1980). Although most studies find that time spent in front of a television is correlated with lower participation and knowledge, there is evidence that television use is nonlinearly related to civic participation, positively associated at low levels of use, and then negatively related as use increases (Hooghe, 2002). There is no general agreement that television use represents a simple negative influence (see Peer, Malthouse, & Calder, 2003).

Norris (1996) suggested that much of the confusion concerning the effects of television stems from the fact that many researchers have treated television use in the aggregate. By looking at individual aspects of television use, Norris argued, we may be better able to understand the processes that mediate the effects of television (see also McLeod, 2000). For this study, we took Norris's suggestion and examined five aspects of televised media use that distinguish between news (national and local) and entertainment (following shows and watching movies) as well as overall hours spent.

The debate concerning the social consequences of Internet use is also far from over (Delli Carpini, 2000; Katz & Rice, 2002). Nie and Erbring (2000) found that hours of Internet use, like television, were negatively correlated with time spent with family and friends as well as with other media. Others have reached the opposite conclusion that "Internet users are not social isolates . . . [and that] they tend to have wider social circles than nonusers" (Uslaner, 2004, p. 223). Indeed, some research suggests that those using the Internet for information, especially political information, exhibit

higher levels of political efficacy, knowledge, and participation (Johnson & Kaye, 2003; Kenski & Stroud, 2006), but those who use it for recreation do not do as well in any political categories (Shah, McLeod, & Yoon, 2001). The suggestion has been made that greater informational engagement with the medium may be the answer to young people's political apathy (Delli Carpini, 2000). In this study, we focus on informational use of the Internet.

Newspapers have historically been a fairly reliable predictor of political knowledge (Chaffee & Frank, 1996), as well as civic engagement and interpersonal trust (Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001). Although some studies suggest that the correlation between knowledge and newspapers might be a product of demographic variables or a function of the level to which people follow politics (see John et al., 2002; Mondak, 1995), the consistency of the role of newspapers even after controlling for following politics and demographic variables argues against this interpretation (Chaffee & Frank, 1996; Shah, Kwak, et al., 2001). Nevertheless, fewer young people are taking advantage of the printed news medium (Putnam, 2000; Robinson & Godbey, 1997). Although the effects of newspaper reading on political learning have been studied extensively, we were interested to evaluate the extent to which newspaper reading is independently related to both the political awareness and civic involvement of young people.

Although noted in the McLeod et al. (1968) landmark study of media in Ecuador, book reading has been reexamined only recently as a possible facilitator of political participation in the United States. A National Endowment for the Arts survey found reading has declined across generations in both cross-sectional and over-time analyses (Bradshaw, Nichols, & Bauerlein, 2004). Literary readers in the National Endowment for the Arts survey were more than twice as likely to perform volunteer and charity work (43% of literary readers as opposed to 17% of non-literary readers) and were more likely to attend sporting events, visit art museums, and attend performing arts events (Bradshaw et al., 2004). The National Endowment for the Arts report found a decline in reading, especially among younger Americans, that the authors claimed is related to the drop in general civic participation; reading is also associated with lower levels of television viewing and Internet use (Bradshaw et al., 2004).

Radio news has been at most a side note in many studies of political participation, possibly because television has usurped the better part of the informative role of talk and news radio (Chaffee & Frank, 1996). The same can be said about magazines. Nevertheless, earlier studies find that magazines play a role in the political development of young people (Tan & Vaughn, 1976). We included both media to assess their impact, controlling for exposure to other media sources.

The long-term influence of films on youth has been studied since the 1930s, when it was found that young people's beliefs and attitudes could be influenced by movies and that the resulting changes increased with repeated viewings and were relatively enduring (Charters, 1933). Less attention has been devoted, however, to the civic and political effects of film. Because films can be viewed in either public gatherings (in theaters) or more solitary settings (on television and DVD/videotape), we differentiated these

modes of viewership. We expected much of the civic effect of movie watching to stem from shared experience of the content (see Gitlin, 2001), but attending films in theaters may also encourage a greater sense of community among young people.

Predictions

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which media facilitate or impede youth political and civic involvement. We examined these outcomes using two indicators: political awareness and participation in voluntary associations such as clubs, other voluntary organizations, and community service. We assessed political awareness using standard indicators of knowledge of current national politics (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). These indicators correlate with political participation and predict the ability to understand and assimilate political information (Zaller, 1989). Following Putnam's (2000) analysis of the precursors of political engagement, we expected that

Hypothesis 1: Civic activity is positively related to political awareness.

We could not anticipate all the intercorrelations among the many media we studied, and so it was difficult to make precise predictions about each one. Nevertheless, we hypothesized that

Hypothesis 2a: Use of mass media is positively related to civic activity because it creates a shared experience that promotes community in young people.

However, we expected that

Hypothesis 2b: Media that transmit information, such as Internet use, television and radio news, and newspapers, will be particularly effective in promoting political awareness.

At the same time, we expected that

Hypothesis 3: High levels of media use, such as intense television viewing, could reduce opportunities to engage in civic activities as well as reduce political awareness.

Hence, we examined the effects of media on our outcomes for both linear as well as potential curvilinear relations reflecting the interfering effects of excessive media consumption on civic and political engagement. Finally, we expected that

Hypothesis 4a: When all effects of the media are tabulated, we will see greater evidence of facilitation than inhibition of civic and political outcomes as a result of media use.

Because of the importance of television viewing, we also examined its aggregate effects. Following Norris's (1996) analysis, we predicted that

Hypothesis 4b: Television viewing will increase civic participation but not political awareness.

Method

This study uses data from the 2004 National Annenberg Risk Survey of Youth, a survey conducted by the Adolescent Risk Communication Institute at the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania. The survey involved 1,501 telephone interviews with 14- to 22-year-old respondents conducted between April 27 and September 16, 2004. Within each household, a 14- to 22-year-old was requested to respond to the interview. In those households in which more than one person qualified for the interview, the one with the most recent birthday was chosen. In households where a potential respondent was away at school, we attempted to schedule an interview when the respondent was home. For those younger than 18 years of age, parental permission was obtained. The survey was approved by the institutional review board of the University of Pennsylvania. Schulman, Ronca, & Bucuvalas, Inc. conducted the interviews. The response rate for the survey (American Association for Public Opinion Research formula 4) was 51.3%.

The unweighted sample was not far off from U.S. Census Bureau demographic estimates for this age group. The unweighted sample contained 49.9% males, 12.8% Hispanics, 12.0% Blacks, 11.3% non-Black/non-White racial identifiers, and 78.1% current students. Nevertheless, because Hispanics, Blacks, and non-Blacks/non-Whites were slightly underrepresented, we opted to use the weighted sample when reporting frequencies and bivariate associations. The sample was weighted for region, sex, race, age, and education.

Dependent Variables

Two dependent variables were the focus of our analyses: political awareness and participation in extracurricular voluntary activity. To assess political awareness, we asked six items that tapped general understanding as well as current knowledge of the U.S. political system: (a) "Do you know what office Dick Cheney holds? If yes, what is it?" (b) "What are the major political parties in this country?" (c) "Which party has the most members in the House of Representatives?" (d) "Which party, as far as you know, is more conservative?" (e) "Whose responsibility is it to determine if a law is constitutional? Is it the President, the Congress, or the Supreme Court?" and (f) "How much of a majority is needed in the House and Senate to override a

presidential veto? Is it one-half, two-thirds, or three-quarters?" Questions c and d were asked only of respondents who named the Democrats and Republicans as major political parties in Question b.

A political awareness scale was created by summing correct answers with incorrect/don't know/refused responses treated as incorrect. Respondents had to provide the correct office for Dick Cheney to receive a correct score. Items 3 and 4 were scored as incorrect if respondents did not name the two parties in Question 2. Item 2 was not scored separately. The resulting five-item scale was reliable with a Cronbach's alpha of .71. On average, respondents answered 2.65 items correctly ($Mdn = 3.0$, $SD = 1.69$).

Involvement in extracurricular voluntary associations was measured with the question "I am going to ask you about some of the things you typically spend your time doing outside of classes or a job. Do you participate in a club or other extracurricular activity (2) most days, (1) some days, or (0) never?" Of respondents, 29% said most days, 37.3% said some days, and 33.8% said never.

Respondents were also asked about community service with the question "Do you volunteer your time for a worthy cause, such as community service most days, some days, or never?" Of respondents, 9.0% said most days, 47.4% said some days, and 43.6% said never. The two civic activity items were correlated ($r = .343$, $p < .001$); hence, we used the mean of the two scores to represent an overall civic activity index.

Media Use

Media consumption was measured for 12 different types of media use. Respondents were asked how often they read "a newspaper," watched "the national nightly TV news or a cable station such as CNN," watched "the local TV news that comes on before the national news or again at 10 or 11 p.m.," listened "to a radio news show dealing with the events of the day for at least 5 or 10 minutes," used "a computer to go online (use the Internet) to get information," watched "a movie that's broadcast on TV," watched "a movie using a DVD or video cassette player," watched "a movie at a theatre," watched "a TV show that you are following," "read a book," and "read a magazine" (most days = 3, once or twice a week = 2, less often = 1, never = 0). They were also asked about their frequency of daily television viewing with the question "About how many hours do you watch television on a typical weekday?" (less than 1 hour a day = .5, between 1 to 2 hours a day = 1.5, 3 to 5 hours a day = 4, 5 to 8 hours a day = 6.5, more than 8 hours = 8).

Demographic Predictors

In addressing the erosion of political and civic engagement, researchers have looked to demographic factors that seem to correlate with overall levels of engagement. We examined many of these factors as well to control for their effects in our analysis of the media.

For both adults and youth, greater levels of education are closely related to higher political knowledge as well as more civic engagement (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996, pp. 144-145; National Association of the Secretaries of State, 1999). The average education level in our sample was 10.9 years of schooling ($Mdn = 11$, $SD = 2.1$).² We would also expect current students to fare better than those who have ceased formal study because of the greater range of requirements and opportunities to engage in community service and clubs that the schools afford. Of respondents, 78.9% were currently students.

Race and gender are also significant correlates of political knowledge and civic engagement. The weighted sample contained 50.8% males, 14.5% Hispanics, 15.3% Blacks, and 11.7% non-Black/non-White identifiers. With a few exceptions, Whites appear more politically aware than Blacks, Hispanics, and other non-Whites (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996, p. 157). When it comes to civic engagement, however, race has not been as strongly related in one direction or the other (Lopez, 2002; Putnam, 2000, p. 280). Women, on average, belong to more associations and organizations than men but tend to exhibit less political knowledge (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Kenski & Jamieson, 2000; Lopez & Kirby, 2003, p. 172).

Socioeconomic status is yet another factor in assessing political knowledge and civic engagement. Those with greater incomes are more engaged both civically and politically and are much more knowledgeable about politics (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996, p. 215; Schlozman, Verba, & Brady, 1999, p. 433). In this study, we focused on the income of the neighborhood of our participants, under the assumption that this would capture the resources in schools and other settings that might promote greater civic and political activity. Neighborhood household income was measured by matching self-reported zip codes with the 2000 U.S. Census Bureau median household income estimates. Approximately 9% of the sample could not provide a valid zip code. Because the presence of missing data was not correlated with other demographic variables, we assigned the mean sample value of US\$47,700 to these cases.

Analytical Procedures

Mean levels of awareness and time spent in civic activities were calculated across the various media sources. To examine the relations between use of various media sources and the two outcomes, multivariate analyses using ordinary least squares regression were conducted in two stages. In the first stage, all demographic variables were entered. Because media variables could be correlated but still have different relations with our outcomes, we conducted the second stage in a stepwise fashion until no further prediction of the outcome was possible ($p < .05$). To assess the potential for interfering effects of extreme media use, we included both linear and quadratic predictors for each media variable.

Results

Relation Between Civic Activity and Political Awareness

To assess the hypothesis that civic activity is related to political awareness (Hypothesis 1), we entered the civic outcome into a regression equation predicting awareness along with all demographic variables. Civic activity was strongly related to awareness ($B = .299$, $SE = .067$, $p < .001$, $pr = .116$), despite controls for demographic factors. This finding supports the underlying premise of this research that those who participate in civic activity are more likely to be politically engaged.

Media Use

As shown in Table 1, using the Internet to get information was the most popular form of media use, with 58.3% of youth reporting that they do it most days of the week. A little less than one third of young people reported that they read a book most days of the week. A majority of youth read a newspaper, watched the national nightly television news or cable news, watched the local news, listened to a radio news show, watched a movie that was broadcast on television, watched a movie using a DVD or videocassette player, watched a television show that they were following, read a book, and read a magazine at least once a week or more. A sizable proportion (29.8%) of young people went to a movie theater at least once a week or more.

The least popular activities, reported as never done, were watching the national evening television or cable news, with 25.9% saying that they never do this, and listening to a radio news show for more than 5 or 10 minutes, with 25.8% reporting that they did not do this. When it came to watching television generally, 5.3% reported watching more than 8 hours a day, 6.7% said 5 to 8 hours a day, 35.2% said 3 to 5 hours a day, 38.9% said between 1 to 2 hours a day, and 14.0% said they watched less than 1 hour a day.

An examination of the intercorrelations between the 12 media variables indicated that most were not highly related. The largest correlation was between viewing of local and national television news ($r = .36$). Nevertheless, many of the uses were related as expected. For example, entertainment uses of television (movies and shows) tended to correlate with each other and with overall television use (rs of .3), whereas both forms of television news correlated more highly with each other than with total use of television (rs of .10 and $-.01$). In a similar manner, viewing movies in theaters or on DVD was more related than watching them on television (r of .2 vs. .1). Newspaper reading was related to television ($r = .2$) and radio news use ($r = .1$), as well as to magazine ($r = .2$) and book reading ($r = .2$). Informational use of the Internet tended to correlate with a variety of media uses, including entertainment (movies in theaters, $r = .1$), news (on national television, $r = .1$), and book reading ($r = .2$). The largest negative relation

Table 1
Percentages of Respondents Reporting Use of Various Media
From Most Days to Never (row percentages)

Media Use	Frequency of Use			
	Most Days	Once or Twice a Week	Less Often	Never
Using Internet for information	58.3	20.7	11.5	9.5
Following shows on TV	42.8	30.2	14.5	12.5
Watching local TV news	39.2	27.7	16.6	16.5
Watching movies on DVD or videotape	34.8	44.9	18.4	1.9
Listening to radio news	34.5	21.0	18.6	25.8
Reading books	32.6	26.3	28.9	12.1
Watching movies on TV	27.1	36.4	28.5	8.0
Reading newspapers	26.6	34.8	23.9	14.8
Watching national TV news	24.1	27.5	22.5	25.9
Reading magazines	22.2	35.7	28.8	13.3
Watching movies in theaters	5.5	24.3	63.8	6.5

was between total time watching television and book reading ($r = -.11$). This pattern of correlations suggested that most of the media variables operated independently of each other and that forming composites was less useful than examining each of them separately as potential predictors of civic and political outcomes.

Media Use and Civic Activity

Tables 2 and 3 present means for participation in civic activity as a function of media use. As shown in Table 2, those who read books or use the Internet for information most days of the week were more likely to report regular participation in civic activities than those who never used these media. Young people who watched movies in a theater or followed a television show also demonstrated increased civic participation. Frequency of watching movies on television, however, was not related to civic engagement. Correlations between media use and civic activity indicated that nearly all of the media variables were positively associated with civic activity (Hypothesis 2a). There were no significant negative relations except for overall hours of television use (see Table 3).

Media Use and Political Awareness

The relationships between the uses of media and political awareness are shown in Tables 3 and 4. In support of Hypothesis 2b, political awareness was most strongly associated with informational media, such as Internet use followed by newspaper reading. Watching national nightly TV news or cable news also was positively associated

Table 2
Mean Participation in Civic Activity on a Scale From Never (0) to Most Days (2) by Use of Various Media and Bivariate Pearson Correlations of Activity With Each Media Variable

Media Use	Frequency of Use				Pearson's <i>r</i>
	Most days	Once or Twice a Week	Less Often	Never	
Using Internet for information	0.89	0.77	0.68	0.47	.219***
Following a TV show	0.81	0.84	0.79	0.68	.061*
Watching local TV news	0.83	0.81	0.81	0.72	.057*
Watching movies on DVD or videotape	0.77	0.83	0.82	0.57	-.012
Listening to news on radio	0.84	0.80	0.88	0.70	.076**
Reading books	0.92	0.85	0.77	0.46	.210***
Watching movies on TV	0.75	0.85	0.81	0.73	-.009
Reading newspapers	0.85	0.85	0.75	0.70	.092***
Watching national TV news	0.86	0.85	0.83	0.67	.114***
Reading magazines	0.91	0.84	0.76	0.62	.150***
Watching movies in theaters	0.78	0.88	0.80	0.54	.085**

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

Table 3
Mean Political Awareness Scores and Frequency of Participation in Civic Activity by Hours of Overall Television Viewing and Pearson Correlations Between Each Outcome and Television Use

Outcome	Hours of Overall Television Viewing					Pearson's <i>r</i>
	More Than 8 Hours a Day	5 to 8 Hours a Day	3 to 5 Hours a Day	Between 1 to 2 Hours a Day	Less Than 1 Hour a Day	
Political awareness	1.9	1.8	2.5	2.9	3.0	-.202***
Time in civic activity	0.59	0.70	0.78	0.85	0.85	-.112***

*** $p < .001$.

with awareness. However, book reading was also highly related. Three of the media variables were not significantly related to political awareness (local television news, radio news, and reading a magazine). Some negative associations did appear, and these all involved either watching movies or following shows on television. Table 3 shows that the number of hours engaged in watching television was negatively related to political awareness.

Multivariate Relations Between Media Use and Outcomes

Our interest in identifying the unique contribution of each individual media variable led us to use stepwise regression in which media variables were entered into each model after controlling for demographic factors. Three of the media-use variables, using the Internet, reading books, and watching national television news, significantly ($p < .05$) improved prediction of each outcome in the multivariate models (see Table 5). These associations were significant, even though gender, ethnicity, race, education, current student status, average household income in neighborhood, and other media variables were included in the models. Effect size estimates (partial r s) indicate that reading books and using the Internet were also the largest contributors to the prediction equations. Furthermore, as indicated by the significant quadratic term, civic activity increased disproportionately in relation to Internet use.

Reading newspapers was also positively related to political awareness, but it was not a significant predictor of civic activity. The remaining predictors of political awareness were negatively related to the outcome. Watching movies and following shows on television were negatively related to awareness. Furthermore, in support of Hypothesis 3, these relations were with the squared values of the media variables, indicating that the relation got progressively more negative as use of these media increased. Watching movies in theaters had a nonmonotonic relation, first increasing but ultimately decreasing political awareness. Finally, political awareness also tended to grow less rapidly as book reading increased. However, the relation remained positive across the book reading continuum.

Several media variables were positively related to civic activity: listening to news on the radio, following shows on television, and reading magazines. Only one variable was negatively related to civic activity, overall use of television, and the effect grew disproportionately stronger as television use increased (Hypothesis 3).

Of the demographic variables, education was the strongest predictor of political knowledge. We should note that education for this adolescent sample is highly correlated with age ($r = .81$). Therefore, in addition to representing educational achievement, our education variable reflected experience that comes with age. Nevertheless, when we tested a model that contained both age and education level, age was not a significant predictor in any of the equations. In regard to civic activity, current student status was the only predictor. This is not surprising inasmuch as opportunities and requirements for such activities are greater in school settings and individual differences are less critical.

Overall Effects of Media Use

To assess the overall effect of media use on each outcome (Hypotheses 4a and 4b), we calculated the predicted values stemming from the regression models in Table 5. These calculations found that the effects of media were positive and significantly greater than 0 for both civic activity ($M = 0.41$, $SE = .004$, $p < .001$) and political

Table 4
Average Number of Items Answered Correctly on 5-Item Political Awareness Scale by Frequency of Use and Bivariate Pearson Correlations of Awareness of Each Media Variable

Media Use	Frequency of Use				Pearson's <i>r</i>
	Most Days	Once or Twice a Week	Less Often	Never	
Using Internet for information	3.0	2.4	2.0	1.5	.288***
Following a TV show	2.4	2.8	2.8	3.0	-.127***
Watching local TV news	2.6	2.7	2.6	2.5	.021
Watching movies on DVD or videotape	2.3	2.9	2.7	1.7	-.071**
Listening to news on radio	2.6	2.8	2.8	2.4	.029
Reading books	3.0	2.8	2.4	1.8	.219***
Watching movies on TV	2.1	2.7	3.0	2.9	-.184***
Reading newspapers	3.1	2.8	2.3	1.7	.275***
Watching national TV news	2.9	2.7	2.6	2.2	.159***
Reading magazines	2.5	2.9	2.7	2.2	.043
Watching movies in theaters	1.5	2.7	2.8	2.2	-.055*

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

awareness ($M = 1.32$, $SE = .014$, $p < .001$). In addition, the overall effects of all five television variables were positively related to civic activity ($M = .07$, $SE = .002$, $p < .001$). However, television had a net negative relationship with political awareness ($M = -.22$, $SE = .006$, $p < .001$).

Discussion

This study provides the most comprehensive examination to date of media use in young people and how that use relates to civic and political behavior. Previous studies examine some uses of media in relation to civic (e.g., Iyengar & Jackman, 2004) or political (e.g., Bennett, 1998) outcomes. However, no study examines both entertainment and informational media in a nationally representative sample of young people (cf. McLeod, 2000). We find that media use is associated with greater involvement in civic activities and higher levels of political awareness. Although some uses of media were negatively related to each outcome, the overall effects of media were strongly positive. In addition, our indicator of civic activity was positively related to political awareness, supporting Putnam's (2000) hypothesis that persons who engage in civic activity (e.g., community service and voluntary associations) are also more likely to be engaged by politics. This finding extends the research that examines the role of voluntary activities

Table 5
Regression Results Predicting Political Awareness
and Civic Activity ($N = 1,478$)

	Political Awareness (5-Point Scale)				Civic Activity (3-Point Scale)			
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	Partial <i>r</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	Partial <i>r</i>
Intercept	-2.103	.293	.000		.066	.110	.552	
Male (male = 1, female = 0)	.458	.073	.000	.164	-.051	.029	.076	
Hispanic (Hispanic = 1, else = 0)	-.589	.119	.000	-.129	-.075	.047	.109	
Black (Black = 1, else = 0)	-.459	.114	.000	-.106	.048	.045	.290	
Non-Black/Non-White (Black or White = 0, else = 1)	-.125	.124	.314		.018	.049	.709	
Education (in years)	.236	.019	.000	.323	.002	.007	.734	
Current student (yes = 1, no = 0)	.380	.098	.000	.102	.329	.038	.000	.227
Household income in neighborhood (in thousands)	.011	.002	.000	.131	.001	.001	.146	
Reading newspapers (0 to 3)	.197	.038	.000	.134				
Watching national TV news (0 to 3)	.084	.033	.012	.066	.036	.013	.007	.071
Watching local TV news (0 to 3)								
Listening to news on the radio (0 to 3)					.035	.012	.004	.074
Using Internet for information (0 to 3)	.196	.040	.000	.129				
Using Internet squared					.017	.004	.000	.101
Watching movies on TV (0 to 3)								
Watching movies on TV squared	-.044	.012	.000	-.098				
Watching movies in theaters (0 to 3)	.488	.179	.007	.071				
Watching movies in theaters squared	-.196	.056	.000	-.091				
Following shows on TV (0 to 3)					.029	.015	.050	.051
Following shows on TV squared	-.030	.011	.006	-.072				
Reading books (0 to 3)	.492	.137	.000	.094	.061	.014	.000	.111
Reading books squared	-.081	.039	.039	-.054				
Reading magazines (0 to 3)					.036	.015	.018	.062
Television viewing (hours per day)								
Television viewing squared					-.003	.001	.003	-.077
R^2	.348				.152			

Note: Significant predictors in bold.

during high school as precursors of later political engagement by showing that civic activity is related to greater political awareness during late adolescence and early adulthood. At the same time, the results are more supportive of the role of mass media as facilitators of civic and political engagement than Putnam and others have recognized. Indeed, the results suggest that young people's use of mass media may help to stimulate development of both social and political action.

Although Putnam (1993, 2000) focused on the role of informal social networks as the source of social capital, our results indicate that young people's use of media facilitates the development of those social networks. In particular, consuming three of the media was positively and independently associated with both political and civic engagement: using the Internet to gather information, book reading, and watching national television news. Two other media appeared to be related to civic activities: listening to radio news and reading magazines. Even following particular entertainment shows on television was positively associated with civic activity. On the other hand, newspaper reading was strongly related to political awareness but did not appear to facilitate civic activity. These patterns of results suggest that the media, even those that primarily serve as entertainment and, hence, carry little information about political or social action, may help to build social capital in their users.

Although many media uses were supportive of civic activity, there was also support for the prediction that heavy media use can interfere with knowledge acquisition and opportunity for action. Total amount of television viewing was negatively related to civic activity, and watching large amounts of television in the form of movies and other entertainment also interfered with gaining political awareness. Indeed, heavy use of these media had increasingly negative effects as evidenced by the quadratic terms in the regression models. Other media uses had nonmonotonic relations with political awareness, indicating an initial facilitation followed by increasing interference. Watching movies in theaters followed this pattern. Book reading exhibited a declining effect at high levels, but the overall relation with awareness was positive.

Despite evidence for displacement from media use, most of the significant relations between media use and civic activity were positive, and the overall effects of media use were positive for each outcome. Calculations based on the multivariate model indicated that media use was more likely to increase both political and civic involvement than to inhibit it. Although some media uses, such as book reading and acquiring information on the Internet, may seem to be solitary activities, they can be powerful means for acquiring and learning about potentially shared interests. We do not know what books, television shows, or Internet sites our respondents were drawn to, but it is likely that these uses reflect popular interests that can be a source of community. Similar effects are likely to be at work in the relations between civic activity and magazine use as well as radio and local television news. The small but positive effect of seeing films in theaters may reflect the community building effects of engaging in this activity in group settings.

Effects of Television

The findings in regard to television support Norris's (1996) argument that this medium is not monolithic in its role in knowledge acquisition and civic engagement. Although total time spent watching television was negatively related to civic activity, specific forms of television, such as national news programs, promoted both outcomes, and following entertainment programs was positively related to civic activity. Indeed, contrary to Putnam (2000), the overall effects of television were favorable for civic activity. However, the results for political awareness were less positive. Although national news increased knowledge, following specific shows and watching movies on television decreased awareness, leading to an overall interfering effect. Although the present results indicate that it is not valid to stereotype television as an inhibitor (or facilitator) of either political or civic engagement in young people, there clearly is cause for concern that as a whole, its effects may be detrimental for political engagement.

Print Versus Electronic Media

Our finding that newspaper reading was only positively related to political awareness suggests that this news medium has rather limited motivational effects in young people. Considerable previous research supports the role of the print press as a source of knowledge in young people (Chaffee & Frank, 1996). Our findings suggest this effect does not transfer to civic action. On the other hand, searching the Internet for information appears to have rather global effects across both political and civic engagement. Even national television news had positive relations with both outcomes. These findings suggest that Delli Carpini's (2000) optimism about the potentially helpful effects of the Internet as well as other electronic media may not be misplaced. However, to the degree book and newspaper reading has declined and television viewing has increased, it is quite possible that the overall favorable effects of media have declined during the television age. It remains to be seen, therefore, if the age of the Internet can reverse these patterns, leading to an increase in both political and civic activity.

Limitations in the Study

Although we found many instances of media playing what appears to be a facilitative role for civic and political engagement, there may well be effects of the media that are not evident in our analyses or that have reduced the positive associations we might otherwise find. For example, Meyrowitz (1985) argued that one effect of the electronic media, especially television, is the reduction of trust in formal institutions, such as the government. However, we did not assess trust in government in this study.

Even if there are negative effects of the media that we were not able to identify, the many positive relations we did uncover indicate that on balance, media use does

not inhibit political or civic participation. It remains for future research to identify the motivating and interfering effects of the various media. Learning more about these effects may help to improve school curricula so that the pervasive use of media in students is directed in a way that is beneficial for the development of political and civic interests. Such knowledge may also provide guidance to producers of media material directed to adolescents so that their products can do more to develop civic and political interests.

Conclusion

The findings suggest that mass media play a powerful role in facilitating shared interests in youth and ultimately help to promote more civic and political action than would otherwise occur. Indeed, persons younger than age 25 increased their presence at the polls in the 2004 presidential election by more than 11 percentage points compared to the previous election (to 47%; Lopez, Kirby, & Sagoff, 2005), and they were particularly more likely to vote in highly contested “battleground” states (Patterson, 2005). This surge in political activity suggests that it was possible to engage young people in the political process when they were reached through the media and when the issues were interesting to them (Delli Carpini, 2000). Despite the free-rider dilemma, young people’s connection with others in civic action is likely to bode well for their future political and social action.

Notes

1. We gratefully acknowledge Elihu Katz’s suggestions for the formulation of this article and Robert Putnam’s comments regarding our findings. Please direct correspondence to Daniel Romer, Adolescent Risk Communication Institute, Annenberg Public Policy Center, 3535 Market Street, Suite 550, Philadelphia, PA 19104-3309; phone: 215-898-6776; fax: 215-573-2667; e-mail: dromer@asc.upenn.edu.

2. Age was also assessed with the average respondent being 17.8 years old ($Mdn = 18$, $SD = 2.5$) in the weighted sample. Although not all respondents were current students, there was a strong correlation between age and education ($r = .813$). Thus, age was omitted from the multivariate analyses.

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