MEDIA CHOICES AND POLITICAL BEHAVIOR

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

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Literature Review

In the United States and other western democracies, young people are the largest political demographic and they prefer mobile content to receive information. They are also more likely to use their access to the internet to research ideas that are presented to them (Appleton Creative, 2019). This is significant because a study in the Netherlands shows that the types of media that people living in democracies consume has an impact on their political participation and cynicism. The study finds that those who watched commercial news sources had an increase in political apathy when compared to those who watched public news sources (Aarts and Semetko, 2003). Those who watched public news were more likely to participate in democracy (Aarts and Semetko, 2003).

But this trend is likely to only apply to democratic systems of government where citizens have the option to participate and vote. In authoritarian China where the government controls the flow of information to the people while simultaneously investing the internet to promote business, many people who disagree with the government turn to the internet to receive

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information (Esarey and Xiao, 2011). Due to government censorship of the internet, the people who use this source of information have to find ways to circumvent the controls, such as ironic use of government sanctioned language and parodies of official media products (Esarey and Xiao, 2011). This shows that even though people living in China and those living in western democracies may use similar sources, the way they use these sources is different.

Thesis Statement

The relationship between media consumption and political participation should be different between democracies (e.g. The Netherlands) and authoritarian regimes (e.g. China), in that those who use commercial sources of information in the Netherlands are less likely to be politically active. However, those in China who seek out commercial sources of information from around the world could be more likely to be politically active due to the time and effort they put in to find uncensored sources of information.

Theoretical Framework

Government-sponsored sources of information are the main source of news for many Chinese citizens due to the strict government control of news and information. In a democratic country such as The Netherlands, there are public and private options for news sources that are all freely available. This makes the private news sources have to compete for viewership and customers by selling negative stories that are sensational, which could affect the readers' inclination to participate in politics negatively, while those living in China do not have the same level of access to commercial sources. Because of this, it is expected that only those who have a desire to do the work to seek out private sources of information will do so due to the fact that they are harder to find in that country.

Project Description

   Different types of media influence political knowledge everywhere in the world. This project seeks to understand whether citizens of The Netherlands and China behave similarly when presented with public and commercial sources of news. Research is conducted by comparing the relationship between political participation and media sources in China and The Netherlands. This will be based on a previous study from The Netherlands that shows a link between the type of news source people use and the type of political participation (Kees and Semetko, 2003) and data from The China Survey done in 2008 that is publicly available through the Texas A&M political science department. The data will be analyzed primarily through bivariate cross tabulation. The research on The Netherlands is already done, and the relationship found in previous research will be the basis for comparison to see if the link found in a democratic country such as The Netherlands will hold true in a more restrictive authoritarian regime in China.

DEDICATION

To my family, friends, and everyone who has supported me through this journey, thank you. I would not be able to do this without you.

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INTRODUCTION

As news media technology develops and communication becomes faster and more efficient, it's important to understand how different forms of media affect the political views of the public. In addition, there are a variety of different political systems that value the public opinion at different levels. In open, democratic systems, such as those in western Europe, public opinion is vital because democracies rely on an informed population to cast votes on major governmental decisions. On the other side, authoritarian dictatorships do not need or want their population to be fully informed due to the government's unilateral power in decision making on all decisions.

In both systems, information is a valuable commodity that allows people to form well thought out opinions on major policy decisions made by lawmakers. In open systems, the people presumably have the right to vote, petition their lawmakers, and express their opinions on any and all government decisions. To be able to successfully use this power, the people need to be well informed of the ramifications of each vote that they cast. In closed systems, the people's rights are limited in that they do not have the right – or have only very limited rights -- to vote or protest. However, there are still activists in these systems who seek to organize to gain rights to political participation and it is vital to their goals to be well informed so that they can successfully organized

Theoretical Background

In authoritarian governments, those in power seek to strictly control the flow of information to their people so that they can maintain the status quo in their countries. The main sources of news available to the people are sources that are controlled by the government. This

strict control and lack of open access to information is the case in authoritarian China which functions under a closed system of government. In China, state news is the only sanctioned source of information available to the people. This means that the news is never critical of the government, often covering up things that could be embarrassing to the leaders. In order to access sources of information that are not state sponsored, or private news sources from different parts of the world, many people turn to the internet and seek out news against the wishes of their government.

In democratic systems of government, such as in The Netherlands, there is a free market of news, with public and private sources of news freely available to all citizens. Public sources are sources that are supported by the government financially, but are independent in their reporting powers, while private sources are self-funded businesses who publish news in order to generate profit. Due to the business models of private newspapers, they can only be sustained if people buy subscriptions and click on their articles on the internet, so they have incentives to compete for viewership by selling negative, sensationalized stories. This type of reporting affects the reader's inclination to participate in politics negatively, leading to lower rates of participation. However, since public news sources receive money from the government, they do not need to be so concerned with sensationalizing the news. Readers who choose public sources, therefore, are more likely to have a positive outlook on politics and are more likely to participate in elections.

Expectations

According to previous research on the open, democratic system in the Netherlands, the type of news source that citizens prefer has an impact on their perceptions of politics and on their

levels of political participation. Those who use private news sources tend to be more cynical of politics and participate in democracy less than those who use public sources of news.

Such research exploring the link between types of media sources and political participation has not yet been conducted in closed systems, such as China. However, given other literature it would be reasonable to expect that those in China who seek out private sources would be more politically active due to the extra time, effort and risk that doing this poses. Because of this, those in China using private sources of news should be those who are more politically active and critical of the government. Those who use the state sponsored news sources can be expected to be those who are more apathetic or neutral towards politics.

CHAPTER I

LITERATURE REVIEW

General Literature

In general, the internet has been a main point of focus for much of the research done about political communication in the modern age. With the onset of new technology and faster communications, it is important to understand how the internet shapes how people interact with information in a political capacity. A 2005 study by Peter Dahlgren found that the internet has led to the destabilization of the political communication system (Dahlgren, 2005). However, he argues that this could be seen in a positive way; the disruption is important to getting rid of older and less efficient systems that have now become obsolete and can also function to get more people involved in political discussions (Dahlgren, 2005). Towards the end, he suggests that political culture in different regions could also be a way to understand the importance of online political discussions (Dahlgren, 2005).

Overall, this could be a positive influence due to its increased efficiency and reach that suggests the internet has revolutionized political communication and caused disruptions in traditional media technology, (Dahlgren, 2005). However, it would be important to keep in mind the "civic cultures" when analyzing how people participate in political discussions (Dahlgren, 2005). Even though the internet is an important tool that is vital for reaching people around the world, it still functions within the bigger overarching political systems and cultures in each region. The way people use this tool is still best understood in a broader context of how the overall culture relating to public involvement in politics functions. Therefore, looking at only one type of political system or culture and trying to generalize that theory to vastly different

systems or cultures would not provide an accurate analysis of how political communication works around the world.

The internet is a revolutionary tool in which the landscape has been changed through the rise of social media websites in recent years. Sites such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter make up for a large portion of internet traffic and can be used for many different purposes such as conducting public discussions and organizing movements. In a survey of German parliament members, researchers found that most members were familiar with social media and acknowledge that the relevance of these platforms would be increasing through the coming years (Stieglitz, Brockmann, and Xuan, 2012). The respondents said they used their favorite site multiple times a day for four major reasons: to report political activities they participated in, to present themselves well to the public, to maintain contact with their bases, and to inform people about current political happenings (Stieglitz, Brockmann, and Xuan, 2012). The politicians also note a need for social media as a tool to help them shape public opinion and are starting to see it as increasingly relevant, but many of them don't have the time to dedicate to writing tweets and status updates (Stieglitz, Brockmann, and Xuan, 2012).

This shows that politicians are starting to realize that new media are important if they want to effectively communicate with their people and are trying to harness the power of social media to directly communicate with their people. With the rise of social media, they also have the power to give news about current political events directly to the people, giving them more control about how they frame the news to make themselves look as good as possible in any given situation. The research from this paper does not examine how politicians sharing information impacts the people's political knowledge, however, it provides insight on how members of the

government view and use these platforms that allow them to better communicate their stances and views to the people.

The focus of this paper is to examine how social media impact the people's political engagement; therefore, it is vital that we explore how different kinds of media cause people to react in different ways. In a study about government control of the media and its relationship to the people's political knowledge, Peter Leeson finds that the more governments control news media and content, the less politically knowledgeable and engaged the people are (Leeson, 2008). On the other hand, when the media are less regulated the citizens are more politically engaged. When the government controls the media, the public is more likely to perceive the media as just an arm of the government and are less likely to pay close attention with privately owned sources; however, there is no perception that the government is manipulating the media to be seen favorably, which increases trust within the people (Leeson, 2008).

These sources combined point out a few important things about political communication in common. First, the importance of the internet is unimpeachable, and it is a versatile tool that people and governments alike can use to participate in politics in different ways. The people can use the internet for political discussions, to organize to get their needs met, and to look up sources of news to help them be more knowledgeable and engaged. It should be noted that the way the people engage with politics depends on the political system and culture of the country (Dahlgren, 2005). Government officials can use the internet to communicate with their bases and highlight news that shows them in a flattering light (Stieglitz, Brockmann, and Xuan, 2012).

Second, for the people the perception of the media is everything. If the content that is published in the media is perceived as controlled by the government, the people will be apathetic towards it, but if the people perceive the media to be free of government interference then people

will tend to be more engaged and politically knowledgeable (Leeson, 2008). This forms a background knowledge about political communication and the role it plays in public knowledge in general, without regard to how the system of government affects the results. The next section will explore the differences in political communication in open and closed systems of government.

Open Systems

In 2003, Aarts and Semetko conducted a study on how public and private news sources affect voter turnout. They acknowledge that there are conflicting explanations about how media use impacts voter behavior, but they find that their two-fold hypothesis is supported (Aarts and Semetko, 2003). They find that those who opt for public service channels—those which receive funding for the government but are free in the content they produce— have positive outcomes in political knowledge, efficacy, and voter turnout; but those who choose commercial channels have negative effects in all those categories (Aarts and Semetko, 2003). This shows that the type of the media source that people choose has impacts on the behavior they exhibit. These findings can account for some of the conflicting findings from previous literature on the subject since other sources have not placed as much emphasis on the type of media source that people use, just whether or not they have a media diet high in news sources (Aarts and Semetko, 2003). This paper is key in the development of the theory of the current research paper. If what Aarts and Semetko find in their paper is true, this paper seeks to expand their findings and compare their theory to political communication and knowledge in closed systems of government.

A cross-national study by de Vreese and Boomgaarden finds out that those who are exposed to news media no matter what kind have positive effects on political knowledge (de Vreese and Boomgaarden, 2006). In addition to that, those who are exposed to media with high

levels of political information, such as public television news stations or physical newspapers, have the most positive effects on political knowledge and likelihood to vote (de Vreese and Boomgaarden, 2006). Those who choose news with low levels of political content show no effects or weakly positive effects on political knowledge and likelihood to turn out to vote (de Vreese and Boomgaarden, 2006). These findings support the study from the Netherlands by Aarts and Semtko and expand their findings showing that a similar trend holds true in other western democracies.

In addition, looking specifically at digital media, a study in 2011 tried to examine the effects of digital media on political knowledge and participation and whether different forms of digital media have different effects on people (Dimitrova, Shehata, and Strömbäck, 2011).They found that the effects of digital media use on political knowledge are very limited and only certain online news sites led to higher political knowledge while social media and party websites don't lead to increased knowledge (Dimitrova, Shehata, and Strömbäck, 2011). They conclude that what is important for growing political knowledge is interest in the subject, previous knowledge, and attention to more traditional sources (Dimitrova, Shehata, and Strömbäck, 2011). They also warn future researchers not to take all digital and social media as the same since sites vary greatly in their intended purposes (Dimitrova, Shehata, and Strömbäck, 2011).

This section shows important findings in how types of media sources influence voters in democratic systems. They find and support that certain types of news sources have more effect on political knowledge but not all sources serve to increase political knowledge and engagement. All of these papers look at political knowledge and voter turnout as an indicator of participation, but in closed systems it is not always easy to tell who is politically involved due to the lack of

elections and opportunities to vote. Because of this, the theory for media and political involvement in closed systems is different.

Closed Systems

In authoritarian systems where the government has strict control over the media, it stands to reason that media consumption and its relationship to political knowledge is not the same as it would be in democratic systems. The use of digital media is strictly restricted in many of these regimes and that has an impact on the public discourse that goes on online. In China, the government uses the internet to promote business, but has to find a way to control the flow of information online (Esarey and Xiao, 2011). Those who disagree with the government can turn to the internet to receive information if they are able to get past the state's firewalls and restrictions (Esarey and Xiao, 2011). Often, dissidents can get past the controls by posting information that uses state sanctioned language in ironic ways or parodies official content (Esarey and Xiao, 2011). The evidence found in Esaray and Xiao's study finds that even though the Chinese Communist Party has responded to the technological advancements with legal and technical ways to restrict information, the internet and digital media have managed to empower citizens who have access to the internet while reducing the government's ability to control the public agenda and political expressions (Esarey and Xiao, 2011).

In addition to creating content to express dissent, people living under strictly controlled media systems seek out alternative news sources online. Authors Behrouzian, Nisbet, and Çarkoğlu, propose a theory of "motivated resistance to censorship" in which they examine the psychological aspects on why people seek out alternate news sources and how they react to perceived censorship (Behrouzian, Nisbet, and Çarkoğlu, 2016). They used survey data to find that people have a negative reaction towards perceived censorship, and because of this they will

tend to seek alternative sources as a way to try to lessen the effects of censorship and still find information that they deem as valid (Behrouzian, Nisbet, and Çarkoğlu, 2016). Not only are people going online to express dissent, they are undermining their government censors by finding information that has not been officially approved to further their political knowledge by taking steps themselves to seek out what they want to know.

On top of people having the liberty with the onset of the internet to seek out alternative and not state approved sources of information, there has been research done in China about how the internet leads to government agenda setting. In democratic systems, the people's concerns drive what issues the government focuses on, but in authoritarian systems this is not the case. The study looks at whether public opinion online impacts the agenda and attention of traditional media and the government at the national level in China (Luo, 2014). They found that online discourse and public opinion had no effect on government agenda setting, and that the government could sometimes control the online discourse in some instances (Luo, 2014). In regard to traditional media sources, there was a two-way relationship with the online opinion influencing traditional media agendas, and traditional media influencing the topics of discussion on the internet (Luo, 2014). This shows that the government is not responsive to the people's concerns and sometimes is even powerful enough to channel people's thoughts in the direction that they want.

This previous literature shows how the rise of the internet impacts political participation in closed systems of government. While the people don't have the option of participating in many of the ways available to citizens in democracies, they can use the internet to create content that subtly pokes fun at the government, seek out information outside of government censorship, and have discussions with other citizens on online forums. The government still can exert control

over the internet land scape in their countries, blocking certain forms of social media, taking down content that is critical of the state, and outlawing certain practices on the internet. However, there are still technologically savvy people who can circumvent the restrictions in order to seek out the information and the content they want to see. There are still ways to access foreign newspapers, as well as alternate sources of information over the internet.

The logic behind the role media plays in open and closed systems depends very heavily on the context of the system. In an open system, media and sources of news are widely available to all people on all sorts of different topics, so those who seek news sources with high levels of political information, such as public service news stations, are more politically involved than those who choose news sources without much political information (Aarts and Semetko, 2003). In closed systems, there are not as many choices available for people to choose from, their choice of media are limited to government controlled highly censored forms of media illegal outside sources that can now be accessed through the internet (Esarey and Xiao, 2011). Their behaviors for political involvement are also different. Those in democratic systems show their knowledge and involvement by voting and making informed decisions at the polls while those in authoritarian systems show their political interest and knowledge by seeking out information and creating critical content, due to not having other options to voice their opinions. Because of these key differences, I expect that the effect of the type of media that people choose to look at in the Netherlands and in China will have dissimilar effects.

CHAPTER II

METHODS AND FINDINGS

Methods

The data for this research come from The China Survey of 2008[1] that is made available

through Texas A&M's political science department and was analyzed through cross tabulation.

The survey questions chosen as independent variables came from Media Usage section of the

survey. The independent variables focus on the type of media that the people surveyed prefer to

consume, either Chinese or foreign, and whether people had gotten political information from

third party sources such as blogs, chat rooms, or bulletin board services. These questions were

already framed as yes or no questions so there was no need to recode the data as dichotomous.

Those who refused to answer were treated as missing cases.

Then, the dependent variable, political participation was created by combining the survey

results from several items in the Political Participation section of the survey. Questions

concerning whether people had attended a political meeting, contacted or attempted to contact

any party official to express views, contacted or appeared in the media to express views,

contacted a civic organization to express views, donated money or raised funds for a civic

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[1] "The data used in these analyses were all developed for The China Survey, a project of the College of Liberal Arts at Texas A&M University in collaboration with the Research Center for Contemporary China (RCCC) at Peking University. The data were produced by Chinese interviewers in eighty-minute face-to-face interviews with 3989 PRC citizens aged 18 or over between April 6 and June 7 of 2008. The nationwide sample was drawn using state-of-the-art GPS/GIS Assistant Area Sampling. [GPS/GIS Assistant Area Sampling, designed to correct bias caused by coverage errors in list-based samples, was developed by the Research Center of Contemporary China at Peking University with Professor Pierre Landry of Yale University. For more on GPS/GIS sampling, see Landry & Shen, 2005.] Within each of the 75 primary sampling units (counties) spread across seven official regions and one metropolitan district, two townships were drawn randomly and then GPS/GIS technology was used to draw two half-square minutes within each township. The intention was to then sample twenty-five dwellings within each township, and finally interview one person per dwelling. The end result was the sample of 3989 nationally (higher than the projected 3750 due to normal over-sampling). For additional details on the sampling and survey procedures of The China Survey, contact Robert Harmel at Texas A&M University." (Harmel and Yeh, 2011).

organization or social activity, signed a petition, taken part in a demonstration, or joined an organization or group in support of a particular cause were added together in SPSS software and dichotomized. If a person had reported doing any one of these activities, they were coded as "1" for participating in any way. Those who didn't report doing any of these activities were coded as "0" for not participating in any way. If a person refused to answer for any one of the items, they were then treated as missing cases.

In order to support the hypothesis, the data would have to support to a statistically significant level the idea that those who use foreign sources are more likely to participate in democracy. That is, those who answered "yes" to questions such as whether they use foreign newspapers, whether they read about political issues or national affairs on international websites, or on Hong Kong websites, need to also answer "yes" to participating in one or more political activity. The participation variable focuses more on non-electoral forms of participation because there is only limited use of elections in China.

In the cross-tabulation analysis, participation was treated as a dichotomous variable. Anybody who said that they had done something to participate in politics was coded as "1" and those who had not participated at all were coded as "0". This system treated anybody who participated at all as someone likely to participate in politics and those who had not participated as someone not likely to participate in politics. Then, I ran the cross-tabulation analysis for each of the independent variables—the questions about media preferences— in order to see whether the data supported the theory and whether the results are statistically significant.

Statistical significance was determined by the 2-sided chi-squared significance probability generated in SPSS, divided by 2. This is due to the directional nature of the

hypothesis under review—since the hypothesis specifies the direction of the relationship, a 1-sided chi-squared test would be appropriate.

Findings

The data from analyses using five of the six independent variables examined found a trend that supported the hypothesis. Three of the six analyses supported the hypothesis to a statistically significant level. Only one analysis showed a trend opposite to the hypothesis.

To start, the data from the relationship between participation and whether people had ever gotten political information from blogs yielded results to the highest level of statistical significance.

Table 1.

Crosstabulation: Participation by Reading About Politics on Blogs

		Have Used Blogs?		
		Yes	No	Total
No participation	.00	19.3%	45.8%	41.2%
Participation of some type	1.00	80.7%	54.2%	58.8%
Total		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		n=57	n=271	N=328

Pearson Chi-Squared= 13.613[a]   p<.05 (p=.000) [one-sided]

This table shows that those who used blogs to read about political issues or national affairs are substantially and significantly more likely to participate in politics in some form than those who do not. Most of the blogs are not state-sponsored, but rather from interested individuals posting about current affairs on the internet. Therefore table 1 provides evidence in support of the theory being tested.

Next, those who reported using Hong Kong/Macao/ Taiwan websites to get their political information reported a similar trend to a statistically significant degree.

Table 2.

Crosstabulation: Participation by Reading about Politics on Hong Kong/Macao/Taiwan Websites

		Have used Such Websites?		
		Yes	No	Total
No participation	.00	7.7%	42.5%	41.2%
Participation of some type	1.00	92.3%	57.5%	58.8%
Total		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		n=13	n=315	N=328

Pearson Chi-Squared= 6.260 [a] p<.05 (p=.006) [one-sided]

Table 2 shows a similar trend to table 1. Those who seek out Hong Kong, Macao, or Taiwan websites to get their political information are more likely to participate than those who do not. This crosstabulation also supports the theory to a statistically significant level.

Those who had used bulletin board services in order to receive political information were also significantly more likely than non-users to participate in some manner. (See Table 3.)

Table 3.

Crosstabulation: Participation by Reading about Politics on

Bulletin Board Services (BBS)

		Have used Bulletin Board Services?		
		Yes	No	
No participation	.00	31.6%	44.2%	41.2%
Participation of some type	1.00	68.4%	55.8%	58.8%
Total		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		n=79	n=249	N=328

Pearson Chi-Square= 3.889 [a] p<.05 (p=.025) [one sided]

Analyses involving reading of foreign newspapers and obtaining information from international websites do not support the hypothesis to a statistically significant level, but they demonstrate trends that go in the direction of the hypothesis. (See Tables 4 and 5.)

Table 4.

Crosstabulation: Participation by Reading About Politics in

Foreign Newspapers

		Have used Foreign Newspapers?		
		Yes	No	Total
No participation	.00	35.0%	49.0%	48.8%
Participation of some type	1.00	65.0%	51.0%	51.2%
Total		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		n=20	n=1097	N=1117

Pearson Chi-Square= 1.550[a]   p<.05 (p=.107) [one-sided]

Table 5.

Crosstabulation: Participation by Reading About Politics on International Websites

		Have used International Websites?		
		Yes	No	Total
No participation	.00	37.8%	41.7%	41.2%
Participation of some type	1.00	62.2%	58.3%	58.8%
Total		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		n=45	n=283	N=328

Pearson Chi-Square=.246[a] p<.05 (p=.304) [one-sided]

Both of these tables show a weak relationship between non-governmental media choice and political participation in the same direction as the hypothesis. The data show that those who choose both foreign newspapers and international websites tend to participate more in politics, but not to a significant level. However, at least the "directions" are consistent with the analyses reported above. Table 6, however, tells a different story.

Table 6.

Crosstabulation: Participation by Reading about Politics on

Chat Rooms

		Have used Chat Rooms?		
		Yes	No	Total
No participation	.00	43.5%	40.6%	41.2%
Participation of some form	1.00	56.5%	59.4%	58.8%
Total		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		n=62	n=266	N=328

Pearson Chi-Square= .180ª p<.05 (p=.336) [one-sided]

This table shows a tendency that is opposite to what the hypothesis proposes, though it is not at a statistically significant level. In fact, these results show weakest relationship to participation of all the independent variables tested. However, even this insignificant relationship in the "wrong" direction deserves further consideration below, since it could be suggestive of a relevant distinction among the non-governmental sources of information.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

The cross tabulations indicate support for the hypothesis to varying levels of statistical significance, except in the case of chat rooms. Those who use internet blogs, websites from Hong Kong/Macao/Taiwan, or bulletin board services to receive political information are more likely to participate in politics than those who do not look for these sources. The cross tabulations (Table 1, 2, 3) for each of these independent variables show this trend to a statistically significant degree. These sources are not state sponsored forms of media, and the fact that those who seek out these sources are more likely to participate in politics is in line with the theoretical framework of this study.

The cross tabulations for the independent variables regarding foreign newspapers and international websites (Table 4, 5) show a general trend towards supporting the hypothesis, but it is not to a statistically significant level. This could be due to the relatively small number of people who choose to use these sources to receive political information, though there should be further studies done to determine the cause of the weaker results. However, even the weak trend represented in these tables indicates weak support for the hypothesis of this study, when coupled with the significant relationships reported above.

The use of chat rooms for political information presents a different type of result, in that the trend that the cross tabulation reveals goes in the opposite direction, but this trend is not statistically significant either. This could come from the specific function of chat rooms. People use chat rooms to message friends privately and in groups and to have conversations. However, since chat rooms are used for casual forms of conversation like this, they would not necessarily

have much of an effect on political behavior. Political information gained from a chat room would most likely be a friend sending an article or piece of information that one had not seen before, but this might not be enough to convince someone to change the way that person chooses to participate in politics.

These results provide at least tentative support for the theory proposed in the introduction of this paper: that in an authoritarian regime, those who use non-state sponsored, private sources of information are more likely to participate in politics than those who do not use these sources of information. Though that may not be equally true for all types of non-state sources, it does appear to be true for some of them. Furthermore, when we compare these results from China to the results from the Netherlands, we can see that the results from China are opposite to the results from the Netherlands. In the Netherlands we see those who use public sources of information more likely to participate in politics (as measured by voter turnout) than those who use privately owned sources of information (Aarts and Semetko, 2003).

CONCLUSION

Political participation depends heavily on having an informed populace; the sources that information comes from are vital in shaping the public consciousness. Therefore, it is important to understand what choices people are making with regards to their information and how it affects their political participation. To sum up, based on the findings of this study and previous research done in The Netherlands, non-state sponsored forms of media impact citizens' political participation differently based on different types of political systems.

Further studies could analyze these data through multivariate regression, which would allow for controlling for other alternative sources of explanation for our bivariate findings.[2] Another improvement would be to conduct this study with a larger number of cases in order to gain a deeper understanding of how media choice affects political participation in authoritarian regimes, though that will require additional surveys to be done in China. This could help provide a greater understanding of some of the factors that influence political behavior in different systems of government.

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[2] Another technical "next step" would be to create an additional independent variable which effectively "combines" answers to the various items concerning non-state sources of political information. The new variable would be dichotomous, indicating whether the respondent used "any" of the six sources studied here or "none" of them. The inability to access the necessary resources at Texas A&M during the Covid-19 epidemic prevents doing this step at this time.

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