POLITICAL MARKETING IN THE DIGITAL ERA: MILLENNIALS' USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR POLITICAL INFORMATION AND ITS EFFECT ON VOTING DECISIONS

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ABSTRACT

Questions exist over the extent to which social media has affected presidential campaigns and whether social media will play as big a role in the 2016 U.S. presidential election as it did in the 2008 and 2012 U.S. presidential elections. This study examines (1) how social media use for political information influences millennials' voting decision and (2) the role of social media political involvement in the relationship between political efficacy and offline (situational) political involvement. Millennials have surpassed Baby Boomers as the nation's largest living generation; therefore, millennials are expected to have a huge influence in determining our politicians and the decisions they make over our rights. Results from a survey of 169 millennials indicate that social media use for political information does affect millennials' voting decision in the 2016 presidential election. However, for certain candidates, political ideology is the stronger determinant in influencing voters' decision. Furthermore, high social media political involvement is positively associated with higher political efficacy and offline political involvement.

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Introduction

Ten years ago the term "social media" was almost nonexistent. Although social media sites did exist, Internet users only used them for business or education purposes. Presently, ubiquitous social media is no longer merely serving our social needs and desires. It has empowered average people with confidence to stand up for their beliefs, whether it is for freedom and democracy or giving voice to their concerns, thus, changing how politicians connect and converse with their voters as well. Social media created a new political dialogue because it allows everyone to participate through media production and distribution and not just be passive consumers. It created personal bonds between strangers on the Internet, connecting through a common value, concern, or belief. In turn, it also fueled peer-to-peer networks and civil disagreements through public discourse (Kim & Chen, 2016), which brought us into the digital era and shifted the paradigms of politics, revolutionizing political marketing.

Because citizen participation is considered a core element of a healthy democracy (Lazarfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944; McLeod, Kosicki, & McLeod, 2002), scholars have been interested in examining what facilitates citizens' political activities both online and offline (Bode, Vraga, Borah, & Shah, 2014; Fernandes, Giurcanu, Bowers, & Neely, 2010; Hayes, 2009; Himelboim et al., 2012), especially after President Obama's 2008 and 2012 campaigns– two successful campaigns that effectively utilized social media to engage voters, recruit campaign volunteers, and raise funds. Obama's campaign represents a paradigm shift in how presidential campaigns are run because he and his teams have capitalized on technological advances and leveraged them for maximum effect. His major campaign strategy was to politically empower his voters to make a difference individually and collectively primarily through social media (Newman, 2016). Previous studies have demonstrated that social media use

influences citizens' participatory behaviors via psychological variables such as political efficacy (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010; Jung, Kim, & Zúñiga, 2011). A study by Jung, Kim, and Gil De Zúñiga (2014) identified political knowledge and efficacy as important personal-psychological variables that partially mediated the relationship between social media and political participation.

As our nation approaches the 2016 presidential election, the role of social media cannot be ignored. Therefore, the current study aims to expand on past literature that indicates social media use directly affects citizens' political participation by influencing their political efficacy and offline political involvement (Jung et al., 2011; Kim & Chen, 2015; Kaufhold, Valenzuela, & Zúñiga, 2010; Valenzuela, Kim, & Zúñiga, 2012) in the context of the 2016 presidential election and candidates. This study also seeks to contribute to the literature by examining this relationship among American millennials (ages 18-35). It is imperative to examine political involvement on social media and whether or not using social media directly affects millennials' political efficacy and offline (situational) political involvement (i.e., voting) because this group makes up 23.4% of the population and they are all eligible to vote. Furthermore, millennials have surpassed Baby Boomers as the nation's largest living generation (Fry, 2016). Therefore, examining millennials' voting participation rate and the channel of communication they use to stay informed will have a huge influence in determining the politicians. This fact is proven after the 2008, and 2012 presidential election, when 52% of eligible young adults voted in the 2008 election, reflecting the highest percent of voters in this population since 1972 (Godsay & Kirby, 2010). In essence, our success as a nation and the productivity of future government are in direct proportion to millennials' political participation. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine how political social media use for information and involvement affects millennials' political efficacy and offline political involvement in the 2016 presidential election, above and beyond the

more traditional factors predicting voting behavior such as partisanship, to provide a deeper understanding of the relevance of social media for political marketing.

Literature Review

The Digital Revolution of Political Communication

Political marketing has become omnipresent in modern American politics used by politicians, parties, groups, movements, and governments to advance a range of political goals. These goals include winning elections, gaining donations, attracting volunteers, driving public opinion, advance their own ideologies, win elections and pass legislation and referenda in response to the needs and wants of selected people and groups in society (Lees-Marshment, Conley, & Cosgrave 2014; Newman, 2016). Broadly defined, political marketing is "the applications of marketing principles and procedures in political campaigns by various individuals and organizations" (Newman, 2016, p.352). The procedures involved include the analysis, development, execution and management of strategic campaigns by candidates, political parties, governments, lobbyists and interest groups.

During political campaigns, the communication channel is an integral means for political candidates or parties to share political messages and promote their political goals (Kaid, 1981). Throughout American history, campaigns have been vibrant and colorful but also strident and divisive. The press has always played an important part in American campaigns with a long history of print media in the 18th century and providing a mouthpiece to reach voters through radio in the 19th century (Newman, 1999). Televised ads came to the forefront of political advertising after it helped Eisenhower defeat Stevenson in 1952 presidential election. After 20 years of Democratic presidents, Eisenhower became the first Republican president (Smith, 2015). As Trent and Friedenberg (2004) wrote, "political election campaigns are campaigns of

communication" (p. 12), and thus, political campaign strategies evolved to exploit various mass media rhetorical potential.

With technological advancement, the Internet offers a broad scope of political possibilities, such as participating in forums, organizing electronic petitions, and researching political information. Prior to the Internet, political campaigning primarily involved being on the road, meeting constituents face-to-face, and drumming up support with an empowering speech. Americans only "got to know" a candidate through the representation of the candidate in the media. As McLeod (2000) notes, exposure and attention to news media, whether print, broadcast, or online, are critical in distinguishing people who become active citizens from those who remain disengaged from public life. Since the development of digital technologies, the Internet has emerged as a vital campaign tool for presidential candidates. Candidates are now able to use their websites to communicate with the public, convert traditional messages such as press releases and television advertisements to a digital format, and even elicit campaign-relevant outcomes such as fundraising and volunteer mobilization (Kaid & Postelicu, 2005).

The Internet is able to incorporate both text and visual information of print advertising as well as the audiovisual information of television advertising (Dijkstra, Buijtels, & van Raaiji, 2005). Thereby, Internet campaigns are found to be more effective at communicating a candidate's political message and image to the electorate (Kaid & Postelnicu, 2005). A study by Pinkelton and Austin (2004) found that traditional communication channels such as television and newspapers failed to connect with and motivate young voters. On the contrary, the Internet was found to be the leading source of information for young voters, appealing to their increase levels of individualism (Edwards, 2000), and hence, motivating political participation and engagement. It has become a significant factor and political tool in presidential campaign since

its initial use in the 1992 presidential election (Bronstein, 2012). Presidential candidate Howard Dean is noted for pioneering the framework for Internet's use by integrating the use of emails and static websites along with web-blogging (Hayes, 2009). Presently the Internet has become an even more significant factor and political tool since the emergence of social network sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. The first presidential candidate to effectively utilize social media to reach voters, particularly the young adult population, is President Obama. President Obama cites Howard Dean's Internet organization model as attributing to the framework for his successful social media campaign (McGarth, 2011).

Using Social Networking Sites for Political Campaigns

The social networking site (SNS) proliferation began when Mark Zuckerberg launched Facebook from his Harvard dormitory in February of 2004 (Facebook.com). Facebook is now equivalent to the third most populous country in the world, numbering over 750 million members from around the globe (Bode et al., 2014). Facebook allows users to gather information from group and individual profiles and real-time interaction with established friends through sharing what others post on their own "timeline" (Hayes, 2009; White & Anderson, 2014). Beside Facebook but focusing on visual contents, YouTube, an online video-sharing network, allows users to interact by sharing personal and popular culture videos, as well as comment, and browse other users' uploaded videos, or post on their personal websites (Weaver & Morrison, 2008; White & Anderson, 2014). From the blogging aspect, Twitter, micro blogging style SNS, allows users to "follow" other users, celebrities, and organizations. The interactive SNS environment has created a platform for candidates to reach out and mobilize young voters by increasing the amount of personal communication with them. In effect, young voters gain a sense of personal interaction with candidates (Hayes, 2009). Not only engaging young voters, SNS's real-time

interactive environment has also created a platform for young adults to use SNS to obtain campaign information, share campaign news with others, exchange their political views, and express support for a candidate, which equates to online political participation.

As young adults were relying less on traditional news media and more on new online media for political information (Bode et al., 2014), political candidates began to use SNS for their campaigns as well. This proliferation has given rise to the era of "clicktivisim," catalyzed by the emergence of SNS. SNS is generally defined as "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semipublic profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system'' (Bode et al., 2014, p.416). Past studies suggest that the use of SNS has decreased political apathy by increasing political participation (Fernandes et al., 2010; Hayes, 2009). Young voters no longer had to wait till the ten o'clock news or read the Sunday paper for political information; SNS allows access to an abundance of political information with a "click" of the mouse.

In a study done by Bode, Vraga, Borah, and Shah (2014) the authors developed a concept called "political SNS use," which can be defined as using SNS explicitly for political purposes such as displaying a political preference on one's profile page, or "following" a politician (p.415). Since the rise of SNS, politicians could create opportunities for political participation. Why does political SNS attract more engagement than generic online political participation (e.g., blogs and political forums)? Mainly because political SNS captures the ability of individuals to not only exchange information about politics but also publically affiliate themselves within a homogeneous group (Bode et al., 2014). Political content can be shared, commented, and even become viral – reaching millions of potential voters with a single trending post. President

Obama's appeal to the young adult population is often credited to his utilization of social networking sites in the 2008 election. Bakker and de Vreese (2011) have found that political participation levels increase among the young adult population when low levels of voter input and low cost are required. The same model was applied during the 2012 presidential election with the addition of social networking sites campaign to the existing traditional website campaigns (Hayes, 2009). During the 2008 election, the main SNS that were used were Facebook, MySpace, and YouTube; Twitter was not a developed significant social network until the 2012 election.

President Obama's two successful campaigns (2008 and 2012) effectively utilized social networking sites to politically target the young adult age group (18-29 year olds). His approach was to connect with young adult voters on a personal level and mobilize them to become active participants in the political process. Both his campaigns were primarily virtual campaigns. Obama's young "followers" on social media developed Internet social media communities using Facebook, Twitter and YouTube with relatable slogans and videos, in turn influencing more participants in this age demographic to become politically mobilized. As a result, the Obama campaign in 2008 brought out millions of new voters who had previously lost interest in politics (Newman, 2016; Panagopoulos & Francia, 2011).

Traditional and online political participation are similar but slightly different. Traditional political participation refers to the participation of citizens in activities that can influence the structure of government, selection of officials, and policies (Himelboim et al., 2012). Online political participation has been defined in the same way, except that these activities are occurring in an online context (Brady, 1999)–the low barriers and cost of performing these activities, especially on SNS, distinguishes online political participation from traditional participation

(Bode et al., 2014). These advantages of online political participation allow young adults to instantly access political information and share it amongst their peers (Hayes, 2009; Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010). Therefore, SNS also encourages civil engagement in young adults and promotes political information seeking-behavior (Hayes, 2009; White & Anderson, 2014).

Online Political Expression

As SNS such as Facebook and Twitter provide private and semi-private settings for self-representation and self-expression, the boundaries between public and private roles online and offline have been blurred (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013). SNS allows users to not only seek information but also interact with others through online expression such as posting comments on various news pages and sharing user-generated content. A survey conducted by Smith and Rainie (2008) found that 15% of Americans used the Internet at least once a week during the 2008 election to urge others to support a candidate. An even more staggering number appears when more than nine million Facebook users clicked an "I voted" button, telling their friends they had participated in the election on Election Day in 2012 (Bakshy, 2012).

Some studies have indicated that Facebook facilitates political expression due to its open platform for political discussion for both "cross-cutting" and "like-minded" perspectives. However, both studies also explicate that exposure to cross-cutting and like-minded perspectives and political expression are likely to depend on the type of social site (Kim & Chen, 2016; Vraga et al., 2015). For example, blog use is associated with exposure to like-minded perspectives, which leads to high levels of online political expression. On the other hand, SNS such as Facebook users are exposed to cross-minded perspectives because some individuals posting about politics are provocateurs, posting not in spite of the potential for disagreement but because they are seeking it (Vraga et al., 2015). Contrary to a past study that links lower political

expression to exposure to cross-cutting perspective, Kim and Chen's (2015) study indicates that exposure to cross-cutting perspectives offers a path to stronger and more active political expression, especially when it is facilitated through SNS use. Making SNS users step out of their comfort zone and express their political attitudes and opinions despite the risk of exposure to cross-minded perspectives can create opportunities for political engagement in the SNS realm.

Situational Political Involvement

Situational political involvement is a psychological state ''particularly important to political decision making because of its role in motivating information source use and learning'' (Pinkleton & Austin, 2001, p. 322). It is defined as the perceived relevance of an issue at a given moment or the degree of interest in social situations such as an election outcome (Austin & Pinkleton, 1999; Faber, Tims, & Schmitt, 1993; Pinkleton & Austin, 2004; Salmon, 1986).

In a political context, situational political involvement is a point of entrance into the political process as the involved voter is more motivated to seek out information, which in turn leads to knowledge gain (Tan, 1980) and voting intent (Pinkleton & Austin, 2001). Prior research done by Wells and Dudash (2007) suggests that attention to social media is positively associated with situation political involvement, because social media offers users new channels for political information. In the same context, Kushin and Yamamoto (2010) study suggests online expression and attention to SNS for political information were significant predictors of situational political involvement. In other words, those who frequently expressed opinions about the election online and paid greater attention to SNS for political information were more involved in the election.

Political Efficacy

Among the various factors influencing political behaviors, political efficacy is considered one of the most important psychological constructs closely related to political participation (Cohen, Vigoda, & Samorly, 2001). Political efficacy is defined as confidence about one's own competence to understand and to participate effectively in politics (Tedesco, 2011). Alterations in the type of political information to which an individual is exposed leads to differences in the type of information processing. Therefore, the source and medium play a key role in determining one's level of political efficacy (Kaid, McKinney, & Tedesco, 2007).

Internal and external are the two dimensions that comprise political efficacy. Internal political efficacy concerns feelings of self-competence to understand and to participate effectively in politics. External efficacy refers to the perception of the responsiveness of political officials to citizens' demands (Hoffman & Thompson, 2009). Previous empirical studies findings suggest that political efficacy is closely related to various types of political participation, such as political campaigning and voting (Pollock, 1983). Past studies have also reported that political use of SNS is positively related to political efficacy (Kim & Geidner, 2008; Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009; De Zuniga, Puig-i-Abril, & Rojas, 2009) because of media-rich social applications for political information such as microblog updates and streaming live video of campaign events. Consequently, political use of SNS gives users the perception of increased engagement with preferred candidates or parties (Kushin and Yamamoto, 2010).

There is a strong correlation between political information, knowledge, and political participation. Research by Kaid, McKinney, and Tedesco (2007) suggests that young voters exposed to political information on the Internet are more likely to seek out additional information sources, which leads to a stronger likelihood of voting. In their study that draws on the media

system dependency theory, Tolbert and McNeal (2003) argues that the variety of information sources on the Internet, combined with the speed, flexibility, and ease of access of obtaining political information online, stimulates higher voter turnout.

Political Authenticity

Authenticity in-of-itself is a concept – a moral judgment and the "revelation of being" that imagines the self (Hardt, 1993; Edwards, 2008), something bound up with a projected by *image*, a form of stagecraft especially in politics. Parry-Giles (2001) suggests our postmodern age has contributed to the eclipse of individual understanding of authenticity to a more social conceptualization (Edwards, 2008). There are four media markers that test authenticity: (1) Motive – the possession or lack of rational for the campaign bid; (2) Consistency – exhibiting fidelity or discordance with announced or expected principles; (3) Oppositional opinions – exhibiting willingness to go against the grain of public opinion, having a sense of independence driven by integrity; (4) Geography – affiliation with a state of locality must be genuinely linked over time (Parry-Giles, 2001, p.215).

In Obama's 2008 campaign, political authenticity emerged as his political discourse in several ways and could be seen as the main influence as to how he increased young adult involvement and support. The first being Obama's campaign rhetoric, offline and online to send a message of hope through various modes of persuasion, which attracted millennials to Obama because of his fresh approach to politics and his promise to bridge the differences between Democrats and Republicans (Newman, 2016). Through specific word choice of inclusive language such as "we," "us," and "together," Obama was able to bind together communities, offering hope and change for all people to enjoy (Jenkins & Cos, 2010). His rhetoric choice added enthusiasm, which appealed to younger generations, and connected Obama's image to

popular activists including Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Jr., and John F. Kennedy (Jenkins & Cos). Obama was consistent in defining his political image, through "catchy" slogans such as "Change" and "Yes we can." He was seen as the modern and personal candidate compared to his opponents McCain and Romney (Greenberg, 2009; White & Anderson, 2014).

Obama's authentic image was also reinforced in his tone and style; perceived as grounded and highly focused in comparison to the opposing candidates such as McCain and Romney, whose style was perceived as partisan and highly embellished (Hart & Lind, 2010; Dudash & Harris, 2011; White & Anderson, 2014). Thus Obama is able to attract and connect with young adult voters on a personal level. Furthermore, in 2008 there are 46 million young adults (18-29) who are eligible to vote, accounting for 21% of America's eligible voting population. During both the 2008 and 2012 presidential election, 52% of eligible young adults voted, reflecting the highest percent of voters in this population since 1972 (Godsay & Kirby, 2010). Even though there was a decline of enthusiasm in the 2012 presidential election with 50% of eligible young adults who voted, young voters still felt that Obama was better equipped to handle the federal deficit, economy, and healthcare more efficiently than Mitt Romney ("Young Voters in the 2012 presidential election", CIRCLE, 2012). This suggests that young adults are more inclined to be politically involved if there is a sense of authenticity, which leads to a connection with the candidate on a personal level.

Social Media's Role in the 2016 Presidential Election

Ever since 2015, citizens living in the United States have collectively spent more than 1,284 years reading about Donald Trump on social media (Lang, 2016). Frank Speiser stated, "this is the first true social media election…before it was an auxiliary method of communication. But now (candidates) can put messages out there" (Lang, 2016, p.1). Social media has evolved

from an afterthought to strategy and the 2016 presidential election front-runners such as Hilary Clinton, Donald Trump, and Bernie Sanders have capitalized on this opportunity by utilizing social media as a direct line to voters, particularly among younger voters (Lang, 2016). Social media has even become a "debate stage" (McCabe, 2015) with candidates like Clinton and Jeb Bush having a "photoshop battle" (McCabe, 2015, p.1) equivalent to sparring their difference in opinion in regards to the growing student debt during President Obama's presidency.

Presidential candidates are customizing their message to each individual social media platform such as Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, and Twitter (*Social Times*, 2016). As such, social media platforms are catering to the presidential campaigns as well. For example, YouTube now has a feature that will help candidates target people based on their geographical locations and language (*Social Times*). A Pew Research survey released in 2015 found that in 2014, 71% of millennials ages 18 - 35 used Facebook, 26% used Instagram, and 23% used Twitter – and the numbers are rapidly growing (Barthel, 2016). Furthermore, the Pew Research survey also found that nearly three-in-four millennial Democrats (74%) survey participants who said they were very likely to participate in their state's primary or caucus had learned about the election from social media, compared with 50% of their Republican counterparts (Barthel), thereby, leading to presidential candidates like Clinton, Trump and Bernie creating social media pages that personifies their authenticity in order to appeal and engage with millennials (McCabe, 2015). Although social media presence is not an automatic key to the presidency, it is evident through Trump's success that candidates with higher social media followers have a much larger share-of-voice, particularly with millennials 18-35 in the 2016 presidential election (Lang, 2016).

Based on the literature, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1: Millennials ages 18-35 pay more attention to election information on social media than traditional media.

H2: For millennials ages 18-35, high SNS political involvement will be positively associated with higher political efficacy.

H3: For millennials ages 18-35, high SNS political involvement will be positively associated with higher offline political involvement.

RQ1: Does a candidate's social media presence and authenticity on social media influence millennials' likelihood of voting for the candidate?

Method

Survey Design and Sampling

The survey was administered online using Qualtrics, a web survey software to which the author has a university-wide subscription account. Responses were gathered from May 12th till June 3rd, 2016. Convenience sampling was used. Responses were collected from those who registered to participate in an online panel administrated by a research lab at DePaul University called DePaul SONA. The participants were also recruited using email, social media sites Facebook and Twitter, an online forum called Reddit, and DePaul's Desire to Learn student portal. In the recruitment email/post, a URL link was included that takes participants directly to the survey.

There were two inclusion criteria: (1) subjects must have used a social media platform at least once in the last month and (2) between the ages of 18-35. The participants had to be between 18-35 and have used a social media platform at least once in the last month because this

study is aimed towards understanding millennials' social media usage for political information. Out of the 249 responses collected, 169 responses were both social media users and between the ages of 18 to 35. Out of the 169 respondents, 79.3% were female and 20.7 % were male.

Measures

Attention to social media for election information versus traditional media. Drawing from data based on the responses used in the model and adapted from Gil de Zūñiga, Jung, and Valenzuela's (2012) work, three items composed this index asking to what extent subjects paid attention to election information on social media and traditional media. Specifically asked, "Please indicate whether you strongly disagree or strongly agree with each of the following statements: I pay attention to election information on social media. I pay attention to election information on traditional media (TV, radio, newspapers, etc.)."

Reliability of election news on social media versus traditional media. Respondents were asked to rate on a 7-point scale to what extent they agree or disagree with the following statements: "Traditional news outlets (TV, radio, newspapers, etc.) deliver reliable presidential election news," "Social media delivers reliable presidential election news."

SNS political involvement. Based on previous studies (e.g., Zúñiga et al., 2014; Jung et al., 2011; Kim & Chen, 2015; Kaufold et al., 2010; Valenzuela et al., 2012), online political participation was measured by political activity items that tapped into individual's political activities related to the campaign and election on the Internet; an additive index was constructed by summing the scores from these items. Respondents were asked to rate on a 7-point scale the extent they agree or disagree with the following statements: "I like to discuss the presidential election on social media," "I like to debate about different presidential candidates on social media," "I like to share news and articles about the presidential election on social media," "I like to share news and

articles about the presidential election on social media," "I think it is important to share my presidential election viewpoints on social media," "I think it is important to show support for my favorite presidential candidates(s) on social media" (Cronbach's $\alpha = .95$, $M = 3.06$, $SD = 1.62$).

Offline political involvement. Prior research (Bode et al., 2014; Zúñiga et al., 2014) has identified that offline political involvement was measured by an individual's engagement in the following activities: attending a campaign rally, working for a political party or candidate, and contributing money to a political campaign. Using a 7-point scale with endpoints labeled "strongly disagree" and "strongly agree" respondents were asked to what extent do they agree or disagree with the following statement, "I am politically active – attending a campaign rally, volunteering, donate, etc.)."

Political self-efficacy. Based on previous studies (Zúñiga et al., 2014; Kushin and Yamamoto, 2010) political self-efficacy was measured by four items using a 7-point Likert-type scale with "strongly disagree" and "strongly agree" as anchors. Respondents were asked, "Please indicate whether you strongly disagree or agree with each of the following statements": (1) My vote makes a difference," (2)" I have a real say in what the government does," (3) "I can make a difference if I participate in the election process," and (4) "Voting gives people an effective way to influence what the government does." These items were combined into an additive index (Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$), with a higher score indicating higher political self-efficacy.

Political ideology. The study also controls for the effect of an individual's political ideology on their voting behaviors. Respondents were asked to select their political ideology on a 7-point scale from very liberal to very conservative.

Political authenticity on SNS. To capture respondents' viewpoint on a certain presidential candidate's political authenticity on SNS, respondents were asked to rate on a 7-point scale

ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree that the following candidates, Hilary Clinton, Donald Trump, Bernie Sanders, Marco Rubio, Ted Cruz, John Kasich, and Jeb Bush are authentic on social media.

Social media presence. The study also controls for the effect of a candidate's social media presence on an individual's voting decision. Respondents were asked to rate on a 7-point scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree that the following candidates (i.e. Hilary Clinton, Donald Trump, Bernie Sanders, Marco Rubio, Ted Cruz, John Kasich, and Jeb Bush) have a strong social media presence.

In addition to above key measures, five demographic variables were asked in the survey: age, gender, ethnicity, employment status, and household income. The study also included the likelihood of voting for a certain presidential candidate in order to test the potential relationship between a candidate's social media presence, political authenticity on SNS, and the likelihood of an individual voting for him or her.

Results

To test the first hypothesis, which examined whether millennials ages 18-35 pay more attention to election information on social media than traditional media (H1), a paired sample t-test was conducted. The results support the hypothesis (as shown in Table 1) that millennials do indeed pay more attention to election information on social media ($M = 5.41$, $SD = 1.5$) than on traditional media ($M = 4.74$, $SD = 1.8$), $t(167) = 4.58$, $p < .001$). However, the results also indicate millennials find traditional media to be a more reliable source of political news (Table 1.1) ($M = 4.74$, $SD = 1.59$) than social media ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 1.49$), $t(166) = 3.81$, $p < .001$).

Table 1

Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Please indicate whether you strongly disagree or strongly agree with each of the following statem...-I pay attention to election information on social media.	5.41	168	1.549	.120
	Please indicate whether you strongly disagree or strongly agree with each of the following statem...-I pay attention to election information on traditional media (TV, radio, newspapers, etc.)	4.74	168	1.778	.137

Table 1.1

Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	To what extent do you you agree or disagree with? the following statements??-Traditional news outlets (TV, radio, newspapers, etc.) deliver reliable presidential election news.	4.74	167	1.591	.123
	To what extent do you you agree or disagree with? the following statements??-Social media delivers reliable presidential election news.	4.14	167	1.490	.115

Turning to the role that SNS political involvement influence on an individual's political efficacy (H2), bivariate correlation was examined. The analysis shows that there is a statistically significant moderate positive relationship between SNS political involvement and political

efficacy (Table 2)(r = .348, p < .001). Thus, individuals with higher SNS political involvement are more likely to have higher political efficacy.

Table 2

Correlations

		Political_involvement	Political_selfefficacy	To what extent do you you agree or disagree with?the following statements??-I am politically active. (attend a campaign rally, volunteer, donate, etc.)
Political_involvement	Pearson Correlation	1	.348**	.541**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	167	167	165
Political_selfefficacy	Pearson Correlation	.348**	1	.375**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	167	167	165
To what extent do you you agree or disagree with? the following statements??-I am politically active. (attend a campaign rally, volunteer, donate, etc.)	Pearson Correlation	.541**	.375**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	165	165	167

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The third hypothesis seeks to establish the relationship between SNS political involvement and offline political involvement (H3). As shown in Table 2, individuals who are actively involved in political SNS tend to have higher political involvement offline. Similar to H2, bivariate correlations shows that there is a statistically significant moderate positive relationship between SNS political involvement and offline political involvement (r = .541, p < .001).

Table 3

Variables	Likelihood of voting for Clinton	Likelihood of voting for Bernie	Likelihood of voting for Trump
	R = .578	R = .362	R = .303
	Beta	Beta	Beta
Political Ideology	-0.221	-0.562 ***	0.598 ***
Political Efficacy	0.228	0.066	-0.058
Political Authenticity	0.655 ***	0.377 **	0.162
Social Media Presence	-0.176	-0.084	0.08
Political Involvement SNS	-0.360 *	0.135	0.155
What's your current age in years?	0.052	-0.017	-0.04
What was your family's household income level before taxes last year?	0.138	0.075	0.067
	p<.05.***.p<.01.**p<.001.*		

The research question (RQ1) addressed the relationship between a presidential candidate's presence and authenticity on social media and millennials' likelihood of voting for the candidate. Multiple regression analysis was conducted to predict the likelihood of respondents voting for Hilary Clinton, Bernie Sanders, and Donald Trump using each candidate's strength of social media presence and authenticity with the control variables political ideology, political self-efficacy, and political involvement on SNS, age, and income. As presented in Table 3, the presented regression models accounted for a total variance of 57.8% for predicting likelihood of voting for Hilary Clinton.

Among the variables controlled in the model, political authenticity (β = .655, p < .05) and SNS political involvement (β= -.360, p < .001) are positive predictors of likelihood of voting for Hilary Clinton. For Bernie Sanders, the regression models account for a total variance of 36.2% for predicting likelihood of voting for Sanders. Whereas, with Sanders political ideology (β= -

.562, $p < .05$) and SNS authenticity (β= -.377, $p < .01$) are statistically significant in predicting an individual's likelihood of voting for Sanders. With Donald Trump, the presented regression model account for a total variance of 30.3% for predicting likelihood of voting for Trump. For Donald Trump, political ideology (β= .598, $p < .05$) is the only statically significant predictor of an individual's likelihood of voting for Trump. The positive β value for political ideology for Donald Trump indicates the more conservative the voters are, the more likely they vote for Trump. On the contrary, the negative β for Bernie Sanders indicates the more liberal the voters are, the more likely they vote for Bernie. Most importantly, the results indicate the effects of social media – presence and authenticity – are only strong predictors for likelihood of voting for certain candidates, but not all.

Discussion

As social media continue to seamlessly integrate into people's daily lives, specifically millennials ages 18-35, more research will focus on parsing out the effects social media has on presidential campaigns. In the context of U.S. public opinion, some studies have already established a connection between social media use and political efficacy, political expression, offline political participation, and online political participation (Bode et al., 2014; Hayes, 2009; White & Anderson, 2014; Zuniga et al., 2009; Kim & Geidner, 2008; Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009). These empirical connections have also been observed in international contexts (Ceron & Adda, 2015; Demirhan, 2014; Mare, 2014; Levin & Brandes, 2014). Overall, these studies create new avenues for research in this area, which includes (a) discerning the correlation between political SNS use and political efficacy and (b) observing more nuanced and dynamic models to develop a deeper understanding of the relationship between political SNS use and its effect on an individual's voting decision. The current study represents a step further in this direction. It

attempts to pursue both suggestions by exploring the relationship between millennials' SNS political involvement and political efficacy and whether political authenticity and presence on SNS influence millennials' voting decision. Based on the results, it is evident that SNS political use helps explain more involved forms of political activism such as volunteering, donation, and participation in campaign rallies. In addition, the results showed how SNS use for political information and situational political involvement can affect voting intentions.

When it comes to seeking political information, the results indicate that millennials ages 18-35 do indeed pay more attention to social media for political information than traditional media. They find traditional media such as broadcast news, newspapers, and radio news are more reliable sources of political news. This is an interesting finding because with such a high percentage of millennials seeking social media for news, one can assume that millennials would find social media as a reliable source. Perhaps this is due to the abundance of unverified news pages on SNS, which may lower its credibility. Since traditional news such as radio and primetime news has been around for so long, there's a sense of trust and higher level of responsibility when a news anchor delivers the news. Thus, the results imply that traditional media is still highly trusted for political information; therefore, candidates should use SNS to garner awareness for their campaign, but campaign information should still be delivered on traditional media.

The results support recent research indicating that political SNS use for information and expression is associated with situational political involvement and political efficacy (Hargittai & Shaw 2013; Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010; Kaid, McKinney, & Tedesco, 2007). This finding is especially important in light of the strong associations between a presidential candidate's social media authenticity along with an individual's political involvement on SNS, which predicts the

likelihood that an individual will vote for a certain candidate. However, a candidate's social media presence does not influence voters' decision in the upcoming 2016 presidential election. The findings also indicate that in this year's presidential election, age, income, and political efficacy are not significant predictors influencing a voter's decision; rather, political ideology, social media authenticity, and an individual's political involvement on SNS influence respondents' likelihood of voting for a particular candidate. The glaring absence of any significant associations between social media presence and voting lends strong support to previous findings that SNS does not directly affect every aspect of this particular form of political participation (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010; Vromen, 2007; Xenos & Moy, 2007; Zhang, Johnson, Seltzer, & Seltzer, 2010).

Although some previous research suggests that SNS played a direct role in President Obama's successful 2008 and 2012 campaign (Newman, 2016; Towner & Dulio, 2015), the results of this study suggests that in this year's election, social media only influences the voting decisions for certain candidates, but not all. For example, the results indicate that millennials are more likely to vote for Clinton the more they perceive her to be authentic; however, with Trump and Sanders, political ideology is the decisive factor. In addition, an interesting finding is even though Trump has a massive social media following (over six million followers on Twitter) and a strong social media presence, those are not factors that influences Trump's prospective voters; instead, political ideology has the greatest influence; the more conservative they are, the more likely they will vote for Trump. As such, the findings shed light on millennials multifaceted political viewpoints.

As a result, the study confirms a positive relationship between the use of SNS for political information and millennials' voting decision in the context of this year's presidential

election. As stated, it is imperative to examine millennials' political involvement on SNS because they are the largest living population living in the United States, and as evident in the last two presidential elections, millennials can influence a presidential candidate's campaign success. These results are consistent with previous studies showing that the use of SNS has a positive influence of citizens' participator behaviors (e.g., Zúñiga et al., 2009; Macafee & Simone, 2012; Valenzuela et al., 2012). Taken together, these findings demonstrate that political marketing in the digital era cannot fully rely on political SNS, because as Conway, Kenski, and Wang's (2015) study suggests, traditional media still holds their agenda-setting power; thus, candidates are still going to look to the media for legitimacy. However, as the population of SNS users rapidly rises, the nature of social network sites represents a space in which people, especially millennials, may participate in politics. As past studies have indicated (Hayes, 2009; White & Anderson, 2014), political communication continues to evolve with technological advances; hence, political engagement via SNS has become an undeniable factor in encouraging millennials' political participation both online and offline.

Limitations

With an emphasis on SNS use for political information in which millennials may engage, the timing of this study may both limit the interpretation of the findings. Since this study is fielded before this year's (2016) presidential primary elections begin, the likelihood of voting for a candidate does not constitute to the individual's final voting decision. As such, the results do not necessarily reflect an innate relationship between political SNS use for election information and participatory political activities like voting in regards to this year's presidential primary election (since it has not happened yet). Therefore, at this point, the relationship between political SNS use for election information, political efficacy, and situational political

involvement are only applicable in the 2016 presidential caucuses. Yet, the possibility that the use of SNS for political information is directly influencing how candidates present themselves on their social media pages, which it turn, affects how they are perceived by the survey respondents cannot be excluded. These findings cannot be generalized to all politicians or all elections (Boyd & Crawford, 2012; Parks, 2014). However, it is important to note that in the survey, 36.5% of respondents answer "yes" when asked if they voted in the 2016 presidential caucus and 14.8% answer they "plan" on voting in this year's caucus. Also when asked if the respondents plan to vote in the 2016 primary election, 48.2% answered they "strongly agree," and 20.6% answer they "agree" that they do "plan on voting" in this year's primary election. It is, therefore, quite possible that political SNS use for election information will affect millennials' voting decision in this year's primary election.

Lastly, although other factors could influence an individual's political activities online and voting behavior, the study is constrained by the available measures. Even after taking into account a host of control variables including age, household income, and political ideology, there are certainly other variables that can influence an individual's voting decision such as political interest and knowledge. Consequently, in order to have more stringent analyses, future research should include more control variables. Furthermore, the insights gained from the data could potentially change after the 2016 primary election, since from now until November unknown variables may cause a shift in which candidate an individual ends up voting for. In that regard, future researchers should examine unanswered questions by this study after the 2016 primary election.

In conclusion, despite the limitations, this study make advances upon the effects of SNS use for political information and situational political involvement within the millennials by (a)

examining underlying mechanisms with political efficacy and offline political involvement and (b) exploring the role of SNS in facilitating political participation. This study expands the current literature on the effects of social media on citizens' participatory activities by examining political authenticity, social media presence, and political efficacy.

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