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# Chapter 10

## The Effects of Social Media and Mobile Apps Use on Political Participation in Taiwan

Yi-Ning Katherine Chen

**Abstract** The main goal of this study is to examine the relationship among attention to news, mobile social media use, mobile apps use, and political participation. The study also examines the role of online political expression in moderating the relationship among attention to news, social media use on mobile devices, mobile apps use, and political participation for younger people after the 2014 Sunflower Movement in Taiwan. We analyze data from a web survey (n=304) conducted shortly after the Sunflower Movement, which was Taiwanese college students' occupation of the country's parliament in an effort to prevent the passage of an agreement allowing for freer trade in services with China. Results show that mobile social media use and online expression are positively related to political participation, however, online expression does not have any moderating effect on the relationship among social media use, mobile apps use, attention to news, and political participation. Implications of the findings are discussed.

**Keywords** Mobile social media use • Online expressions • Political participation • Sunflower movement • Taiwan

### 10.1 Introduction

The use of social media and mobile social media applications has grown in recent years, particularly among young adults worldwide (Rainie et al. 2012; Smith and Duggan 2012a, b). Katz (2007) noted that research “suggests that mobile phones tend to be used in reinforcing strong social ties, while computer-mediated text-based media tend to be used in expanding relationships with weak ties” (Kim et al. 2007, p. 390). More importantly, the use of social media and mobile devices for acquiring political information, creating user-generated political content, and expressing political views and opinions is on the rise among young adults.

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However, few studies have explored whether young adults have become more politically engaged through actively seeking out news while also frequently expressing opinions online. To assess this plausibility, data from a web survey of college students in Taiwan were analyzed. The younger generation was the focus of this study because social media use for political information is the greatest among people aged 18–29 (Rainie et al. 2012).

According to a Taiwan Network Information Center report (TNIC 2013), more than 60 % of respondents have smartphones or tablets in Taiwan. Moreover, 71 % of those reported that they have downloaded mobile apps. Among different age groups, the highest percentage is 25–34 (86 %), and the second highest is 20–24 (80 %) having smartphones or tablet PCs. It is certainly a fact that, especially for younger people, mobile media is widely used in Taiwan. In addition to social networking sites and mobile apps, online broadcasting websites (e.g., Justin TV and Yahoo! Live) have their own function for political participation and political events and also play an important role in some social movements in Taiwan – for instance, the Wildstrawberries Students Movement in 2008. During that movement, participants from around Taiwan and even elsewhere in the world watched the event online and discussed it with each other on websites (Hsu 2010).

## 10.2 Significance of Study

A greater understanding of the effect of online political talk on young adults' political behaviors may have important implications for democracies, as concerns over political disengagement have long observed about this age group (CIRCLE 2013). A prolonged lack of engagement hampers young adults' representation in the democratic process, which may ultimately undermine the efficacy of the democratic system. The political communication literature (Wyatt et al. 2000) has established the importance of political talks as discourse leading to political participation, and much of the work on political talk has assumed it takes place in a face-to-face context. However, the rise of new media forced scholars to examine the links between political discourse online and its relationship to participation offline. This line of research reveals trends consistent with offline political talk, with positive direct relationships between discussion online and engagement offline (Hardy and Scheufele 2005, 2006; Johnson and Kaye 2003; Price and Cappella 2002; Shah et al. 2005).

Also, discussions online were found to complement and are complemented by other sources of news and information (Hardy and Scheufele 2005; Shah et al. 2005). In their study of use of mobile phone for political communication, Campbell and Kwak (2010) report a positive linkage between using technology to discuss politics and public affairs with others and offline participation. As Hardy and Scheufele (2006) concluded, "The important role of interpersonal communication as a necessary condition for meaningful citizenship is relatively *stable across media*" (p. 1252, emphasis added). Considering the multi-functions of mobile media

discussed above, one can expect that it extends on the benefits of other platforms for political discourse, which facilitates political participation.

The present study extends the literature on the differential gains model by first examining online political expression as a moderator of the relationship between media use and political participation. Second, this study examines a variety of communicative activities that are common among young adults and that are considered part of online expression. Finally, the use of social media and mobile devices as unique sources of political information were explored. Given that new technologies have facilitated alternative forms of opinion expression and information consumption, more research is needed into the ways in which these technologies promote young adults' political participation. Accomplishing these goals will deepen the understanding of how political expression enabled by social and mobile media contributes to political participation.

### 10.3 The Sunflower Movement in Taiwan

In Spring 2014, a history-making political event happened in Taiwan – the Sunflower Movement. Thousands of college students entered and occupied the Legislative Yuan (Taiwan's parliamentary body) to protest the signing of the Service Trade Agreement with China. More than 10,000 students and tens of thousands of people from different social circles, including professors, musicians, lawyers, and doctors, joined the peaceful sit-in around the Legislative Yuan in the center of the Capital. Almost all of them opposed the ruling party (Kuomintang) on the Service Trade Agreement with China. In addition to the sit-in, they raised money to publish reports in newspapers around Taiwan, as well as in other countries such as *The New York Times*, and also designed a website (<http://4am.tw/>) to record the movement and to publicize it to the rest of the world.

This unprecedented political event attracted much attention from foreign media. For example, Deutsche Welle reported, "What began as a demonstration has led to the storming of the Taiwanese Parliament. Students have been occupying the assembly building since Tuesday evening, protesting against a trade agreement with Beijing" (Aldrovandi 2014). CNN reported that "The agreement was passed without proper procedure; that's why the people are angry" (Sanchez and Li 2014). As TIME reported, "Riot police are sent in to evict anti-trade-pact protesters occupying the government headquarters" (Rauhala 2014). The *Guardian* reported "A trade deal struck with China threatens economic as well as political dominance from across the Taiwan Strait" (Pai 2014). The *Los Angeles Times* reported that "Police in Taiwan fired high-pressure water cannons Monday on hundreds of demonstrators who broke into the country's Cabinet compound to protest the liberalization of trade with political rival China, handing the island president one of his worst crises in 6 years" (Jennings 2014).

In addition to describing the events of the Sunflower Movement, international media also reported some possible effects of the movement. For example, BBC

reported that “If the students succeed, it could mean a further democratization of Taiwan, with additional safeguards to let the people, not any political party, decide the fate of the island” (Sui 2014). The transformation of ordinary people into engaged citizens was also an important issue that grew out of the movement. Then, how did the movement gather so many people to participate in such a short time?

One possible source could be the Internet, especially social networking sites accessible via mobile devices. Many groups and pages on social networking sites (including Facebook and BBS) and many mobile phone apps were set up for people to discuss and share information on the movement. They include “副民立院直播 app” (live form the legislature app), “服貿 app” (service trade with mainland China app), and “就是要丟鞋 app” (throwing your shoes app).

## 10.4 Mobile Media, Online Expression, and Political Participation

Using mobile media to assist people’s political participation has become popular in many countries. For example, during the United States’ presidential election in 2012, the political camps of Barack Obama and Mitt Romney respectively set up mobile apps such as Obama for America and Mitt’s VP to publicize their political opinions and events (Smith and Duggan 2012b). South Korean political parties have also invited participation in pre-election nominations through mobile phone voting (Kim 2007). In South Africa’s 2009 elections, most citizens accessed online political information through mobile phones and mobile social architecture (Walton and Donner 2011). Mobile media use has also played a mobilizing role among political participants in other Asian countries, including Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore (David 2013; Ilavarasan 2013; Lim 2013; Ullah 2013; Zhang 2013). Many politicians in Taiwan shared their own views on social networking sites (e.g., Facebook) and made direct contact with their supporters. Many political commentators post their opinions of political events or politicians on the Internet, and their fans shared or discussed their articles. Whether for politicians or for people, mobile media have provided novel ways for people to acquire political information. At the same time, people also employed social media to follow political parties and politicians and to stay informed about them (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press 2012; Pew Research Journalism Project 2012).

Many scholars wondered about the change of political behaviors after the rise of the Internet, particularly in social media such as social networking sites and mobile phones. Many studies reported that social media and mobile platforms have brought forth increased collaborative activities, more engaged civic participation, a sense of social connectedness, and global avenues for cross-cultural communication (Bennett 2008; Benkler 2006; Castells et al. 2006; Comer and Wikle 2008; Dahlgren 2012; Dalton 2009; Ellison et al. 2010; Fowler and Christakis 2010; Haythornthwaite 2005; Lessig 2008; Loader 2007; Mihailidis 2013; Rheingold 2008; Romer et al.

2009; Shah et al. 2009; Shirky 2008, 2010; Surwowiecki 2005; Yamamoto et al. 2013; Zukin et al. 2006).

Because of the extensive use of mobile technology for political events in many countries, some scholars have explored the relationship between mobile media (including social media and mobile applications [apps]) and political participation. For social media like social networking sites, blogs, and YouTube, Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2012) show that social network site use for news has positive effects on political participation, and Baumgartner and Morris (2010) supports that using YouTube and social network sites for news is also related to political participation. Some research studies confirm that mobile social media applications are positively associated with political participation (Campbell and Kwak 2010; Gil de Zúñiga et al. 2009, 2010), and expressing one's position online is also a significant predictor. Other research noted that using social mobile media and mobile apps is related to political participation, and that expression online strengthens the relationship respectively (Yamamoto et al. 2013).

## 10.5 Research Questions and Hypotheses

Based on the literature review and the occurrence of a special political event in Taiwan, the present study examined the role of online political expression in moderating the relationship between political information consumption and political participation among young adults after the Sunflower Movement. The study explored whether or not the behavior of political participation changed after the movement, and the ways people sought information about the movement. Specifically, the following hypotheses were formulated.

- H1: Mobile social media use has an impact on political participation in the Sunflower movement, and the strength of the relationship between them is greater for those who are involved in online expression more frequently.
- H2: Use of social media apps has an impact on political participation in the Sunflower movement, and the strength of the relationship between them is greater for those who are involved in online expression more frequently.
- H3: The attention to Sunflower Movement news has an impact on political participation, and the strength of the relationship between them is greater for those who are involved in online expression more frequently.

## 10.6 Method

A web survey was conducted on several social networking sites related to social issues (e.g., Facebook, BBS) from April 22 to June 16, 2014. A total of 384 responses were collected. 196 of respondents were female, while 140 were of them

**Table 10.1** Demographics

Variables		Frequency	Percent	
Gender	Female	196	50.4	
	Male	140	36.0	
	Missing	53	13.6	
Identification	Undergraduate	148	38.0	
	Graduate	59	15.2	
	Doctoral	4	1.0	
	Military	7	1.8	
	Full-time job	86	22.1	
	Part-time job	11	2.8	
	Unemployed	12	3.1	
	Others	9	2.3	
	Missing	53	13.6	
	Household income	< NT\$ 36,000	59	15.2
		NT\$ 36,001 ~ 47,000	33	8.5
NT\$ 47,001 ~ 58,000		31	8.0	
NT\$ 58,001 ~ 65,000		22	5.7	
NT\$ 65,001 ~ 78,000		31	8.0	
NT\$ 78,001 ~ 88,000		27	6.9	
NT\$ 88,001 ~ 108,000		46	11.8	
NT\$ 108,001 ~ 138,000		37	9.5	
NT\$ 138,001 ~ 158,000		18	4.6	
> NT\$ 158,001		32	8.2	
Missing	53	13.6		
Partisan	Kuomintang	40	10.3	
	Democratic Progressive Party	57	14.7	
	People First Party	3	.8	
	Taiwan Solidarity Union	2	.5	
	Neutral	183	47.0	
	Unknown	51	13.1	
Missing	53	13.6		

were male. Their mean age was 24.34 ( $SD=5.28$ ). See Table 10.1 for other details. Because we focus on the younger generation, only respondents between 18 and 29 years old were analyzed. The final sample is 304.

## 10.7 Measurement

**Mobile Social Media Use** Mobile social media use is measured by six items and rated on a 5-point scale from 1 (never) to 5 (often), unknown and uncertain. Items include “How often do you read articles and news on Facebook, blogs, and BBS via

mobile devices after the Sunflower Movement?”, “How often do you post articles and news on Facebook, blogs, and BBS via mobile devices after the Sunflower Movement?”, “How often do you criticize the Sunflower Movement on Facebook, blogs, and BBS via mobile devices?”, “How often do you follow movement-related politicians or a political party on Facebook via mobile devices after the Sunflower Movement?”, “How often do you follow movement-related politicians or a political party on YouTube via mobile devices after the Sunflower Movement?”, and “How often do you follow movement-related politicians or a political party on Twitter via mobile devices after the Sunflower Movement?” These items are combined to construct an additive index. A higher summation means more frequent online social media use ( $M=16.85$ ,  $SD=5.34$ ).

**Mobile apps use** Mobile apps use is measured by seven items and rated on a 7-point scale from 1 (never) to 7 (very often). Items include “How often do you use traditional media’s apps (e.g., mainstream papers and TV stations) to know the Sunflower Movement?”, “Do you use alternative media’s apps (e.g., pots.com app and coolcloud.org app) to know the Sunflower Movement?”, “How often do you use 副民立院直播 app (live from the legislature app) to know the Sunflower Movement?”, “How often do you use NoECFA app to know the Sunflower Movement?”, “How often do you use 服貿 app (service trade with mainland China app) to know the Sunflower Movement?”, “How often do you use WhatsTheNumber app to know the Sunflower Movement?”, and “How often do you use 就是要丟鞋 app (throwing your shoes app) to know the Sunflower Movement?” These items are combined to construct an additive index, and a higher summation means more frequent mobile app use ( $M=17.95$ ,  $SD=10.51$ ).

**Attention to Sunflower Movement News** This was measured by seven items and rated on a 5-point scale from 1 (no attention) to 5 (a lot of attention); unknown or uncertain was coded as 6. Items included “Do you pay attention to information of the Sunflower Movement in TV news?”, “Do you pay attention to information of the Sunflower Movement in newspapers?”, “Do you pay attention to information of the Sunflower Movement in broadcasts?”, “Do you pay attention to information of the Sunflower Movement in magazines?”, “Do you pay attention to information of the Sunflower Movement in the Internet version of traditional media?”, “Do you pay attention to information of the Sunflower Movement in news portal sites?”, and “Do you pay attention to information of the Sunflower Movement when your family, friends, colleagues, or neighbors discussed politics?” These items are combined to construct an additive index. A higher summation means more frequent attention paid to Sunflower Movement news ( $M=24.81$ ,  $SD=5.09$ ).

**Online Expression** Online expression is measured by six items and rated on a 7-point scale from 1 (never) to 7 (very often). Items include “How often do you post articles about the Sunflower Movement on blogs?”, “How often do you post articles about the Sunflower Movement on social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, and Google+)”, “How often do you post comments about the Sunflower Movement on BBS?”, “How often do you share news, photos, articles, videos, computer graph-



ics works, and other blogs' articles about the Sunflower Movement?", "How often do you create and post news, photos, articles, videos, computer graphics works, and other blogs' articles to express your own position for the Sunflower Movement?", and "How often do you exchange opinions about the Sunflower Movement with other people on the Internet (e.g., blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Google+, and BBS)?" These items are combined to construct an additive index, and a higher summation means more frequent online expression ( $M=26.21$ ,  $SD=9.78$ ).

**Political Participation in the Sunflower Movement** Political participation in the Sunflower movement is measured by 13 items and rated on a dichotomous scale, where 1 means yes and 0 means no. Items included "Have you ever entered the Legislative Yuan to participate in a protest and sit-in for the Sunflower Movement?", "Have you ever participated in joint signatures for the Sunflower Movement?", "Have you ever participated in a protest around the Legislative Yuan for the Sunflower Movement?", "Have you ever taken to the streets of Taiwan's capital Taipei to protest against a controversial trade agreement on March 30 for the Sunflower Movement?", "Have you ever contacted the leaders of the Sunflower Movement?", "Have you ever written a letter to the media for the Sunflower Movement?", "Have you ever discussed face-to-face with others about the Sunflower Movement?", "Have you ever contacted mainstream media actively for the Sunflower Movement?", "Have you ever contacted alternative media actively for the Sunflower Movement?", "Have you ever encouraged someone face-to-face to participate in some activities for the Sunflower Movement?", "Have you ever encouraged someone by phone (including mobile phone) to participate in some activities for the Sunflower Movement?", "Have you ever reflected your opinion to traditional media like TV stations, newspapers, and radio stations for the Sunflower Movement?", and "Did you send Sunflower Movement information to others by email or other communication channel on the Internet?" These items were combined to construct an additive index, and a higher summation means more frequent political participation ( $M=3.44$ ,  $SD=2.41$ ).

**Control Variables** Control variables include gender, age ( $M=23.43$ ,  $SD=2.70$ ), political tendency, internal political efficacy, and external political efficacy. The categories of political tendency are Kuomintang, Democratic Progressive Party, People's First Party, Taiwan Solidarity Union, neutral, independent, and unknown.

Both internal political efficacy and external political efficacy are rated on a 5-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree); unknown or uncertain was coded as 6. The former has four items, including "Do you agree that sometimes politics and the government seem so complicated, but your intention to participate in politics is not reduced?", "Do you agree that sometimes politics and the government seem so complicated that a person like yourself cannot really understand what is going on?", "Do you agree that no matter whether or not a person has professional knowledge, citizens have the obligation to care and to attend to public issues?", "Do you agree that you have the ability to participate in public issues?"

These items are combined to construct a composite scale, and a higher summation means higher internal political efficacy ( $M=14.85$ ,  $SD=2.37$ ). The latter has seven items, including “Do you agree that a person like yourself could affect what the government does by social participation?”, “Do you agree that a person like yourself cannot affect what the government does?”, “Do you agree that government officials care about a person participating in a social movement?”, “Do you agree that government officials do not care about the thoughts of a person like yourself?”, “Do you agree with the sentence ‘The government will change if we strive to participate in social issues’?”, “Do you agree that if people strive together, they can change the government’s strategy?”, and “Do you agree that if people express their views, they can change the government’s strategy?” These items are combined to construct a composite scale, and a higher summation means higher external political efficacy ( $M=23.88$ ,  $SD=4.86$ ).

## 10.8 Statistical Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to test the hypothesis of this study. To observe the moderation effects, product terms between independent variables were created. To reduce potential multicollinearity problems, the five independent variables are first standardized before computing interaction terms. Block one of the regression model included control variables, followed by block two, which included independent variables, and block three included the interaction variables of online expression with the other independent variables.

## 10.9 Results

The results of multiple regression analysis show that gender ( $\beta=-.176$ ,  $p<.001$ ), internal political efficacy ( $\beta=.101$ ,  $p<.05$ ), online social media use ( $\beta=.233$ ,  $p<.01$ ), and online expression ( $\beta=.420$ ,  $p<.001$ ) were related to political participation in the sunflower movement (Table 10.2).

Hypothesis one states that mobile social media use will have an impact on political participation in the sunflower movement, and the strength of the relationship between them will be greater for those who are involved in online expression more frequently. The main effect of mobile social media use is significant ( $\beta=.233$ ,  $p<.01$ ), but the interaction effect between mobile social media use and online expression is not ( $\beta=-.098$ ,  $p=.066$ ). The relationship between social media use and political participation in the Sunflower movement was not moderated by online expression. Thus, H1 is partially supported.

Hypothesis two states that mobile apps use will have an impact on political participation in the Sunflower movement, and the strength of the relationship between

**Table 10.2** Predicting moderator effects on political participation

Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	$\beta$	VIF	$\beta$	VIF	$\beta$	VIF
Block 1: control variables						
Gender	-.078	1.019	-.176***	1.102	-.176***	1.107
Age	-.039	1.029	-.016	1.053	-.007	1.066
Political tendency	.020	1.008	.000	1.015	-.009	1.021
Internal political efficacy	.300***	1.186	.104*	1.367	.101*	1.370
External political efficacy	.132*	1.172	.041	1.234	.040	1.240
Block 2: main effects						
Mobile apps use (AP)			-.004	1.495	-.002	1.769
Mobile social media use (MS)			.250***	2.674	.233**	2.723
Attention to news (AN)			.093	1.420	.086	1.443
Online expression (OE)			.389***	2.509	.420***	2.612
Block 3: moderator effect						
OE $\times$ AP					.028	1.591
OE $\times$ MS					-.098	1.638
OE $\times$ AN					-.038	1.334
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.128		.473		.480	
Incremental adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	–		.345		.006	
N	304					

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

$\beta$  standardized coefficient

them will be greater for those who are involved in online expression more frequently. Both the main effect of mobile apps use ( $\beta = -.002$ ,  $p = .978$ ) and the interaction effect between mobile apps use and online expression are not significant ( $\beta = .028$ ,  $p = .588$ ). Mobile apps use did not have an impact on political participation in the sunflower movement, and the main effect of mobile apps use did not become stronger as respondents express their political views online more often. Thus, H2 is not supported.

Hypothesis three states the attention to Sunflower Movement news will have an impact on political participation, and the strength of the relationship between them will be greater for those who are involved in online expression more frequently. Both main effect of the attention to Sunflower Movement news ( $\beta = .086$ ,  $p = .086$ ) and the interaction effect between attention to Sunflower Movement news and online expression ( $\beta = -.038$ ,  $p = .430$ ) are not significant. In other words, the attention to Sunflower Movement news did not have an impact on political participation in the Sunflower movement, and the strength of relationship between attention to Sunflower Movement news and political participation in the Sunflower movement

was not amplified as respondents politically express themselves online more often. Thus, H3 is not supported.

## 10.10 Discussion

The main goal of the present study is to examine the relationship among attention to news, mobile social media use, mobile apps use, and political participation. The study also examines the role of online political expression in moderating the relationship among attention to news, social media use on mobile devices, mobile apps use, and political participation for younger people after the 2014 Sunflower Movement in Taiwan. The results show that mobile social media use and online expression are positively related to political participation. This finding shows the importance of political expression in leading people to participate politically, and mobile media may lead people to express themselves politically, thereby putting them on a pathway to participation. The results contribute to an understanding of expressive citizenship models now emerging in younger generations in Taiwan. People may pursue their political goals via a mobile device, with its nature of 24/7 connectivity, mobility, and live messaging, by sharing opinions about politics and current events, expressing dissatisfaction with governments, and participating in online collective actions against certain policies. The ease of using and creating messages via mobile media allows individuals to express their opinions more openly and freely as well as to build a more active relationship with institutions in the Taiwanese society. The mobile social media in particular thus provide new forms of media consumption as well as new forms of political participation.

However, online expression does not have any moderating effect on the relationship among social media use, mobile apps use, attention to news, and political participation. In other words, the strength of the relationship between mobile social media use, mobile apps use, attention to news of the Sunflower Movement, and political participation is not amplified or attenuated by the frequency of respondents politically expressing themselves online.

These results are consistent with some research reporting that social media could increase political participation (Gil de Zúñiga et al. 2012), as people who obtain political information via social media will participate in politics more often. On the other hand, results are similar to some research suggesting that political expression online could promote political participation (Campbell and Kwak 2010; Gil de Zúñiga et al. 2009, 2010; Yamamoto et al. 2013) – that is, people who are used to expressing their opinion and sharing political-related articles, images, and videos will participate in politics more. However, the results reveal that mobile apps are not related to political participation, which is inconsistent with previous research (Campbell and Kwak 2010; Rojas and Puig-i-Abril 2009; Yamamoto et al. 2013). Although mobile apps have some useful functions, including providing the latest news, online conversations, trends, and political action information such as when and where political events are held (Lemert 1981), obtaining information via

mobile apps does not have any effect on political participation in this study nor in the Sunflower Movement. One possible reason is that people who attended the movement might have gotten and shared information on social media such as Facebook rather than movement-related mobile apps. There was no need for those apps to reach protesters.

The current study has several limitations. Herein, it focused on political participation after a historical political event (i.e., the Sunflower Movement), but not a regular political event such as an election, and thus it might be difficult to generalize our result to more comprehensive political participation behaviors. Because of the focus on a single event, it might also be difficult to compare the result to other studies that target regular political events.

Moreover, all of the respondents in this study were well aware of the Sunflower Movement, meaning that our subjects might not represent all younger people, and it cannot generalize to the whole population of younger people. Finally, as Yamamoto et al. (2013) mention, results come from only one political event, and it is possible that the results are unique to the present sample. To observe overall political participation in all younger people, future work might be to collect data on more than one political event or design an experiment to control the confounding so that we are able to see the relationship among social media use on mobile, mobile apps use, and political participation more comprehensively.

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