CHAPTER 2

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THE INTERNET AND FOUR DIMENSIONS OF CITIZENSHIP

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MANY people use the phrase "new media" as a shorthand for the diverse technical developments that are changing the nature of political communication and possibly the character of citizenship: digital video recorders, satellite communication, smartphones, digital cable television, and, of course, the Internet. They are new and they are media. But in very little time such a phrase may sound stale, not unlike such terms as "horseless carriage" for automobiles and "talkies" for motion pictures with sound. Already the media that were "new" a decade ago, such as the blog, have been joined by newer media, such as social networking tools. Other terms that have floated through the literature also have their limitations in describing technological changes: "digital media" (Hindman 2009), "online" (Davis 2005), "Web" (Berners-Lee 1999), and "network" (Castells 1996). What is missing from the lexicon is a terminology that fully captures the interoperability, interactivity, intelligence, portability, and increased information bandwidth of these networked devices. In this chapter, as we explore the implications of these capacities for citizenship, we'll rely primarily on the classic term "Internet," which dates to the 1970s, as a synecdoche. The particular advantage of this term is, first, that the Internet is dramatically incorporating the formerly separate media of broadcasting, publishing, and telephony, and, second, that it conjures up a most curious history of invention and adventure (Abbate 1999). The original Internet was a curious product of government institutions and scientific research rather than private enterprise, and so the pairing of this term with issues of democracy and citizenship is fitting.

Whatever term one prefers, the media environment has certainly changed dramatically in the last twenty years. And while everyone agrees that the media landscape is different, exactly what these myriad changes add up to remains controversial, especially in the overlapping realms of politics, the news media, and civic life. Many streams of research on these topics are now more than a decade old, dealing with the Internet and political deliberation, public opinion, political behavior, campaigns, mobilization, collective action, and news, among others. We will treat these as four dimensions of citizenship as they relate to media, and will ask: how has the Internet interacted with, or perhaps even revolutionized, the following:

- citizen deliberation and the public sphere,
- citizen participation in public life,
- citizen knowledge, and
- citizen mobilization and the organizational context for citizenship.

SOONER OR LATER IT WILL ALL BE ON THE INTERNET

The Internet was an accident—a largely happy accident as it turns out. The Internet was nobody's vision or conscious attempt to revolutionize mass communication (Edwards 2010). But revolutionize it has.

"In the rise of any new medium," Paul Starr writes in *The Creation of the Media*, "a key factor is its relationship to the dominant technology of the day" (2004, 193). Whereas in Europe new communications media have usually been handed over to incumbent players to develop (or co-opt or delay), in the United States nascent media have mostly avoided this fate. The post office did not get to run the telegraph, Western Union did not succeed in taking over telephony, and AT&T was not allowed to use its long-distance monopoly to dominate broadcasting. The accidental nature of the World Wide Web helped the Internet effect a similar independence. The Internet's most direct predecessor was the ARPANet, the world's first packet switching network, created in the late 1960s as a US cold war research project. When the Department of Defense discussed ARPANet with AT&T, the company was not interested, concluding that the technology held little commercial value (Abbate 1999, 195).

From the 1970s until the late 1980s, the Internet remained the province of government researchers and academics, which helped foster a participatory and decentralized online culture. The development of the network's technical architecture reflected this, with the dominant ethos favoring "rough consensus and running code" over the kind of formal decision-making typical in corporations and government. Partly as a consequence, the TCP/IP networking protocol that ran the Internet ended up being widely deployed even as competing network standards—such as OSI, developed by an international standards body—were still on the drawing board (Abbate 1999).

Technology executives, government regulators, and even key innovators themselves did not realize until quite late the implications of these technological shifts. When physicist Tim Berners-Lee developed technical refinements in the early 1990s in order to share academic information over the Internet, he hardly expected to lay the foundation of a new mass medium (Berners-Lee 1999). He wasn't alone. As late as 1995, Bill Gates's vision of "the road ahead" hardly mentioned the Internet. The monumental 1996 US Telecommunications Act, which set the regulatory ground rules for competitive telephony and digital television, famously ignored the Internet (Neuman, McKnight, and Solomon 1998).

The Internet, of course, now constitutes a large and still growing portion of the American media diet. As of 2009, over 80 percent of US households had home Internet access (Pew Internet & American Life Project 2009). About 63 percent of households had broadband, about 85 percent of all Americans had cellphones, and about a third had used the Internet from a smartphone or other portable device (Horrigan 2009a, 2009b). In 2006, for the first time, the number of Americans reporting that they went online for news at least three times per week exceeded the number regularly watching nightly network news, and by 2008 exceeded the number reading the newspaper on a daily basis (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press 2008).

The Internet is also entangled in the economic travails of the newspaper and magazine industries. Though rates of newspaper readership have been slowly declining since the 1980s, revenue had been largely stable until the recent and precipitous declines. Between 2006 and 2008 the newspaper industry saw a 23 percent decline in advertising revenue, and by the end of 2008, massive layoffs placed newsroom staffing levels 20 percent below the level of 2001 (Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism 2009). Readers shifting news consumption from print to the Internet explains some of the fall: Web editions now account for half of all newspaper readership, but provide only 10 percent of revenues. Even bigger culprits are sites like Craigslist and eBay, which have gutted newspaper classified advertising, the largest profit center for many small- and mid-sized papers. A wave of highly leveraged mergers has made matters worse by saddling many newspapers with steep debts, turning a long-term problem into an immediate crisis.

THREE CAUTIONARY PRINCIPLES

The dynamics of how media shape citizenship are clearly in flux. In considering the implications of these technologies and their accompanying economic shifts for citizenship, it is worth reviewing three analytic principles from the study of technological evolution and media effects that have helped illuminate previous technological changes. The first is the *diffusion principle*. Everett Rogers engaged in a lifetime study of communication and the diffusion of innovation (1986, 2003). He developed and popularized the notion that early adopters of new technologies are systematically different from mainstream adopters and laggards. Accordingly, for studies conducted

in the United States in the 1990s and early 2000s, one needs to take great care in parsing the impact of the technologies themselves from the characteristics of the atypical citizens who are early adopters. Strikingly few of the publications we have reviewed address this issue seriously. Furthermore, new technical architectures sometimes take decades to change behaviors, expectations, and institutions. The Model T as a mass-produced and accessibly priced automobile was introduced in 1908, but it was not until after the Second World War that the full impact of the automobile was realized (Kline and Pinch 1996). Observations that the Internet has not, for example, challenged the dominance of broadcast-television-based spot advertising in electoral politics need to be seen in historical perspective.

The second, related cautionary principle is the existence of *differential effects*. Often when a new technical resource becomes available the most active and best-resourced members of society are quick to take advantage while marginal members are unable or uninterested in doing so. Under these circumstances, inequality can be magnified. This widely acknowledged dynamic is sometimes identified as positive feedback, accumulated advantage, or "the Matthew Effect" (Merton 1968). Unlike the diffusion principle, this theme is frequently addressed in the literature on Internet effects (Norris 2000, 2001; Bimber and Davis 2003; Hindman 2009; and others). As we will see below, the answers to basic questions about the Internet and political participation or knowledge require accounting for differential effects. This principle is particularly important in assessing hypotheses about the Internet as leveler and mobilizer of previously marginal strata of the citizenry.

The third principle is the prospect of *conditional effects*. The literature in general is quite careful to avoid simplistic technological determinism and uses phrases like "the facilitation by" and "the affordances of" new technologies. Accordingly, under some social and cultural conditions and for some especially motivated strata of society, the Internet's capacities for interactivity, diversity, and information abundance may be transformative. The Internet certainly makes an impressively broad array of political information and misinformation available, and it dramatically changes who can communicate with whom. For those citizens with the motivation and interest to seek political information or to engage in communication about public affairs, the Internet is likely to have much different effects than for those who are relatively disinterested in politics or unmotivated about public life. Indeed, a key emphasis in recent work on the Internet and citizenship is accounting for conditional effects and interactions.

CITIZEN DELIBERATION AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE

The cautionary principles above are a start—but only a start—in addressing perhaps the most basic and difficult-to-answer question about the Internet: what does it mean for the fate of the public sphere in the twenty-first century? Few scholars of political

communication have been more influential than Jürgen Habermas. His concepts of the public sphere and the ideal speech situation have been a popular lens through which to evaluate the Internet's impact on public life. Habermas, of course, argues that the participatory bourgeois public sphere of nineteenth-century salon culture was subverted by the rise of commercialized mass media (1989). Might not the Internet, which grants any citizen the technical means to communicate their views directly to other citizens, move us closer to Habermas's "ideal speech situation" (1981)?

At first glance, one might posit that the Internet is optimally designed to provide a structural *re*transformation of the public sphere along the lines Habermas idealizes. The key elements Habermas sets out concern the capacity of citizens to express their attitudes, desires, and needs, and their ability to challenge the assertions of others without fear of retribution (1990a). The hope is that, as with the widely used metaphor of a marketplace of ideas, the better argument will win out (Napoli 2001). Interestingly, Habermas himself has addressed the question of the Internet and the public sphere several times, and acknowledged that the ideal of a face-to-face collective of mutually consenting members may be also made possible by new technical means (Habermas 1990b; Peters 1993). But Habermas remains highly skeptical. He acknowledges in a recent footnote that "The Internet has certainly reactivated the grassroots of an egalitarian public of writers and readers" but notes that "the rise of millions of fragmented chat rooms across the world tend[s] instead to lead to the fragmentation of large but politically focused mass audiences into a huge number of isolated issue publics" (Habermas 2006, 423). Bruns in a challenging review presses further:

So what is it with Habermas and the Net? A similarly critical (and similarly questionable) negative stance towards the Net can be found in his (German-language) speech on the occasion of the Bruno Kreisky Award in March 2005: here, he suggests that while the Net "has led to an unforeseen extension of the media public and to an unprecedented thickening of communications networks," this "welcome increase in egalitarianism . . . is being paid for by the decentralization of access to unedited contributions. In this medium the contributions of intellectuals lose the power to create a focus." Overall, therefore, "use of the Internet has both extended and fragmented communication connections."   (Bruns 2007)

Habermas's assessment appears to be that the Internet's fundamental openness, and its lack of knowledgeable moderators to structure debate, precludes the sort of deliberation he hopes for. This view arises in large part from his position that every "competent speaker" should participate, rather than every possible speaker. The question of which citizens might qualify as competent remains troublingly unanswered.

In addition to Habermas himself, a small army of scholars has been attracted to the question of whether online deliberation does, or can, approach a Habermasian ideal (among them: Bimber 2003; Brants 2005; Bruns 2007; Castells 2009; Coleman and Blumler 2009; Dahlberg 2004; Davis 2009; Hauser 1999; Hindman 2009; Papacharissi 2004; Poster 1997; Price 2009; Sey and Castells 2004; Thornton 2002; Wilhelm 2000; and Wright and Street 2007). Two elements are common to nearly all of these essays. First, the scholars expand upon or add some conditions to Habermas's original list of

prerequisites for ideal speech. Second, they conclude that they too are skeptical that the Internet could produce such an idealized vision of democratic practice.

Our reading of this body of scholarship suggests that, with variations in terminology, Habermas's original criteria for an ideal speech situation have been expanded into six with respect to online communication. But it is worth emphasizing from the start that the online public sphere is not just a function of the technical facilities of the Internet and related technologies—even when (as rarely happens) these are assessed completely and correctly. Conclusions about the public sphere, as Habermas's own work makes clear, require us to examine the actual practices of debate.

His original criteria for the celebrated ideal speech situation are frequently summarized as: (1) every subject with the competence to speak and act is allowed to take part in a discourse; (2) everyone is allowed to express their attitudes, desires, and needs and to introduce or question any assertion whatever; and (3) no speaker may be prevented, by internal or external coercion, from exercising the rights as laid down in (1) and (2) above (see Habermas 1990a). In some ways, this list underspecifies speech situations in real contexts of all kinds, whether they involve the Internet or not. In the literature on the public sphere and the Internet, these have been elaborated to address in more detail issues of inclusiveness, equality, rationality, agendas, power, and the absence of distraction from substantive discourse. This work can be summarized as follows.

The first criterion for a successful online public sphere is *the inclusion of a broad array of citizens in rational deliberation*. Habermas famously concludes that the one-way commercial media dulled the capacity of the bourgeoisie to engage in critical discussion in public forums such as coffee houses and salons. One problem with the Internet and especially the blogosphere, according to this follow-on literature, is a continuing digital divide. Despite the great extent of Internet diffusion cited above, economically and culturally marginalized citizens represent a big portion of those who do not use the Internet (Bonfadelli 2002; Norris 2001; Servon and Pinkett 2004). And among those already online, large differences in skill levels may represent a second-level digital divide affecting both the elderly and a surprising number of younger citizens (Hargittai 2002, 2007).

But if the hope is to include a broad array of citizens in discussion, overcoming divides in access and skills is only a start. One place discussion takes place is on blogs. It is estimated that there are approximately 900,000 new blog posts every day (Technorati 2010) but most of them are about celebrity and culture. Only one blog in ten discusses politics on a regular basis (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, and Zickuhr 2010). And only a few hundred bloggers can count on readership levels measured in the thousands of visitors per day. This small set of A-list bloggers is hardly a broad cross-section of the public, and this elite group remains overwhelmingly white, disproportionately male, and replete with the alumni of Ivy-League-caliber institutions (Hindman 2009). Bloggers who attract a significant audience certainly have the smarts and schooling necessary to serve as Habermasian moderators; whether they have the necessary temperament is more debatable.

Another place discussion of public affairs takes place is in chat rooms and other online discussion spaces. While the quality of discussions in explicitly political discussion groups is often notoriously low, a great deal of political discussion takes place incidentally in spaces or groups oriented toward other topics, such as hobbies or recreation, and the discursive quality of those discussions can be quite high, due to opportunities for cross-cutting exchanges and exposure to political difference (Wojcieszak and Mutz 2009). Little is known about how people's experiences in these venues contribute to their overall experience of the public sphere. The digital divide is receding but perhaps too slowly to stimulate much enthusiasm. And although the Internet provides ample digital space for those inclined to deliberate about political issues, relatively few are moved to take advantage.

The second criterion is *the capacity to influence the agenda of public discussion*. Citizens themselves need to be able to raise issues of concern and (re)direct attention to topics they care about (Habermas 1989; Dahlberg 2004; Coleman and Gøtze 2001). In a limited way, Internet-based discussion forums probably come closest to this ideal with respect to individuals' ability to shape the agenda of discussion, but these groups may be disconnected from the larger agenda of the public sphere, where commercial media are still so important. Observers commonly look to blogs for the potential to shape public agendas. Prominent bloggers have claimed that the Internet provides ordinary citizens—or at least themselves—the ability to set the agenda for other media (Armstrong and Zúniga 2006; Reynolds 2006; Hewitt 2006). Some scholars have made similar if more measured claims about the ability of blogs to incubate important news stories, to filter for the best content, and ultimately to shape the broader media agenda (Benkler 2006; Farrell and Drezner 2008; Kerbel 2009).

Yet other scholarship has been more skeptical, on several grounds. Attention on the Web is highly concentrated, largely on a few commercial websites. One concern is whether bloggers with small audiences can indeed attract the attention of mainstream media outlets or the few blogs that are widely read. With the notable exception of political scandals, it is hard to find traceable instances where issues nourished online have driven broader public debates. A recent enormous, sophisticated analysis by Leskovec, Backstrom, and Kleinberg shows that political issues and news stories overwhelmingly are raised by news media first and then migrate to blogs, rather than the other way around (2009).

At a more basic level, Internet use may eventually alter public agendas by breaking down boundaries of many kinds in the public sphere. The Internet reduces communicative barriers between individual citizens and small groups, who can find one another and communicate through multiple online means regardless of commercial or institutional agendas—or bloggers, for that matter. The Internet also breaks down barriers between personal, private networks and formal organizations operating in the public sphere, such as the social movement organizations that pursue social justice, environmental, or anti-war agendas (Bennett, Breunig, and Givens 2008). Just how the collapse of such boundaries around interpersonal, group, and organizational communication eventually connects to larger public agendas and news remains to be seen empirically,

but these developments clearly represent a shift in the landscape in which political speech and agendas emerge.

The next criterion of ideal speech on the Internet is a more subtle but equally important extension of the second. While the second focuses on "getting attention" for new or marginalized issues, the third addresses the question *whether, once the attention is evident, the Internet facilitates rational critical discussion and the capacity for collective will formation* (Fishkin 1992; Hauser 1999; Papacharissi 2004; Wright and Street 2007). This turns out to be one of the most exciting and active areas of research. The answer, not surprisingly, turns out to be both yes and no. The Internet advances all kinds of discussion at once, from flame wars and mindless, juvenile commentary to thoughtful and engaged discussion among the well-informed. In this regard, the Internet recapitulates much of the "offline" world of political communication, which ranges no less far in each direction, as does communication with older technologies such as television, the telephone, or the typewriter. The extent of rational speech in any particular political forum on the Internet depends on the evolved norms of interaction, the structure of conversation, the mechanisms of recruitment to conversation, and the prospect of some participants playing the role of moderator—or some technically based system of collaborative moderation. Just as Mansbridge (1983) established in her study of the iconic (face-to-face) American town meeting, collaborative decision-making benefits from evolved norms and procedural structure. Wright and Street conclude their study of European Union discussion forums by noting, "This evidence suggests that we should view deliberation as dependent on design and choice, rather than a predetermined product of the technology" (2007, 849). A research team at the University of Pennsylvania conducted an extensive series of single-issue online discussions and found that the "climate of opinion" and dynamism of information-based discussion on controversial issues led to distinctive patterns of offline opinion change and increased issue knowledge (Price, Nir, and Cappella 2002, 2006).

The fourth criterion is *discursive equality and reciprocal respect—the capacity in collective deliberation to evaluate arguments by their sincerity and persuasive strength rather than the status of the speaker*. These reflect qualities of deliberation that are hard to assess systematically or quantitatively. The analysis here draws attention to synchronous online discussion groups and asynchronous threaded, bulletin-board-style discussion. Partisans and enthusiasts are not always either open-minded or polite listeners. Evaluations should address both how often computer-mediated discussions actually occur, and whether they can sustain (or even improve upon) the level of discursive equality and reciprocal respect produced by face-to-face exchanges, which themselves range widely with respect to these criteria.

One particular aspect of online discussion that cuts both ways is the prospect of anonymity (or pseudonymity) of the speaker. Anonymity has been demonstrated to increase the propensity of animosity and acrimony (often termed "flaming"). But anonymity also offers a potential shield for those with minority views who might otherwise be hesitant to speak. Despite concerns that online discussion would be dominated by a talkative few, recruited online discussions often generate a surprising

level of equity among participant contributions with less suppression of minority views than might be expected (Price 2009). The surprising amity and engaged character of online experiments by Price and associates at Penn may have resulted from the diminished social cues and relative anonymity afforded by text-based exchanges, but further systematic comparative research of online and offline interaction will be needed to better understand the structural links (Price 2009).

The fifth criterion is *the absence of a coercive external constraint on open discussion*. Globally, the absence of coercive constraint on speech on the Internet varies greatly, mirroring the case for speech via other means. First Amendment protections in the US are celebrated online as they are offline. But the Internet is patrolled by authorities in most countries around the world just as physical public spaces are. In most democracies, law enforcement restricts itself to illegal activity such as cyberstalking, obscenity, fraud, and unlawful gambling. There are well-founded concerns that copyright law and anti-terrorism legislation as well as anti-pornography initiatives may have chilling effects on free speech (Zittrain 2008). Notably, the widespread perception that authorities are "listening in" may make marginalized groups afraid to offer political criticism, a fact seen clearly in China and other authoritarian states (Deibert, Palfrey, Rohozinski, and Zittrain 2008). There is little systematic research on how fearful people online are of expressing unpopular opinions, or on their capacity to maintain digital anonymity when they wish. Analysts of radical protest movements assert that some radical groups avoid information technology and rely on traditional face-to-face communication because of the prospect of surveillance (van de Donk, Loader, Nixon, and Rucht 2004, 16), but no systematic or ethnographic confirmation is yet available. Some authoritarian regimes, such as Cuba, have put less effort into censorship and surveillance of speech online than into controlling who has access to the Internet in the first place. Even within free societies, the ongoing struggle to define the responsibility of Internet service providers for what citizens "say" provides a venue for incursions into free speech. So although the Internet in much of the world and notably in the United States is not characterized by a systematic or significant external constraint on open discussion, like other domains of First Amendment policy, it remains a contested area.

The sixth and final criterion is *the absence of systematic distraction from political deliberation*. Recalling the central role of commercial distraction and the reframing of political discourse in the mainstream media in Habermas's seminal analysis (1989), many of the analysts in this tradition have decried the growth of commerce online and the extension of mainstream print and broadcast media sources to slick and attractive online versions (McChesney 2007). Contrary to the expectations of many, non-commercial outlets for political news and information account for only a few tenths of a percent of overall Web traffic. Online news is dominated by traditional media websites such as CNN.com, NYTimes.com, and USAToday.com, along with sites such as Yahoo! News and Google News that aggregate news from wire services and mainstream outlets (Hindman 2009; Pew Research Center for the People & the Press 2006). We conclude that although the expanded space of the digital domain means that

commercially oriented speech and entertainment need not preempt political speech as in, for example, prime time television, the issue of distraction clearly persists.

What does all of this tell us about the online public sphere? On the grounds that Habermas himself emphasizes—worries about audience fragmentation and the lack of knowledgeable moderators—we find there is room for optimism. Online audiences can be more focused and moderators more qualified than Habermas supposes, and they are not obviously in any worse situation deliberatively than they are when not online. Positive research findings for debate in online forums are encouraging, even if it is still unclear how these results mesh with actual practices of online debate. At the same time, some of the increase in egalitarianism that Habermas celebrates is illusory. It may be easy for citizens to speak online, but it remains exceptionally difficult to be heard individually amid the din of competing voices and the countless distractions of non-political content in most settings. Moreover, political blogs, overwhelmingly non-commercial in their early years, are now dominated by sites that either began as or evolved into commercial media outlets. Much of the Internet's remaining promise for altering the public sphere centers not on news sites or political blogs, but in forums that are not explicitly political, from ostensibly non-political discussion groups where political issues arise to the social networking sites. In an important sense, these represent the online analogues of the many forums in offline life where people find themselves in political discussion without having explicitly sought it out: in the workplace, at a party, when bumping into friends at the supermarket. In the world outside the Internet, going to town hall meetings or other events designated for political discussion is a tiny part of most people's lives at best. It should come as no surprise that people's behavior online is not terribly different from their behavior offline. This means that the answer to questions about how people employ the online public sphere will likely come from understanding how people going about their daily lives encounter political discussion, rather than how they seek out and perform in formalized political speech situations.

Citizen Participation

Do the abundant interactive and increasingly diverse sources of political information online stimulate political engagement and participation? Unlike difficult questions about the quality of deliberation, voting and campaign contributions are well measured, although teasing out causal relationships is difficult. Expectations about the Internet's impact on citizen engagement have run the gamut from breathless enthusiasm through cautious skepticism to prophecies of digital doom. We now have fifteen years of published research on this topic, dating from the mid-1990s to the election of Barack Obama.

Though studies have used different methodologies—lab experiments, field studies, and cross-sectional surveys—they add up to a largely consistent portrait. There is a

modest association between access to the Internet and political engagement as measured by voting, contributing money, volunteering time to a political campaign, and other measures. Mossberger, Tolbert, and McNeal (2008) find small effects of Internet use in the form of chat rooms and email on turnout in several elections. Jennings and Zeitner (2003) find a positive association between Internet use and political involvement using a rare panel study with waves comparing the same citizens in 1982 and 1997. Bimber (2003) finds small relationships with campaign donations and attending a political event.

A good deal of discussion has occurred about whether these findings are an artifact of political interest, motivation, or other variables insufficiently controlled in the models (Kenski and Stroud 2006). A meta-analysis published in 2009 examined thirty-eight independent studies of new media use and political participation (Boulianne 2009). In that study, when political interest is controlled for, the resultant partial correlation between new media use and political participation is statistically and substantively insignificant.

Much of the current debate in the literature is addressed to such issues as interest and content choice (Bennett and Iyengar 2008). As Prior (2007) shows convincingly, in a high-choice media environment, political interest is often a stronger predictor of political behavior than socioeconomic variables such as age, gender, income, and even education. Several studies, including Prior's, show a positive effect of Internet use on various forms of engagement when interest is controlled, and support the emerging view that interest and cognitive characteristics interact strongly with Internet use to affect civic engagement and political participation (Shah, Kwak, and Holbert 2001; Prior 2007). For instance, Xenos and Moy (2007) show that an interaction term for political interest and seeing political information online is a stronger predictor of participation than the online information term by itself. Work on social capital and the Internet has produced consistent findings. Shah, Kwak, and Holbert (2001) take on Putnam's (2000) skepticism about the Internet and social capital, and show that Internet use is associated with either increased or decreased social capital, depending on the age cohort of the user and the types of content that users seek out.

Another leading problem in this literature involves what constitutes political participation. Most research so far has focused on very traditional outcomes, especially voting in presidential elections. But there are good reasons to think that many citizens, especially younger ones, are more interested in civic engagement, lifestyle politics, and citizen-directed advocacy than they are in institutionalized forms of participation (Bennett 1998). These broader forms of civic engagement may well be implicated more deeply with Internet use than presidential turnout and other forms of participation in high-profile institutionalized politics, though too little empirical work is available yet. Likewise, little research has thus far examined social media deeply, and much of what we know about participation and the Internet comes from such generic independent measures as how many hours people are online, non-specific questions about obtaining political information online, or indicators of use of political email or chat rooms. The diffusion principle warrants caution in projecting these patterns into a

future of a ubiquitous and universal Internet. Furthermore, it is unclear how much past research will tell us about what happens as younger generations of citizens become more prominent in politics and bring their habits of social media use with them.

Citizen Knowledge

Questions of the Internet and political knowledge intersect closely with those of the public sphere and political participation. The basic Downsian logic would hold that learning is costly, and that citizens will acquire more information as learning becomes cheaper in time and effort (Bimber 2003). An alternative prospect is that with greater choice many citizens will be less likely to be inadvertently exposed to political content, and will therefore become even less informed (Prior 2007). More information and choice may well lead to increased knowledge gaps between the most interested and well informed and those who are less so. An intriguing variant of the problem is whether citizens take advantage of a richer information environment to become informed about different sorts of topics than has been possible with mainstream broadcast and print media.

As with survey research on political engagement, it is precarious to attribute causal influence to a particular medium based on a simple cross-sectional snapshot. Causal attribution requires an experiment, longitudinal analysis, or extensive multivariate controls within a non-longitudinal study. Long-term longitudinal work suggests that citizens on the whole are not growing noticeably better (or worse) informed about political facts, prominent figures, and events. Delli Carpini and Keeter address this at length in their seminal book (1996) and in an updated study focusing on the new media environment (2003). They find:

Several decades of research provide fairly compelling evidence for five conclusions regarding what Americans know about politics: (1) the average American is poorly informed but not uninformed; (2) average levels of knowledge mask important differences across groups; (3) most citizens tend to be information generalists rather than specialists; (4) knowledge is a demonstrably critical foundation for good citizenship; and (5) little change has occurred in any of these tendencies over the past fifty years.   (2003)

Delli Carpini and Keeter take special care to address the recent changes in the digital information environment, concluding that what the Internet and expanded cable TV offerings provide with one hand, they take away with the other. Rich, constantly updated political information is widely available, along with increasingly sophisticated online images, audio, and video. Search engines can track down highly specialized information. But this enticing environment contains much more than political facts and figures. As with the Habermasian concerns above, a key worry for some is that the endless variety of online content will divert "the public from things political—a giant

box of chocolates that lures citizens away from the nourishing food they need" (Delli Carpini and Keeter 2003, 137).

A key element in the Delli Carpini and Keeter analysis is the premise (number 3 above) that the mass public is made up of issue generalists rather than an amalgamation of issue publics focusing on assorted topics of individual interest. The prominence of issue publics or issue specialists remains a controversial question in the literature. There is plentiful evidence that education and political interest lead citizens to care about a large number of issues, a finding sometimes called the education stratification hypothesis (Krosnick 1990). Some recent work also challenges the traditional causal narrative, suggesting that differences in political knowledge after college exist prior to college attendance (Highton 2009). On more than a few issues—such as immigration policy, policy toward Israel, veterans' affairs, or agricultural subsidies—there is ample evidence as well of a defined subset of the public highly attuned to a particular policy area because of personal background or economic interest (Krosnick and Telhami 1995). The question at hand is whether the Internet's sophisticated search capacity and availability of specialized content on nearly every subject imaginable will enhance the influence of issue publics. The evidence is limited, and online behavior continues to evolve, but recent research indicates that online information seekers (1) take advantage of the specialty sites, (2) follow the linkages for additional specialized information, and (3) report that they value and enjoy these resources (Tremayne, Zheng, Lee, and Jeong 2006).

A closely related concern involves selectivity and the possibility that new media are more polarized than traditional broadcast or print news outlets. Baum and Groeling (2008) compared traditional wire services coverage of the 2006 mid-term election with content on both popular political blogs and FoxNews.com. They found systematically stronger partisan filtering among the latter sources. Jones (2002) demonstrated that regular Limbaugh listeners who started out with conservative views moved farther to the right during the mid-1990s, while irregular listeners and non-listeners with conservative views did not shift significantly in either direction. In a finding parallel to Sigelman and Kugler (2003) above, Baldassarri and Gelman (2008) argue that, although political elites have become more polarized over the last several decades, only the most sophisticated and attentive strata of the citizenry have followed suit.

A key element in theorizing about the new media environment is the prospect that the Internet will create a spiral of selective attention, with online partisans choosing information sources that reinforce their preconceptions while ignoring the arguments of those "on the other side." Sunstein (2001) popularized this concern with his discussion of the "Daily Me" approach to content selectivity. Yet such concerns may be overblown for four reasons. First, as Garrett (2009) has demonstrated, although partisans do seek out agreeable information, they do not systematically avoid contrary information when they encounter it inadvertently. Second, clearly partisan observers such as Limbaugh, Hannity, and O'Reilly (not to mention Maddow or Olbermann) spend a lot of time talking about what the liberals (or alternatively conservatives) are saying and doing, albeit in a frequently cynical tone. Incivility toward partisans

on the other side does not necessarily equal ignorance of opponents' claims and ideas. Hindman documents corresponding cross-ideological traffic and hyperlink references in the blogosphere (2009). Third, although partisans may enjoy watching their cheer-leaders wax rhetorical, many of those who are politically active retain a deep interest in hard news reporting (Prior 2007). Fourth, the studies showing substantial selective exposure effects should not be interpreted as saying that few citizens ever see news from a perspective other than their own ideological preference. Most studies find that a significant portion of the news audience is exposed to cross-cutting perspectives, such as Democrats watching Fox News, even while many prefer more congruent news (Iyengar and Hahn 2009). As is true about the political participation, the key effects of the Internet on political knowledge are not to be found in average or aggregate effects so much as in differential effects across categories of citizens.

POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS AND THE ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT OF CITIZENSHIP

The dynamics of political participation and knowledge in mass publics may change only slowly and differentially, but more dramatic changes may become evident in competitive campaigns for office or around issues, as adversarial professionals seek to use the Internet for advantage.

One hallmark of American elections, of course, is that they have been dominated by two political parties since the founding of the republic, excepting occasional flirtations with minor party candidates. It is true as well that incumbent candidates have numerous advantages over challengers. Where issue advocacy is concerned, a hallmark of the US is the presence of an enormous marketplace of political organizations vying with one another for influence over public policy. Like incumbents who dominate election campaigns, interest groups tend to dominate public policymaking over the influence of unorganized citizens, and richer groups tend to prevail over poorer ones. One simple question about the Internet, then, is whether lower costs to produce, distribute, and target political information will level these playing fields, and give underdog candidates, less rich organizations, or individual citizens greater prospects. The literature provides an answer for aspects of this question. In the case of high-salience national campaigns for office, such as the presidency, the answer appears to be no. Bimber (2003) analyzed five case studies of very diverse political entities involved both in campaigns for office and in issue advocacy. He concludes that although smaller and poorer organizations and candidates exploit new media to substitute for the big media resources they lack, larger and more established political organizations make expensive—and often effective—investments that small organizations cannot afford. When both well-resourced and underresourced organizations go head-to-head in highly institutionalized contexts such as presidential elections, resources remain a

key advantage and the gap between them persists. The most compelling possibilities are not in such settings, but within formal organizations themselves as these adapt to new possibilities and expectations from citizens, and also in new kinds of groups that bring new issues to the political agenda and that engage in politics outside highly institutionalized contexts.

This pattern is confirmed in numerous studies, including Phil Howard's detailed ethnography of political mobilization and campaign organizations in the early 2000s:

A decade ago, only the wealthier lobbyists and presidential campaigns could afford the services of Databank.com [a pseudonymous political strategy and data analysis firm], but now the firm also sells detailed relational databases to the country's nascent grassroots movements and individuals eager to start a small campaign of their own. Political data became a marketable product, something that could be sold to grassroots movements, elite campaigns or corporate lobbyists.   (Howard 2006, 29)

Political scientists have been especially curious about the impact of the new media on the structure and prominence of the dominant political parties. Nelson Polsby and others have characterized the last five decades as the mass media age of party politics (Polsby 1984). Polsby noted that structural reforms after the 1968 election reduced the power of the party insiders in the iconic "smoke-filled rooms" and made winning the party nomination the product of a media-saturated primary process. So we ask, will new technology weaken the mass media, reenergize party organizations, or even freshly empower third party efforts? Several scholars have argued that, while the Internet may lessen dependence on big media and facilitate cheaper and more narrowly targeted political communication, it will neither reenergize the major parties nor hasten their decline (Norris 2000).

So, for the most part, the Internet does not look likely to alter the distribution of power among major players much, particularly for political contests taking place in traditional institutionalized forums. A different question is: what happens when political organizing happens outside traditional venues and organizations, in campaigns other than for national office, or where organizing takes alternative forms such as protest or political consumerism? Though these sorts of cases have received less study, the Internet has played an essential role in many recent and varied instances of political activism, from the 2006 student immigration walkout in Los Angeles high schools to the demonstrations at the 2010 Copenhagen climate change conference. The Internet increases the speed of mobilization and the ability of organizers to shift scale from the local to the global and back (Bennett, Breunig, and Givens 2008). It permits activists to mobilize people who become interested in one issue, even if temporarily, and who do not necessarily "belong" to anything but their own personal social networks. Structurally, this is a substantial change in how mobilization can work. The Internet also affects the structure of organizers themselves, permitting organizational hybridity (Chadwick 2007) and contributing to a profusion of new organizational forms that are less dependent for their existence upon traditional resources and infrastructure, or on traditional practices of "membership" (Bimber, Stohl, and Flanagin

2009). All this means that the menu of participatory opportunities for interested citizens is expanding, and to a large degree it is doing so on citizens' own terms. What to participate in, when, and even how, are decisions increasingly in the hands of citizens themselves, rather than the formal leadership hierarchy of interest groups or political campaigns. These developments suggest that significant changes may be coming in the structure of collective action broadly, even if highly institutionalized election campaigns for high office remain dominated by elites and campaign professionals. How citizens choose among options for engagement and political expression in this changing, expanding, and less well-bounded environment remains to be seen.

The Changing Context for Citizenship

In the study of media and politics, the media have often played the role of convenient whipping boy. When US survey data began showing declines in political trust and efficacy during the 1960s and 1970s, television was seen as the obvious culprit (Robinson 1976). There is a long tradition of attributing negative dimensions of the human condition to the mass media, most notably violence and irresponsible sexual behavior. But in the case of the Internet and politics the dominant theme has been surprisingly positive. Scholars have been inclined to believe that the expanded media environment will be able to engage, inform, and enrich the political consciousness of the otherwise easily distracted citizenry.

One of the earliest book-length studies reviewing these issues was published in 2000 and concluded that the null hypothesis had won out: the Internet environment represented nothing more than "politics as usual" (Margolis and Resnick 2000). Perhaps they spoke too soon. Online and mobile media are becoming intimately integrated into the daily flow of political information and occasional waves of citizen mobilization. The dramatic changes in technology have not led to similarly dramatic changes in the political psychology of the average citizen. But Internet-facilitated changes in citizenship are numerous, subtle, conditional, and still evolving.

We have been using the term "Internet" to try to capture the diverse elements of interoperability, interactivity, intelligence, portability, and communicative capacity commonly associated with the digital revolution. When many of the studies in the extant literature were being conducted, the term "Internet" conjured up a desktop computer with a bulky monitor tethered to a wall. Now laptops outsell desktops, and to many people the Internet means Facebook and Twitter on a smartphone. It will likely mean something else in another decade. Those analyzing the Internet are attempting to assess a moving target as new stages of Internet diffusion arrive.

In this chapter we have reviewed four dimensions of citizenship of particular salience in these literatures. In each of the four dimensions we have documented a changing information environment and subtle but important responses by the public. The most consistent finding across all four domains is that the Internet has not changed the US

into a country of highly politicized policy wonks and activists. The unrealistic expecta-
tions of optimists have not been met, and online politics has had more success at
drawing in the politically engaged than in converting the disaffected. Even with online
fundraising—the area of political participation where the Internet's impact is clearest—
much of the cash raised online is spent on high-cost television political advertising.
Exposure to ads is inadvertent, and not limited to the subset of politically active citizens
who spend long hours on political websites. Still, television advertising itself is chang-
ing as more citizens watch video programming online and as they routinely filter out
advertising with digital video recorders. Sooner or later it will all be on the Internet.
The consensus among campaign professionals that "television remains king" may be
true for now, but it is not likely to hold forever.

Moreover, turnout and campaigning for high office are not the only areas to be
looking for consequences of technological change. As the Internet began to diffuse into
politics, these were naturally among the first places that social scientists looked for
effects. But many broader questions are likely more important: how people are affected
differentially or conditionally by their use of the technology, how the Internet subtly
changes the context for political discussion and learning, how technological change
affects the ways people choose among opportunities to engage in a shifting environ-
ment for news and political mobilization, and as a consequence whose interests and
values prevail in the democratic system. For answers to these key questions, the best
advice we can offer is a phrase made popular in the broadcast era: stay tuned.

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