



Facebook, Mobile Phones, and Political Participation during the 2011 Singapore General Election

Marko Skoric
Assistant Professor
Wee Kim Wee School of Communication & Information
Nanyang Technological University

Mobile & Social Media Today

- 5.3+ billion mobile phone subscribers in the world
 - 1 billion mobile broadband subscribers (i.e. 3G)
- 750+ million Facebook users
 - Open to anyone above 13
 - Still growing globally, but growth stalling in the US and Canada

Mobiles and Facebook in Singapore

- 90.7% Singaporeans have a mobile phone
 - Very high 3G penetration rate
- 46.7% Singaporeans have a Facebook profile
 - 18% have membership in at least one Facebook group concerned with politics or public affairs

(Nielsen/IPS, June 2011)

Mobile Phones: Civic & Political Engagement

- Mobile phones provide a platform for sending, receiving and sharing political information
- Key ingredient to a knowledgeable and active citizenship is political talk
 - Use of mobile phones for discussing politics and public affairs with one's close networks is positively associated with political participation and openness
 - Discussing politics with others with similar views lead to political mobilization
- Mobile phones frequently used for micro-coordination
- Mobile contact fosters close ties among people

What is Facebook?

- Social network sites (SNS) like Facebook are web-based services that allow individuals to:
 1. Construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system
 2. Articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection
 3. View and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system

(boyd & Ellison, 2007)

Facebook and Social Ties

- Facebook used mainly for maintaining existing social ties
- Context collapse
 - Mixing of personal, family and professional circles
 - Enter Google +
- Lowering the transaction cost and increasing the information flow
 - The strength of weak ties (Granovetter, 1973)

Facebook: Civic & Political Engagement

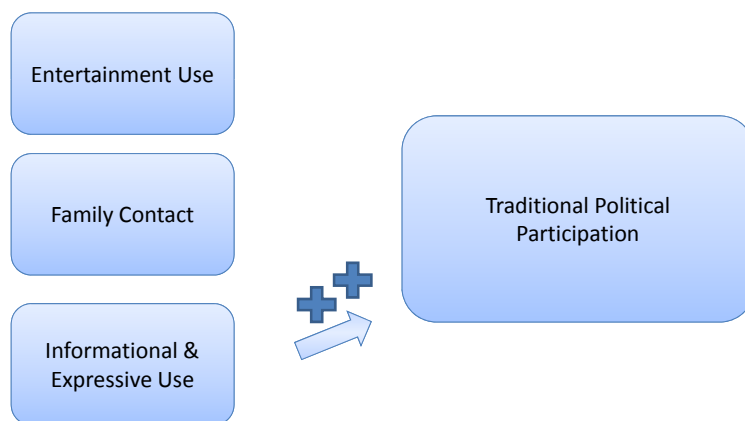
- Studies indicate a positive impact of Facebook use on civic and political engagement
 - Facebook use linked with social capital
 - Particularly suitable for mobilization and organization, less for debate & persuasion
- Everyday use of Facebook related to civic & community engagement, but not to traditional, offline political participation
 - Membership in political groups on Facebook related to traditional political participation

Research Questions

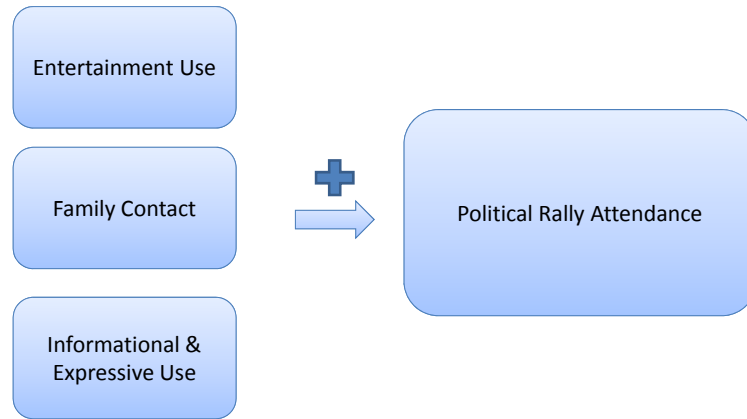
- What is the relationship between different types of mobile phone use and political participation?
- What is the relationship between generic Facebook use and political participation?
- What is the relationship between political uses of Facebook and political participation?

Findings

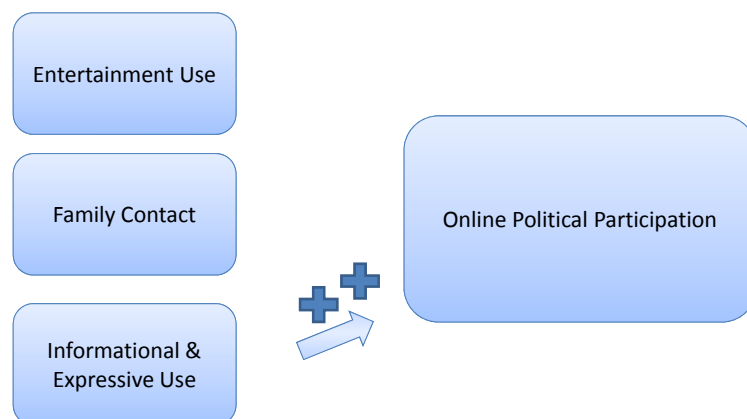
Mobiles and Traditional Participation



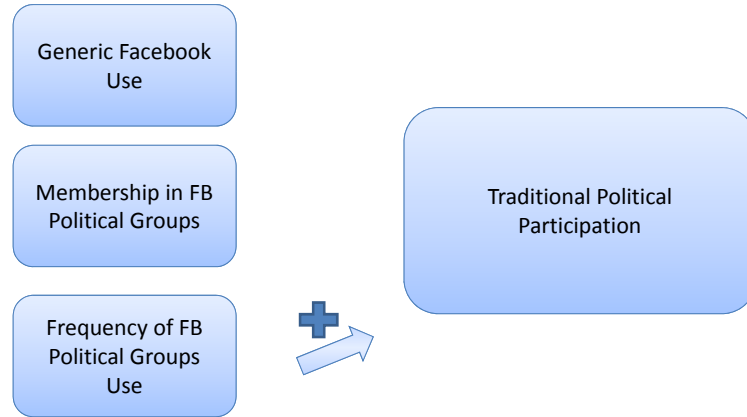
Mobiles and Rally Attendance



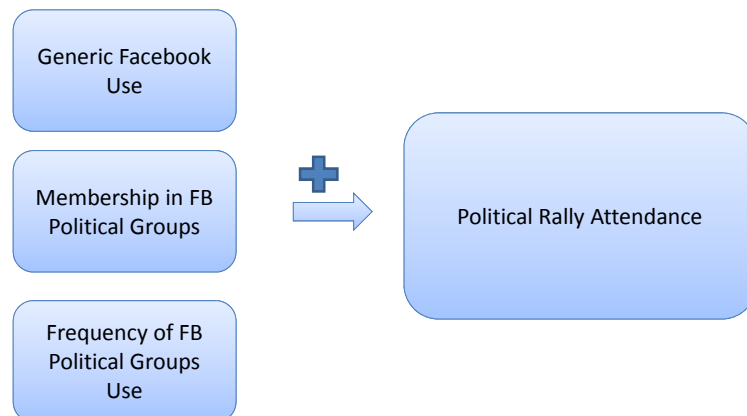
Mobiles and Online Participation



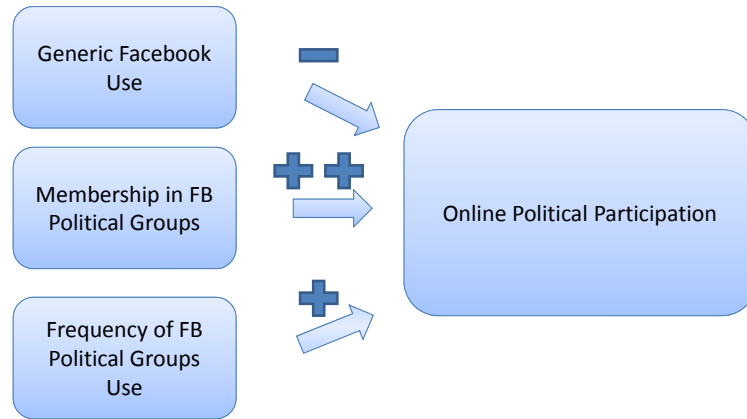
Facebook and Traditional Participation



Facebook and Rally Attendance



Facebook and Online Participation



Future Developments

- Increasing share of personal messages are communicated over public or semi-public networks
 - Email use is decreasing
- Greater ability to collect, store, and analyze personal data
 - Real-time market/public opinion analytics
- Rising expectations regarding transparency of public organizations
- Greater volatility of public opinion

Thank you.

marko@ntu.edu.sg