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**Facebook is... Fostering Political Engagement: A Study of Online Social
Networking Groups and Offline Participation**

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Abstract:

Can online groups help to foster political engagement among citizens? We employ a multi-method design incorporating content analysis of political group pages and original survey research of university undergraduates ($n = 455$) to assess the quality of online political group discussion and effects of online group membership on political engagement measured through political knowledge and political participation surrounding the 2008 election. We find through OLS and 2SLS multivariate regression analyses that participation in online political groups strongly predicts offline political participation by engaging members online. However, we fail to confirm through 2SLS that there is a corresponding positive effect on political knowledge, likely due to low quality online group discussion. This work contributes to an active dialogue on political usage of the Internet and civic engagement by further specifying forms of Internet use and corresponding effects. Overall, we conclude that online groups perform many of the same positive civic functions as offline groups, specifically in terms of mobilizing political participation.

(Word count: 160)

New media is a growing force in the study of civic engagement. There are many levels of analysis within the discussion of new media effects ranging from the global economy to personal use of the Internet. Our research exists on the level of the democratic divide (Norris, 2001), where researchers study individual-level usage of the Internet and analyze its effect in terms of civic engagement. We join an active discussion of whether political Internet use will be helpful, harmful, or irrelevant in its effects on civic society and political engagement. Many are optimistic about the ability of political Internet use to increase political participation, (Mossberger, Tolbert, & McNeal, 2008; Dhavan Shah, Cho, Eveland, & Nojin Kwak, 2005; Xenos & Moy, 2007), knowledge (Xenos and Moy 2007), and civic engagement through social capital (Jennings & Zeitner, 2003; Norris, 2001; D. V. Shah, N. Kwak, & Holbert, 2001). The study of the Internet and new media is growing rapidly, through increased research efforts and better instruments of measurement, and we are beginning to get a better idea of how exactly to go about measuring this influence.

Recently, researchers have begun to examine specific forms of “political use” of the Internet, an approach we find to be more indicative of the mechanisms through which new media engages society. Mossberger, Tolbert and McNeal (2008) find that chat rooms, political email correspondence, and online news exposure predict higher voting rates. Shah, Kwak and Holbert (2001) demonstrate that information exchange over the Internet fosters civic engagement, trust, and life contentment in younger generations, while social recreation on the Internet is negatively correlated with trust and life contentment. As we begin to examine more closely what we mean by “political use,” we develop a more accurate picture of the ways in which citizens engage with the Internet. We contribute to this exploration by examining online political group membership facilitated through the popular social networking site, Facebook.

When people are involved in groups and voluntary associations, both individuals and society benefit. Social scientists have celebrated the advantages of group membership and associations for decades and some have prescribed participation in groups as an “all-purposive elixir for the ills of society” (Dekker & Uslaner, 2001). Existing research demonstrates that group membership encourages trust (Brehm & Rahn, 1997; Jennings & Stoker, 2004), democratic values, and the development of important political skills

(McFarland & Thomas, 2006). Furthermore, membership in a group provides necessary motivation and incentive to be politically informed (Coleman, 1988; Fishkin, 1991). Indeed, described as a “nation of joiners” in the 18th century by foreign visitor Alexis De Tocqueville, political engagement in the U.S. has historically been spurred by group membership.

In one of the more crucial calls for attention to groups, Putnam (2000) details an alarming trend amid group membership and civic engagement in the United States; as membership in civic groups decreases so too does civic engagement. Putnam believes the stock of social capital underpinning civic engagement is built up through participation in voluntary organizations, largely offline. Yet the Internet is changing the ways in which we communicate, organize, and socialize (Bimber, Flanagin, & Stohl, 2005; Hampton & Wellman, 2001; Rich, 1999; Klein, 1999; Dhavan Shah et al., 2005). More specifically, the Internet revolution has brought about the inception of online groups that appear to resemble offline groups in function, if not in form.

The observed decline in offline groups paired with growth among online groups raises an important question for civic engagement and new media: Can we expect the positive benefits of offline group participation to also be present in online group participation as well? In this paper, we anticipate advancing scholarship on the effects of online political group membership specifically in terms of *political engagement*. Heeding advice from Berger (2009) we avoid measuring effects on civic engagement broadly, and focus more directly on political engagement in the form of political participation during the 2008 election and political knowledge acquisition. We argue that online group membership is likely to encourage offline political participation, but is unlikely to correspond with subsequent and ubiquitous gains in political knowledge among joiners.

Focusing on the social networking website Facebook, we use a multi-method design to learn more about the content of online political groups and potential influence they have on political engagement. We begin with analysis of original survey data (n = 455) to measure membership in online political groups and levels of offline political activity and knowledge. We find that increased online political group membership predicts increased levels of offline political participation but not increased levels of

political knowledge To elaborate on these findings, we conduct an analysis of the content of group pages and group wall commentary where we find information quality to be quite low and relatively opinionated rather than information rich. We conclude with a discussion of our findings and suggest direction for future research in this area.

The Effects of Group Membership:

Group membership is thought to encourage political engagement through a number of mechanisms. First, group membership opens channels for discussion. Discussion is thought to be integral to learning and to encourage efficacy among citizens, leading to more informed decision-making and higher rates of political activity (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1997; Fishkin, 1991; Robinson & Levy, 1986). Discussion encourages learning and efficacy amongst citizens by necessitating the expression of views (Taber & Lodge, 2006), and forcing more thoughtful consideration of viewpoints (Huckfeldt, 2007). Engaging in political debate is thought to be especially important in helping people develop skills that encourage a deeper understanding and subsequent engagement in political affairs, highlighting the importance of diverse discussion groups to a more politically engaged citizenry (Gastil, Deess, & Weisler, 2002; Dietram A. Scheufele, 2002; Nisbet & D. A. Scheufele, 2004). Yet message exposure is only as diverse as a person's network.

When most people do discuss politics, "their conversations usually take place within primary groups of family and close friends - that is, among like-minded people who largely resemble each other socially and politically" (Price & Capella, 2002; see also Wyatt, Katz, & Kim, 2000). Mutz and Martin (2001) find cause for concern as they show a trend toward ever-homogenizing discussion networks, however, they go on to note that our media environments are more diverse than our real ones and that when compared to personal interactions, people have less ability and desire to exercise selective exposure on media content (p. 99; see also Brundidge & Rice, 2009) Additionally, some have taken the hopeful view that new, albeit intangible, venues unrestrained by geography will enable diversified discussion groups and a more engaged citizenry (Kollock & Smith, 1999) or that online messaging will lead to more civic participation (Shah et al. 2005). The Internet exists as an emporium of diverse information and facilitator low-cost

discussion where people can communicate freely, without the restriction of time and space.

However, selection capabilities and little regulation of material available online might instead beget groups with members who share similar values and ideas; in other words, the Internet possibly will lead to a heightening of selective exposure - the tendency of individuals to expose themselves selectively to agreeable messages. By the utility of choice lent to Internet users, those surfing the web can choose to only join groups and discuss politics with others with whom they agree (Bimber, 2008). Thus, although spatially broad, online groups may tend to be ideologically narrow (Sunstein, 2001).

Additionally, discussion that takes place online is temporally broken; although a number of social networking sites have a forum or application for chatting and discussion, most dialogue takes place on message boards and over the course of a few days or months. For instance, a group member can post a comment on a message board and either never return to see if others have responded, or return several days later to continue the conversation. Either way, this type of discussion adds dimension to our traditional understanding of deliberation, and possibly stymies the effects.

Another valuable component of group membership that may or may not be present online is accountability. Olson (1965) famously argues that face time is an important component in the enforcement of member participation; by ensuring individuals will physically run into each other, small groups more specifically will enhance membership participation. Correspondingly, larger groups are less likely to incentivize member participation and individual accountability. The Internet alternatively, does not bring people into physical contact or require as much commitment from its members, and this has potentially harmful associated effects (Putnam, 2000). If we apply this logic to group membership online, it suggests that online groups may be unlikely to hold members accountable. Not only do members of online groups not meet face to face, but members of online groups can choose to be anonymous, or have multiple or false identities (Nie & Erbring, 2000; Kolko & Reid, 1998). This can have negative effects on one's online community. As Kolko and Reid (1998) suggest, individuals who are anonymous or have multiple identities online are less likely to maintain their online

identities and as a result be unlikely to contribute in a meaningful way to an online community. These findings also suggest that elements of political engagement may be hindered as a result. In conclusion, several attributes of offline groups, such as face-to-face communication, physical group membership, and fluid personal discussion are not staples of online membership, leading us to believe that online political groups may have a more nuanced effect on members than offline groups have in the past.

As the scholarship now stands, we have many competing as well as consistent expectations of the influence of online group activity on political engagement. Early work quickly called into question the exchange of face-to-face interaction for online correspondence, but later work has begun to identify areas in which the two forms are similar and even complementary (Krueger, 2002; Norris & Jones, 1998; D. V. Shah et al., 2001; D. V. Shah, McLeod, & Yoon, 2001; Wellman, Haase, Witte, & Hampton, 2001; Williams, 2007). As we continue to move forward in understanding the effects of online activity, greater attention must be paid to the type of information being exchanged, specific venues being used, and the quality of opinions being expressed online. We move this line of research forward by opening up social networking sites and looking inside at the specific ways in which groups within these sites foster activities that may relate to political participation and knowledge. Through detailed analysis of the information exchanged among online groups, online group membership rates, and political engagement and knowledge of group members, we are able to empirically explore the theoretical expectations of online group participation.

Facebook and Social Networking Sites:

Facebook is an online social networking website that lets users interact with each other by sharing information about themselves via personal profiles. Users share their information by “friending” others and allowing them access to their profile. As of mid-2009, Facebook is currently considered the largest online social network with over 200 million active users, surpassing other online social networks such as MySpace, Friendster, and Bebo. Originally created by several Harvard students in February 2004, Facebook was modeled after paper pages that Harvard circulated profiling staff, faculty, and students. Facebook originally began as a service only offered to universities, but

continually expanded its availability until Facebook allowed global registration in September 2006. Since then, Facebook has grown rapidly, becoming especially popular among younger generations and college students.

Although the premise of Facebook rests with sharing information via an online profile that contains basic information about the user, there have been important additions to the site that have fundamentally changed how users interact with others on Facebook. Facebook introduced the “groups” application in September 2004 as one of its basic features. Groups allows users to share common interests with each other by providing a common space where users can meet others interested in a specific topic, disseminate information about that topic, and have public discussions relevant to that topic. The group application was one of the earliest and still remains one of the most pivotal features contributing to the interactive nature of Facebook. Facebook has also made the wall (where users can post messages on other people’s profiles), notes (where users can share their views with blog-like posts), share (where users can post links to external websites on their profile), and fan pages (where users can show support for a public figure), features enabling users to continually interact with each other.

Research Methodology:

This is a study of a specific application of social networking sites (SNSs), mainly online political group participation. Of the work to date that has focused on SNSs (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Zywicki & Danowski, 2008; Lewis, Kaufman, & Christakis, 2008) none have examined the specific applications of these platforms. This study charts new water by examining online group membership facilitated by social networking sites. To do this, we use a multi-method design which employs a survey to test our primary hypotheses as well as supplementary content analysis to better understand our findings.

Very few large, national surveys include measures for specific types of SNS usage that we would like to explore in our study. Consequently, we designed a survey that allows us to open up general SNS usage and learn more about the specific ways in which people use these sites as well as the political and civic ramifications of their usage. We sampled undergraduate college students who are hyper-users of Facebook and other

online SNSs, thus making them an important sample population to examine for potential effects. Based on this survey we can begin to gain a better understanding of which SNS applications, if any, are civically virtuous.

Political participation and political knowledge are critical components of general political engagement; therefore, we examine two primary hypotheses. Of the available Facebook applications, we specifically expect that online group participation will facilitate offline participation because online groups promote activity and engagement that transfers readily to the offline world. Online groups allow members to express their opinion through posts and to engage on many levels with the group discussion and information sharing; these activities provide a psychological connection with political activity online that we predict will stimulate political empowerment offline.

H1: Online political group membership leads to increased levels of offline political participation.

We would also expect that the information sources that are provided for members to access and share would increase levels of political knowledge if fully exploited and informed. However, information transmission online is low-cost and perhaps too easy in a sense. In face-to-face interactions, people are physically held accountable for their statements and conversation. By contrast, we believe that the anonymity or lack of personal interaction online may lead to lower quality information sharing and provision. Because it is very easy to post comments online, and because people can do so without much social risk, we expect to find a paucity of high quality information being shared on group walls and therefore no correlation with increased levels of political knowledge.

H2: Online political group membership does not lead to increased levels of political knowledge.

We use detailed content analysis of self-defined “political” group pages on Facebook in order to offer supplementary insight on the information content and quality of these group pages which supports our survey research and findings with additional explanation.

Survey Analysis:

We constructed a survey that was administered to college undergraduates at a public university in California (n = 455). The survey allows us to gather cross-sectional data about Facebook usage among a relevant population including new measures for distinctly political versus non-political usage. Subjects were sampled according to large course enrollment during the beginning of the Spring quarter 2009. We surveyed students in three large political science classes; two lower division courses and one upper division course. Nearly 70% of the students surveyed were declared, or intend to become, Political Science majors. It is reasonable to assume that this sample might be more politically engaged on average than a random sample of students. The survey took 15 minutes to complete on average and all surveys were conducted over the course of one week.

We suspect that there may be some simultaneity between people who choose to join online political groups and people who engage politically. While endogeneity is a potential problem that we anticipate, we run an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression as a starting point for determining the effects of group membership on political participation and political knowledge. To address the problem of endogeneity, we also employ a two-stage least squares regression (2SLS).

Online group participation can take on many forms, traditionally general chat rooms or mail list-serves. The technological innovation that Facebook introduces combines these traditional forms with new ways to link to more information, videos and pictures, an easy way to learn about upcoming events and engage in news sharing. Our independent variable is a measure of how many political groups the respondent is a member of as a proportion of their total amount of group membership (*PG*), ranging on a 5-point ordinal scale from none to all. There are two primary dependent variables that we are most interested in, offline political participation (*PP*) and political knowledge (*PK*). To measure offline political participation, we created an aggregate scale composed of ten modes of political participation, each scored on a four-point scale indicating participation

frequency. The scale ranges from 0-40 ($M = 19.29$, $SD = 4.18$, $\alpha = .733$).¹ The measure for political knowledge is also an aggregate variable composed of dummy variables for correct answers to 11 political knowledge questions. The scale ranges from 0-11 ($M = 9.47$, $SD = 1.64$, $\alpha = .621$).² The equation estimated for political participation and political knowledge is:

$$(PP), (PK) = \alpha + b_1PG + b_2S + b_3A + b_4Y + b_5I + b_6ID + b_7R + b_8PI + b_9ON + b_{10}P + \varepsilon \quad (1.1)$$

In the above equation, a number of measures are used to control for socioeconomic and demographic conditions as well as political factors that are thought to have an influence on participation and knowledge (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). To control for the possible impact of sex on political participation we include a dummy variable for sex (S), coded 0 for male and 1 for female. We include a scale for age (A) as well as an ordinal measure for year in school (Y), coded low to high. We asked subjects to report their family income (I) because this is likely a better indicator of their socioeconomic status than the income of a student. Family income is reported on an ordinal scale ranging from “under \$50,000” to “over \$250,000” in \$50,000 increments, with 6 representing over \$250,000. Party identification (PI) is measured using a 5-point scale moving from strong Democrat to strong Republican, with a score of 3 coded for an Independent. Highly differentiated racial diversity proved to be an insignificant factor predicting participation and knowledge, so we use a basic dummy variable (R) here where white / non-Hispanic is coded as 1 and all else coded as 0. Political interest (PI) is controlled for using a 7 point scale measuring the respondent’s

¹ The participation scale includes measures of whether the subject voted in 2008, plans to vote in the 2010 election, tried to persuade someone to vote, donated money to a political candidate or campaign, worked as a paid employee for a candidate or campaign, worked as a volunteer for a candidate or campaign, attended a political rally, stuck a campaign sticker on window or car, participated in a boycott, and signed a petition.

² The knowledge scale includes measures for whether the subject provided the correct response to the following 11 questions: which party holds the majority in the House of Representatives, vote required to override a presidential veto, which party is more conservative, whose responsibility is it to determine if a law is constitutional, how many terms can the President serve, how many members are on the Supreme Court, what political office is held by Nancy Pelosi (write-in), can you vote online in a presidential election, do you need to pass a literacy test to vote in CA, which 2008 presidential candidate most favored universal health care, which 2008 presidential candidate most favored troop reduction in Iraq.

overall interest in politics. Lastly, recent work suggests that online news gatherers (*ON*) are more likely to vote (Mossberger, Tolbert & McNeal 2008), and we suspect that privacy (*P*) online may also correspond with political reclusiveness, so we include a dummy variable for online news readers and a measure for online privacy that ranges on a 4-point scale from few restrictions to many restrictions.

We first test the hypotheses that increased online political participation predicts offline political participation and political knowledge by using a multivariate OLS regression. However, we also use a 2SLS regression to control for any simultaneity between our primary variables. In the first stage of the two stage least squares equation for *both* political participation and political knowledge, PG is instrumented using:

$$PG = \alpha + b_1LM + b_2FL + \varepsilon \quad (1.2)$$

We use two variables as instruments for political group membership that correlate with increased group membership but are not politically motivated: how long respondents have been Facebook members (*LM*), calculated on a 5 point scale from “less than 6 months” to “more than 3 years” and how frequently respondents log on to Facebook (*FL*) calculated on a 6 point scale from “never or almost never” to “I always stay logged on.” The second stage is similar to Equation 1.1.

Content Analysis:

Through in-depth content analysis of political groups, we gain a better understanding of the type of information and discourse to be found among these online groups. We argue that political information levels will remain unaffected by increased political group membership. Should the survey analysis confirm our hypothesis, then it will be important to understand why this seemingly contradictory effect occurs. By analyzing the content of information posted to these online political groups, we are able to assess the quality of information accessible through online group participation.

We analyzed the content of 39 randomly selected “political” Facebook group pages, accounting for numerous dimensions of information content and quality available through these online groups. We coded the information for these political group pages (Cohen's Kappa = .71), gathering general group information including: number of news

posts, links posted by the group administrators, shared videos, advertised events, and group wall discussion. Groups usually allow for members to post comments on “the wall” to be viewed by members and non-members alike. These comments on the group wall are seen as a proxy for discussion that might occur in face-to-face interaction in a traditional offline group. We randomly selected 20 comments from each wall ($n = 780$) to be coded according to information content, comment length, opinion strength, and overall information quality.³

Results:

Table 1 presents the findings from the OLS and 2SLS models with political participation as the dependent variable (H1). The political participation scale is coded so that higher scores are associated with higher probabilities of participating offline. This table indicates that our primary independent variable, political group membership through Facebook, has a significant effect on offline political participation after controlling for other influential factors. This relationship also holds up after we instrument for group participation through a two-stage regression model.

Table 2 examines political knowledge as the dependent variable (H2), where we observe that online group membership through Facebook is a significant predictor of political knowledge in the OLS model. However, when we use the two-stage model, the predicted probability of group membership fails to achieve statistical significance, suggesting that the relationship observed in the OLS model is a result of endogeneity.

As such, it seems that we can make the case that membership in online political groups via the Facebook platform encourages offline political participation, even when the simultaneity problem is taken into account. At the very least, we can be confident that online groups encourage offline political participation and therefore we confirm H1. When we turn to political knowledge, however, H2 is supported in the 2SLS model which controls for simultaneity showing that political group membership does not bolster levels of political knowledge. Therefore, while political engagement encompasses both political participation and political knowledge, our study cannot confirm the fact that

³ We used a random number generator to produce 20 numbers ranging from 1 to n . We then scrolled through the wall pages to find the corresponding wall post and pasted it onto a sheet for our research assistants to code.

Facebook creates fully politically engaged participants, rather it seems that it encourages political participation but not corresponding political knowledge. To understand more about why this might be the case, we turn to the content analysis of the group pages.

The political group pages present visitors with several sources of information, particularly in self-guided formats. Sixty-two percent of the pages we coded provided additional contact information for the group outside of Facebook and 82% posted additional website links in the designated “links” space (see Table 3). A large number of the groups posted news links, photos, and discussion topics for the visitors to engage in online, where only 20% of the groups we coded provided information about offline events.

Figure 1 presents our findings across three critical dimensions among the 780 wall posts randomly selected for analysis. Overall the informational content and quality of discussion on the walls was very low. Forty-one percent of the wall posts were “not very” informative - or did not share any new information, and only 16% were classified as sharing “very” thoughtful information, or information that offered a new perspective or information. The strength of the opinion offered in the post was coded not opinionated or neutral, low opinion, or high opinion by inciting people or advocating for action. Overwhelmingly, 523 of the 780 (67%) posts offered low or high opinion strengths suggesting that the general discussion in Facebook groups is opinionated. The wall posts were also coded for their overall information quality, ranging from “Poor” where the information was inaccurate, incoherent, or did not support thought with evidence, to “Excellent” where the post supports their thought with evidence and/or thoughtful explanation. The overall quality of the posts we coded was poor and only 4% were thought to offer excellent quality discussion.

Our content analysis indicates that political Facebook group users often do not share much new information and the information they do share tends to be somewhat inaccurate, incoherent, or not very well supported with evidence. As a forum for people to easily engage and share their opinions, online groups are beneficial; however as a forum to learn new political information online groups are ineffective due in part to low quality wall discussion.

Discussion:

This research and its findings are significant on three important levels. First, we illustrate the need to start looking deeper into SNS usage, and political Internet usage more generally. Social networking sites are not a use in themselves, as much as they are a platform for various applications that have important implications for studying how people interact in this era, such as group formation. Through technological advances over time, Facebook provides a service through which groups can form and function in ways very similar to offline groups. In addition, Facebook and other social networking sites have created new ways to bridge the gap between users through groundbreaking interactive technologies which we show foster political participation among members.

We show here that online groups produce similar effects to offline groups, specifically in their ability to foster political engagement. The 2008 election solidified the importance of the internet broadly, and SNS specifically, as critical elements of politics and campaigning today. This election left us wondering if and how this was true. We set out to identify the ways in which SNS such as Facebook, and peer-to-peer networking can facilitate political engagement offline in the form of political participation and political knowledge. We find that Facebook allows for the creation of online political groups that provide many of the benefits that we have known face-to-face groups to provide for decades. The content analysis of online political groups shows various interactive applications that online groups can employ. Group visitors can link to other related websites, view photos or videos, and post on the wall or discussion board; all of these actions are interactive and participatory. The applications available through Facebook groups involve the visitor or member deeper in the community through online participation that we find also predicts offline participation as well. In this sense, Facebook is...fostering political engagement.

The last point we make is bitter-sweet. The fundamentals of democracy assume a knowledgeable public, one that is capable of representing its own self-interest effectively. A healthy democracy, then, should see tandem movement between political knowledge and political participation. Here we find that while online group membership predicts increased levels of offline political participation, we do not see an equally significant

effect on levels of political knowledge. The content analysis of group wall posts offers a suggestion for why this might be the case. The information content and quality of most wall posts were found to be very poor, generally lacking support for their claims, incoherent, or simply opinionated. In other words, group members are exposed to little new or well-articulated information about the political causes around which these groups form. The information is more likely to be reinforcing and therefore mobilizing, but not enlightening and therefore educational.

Through content analysis of online group pages coupled with a survey of high-level Facebook users, we offer a step forward in understanding the political nature and effects of online social networking sites. We find that online groups that are facilitated through SNS platforms perform many similar functions to the offline groups. Online political groups are effective in increasing offline political participation, but appear to fall short of increasing levels of political knowledge. We find this is the case because while the groups offer many applications that members can use to feel engaged and politically empowered, the group wall discussion falls short of quality deliberation and offers little substantive information sharing.

Future research should continue to examine particular uses of new media and the Internet, rather than simply access. We anticipate that as research in this field continues to grow in demand and interest that this will become easier to do. Furthermore, researchers should look at more specific forms of political participation that are facilitated through new media, both offline and online. As part of this, we should continue to expand our understanding of what it means to be a political participant in the era of new media as these definitions, and survey measures, should continue to change rapidly.

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Table 1:

OLS and Two-Stage Least Squares Estimates of Political Group Membership on Facebook and Offline Political Participation				
Variables	OLS		2SLS	
	b (se)	p > z	b (se)	p > z
Political group membership on FB	1.785(.315)	.000		
Predicted probability of group membership ^a			2.742(1.334)	.041
Female	-.103(.475)	.830	-.269(.537)	.617
Age	.231(.299)	.442	.297(.320)	.354
Family income	-.280(.150)	.063	-.240(.163)	.143
Party identification	.441(.188)	.020	.351(.227)	.124
Year in school	-.096(.393)	.807	-.057(.406)	.888
Political interest	.923(.206)	.000	.667(.404)	.100
White	.636(.522)	.225	.495(.568)	.385
Online news user	.038(.024)	.116	.030(.027)	.274
Privacy restrictions	-.538(.298)	.073	-.482(.315)	.128
R ²	.411		.382	
Adjusted R ²	.380		.349	
F	13.12		9.86	
N	199		199	

Note: Data derived from survey of 455 college undergraduates. Unstandardized regression coefficients with standard error in parentheses. All tests are two-tailed tests. To control for possible interdependence between group membership and political participation offline, we estimated a two-stage least squares model

^a Predicted probabilities from first-stage OLS regression where the dependent variable is political group membership, and independent variables are female, age, family income, party identification, year in school political interest, White, Asian, Black, Hispanic, Online news user, and privacy restrictions. Years on Facebook and frequency of Facebook log-in are the instrumental variables.

Table 2:

OLS and Two-Stage Least Squares Estimates of Political Group Membership on Facebook and Political Knowledge				
Variables	OLS		2SLS	
	b (se)	p > z	b (se)	p > z
Political group membership on FB	.295(.140)	.036		
Predicted probability of group membership ^a			1.045(783)	.184
Female	-.590(.225)	.009	-.695(.265)	.009
Age	.286(.138)	.040	.392(.185)	.035
Family income	.099(.070)	.158	.114(.077)	.139
Party identification	.008(.087)	.931	-.063(.118)	.596
Year in school	-.340(.178)	.058	-.375(.195)	.056
Political interest	.336(.098)	.001	.127(.239)	.596
White	.498(.242)	.041	.352(.301)	.244
Online news user	.007(.011)	.568	.001(.014)	.963
Privacy restrictions	.015(.138)	.916	.112(.179)	.532
R ²	.243			.123
Adjusted R ²	.201			.074
F	5.79			4.79
N	191			191

Note: Data derived from survey of 455 college undergraduates. Unstandardized regression coefficients with standard error in parentheses. All tests are two-tailed tests. To control for possible interdependence between group membership and political knowledge, we estimated a two-stage least squares model

^a Predicted probabilities from first-stage OLS regression where the dependent variable is political group membership, and independent variables are female, age, family income, party identification, year in school political interest, White, Asian, Black, Hispanic, Online news user, and privacy restrictions. Years on Facebook and frequency of Facebook log-in are the instrumental variables.

Table 3:

Political Facebook Group Page Content		
	Percentage of Groups	
	No	Yes
Provide additional contact information	39%	62%
Provide web links in the "links" section	18%	82%
Provide video links	41%	59%
Event information posted	80%	20%
News posts provided	26%	74%
Photos posted	13%	87%
Discussion topics posted on "discussion board"	13%	87%

Figure 1: Content Analysis of Political Group Wall Posts

