

Do Social Media Facilitate Political Learning? Social Media Use for News, Reasoning and Political Knowledge

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Abstract

This study examines how using different types of social media for news predicts political knowledge. Drawing on a national survey, the present study finds that blogs and Twitter are positive predictors of political issue knowledge, while Facebook and YouTube are not. Using blogs for news predicts political personalities and process knowledge, but using Twitter, Facebook, or YouTube for news does not. Additionally, the present study reveals that political talk offline and online reinforces the impact of social media use for news on political issue knowledge.

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According to the normative theory of democracy, a democratic system works better when citizens are politically knowledgeable (Eveland & Schmitt, 2015; Galston, 2001). The immense connectivity and access to information in today's society have brought forward questions about the role of social media regarding political knowledge. Will social media contribute to strengthening democracy by promoting political knowledge? The answer to this question is not conclusive. Some have argued that social media will have positive and potentially strong effects on political knowledge by providing more opportunities to access political content (Bode, 2015; Boulianne, 2009), while others are skeptical, viewing social media as predominantly entertainment- and relation-oriented (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010; Dimitrova, Shehata, Strömbäck, & Nord, 2014).

The current study claims that one of the reasons for such confusion is that social media can cause a different effect on political cognition depending their unique functions and affordances. Social media, despite wide recognition of the term, are not one single entity. They contain different types, such as microblogging, social networking, and media sharing. To date, little research has attempted to look at different forms of social media and their relative effects on political knowledge. Focusing on the theoretical concepts of *information richness*, *diversity* and *credibility*, the present study conceptually differentiates the types of social media under the assumption that such differences can exercise substantial impacts on political knowledge (Stephens et al., 2014).

In addition, the current study examines what roles political reasoning plays between the use of social media

for news and political knowledge. Reasoning refers to mental efforts to ponder over issues and make logical association between them. Reasoning takes diverse forms such as offline and online political talk and news reflection. Interpersonal political talk alert people about important social and political issues (Shah et al., 2007). News reflection plays a crucial role in causing political learning from news attention (Jung, Kim, & Gil de Zúniga, 2011). To date little research has compared the different roles of political talk and news reflection in political communication.

This study proceeds with a theoretical discussion of informational functions of different types of social media and their potential impacts on political knowledge. This study then discusses conceptual differences between offline and online political talk and news reflection. By using a representative national survey, the current study assesses (1) the effects of different types of social media on political knowledge and (2) the moderating role of different modes of political reasoning between social media and political knowledge.

Literature Review

Dimensions of Political Knowledge

A baseline for a well-functioning democracy is the presence of actively participating citizens who acquire necessary information and have sufficient understanding of public issues (Gil de Zúniga, Molyneux, & Zheng, 2014; Lee, Choi, Kim, & Kim, 2014). An informed citizenry is essential for democracy (Lakoff, 1971), and thus political knowledge is deemed as a yardstick to evaluate the effectiveness of democracy. Without having a basic level of political knowledge, citizens should have difficulty in un-

derstanding political events and eventually engage in public matters (Popkin & Dimock, 1999).

Some studies have measured political knowledge by asking respondents to name party leaders and party positions on different issues (Kunovich, 2013), foreign events, personal information about the president, legislative majorities, newly passed laws and policies (Barabas, Jerit, Pollock, & Rainey, 2014), names of leaders of foreign countries (Strabac & Aalberg, 2011), and percentages of women in Congress and the Supreme Court as well as identification of senators (Dolan, 2011). In a meta-analysis of political knowledge measurements, Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) found that the measurements included knowledge about current national and international events, political personalities, institutions and processes.

Political knowledge, being predicted by media use, may be different when it comes to recognizing the names of political personalities than from understanding nuances of the political process. Mass media use is likely to predict users' information regarding political players and current events, but knowledge about political process and institutions may be more influenced by users' education and political efficacy. Studies need to explore experimental methods to find specific relationship between using different types media use and different dimensions of political knowledge. The current study measures diverse aspects of political knowledge using questions about political issues, personalities, and processes.

Different Types of Social Media and Political Knowledge

Research consistently shows that citizens become politically informed if they have the motivation, capability,

and opportunity to learn (Eveland, 2001; Luskin, 1990). However, the informational function of a medium has a great deal to do with how much people learn, regardless of their motivation to learn. Technologies that serve informational functions have the capacity to produce, distribute, and collect knowledge (Ballew, Omoto, & Winter, 2015). Several studies found evidence that the informational function of a medium can have significant link to people's acquisition of political knowledge from the medium (Chaffee & Kanihan, 1997; De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006). Drawing on the criterion of *informing*, which refers to media's role of providing information to the public (Foot & Schneider, 2006), the current study breaks down social media into several types. This study aims to answer the question of what are the substantive content-related differences among different social media that create different effects on political knowledge.

Social media vary in the informational function, more specifically the richness, diversity, and credibility of information that characterizes each type of social media. According to media richness theory (Carlson & Davis, 1998; Daft & Lengel, 1986), media differ in terms of the degree of richness they possess, that is, the amount of information they allow to be transmitted in a given time interval. Although too much information can make it hard for people to figure out crucial facts they need to know to become informed citizens (Fenton, & Barassi, 2011), generally, information-rich media are more beneficial for users to accumulate knowledge. Recently Eveland and Schmitt (2015) found a positive association between the number of stories read and factual political knowledge, suggesting the importance of exposure to substantial information in

political learning. Therefore, the present study considers *information richness* one important dimension of the informational function of social media.

According to Eveland and Schmitt (2015), diverse exposure across topics has a positive impact on political knowledge. By sampling and moving between stories that focus on different topics, the interconnection between those topics should become more apparent to readers either by cross-references or by the pattern of exposure in which salient aspects of an issue are covered. This study conceptualizes *information diversity* as the extent of diversity of political content that flows in social media. The more diverse information social media provide, the more chances of obtaining political knowledge users will have. For this reason, the current study regards information diversity as another crucial dimension of the informational features of social media.

Credibility of sources is crucial in causing media effects (Tsfati, 2003; Kioussis, 2001). The more credible a piece of information is, the more likely people will recall and remember the information (Underwood & Pezdek, 1998). Drawing on the above reasoning and literature, this study uses *information richness*, *information diversity*, and *information credibility* as major criteria for classifying different types of social media and examining their impacts on political knowledge.

The types of social media under examination in this study are Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, which are the top 3 social media by Global Web Index (2015). This study also includes the blog because it has importance as the earliest form of social media and is still influential in the political realm (Davis, 2009).

Facebook is a representative example of social networking sites, which refer to applications that enable users to connect to other users by creating personal information profiles, inviting friends and colleagues to have access to those profiles, and sending e-mails and instant messages between each other (Ellison, 2007). Facebook communication usually takes place on the basis of strong ties because Facebook are basically designed to connect with intimates. Facebook users predominantly share like-minded news articles and avoid conflicting ones (An, Querica, & Crowcroft, 2013). Such characteristics of Facebook minimize the potential for users to obtain diverse information because people having strong ties are likely to share a similar knowledge pool (Granovetter, 1973). Additionally, many Facebook users simply stumble upon political information while looking for entertainment (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010) rather than actively seeking political content. Therefore, the current study expects that the information richness and diversity of Facebook is relatively low. Also many people do not see Facebook as a credible place to gather news (Somini, 2012).

Another type of social media under consideration by this study is Twitter, which represents microblogging sites. Twitter is centered around exchanging short messages that are mostly real-time status updates, creating an 'ambient awareness' of issues (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). Twitter is characterized mainly by status updates and quick information/news posting and sharing. Information on Twitter may be perceived as not very trustworthy by its users. This is because Twitter users often compromise content control for the sake of the quick spread of information. Indeed, Schmierbach and Oeldorf-Hirsch (2012)

found that college students rated news items less credible when reading the same story from the official *New York Times*' Twitter feed than viewing it from *New York Times*' website. However, in terms of information richness and diversity, it seems that Twitter excels other social media. According to Pew Research Center (2015), 46% of Twitter users follow news organizations for news. A lot of news sources, including journalists, media organizations, politicians, civic activists, and ordinary people post news on Twitter. Therefore, Twitter is deemed information-rich enough for citizens to get substantial information about political issues. Twitter helps people connect with more strangers than other social media (Zhang, Qu, Cody, & Wu, 2010), and it allows users to remain anonymous. Wide connectivity and anonymous participation allows Twitter users to access diverse political content.

Blogs usually display date-stamped entries in reverse chronological order. Blogs exist first and foremost to inform visitors. Blogs provide rich, often lengthy, information about diverse public and political issues (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). Blogs are strong in content control. Often, political blogs show partisan orientation. Although political blogs are often criticized for being biased (Bernhardt, Krasa, & Polborn, 2008) or do not have the key characteristics of mainstream news that drive public trust (Gunter, Campbell, Touri, & Gibson, 2009), the amount and diversity of information seem to be remarkable. There are no restrictions to create and maintain the amount of posts on blogs. Also many political blogs tend to analyze political issues using diverse facts and perspectives. Therefore, the political information on political blogs seems to be rich and diverse.

The last type of social media considered in this study is YouTube, which represents media sharing sites. Media sharing sites allow people to upload and share various media content such as pictures (Flickr) and videos (YouTube). The primary function of YouTube is to share user-generated videos with others. Additionally, it allows for robust commenting on posted videos. Although YouTube contains rich information, the possibility of encountering political information incidentally is relatively low unless people intentionally seek for political content on this site (Ricke, 2014). Also considering that political content on YouTube is created mostly by ordinary individuals, information credibility should not be as high as that of Twitter, which contains a lot of links to professional news sources. Information diversity on YouTube seems to be relatively high because of little limitation in terms of available videos.

Although other factors can be considered in assessing the informational function of social media, this study believes that at least information richness, diversity, and credibility can account for a significant portion of the role of social media as a political knowledge builder. The relative importance of these social media functions is displayed in Table 1. Based on such a theoretical framework, this study expects that using blogs and Twitter for news will have stronger effects on political knowledge than using Facebook or YouTube for news. The rationale is that blogs and Twitter rank high on at least two aspects of the informational function, while Facebook and YouTube do not.

H1: Using blogs and Twitter for news will have a stronger effect on political knowledge than using

Table 1*Levels of Importance of Different Social Media Functions*

	Political Information Richness	Political Information Diversity	Political Information Credibility
Blogs	High	High	Medium
Twitter	High	High	Medium
Facebook	Low	Low	Medium
YouTube	Medium	High	Low

Facebook or YouTube for news.

Offline vs. Online Political Talk

The most fundamental practice in democracy is interpersonal discussion (Dahlgren, 2005; Shah, 2016). When engaging in discussion, individuals often make significant efforts to comprehend topics of discussion, organize their thoughts into articulate expressions, and weigh the pros and cons of diverse arguments provided by diverse discussion partners (Benhabib, 1996). In other words, interpersonal discussion entails elaboration on media content (Jung et al., 2011).

Based on the above rationale, the current study expects that political talk can moderate the impact of social media on political knowledge. Additional mental work can help transform the information obtained from social media into a long-term memory. Indeed, Scheufele (2002) found that news effects on knowledge are stronger in the presence of discussion. One mechanism of discussion effects may be that discussions are able to provide information that individuals did not know before (Hinsz, Tindale, & Vollrath, 1997). Moreover, interpersonal discussion pro-

vides an opportunity for repetition and rehearsals of information. As individuals engage in discussion of news, they practice retrieval, verbally repeat the information, and hear others do the same (Hirst & Echterhoff, 2012; Rajaram & Pereira-Pasarin, 2007). Through such processes, information exchanges in conversations are able to consolidate the corresponding information in long-term memory and to foster knowledge-building processes (Hirst & Echterhoff, 2012).

Recently, scholars began exploring the role of online political talk as a new type of interpersonal discussion (Stromer-Galley & Foot, 2002; Price & Cappella, 2002; Shah et al., 2007). Online discussion differs from face-to-face discussion in several ways. First, in an online discussion, the comments are posted in the ongoing transcript in the order in which they are entered, so no participant can cut off any other participant's comment. Online discussants can post their comments whenever they want. Second, online users tend to engage in online discussion more freely and actively than offline discussion because they do not have to care about nonverbal cues signaling disapproval. Unlike the face-to-face situation, online discussions have few social context cues that signal people's social and organizational differences (Rourke, Anderson, Garrison, & Archer, 2007). When social context cues are missing, people cannot see the boundaries that divide them, so they participate more actively in discussions (Murphy, Durako, Muenz, & Wilson, 2000; Walston & Lissitz, 2000).

The aforementioned rationale suggests that online political discussion could produce a stronger degree of elaboration than offline political talk. Indeed, Paskey (2001) found that online students experienced greater cog-

nitive and explanatory learning than offline students. Newman (1995) found that students using computers are more likely to link ideas than the face-to-face comparison group. Thus, it is posed:

H2: Online political talk will make a larger contribution than offline political talk to the impact of social media for news on political knowledge.

Interpersonal Discussion vs. Intrapersonal News Reflection

Reasoning can take place not only from engagement in interpersonal conversation (Eveland, Hayes, Shah, & Kwak, 2005) but also from individuals' reflection on media content (Eveland, 2001; Mutz, 2006). News reflection refers to "the use of news information to make cognitive connections to past experience and prior knowledge, and to derive new implications from news content" (Eveland et al., 2003, p. 363). News reflection can play a similar role as political discussion in political communication. Studies show that news reflection is closely associated with political learning (Eveland, 2004; Eveland & Thomson, 2006) because it tends to increase comprehension and retention of the communication message (Eveland, 2001; McLeod et al., 1999). An individual's level of reflection might be an important factor in leading to message retention and retrieval, enhancing the potential for media effects (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953; Watts & McGuire, 1964).

One question here is that whether news reflection is better than political talk in promoting the impact of news consumption on political knowledge. Individuals who are engaged in interpersonal discussion become able to use complex concepts, make deep logical connections among

them, and create consistent and reasoned argumentations (Cappella, Price, & Nir, 2002; Kim, Wyatt, & Katz, 1999). Elaborative thinking produces strong political orientations that subsequently lead to increased political knowledge (Eveland et al., 2005). Southwell and Yzer (2007) argue that political conversation is a reasoned and consequential behavior through which information is reconsidered, elaborated, and clarified. In short, political talk inherently contains the nature of news reflection. Based on the above logic, the current study proposes:

H3: Political talk will make a larger contribution than news reflection to the impact of social media use for news on political knowledge.

Method

Data Collection

This study relies on original survey data collected in South Korea between May 1 and May 30, 2014. In order to assure the representativeness of the sample, data were collected via a stratified quota sampling method based on age (17.6% aged 19-29; 18.1% aged 30-39; 21% aged 40-49; 19.9% aged 50-50; 23.4% aged 60 or older) and gender (49.5% male) of the 2014 voter registration data of the Korea Election Management Commission (2014). The procedure provides a more accurate representation of the population (Correa, Hinsley, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2010). Before doing stratification, this study constructed a sampling frame of 3,000 out of a pool of 100,000 Korean voters obtained from a survey research firm.

The selected panel members received the survey's URL through an e-mail invitation. This invitation provided respondents with a time estimate to complete the sur-

vey and information about how to enter a drawing for their participation. The invitation obtained 1,157 usable responses (response rate, 38.6%). Compared with the voter registration data, the present sample had more males (51.2%) and was slightly better educated and younger. Nevertheless, the demographic breakdown of the current sample was similar to the voter registration data.

Measurement

Political Knowledge. The current study measured political issue knowledge by asking respondents about five major political issues at the time of survey implementation such as: policy differences between the ruling party and the main opposition party and the reunion of separated families between South and North Korea. These questions were multiple choice, and respondents received one point for each correct answer, creating a political issue knowledge variable ranging from 0 to 5 ($M = 2.96$, $SD = .94$, $KR-20 = .47$).

This study measured knowledge about political personalities by asking respondents to identify the incumbent prime minister, the president of Congress, the speaker of the main opposition party, the chief justice of Korean Supreme Court, and the chairperson of the ruling party ($M = 2.54$, $SD = 1.04$, $KR-20 = .53$). Political process knowledge consists of five items: the length of congressional terms, the definition of fiscal policy, the examples of the three branches of the government, the number of votes needed to override a presidential veto, and the total number of Congress representatives ($M = 2.08$, $SD = 1.07$, $KR-20 = .45$).

Social Media Use. Respondents were asked how often

they accessed political news from the following four types of social media during the last two weeks on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (very frequently): blogs ($M = 1.96$, $SD = 1.02$), Facebook ($M = 2.51$, $SD = 1.25$), Twitter ($M = 2.78$, $SD = 1.39$), and YouTube ($M = 2.04$, $SD = .96$). Also in order to measure general social media use, this study asked how often respondents used the four types of social media during the last two weeks ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 1.34$).

Political Reasoning. Offline political talk was created by adding scores of five items that tapped the frequency of individuals' face-to-face conversation about political issues they read or watched on news media with the following people during the last two weeks: (1) friends and/or family; (2) coworkers and/or acquaintances; (3) strangers. Responses were coded on a 5-point scale ($\alpha = .75$, $M = 2.33$, $SD = 1.16$). Online political talk was measured by asking respondents how often they had conversation about political issues with the following people via the Internet during the last two weeks: (1) friends and/or family; (2) coworkers and/or acquaintances; (3) strangers. Responses were coded on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (very frequently) ($\alpha = .80$, $M = 2.48$, $SD = 1.39$). This study used the following two statements to measure news reflection on 5-point Likert scale: (1) "I often find myself thinking about what I've encountered in the news" and (2) "I often try to relate what I encounter in the news to my own personal experience." Responses were averaged to create an index ($r = .63$, $M = 3.15$, $SD = .99$).

Conventional Media Use. Respondents were asked how often they accessed during the last two weeks political news via traditional and online news media on a 5-point

scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (very frequently): Newspapers ($M = 1.93$, $SD = 1.53$), network or cable TV news ($M = 3.15$, $SD = 1.39$), radio news ($M = 2.34$, $SD = 1.33$), current-affairs magazines ($M = 2.23$, $SD = 1.19$); news aggregators such as Yahoo News ($M = 3.04$, $SD = 1.72$); Web-only news sites such as OhmyNews ($M = 2.23$, $SD = 1.19$).

Political Antecedents. For internal political efficacy, three items were measured on a 5-point agree-disagree scale: (1) "I consider myself to be well qualified to participate in politics," (2) "I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country," and (3) "I think that I am as much informed about politics and government as most people" ($\alpha = .89$, $M = 3.28$, $SD = .66$). Political interest was assessed on a 5-point scale by asking respondents how much they are interested in (1) local politics and (2) national politics ($r = .65$, $M = 2.91$, $SD = 1.17$). Ideological extremity was measured using a 3-point scale (1 = moderate; 2 = liberal or conservative; 3 = very liberal or very conservative, $M = 1.50$, $SD = .63$).

Sociodemographic Variables. Age was measured with an open-ended question ($M = 39.71$, $SD = 12.87$). The question that measured income asked "What was your family's total household income last year?" Answers ranged from 1 (under \$20,000) to 10 (\$100,000 and over) (median = \$40,000 ~ 49,999). Education was measured as the level of schooling, ranging from 1 (middle school degree or less) to 5 (graduate degree) ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 1.49$). For the gender variable, female was coded as 1 and male as 2.

Additionally, respondents received questions about how much they agree with the claim that each type of social media contains substantial political content (information richness), diverse political content

Table 2*Evaluation of the Informational Functions of Social Media*

	Info Richness	Info Diversity	Info Credibility	Average Evalu- ation Score
Blogs	4.62	4.05	3.98	4.45
Twitter	4.50	4.21	3.74	4.01
Facebook	3.09	3.05	3.65	3.46
YouTube	3.37	3.92	2.76	3.08

(information diversity), and trustworthy political content (information credibility) (Table 2). Responses were collected on a 5-point scale. In terms of information richness, blogs ($M = 4.62$) and Twitter ($M = 4.50$) excelled Facebook ($M = 3.09$) and YouTube ($M = 3.37$). Similarly, in terms of information diversity, the means of blogs (4.05), Twitter (4.21), and YouTube (3.92) were significantly higher than the mean of Facebook (3.05). The mean information credibility of YouTube (2.76) was significantly lower than the means of blogs (3.98), Twitter (3.74), and Facebook (3.65). In terms of the total informational function, respondents ranked in the order of blogs (4.45), Twitter (4.01), Facebook (3.46), and YouTube (3.08). The results align with the theoretical framework of the current study.

Data Analysis

To measure the direct and differential effects of the four types of social media on political knowledge, this study conducted a series of hierarchical regression analysis. The dependent variable, political knowledge, was regressed upon six blocks, including demographic variables (age, gender, education, and household income) at the first

block, political antecedents (ideological extremity, political efficacy, and political interest) at the second block, conventional media (newspapers, TV news, radio news, magazines, news aggregators, and Web-only news sites) at the third block, political reasoning (offline and online political talk and news reflection) at the fourth block, social media use at the fifth block, and the interaction terms of social media use for news and political reasoning at the sixth block. Centered means were calculated for each type of social media and each type of political reasoning before including interactions to avoid multicollinearity issues.

Results

The model accounted for 40.1% of the variance of political issue knowledge (Table 3). Males and well-educated people were more knowledgeable than females and the less educated. Political interest ($\beta = .15, p < .001$) and internal political efficacy ($\beta = .11, p < .05$) predicted political issue knowledge. Among conventional media, newspapers ($\beta = .13, p < .01$), current-affairs magazines ($\beta = .12, p < .01$), news aggregators ($\beta = .10, p < .05$), and Web-only news sites ($\beta = .12, p < .01$) had a positive association with it. All three modes of political reasoning had a positive and significant relationship with political issue knowledge: offline political talk ($\beta = .11, p < .05$); online political talk ($\beta = .20, p < .001$); and news reflection ($\beta = .11, p < .05$). Among social media variables, only blogs ($\beta = .15, p < .001$) and Twitter ($\beta = .11, p < .05$) were found to be significantly related to political issue knowledge.

The model predicting political personalities knowledge explained 29.4% of the variance. Older adults, males and well-educated people were more knowledgeable

Table 3 *Prediction of Political Knowledge*

	Issue Knowledge	Personalities Knowledge	Process Knowledge
<i>Block 1: Demographics</i>			
Age	.061	.093*	-.042
Gender (1 = male)	.116*	.107*	.068
Income	-.027	.035	.021
Education	.101*	.089*	.080*
<i>R</i> ² (%)	3.4	2.5	2.1
<i>Block 2: Political Antecedents</i>			
Political Interest	.152***	.136***	.154***
Political Efficacy	.110*	.150***	.099*
Ideological Extremity	.067	.052	.049
Inc. <i>R</i> ² (%)	8.5	7.8	6.6
<i>Block 3: Conventional Media</i>			
Newspapers	.126**	.100*	.098*
TV News (network or cable)	.087	.082*	.065
Radio News	.085	.076	.060
Current Affairs Magazines	.123**	.115**	.052
News Aggregators (e.g., Yahoo news)	.103*	.085*	.083*
Web-only news sites (e.g., OhmyNews)	.122**	.097*	.096*
Inc. <i>R</i> ² (%)	14.9	10.7	8.3
<i>Block 4: Political Reasoning</i>			
Offline Political Talk	.108*	.108*	.057
Online Political Talk	.196***	.116**	.094*
News Reflection	.105*	.044	.056
Inc. <i>R</i> ² (%)	8.1	5.3	3.9
<i>Block 5: Social Media</i>			
General Use	-.024	-.079*	-.76*
Blog Use for News	.153***	.098*	.082*
Facebook Use for News	.074	.053	.047
Twitter Use for News	.109*	.064	.068
YouTube Use for News	.052	.037	.033
Inc. <i>R</i> ² (%)	5.2	4.1	3.8
Total <i>R</i> ² (%)	40.1	29.4	25.8

than young, female and less-educated adults. Political interest ($\beta = .15, p < .001$) and internal political efficacy ($\beta = .14, p < .05$) strongly predicted political personalities knowledge. Also, newspapers ($\beta = .10, p < .05$), TV news ($\beta = .08, p < .05$), current-affairs magazines ($\beta = .12, p < .01$), news aggregators ($\beta = .09, p < .05$), and Web-only news sites ($\beta = .10, p < .05$) were associated with it. Out of political reasoning variables, offline talk ($\beta = .11, p < .05$); online talk ($\beta = .13, p < .01$) was significantly related to political personalities knowledge, but news reflection ($\beta = .04$) was not. Out of the four type of social media, only blogs ($\beta = .10, p < .05$) predicted political personalities knowledge.

The model predicting political process knowledge accounted for 25.8% of the variance. Education ($\beta = .08, p < .05$), political interest ($\beta = .15, p < .001$), internal political efficacy ($\beta = .10, p < .05$), newspapers ($\beta = .10, p < .05$), news aggregators ($\beta = .08, p < .05$), Web-only news sites ($\beta = .10, p < .05$), and online political talk ($\beta = .09, p < .05$) were positively associated with it. Out of the social media use variables, only blogs ($\beta = .08, p < .05$) had a significant association with political process knowledge.

Taken together, the results show that the use of blogs and Twitter predicted political issue knowledge, while Facebook and YouTube failed to do it. In regard to political personalities knowledge and process knowledge, only blogs had a significant relationship with them. Although the use of Twitter for news was not significantly associated with political personalities and process knowledge, its regression coefficients were higher than the coefficients of Facebook and YouTube. Therefore, H1 (the use of blogs and Twitter for news will have a stronger ef-

Table 4 *Interactions of Social Media and Political Reasoning*

	Issue Knowledge	Personalities Knowledge	Process Knowledge
<i>Prior Blocks (R², %)</i>	40.1	29.4	25.8
Blog X Offline Talk	.087*	.036	.034
Blog X Online Talk	.095*	.078*	.047
Blog X News Reflection	.081*	.023	.011
Facebook X Offline Talk	.044	.031	.024
Facebook X Online Talk	.083*	.046	.038
Facebook X News Reflection	.036	.025	.019
Twitter X Offline Talk	.085*	.052	.047
Twitter X Online Talk	.102*	.070*	.050
Twitter X News Reflection	.040	.041	.023
YouTube X Offline Talk	.062	.053	.025
YouTube X Online Talk	.088*	.064	.048
YouTube X News Reflection	.039	.027	.009
<i>R²(%)</i>	2.95	1.9	1.4
Total <i>R²(%)</i>	42.96	31.3	27.2

fect on political knowledge than the use of Facebook and YouTube for news) was supported.

With regard to political issue knowledge, the interaction effect between blog use and online talk ($\beta = .10$, $p < .05$) was significant and stronger than the coefficient be-

tween blog use and offline talk ($\beta = .09, p < .05$) and the coefficient between blog use and news reflection ($\beta = .08, p < .05$). The interaction effect between Twitter use and online political talk ($\beta = .10, p < .05$) was stronger than that between Twitter use and offline political talk ($\beta = .09, p < .05$). The interaction effect between Twitter and news reflection was not found. The analyses also found significant interaction effects between Facebook and online talk ($\beta = .08, p < .05$) and between YouTube and online talk ($\beta = .09, p < .05$). Out of 12 interaction terms, only blog X online talk and Twitter X online talk were found to be significant when the dependent variable was political personalities knowledge. Regarding political process knowledge, no interaction effect was identified. Overall, the outcomes lend a general support to H2 (online political talk will make a larger contribution than offline political talk to the impact of social media for news on political knowledge) and H3 (offline and online political talk will make a larger contribution than news reflection to the impact of social media for news on political knowledge).

Discussion

Based on the assumption that the informational function of social media will have crucial influence on how much citizens learn politics from social media, the current study conceptually classified social media into four discrete types and examined how each type of social media predicts political knowledge. The findings suggest that the impact of social media use for news on political knowledge aligns with the unique informational features of each type of social media. The current study also found that political reasoning moderates the relationship between social me-

dia use for news and political knowledge.

Prior studies focused mostly on the motivations of social media use in explaining political outcomes. This study sheds new light on the importance of the informational function of social media. Using three dimensions of the informational function (information richness, diversity, and credibility), the present study conceptually differentiates four types of social media. Blogs and Twitter are better than Facebook and YouTube in terms of information richness. Regarding information diversity, Facebook ranks the lowest out of the four types of social media. YouTube ranks the lowest in terms of information credibility.

The current study finds that blogs and Twitter have a significant association with political issue knowledge, while Facebook and YouTube do not. The finding suggests that blogs and Twitter have greater potential for political information provision than Facebook and YouTube. In other words, certain social media can be more beneficial for citizens to learn politics in part because of their informational features. Although it is also possible that other functional features besides informational characteristics can affect the political outcome of social media, this study clearly shows that the informational functionality of social media is important in the process of political knowledge acquisition. The finding also shows that the aggregate treatment of social media does not make much sense and that differentiating each type of social media is recommended in political communication research.

Another important contribution of the current study is that it clarifies whether the use of social media for news influences different types of political knowledge. Unlike many studies on political knowledge, this study measured

three dimensions of political knowledge (political issue, political personalities, and political process knowledge) as the dependent variable and finds that the most dominant social media – Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube – make marginal contribution to accumulating knowledge of political personalities and processes. Only blogs had a significant contribution to the increase of all three dimensions of political knowledge. These results indicate that despite their potential for political information channels social media may not be equivalent to traditional news media, which have been consistently found to contribute to diverse dimensions of political knowledge (Fenwick & Farrell, 2011). The results indirectly lend support to the claim that social media play only a limited role in the political process. Such speculation is also supported by the relative small contribution of the social media block in the regression models. Social media use explains only 5.2% of the variance of political issue knowledge, which is much less than the contribution by political antecedents (8.5%), conventional media (14.9%), and political reasoning (8.1%). With regard to political personalities and process knowledge, the increased R square of social media use is smaller than that of political antecedents, conventional media, and political reasoning.

Although the findings cast doubt on the potential of social media in promoting political learning, that is not the whole story. By engaging in frequent political reasoning behavior, individuals can influence the null association between social media use and political knowledge. The interaction analyses reveal that political talk and news reflection moderate the relationship between social media use for news and political learning. This finding indicates

that even the instant and incidental nature of information acquisition via social media may result in the increase of political knowledge when the impact of social media for news on political knowledge is complemented by interpersonal discussion or intrapersonal reflection on news.

In particular, the present study finds that interpersonal reasoning (offline or online discussion) is more powerful in moderating the impact of social media use for news on political knowledge than intrapersonal reasoning (individual reflection on news content). This outcome indicates that interpersonal reasoning is closer to the core of deliberation (Benhabib, 1996; Habermas, 1984) than intrapersonal reasoning. Engaging in actual conversation provides an opportunity for discussants to organize what they have in mind in a coherent manner. Through interpersonal discussion, people can learn easily what others know and think, and thereby engage in more active information processing to increase their level of political knowledge. Additionally, online political talk is more beneficial to the increase of political knowledge than offline political talk. The nature of the Internet facilitates robust engagement in unfettered discussion (Dahlberg, 2001). Also reduced cues in the Internet may motivate people to engage in interactions with others more actively. While doing so, online discussants are more likely to remember the news they obtain and add that to the storage of their political knowledge.

The current study has several limitations. One limitation is the nature of cross-sectional data. Second, this study focused on only four types of social media because those social media are the most widely used in relation to politics. Future research should include other types of so-

cial media such as social news sites. Notwithstanding a few limitations, this study shows (1) that unique informational features of social media affect how much people gain political knowledge from their social media use and (2) that the impact of social media on political knowledge is moderated by reasoning behaviors.

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