Analyzing repeated-wave panel data to identify causal direction:
A meta-analysis of digital media use and political participation

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Research Agenda

(1) Why and how do people participate politically?
   - Citizenship norms and democratic values
   - Repertoires of participation ("tool kits", LCA)
   - Inequalities in participation (socio-demographics)
   - Digital media use

(2) Participation-Policy Connection?
   - **Electoral** - Dassonneville, Hooghe & Oser 2019 (Political Studies)
   - **Non-electoral** / non-institutionalized
     - In the U.S. – Leighley & Oser 2018 (Perspectives)
     - Cross-nationally – Hooghe & Oser 2016 (JEPP)
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How, when, and why does political participation, including participation beyond the electoral arena, make a difference for policies and political outcomes that people care about?

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   Digital media use

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Digital Media use & Political Participation

Theories from the literature (Norris 2000)

Theory 1 – Mobilization

Theory 2 - Reinforcement

Theory 3 – Virtuous Circle
Why Should We Care? Participatory Inequality

Theory 1 – Mobilization – *DECREASE INEQUALITY*
Literature tends to assume “Mobilization”

Theory 2 – Reinforcement – *INCREASE INEQUALITY*

Theory 3 – Virtuous Circle
Two main questions:
(1) Mobilization vs. Reinforcement
(2) Long-term effects?

Causal order:
Requires repeated-wave panel survey data
First Meta-analysis on Digital Media use & Political Participation Based on Repeated-Wave Panel Data Studies

- **Data:** 38 studies
  - Surveys conducted between 1982-2017
  - About 50% U.S. data (12 other countries)
  - 21 studies published since 2017
  - 70,000+ respondents
  - 279 coefficients

- **Method:** Meta-analysis, a statistical synthesis of data; tested for enduring effects over time. Vote-counting method
Key Variables

Digital media use:
- Email
- Social networking sites
- Campaign websites

Political participation: Offline engagement, e.g.
- Voting
- Boycotting
- Protest
Findings: Reinforcement effect

% of tests that are positive and statistically significant

**Reinforcement**

45%

30%

Mobilization

Evident in 1st panel study in this area of research analyzing 1982 ->1997: Jennings & Zeitner 2003 (POQ)
Conclusions

Meta-analysis of Digital Media use & Political Participation

- Stronger reinforcement than mobilization – in contrast to the literature assumptions

- Enduring effects over time – higher percentage of positive effects for time lag > 6 months

- Reinforcement effect & inequality: Digital media use will “strengthen and not radically transform the existing patterns of social inequality and participation” (Norris 2000, pp.121–122)
Next-step Project, Work in Progress: *Political Efficacy*

What is the relationship between *Political Efficacy (PE)*, Online Political Participation (OnPP) and Offline Political Participation (OffPP)?

Urgent Question, Democratic Legitimacy
“Yes I can…? Political Efficacy in the Digital Era”

Systematic Literature Review & Meta-analysis

- **Trends**: Has political efficacy decreased in the past 20 years of the digital era?

- **Efficacy & online vs. offline participation**: is there a meaningful difference in the association of efficacy with online vs. offline pp?

- **Internal versus external efficacy** in the literature and trends (including assessment of measurement approaches)
Harmonization connections

Repeated-wave meta-analysis

- **Causal ordering**: Importance of connecting repeated cross-section surveys with additional data to gain insight into causal relations and underlying mechanisms between key variables.

- **Meta-analysis variable identification**: Meta-analysis of existing single-country studies can identify theoretically important social science variables for harmonization (e.g., efficacy).

- **Contribution of identifying trends**: e.g., efficacy, trust, participation – important contribution in the literature.
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