

## FULL PAPER

### **Media self-efficacy and internal political efficacy as processes underlying young adults' political participation**

### **Medien- und politikbezogene Selbstwirksamkeit als Wegbereiter politischer Partizipation**

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**Abstract:** Young people's political participation is essential for an effective democracy and sustainable society. Particularly news exposure has been demonstrated to leverage political participation. However, it is suggested with this paper that not only news exposure fosters young adult's participation, but also their perception of how effective they are while gathering information with the media (media self-efficacy); and that this perception of media efficacy pays into people's belief of how well they handle the challenges of being an active citizen (internal political efficacy). Based on Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1977), media self-efficacy and internal political efficacy are suggested as underlying processes linking news exposure on the one hand and political participation on the other. This interplay was confirmed for online news exposure and participation, but not for television news exposure and participation. It is suspected that particularly the interactive nature of online news provides possibilities to participate and thus facilitates the development of media self-efficacy and internal political efficacy as foundations for political participation.

**Keywords:** News exposure, political participation, media self-efficacy, internal political efficacy, young adults.

**Zusammenfassung:** Für das Gelingen des demokratischen Systems ist die politische Beteiligung insbesondere von Seiten nachwachsender Generationen von essentieller Bedeutung. In der bisherigen Forschung hat sich die Häufigkeit und Intensität der Nachrichtennutzung als ein wichtiger Prädiktor politischer Partizipation herauskristallisiert. Die nachfolgend berichtete Studie nimmt nun an, dass nicht nur die reine Nutzungshäufigkeit von medialen Nachrichtenangeboten die politische Partizipation fördert. Sie geht davon aus, dass auch das Gefühl mit den jeweiligen Medienangeboten das eigene Informationsbedürfnis effektiv befriedigen zu können (mediale Selbstwirksamkeit) eine wichtige Rolle spielt. Es wird vermutet, dass mediale Selbstwirksamkeit zudem das Gefühl beeinflusst, kompetent mit den Herausforderungen des politischen Systems umgehen zu können (internale politische Selbstwirksamkeit) und somit notwendig ist für die Übersetzung politischer Information in politisches Engagement. Basierend auf Banduras Theorie der Selbstwirksamkeit (1977) werden mediale und internale politische Selbstwirksamkeit als mediierende Prozesse verstanden, welche die Häufigkeit der Mediennutzung und die politische Partizipation miteinander verknüpfen. Basierend auf einer Befragung von Erstwählern konnte diese Annahme hinsichtlich der Nutzung von Online-Nachrichtenangeboten bestätigt werden. Bezüglich der Nutzung von politischen Informationsangeboten im Fernsehen zeigt sich dieser Zu-

sammenhang jedoch nicht. Es wird vermutet, dass insbesondere die interaktive Natur von Informationsangeboten im Internet die empfundene mediale und politische Wirksamkeit und somit die politische Partizipation stärkt.

**Schlagwörter:** Nachrichtennutzung, politische Partizipation, mediale Selbstwirksamkeit, internale politische Selbstwirksamkeit, junge Erwachsene.

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## 1. Introduction

The political participation of young adults, from taking interest in politics to volunteering and voting, is a sine qua non for an effective democracy (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). Young adulthood is a crucial period for fostering political engagement, as individuals, who are engaged in community issues at an early age, are more likely to remain engaged as adults (Jennings & Stoker, 2004). For decades, researchers have studied why some individuals choose to participate actively in the political process, whereas others do not.

Previous studies suggest, that political participation is related to numerous factors, such as gender, age, socioeconomic status, education (Cohen, Vigoda, & Samorly, 2001; Verba, Nie, & Kim, 1971), and interest for politics (Holt, Shehata, Strömbäck, & Ljungberg, 2013). Furthermore, *news media exposure* (Holt et al., 2013; Scheufele, 2002) and *internal political efficacy* (Cohen et al., 2001; Craig, Niemi, & Silver, 1990; Levy, 2013) have been shown to be two of the most important predictors – especially for adolescents and young adults (Levy, 2013). News media exposure can be viewed as the foundation of political participation as it leverages knowledge building processes and delivers the information that is necessary to be part of a society and to understand its policies and politics (Eveland & Scheufele, 2000). Internal political efficacy refers to a citizen's beliefs about participating effectively in the political process (Niemi, Craig, & Mattei, 1991). It seems to link media exposure and political participation (Hoffman & Thomson, 2009; Jung, Kim, & de Zúñiga, 2011; Kenski & Stroud, 2006; Levy, 2013).

The research presented here aims to complement the research on mutual influences of media exposure and internal political efficacy on political participation. I suggest that media exposure and internal political efficacy lack a theoretical link to further explicate how media exposure can be translated into internal political efficacy. Because news comes to the user with so much diversity and in such large quantities, the ability to cope with information is important. That said, I propose that *media self-efficacy* may be the missing link between media exposure and internal political efficacy. To benefit from news media to increase one's internal political efficacy and to participate actively in political life, it seems essential to feel capable of properly using the news media for political information purposes.

Based on the self-efficacy theory of Albert Bandura (1977, 1986), I understand news exposure, media self-efficacy, internal political efficacy, and political participation as consecutively linked. In other words, media self-efficacy should mediate the relation between news exposure and internal political efficacy, which, in turn, should influence political participation. The hypotheses derived from this theoretical groundwork were investigated with an online survey of young adults in Germany. The implications of the study will be discussed in terms of their theoretical contribution to the field and in terms of how society can support political participation by developing young adults' media self-efficacy and, in turn, their internal political efficacy.

## 2. Media exposure and political participation

Researchers have not always agreed upon a common definition of political participation. According to Verba, Nie, and Kim (1971) political participation comprises "all those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the decisions they make" (p. 9). This definition includes a wide behavioral spectrum of political participation activities, such as voting, being a member of a political party or attending political meetings.

Research suggests that mass media play a key role in the development of political participation (Delli Carpini, 2004). They provide political information that usually cannot be experienced by citizens in their everyday lives. Television and Internet have been shown to be the most important news sources for young adults who are searching for political information (Hölig, 2013, Pew Research Center, 2012a, 2012b; von Eimeren & Frees, 2014). By contrast, exposure to print news has experienced severe declines with an all-time low in 2012: less than 20 percent of young adults across the US and Europe use print media daily (Eurobarometer, 2012; Pew Research Center, 2012b). Also, younger generations have been shown to particularly benefit from Internet exposure, whereas for older generations, there is a stronger association between civic activity and traditional news sources, such as television and newspaper (Hasebrink & Schmidt, 2012; Rosenstiel, Mitchell, Purcell, & Rainie, 2011). The Internet reduces the costs of political participation by providing easily available information and by facilitating interactive communication (Calenda & Meijer, 2009; Jung et al., 2011).

However, studies demonstrate that the exposure to explicitly news oriented online content plays a rather subordinated role for adolescents and young adults (MPFS, 2014; van Eimeren & Ridder, 2011): They perceive hard news to be rather demanding and distressing (Vahlberg, Peer, & Nesbitt, 2008). Thus, they prefer entertainment-oriented media as well as social media (Baumgartner & Morris, 2009; Glynn, Huges, & Hoffman, 2012; Marchi, 2012). It has been shown that the type of programs or the particular online activities individuals are engaged in largely influence participation outcomes. Young people benefit from Internet exposure with respect to their political participation if they choose online activities such as blogging, following the news, and chatting (Gil De Zuniga, Puig-I-Abril, & Rojas, 2009; Quintelier, 2015; Quintelier & Vissers, 2008). Fur-

ther, the exposure to social media seems to foster their political participation (Dimitrova, Shehata, Strömbäck, & Nord, 2014; Vitak et al., 2011). Similarly, it has been shown that television exposure may have a positive impact if people make an effective selection of information programs: especially, young adults are more likely to politically participate if they prefer news in contrast to entertainment programs (Prior, 2005; Quintelier & Hooghe, 2011).

For communication scholars, it is particularly relevant to disentangle the mechanisms by which media as a socializing agent might encourage or diminish political participation. Numerous studies have suggested that media exposure has a rather indirect effect on political participation: The perception that one has the competence to understand and to effectively deal with politics, namely internal political efficacy, has been discussed to be a crucial mediator (Chaffee & Frank, 1996; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Hoffman & Thomson, 2009; Jung et al., 2011). In the following section, self-efficacy will be referred to as the theoretical underpinning of the present study. Moreover, the concept of media self-efficacy and its interrelation with media exposure and internal political efficacy will be addressed.

### 3. Self-efficacy, media exposure and political participation

Bandura (1986) described perceived self-efficacy as “people’s judgment of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances” (p. 391). Thus, self-efficacy comprises the belief that a person can perform a specific task successfully, and the belief that, if well performed, the task will provide positive consequences (Bandura, 1986). The sense of personal mastery develops with successful experiences and determines future behavior, effort, and persistence in the face of obstacles (Bandura, 1986). The intensity of behavior, persistence of effort, and level of performance should be higher with a strong than with a weak perception of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Increasing self-efficacy further facilitates cognitive involvement and behaviors with the aim to fulfill one’s interest in a subject (Bandura, 1997).

Self-efficacy has been widely discussed as a domain-specific construct (Bandura, 1982; Caprara, Vecchione, Capanna, & Mebane, 2009; Dorman & Adams, 2004; Pajares, 1996). Hence, competent political action requires skills such as being informed about political issues as well as the belief that one has the efficacy to understand and use political information efficiently. Both skills refer to internal political efficacy, which will be outlined in the following section.

#### 3.1 Internal political efficacy

Internal political efficacy is defined as the belief “about one’s own competence to understand and to participate effectively in politics” (Niemi et al., 1991, p. 1407). Throughout the last years, different variations of the concept have been derived. Table 1 gives an overview over related concepts and its assessment.

**Table 1: Overview over different variations of political efficacy (name, definition, measures)**

Concept	Definition	Measures
Internal political efficacy	Belief “about one’s own competence to understand, and to participate effectively in, politics” (Niemi et al., 1991, p. 1407)	(a) I consider myself to be well qualified to participate in politics. (b) I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country. (c) I feel that I could do as good a job in public office as most other people. (d) I think that I am better informed about politics and government than most people
External political efficacy	Belief about the availability and responsiveness of governmental institutions (Craig et al. 1990; Niemi et al., 1991)	e. g.: (a) Most public officials wouldn’t listen to me not matter what I did. (b) It doesn’t matter what a person does – if the politicians want to listen, the will, and if they don’t want to listen, they won’t.
Political information efficacy	Belief about the “voter’s confidence in this or her own political knowledge and its sufficiency to engage in the political process” (Kaid et al., 2007, p. 1096)	(a) I consider myself well qualified to participate in politics, (b) I think I am better informed about politics and government than most people, (c) I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country, and (d) If a friend asked me about the presidential election, I feel I would have enough information to help my friend figure out who to vote for.
Epistemic political efficacy	Perceived confidence to understand the correctness of political messages (Pingree, 2011; Pingree, Brossard, & McLeod, 2014; Pingree, Hill, & McLeod, 2013)	(a) I feel confident that I can find the truth about political issues. (b) If I wanted to, I could figure out the facts behind most political disputes. (c) There are objective facts behind most political disputes, and if you try hard enough you can find them.
Civic efficacy	Belief to express one’s political opinion, for example towards a newspaper or in terms of the participation in a petition (Boyd et al., 2011)	e. g.: (a) Indicate the extent to which you can write an opinion letter to a local newspaper. (b) [...] sign an e-mail or written petition.

In the present study, I want to deal with the concept of internal political efficacy conceptualized by Niemi and colleagues (1991) as well as Craig and colleagues (1990) as – in terms of its conceptual perspective – it is closely related to active political behavior (Niemi et al., 1991). Studies show that internal political efficacy is one of the most important predictors of political participation (Caprara et al., 2009; Jung et al., 2011; Kenski & Stroud, 2006; Valentino, Gregorowicz, & Groenendyk, 2009; Yamamoto, Kushin, & Dalisay, 2015): Individuals who perceive high internal political efficacy feel that they understand how to take part in

politics; they are able to deal with challenges and conflicts in this field (Valentino et al., 2009), and they are convinced that they can successfully execute political behavior (Craig et al., 1990).

With respect to the *origins* of internal political efficacy, social-scientific research proposes different explanations. Besides political socialization, sociodemographic aspects (e.g., age, education, socioeconomic status), political knowledge, and political interest are discussed as important predictors of internal political efficacy (Easton & Dennis, 1967; Finkel, 1985; Levy, 2013). Moreover, various studies indicate that the feeling of being politically efficacious may be fostered by different forms of media exposure (Hoffman & Thomson, 2009; Jung et al., 2011; Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010; Lee, 2006; Semetko & Valkenburg, 1998). In their long-term study, Semetko and Valkenburg (1998) underline the assumption of a positive causal relationship from news use to internal political efficacy. However, concerning the role of different media outlets results are manifold. Lee (2006) as well as Kushin and Yamamoto (2010) found a strong positive relationship between the exposure to online news sources and internal political efficacy. Whereas, according to Scheufele and Nisbet (2002) the use of online news do not relate to internal political efficacy. They further found that the exposure to entertaining online sites is negatively related to internal political efficacy. On the contrary, results by Hoffmann and Thomson (2009) reveal not only a positive significant influence of late night TV exposure on internal political efficacy, but also a positive impact of internal political efficacy on civic participation. Also, Jung and colleagues (2011) suggested a mediating role of internal political efficacy. They showed that news media use positively influences online and offline political participation through internal political efficacy.

Based on this rationale, I suggest that news exposure positively affects political participation through internal political efficacy. As compared to newspapers, television and Internet have been shown to be the most important news sources for young adults who are searching for political information (Pew Research Center, 2012; von Eimeren & Frees, 2014). Consequently, the present study focused on these two news sources. I predict the following:

*H1a: Internet news exposure positively influences internal political efficacy.*

*H1b: Television news exposure positively influences internal political efficacy.*

*H2: Internal political efficacy, in turn, positively influences political participation.*

At first glance, media exposure does not have much in common with the feeling that one can have an impact on political processes. Thus, in the following, I suggest media self-efficacy as an important mediator that can explain this desideratum.



### 3.2 Why media-related self-efficacy matters

It has been shown, that increasing self-efficacy may facilitate cognitive involvement and behaviors with the aim to fulfill one's interest in a subject (Bandura, 1993). Therefore, it seems plausible to assume that self-efficacy may also play a crucial role in gaining and processing political information from communication media on the one hand and translating this information into political acting on the other hand. With regard to political communication, Hofstetter, Zuniga, and Dozier (2001) proposed the concept of media self-efficacy. They defined media self-efficacy as an individual's perception of how effective he or she is at gathering political information from the media to fulfill his or her personal needs (i.e., information seeking, diversion, companionship) by using different media (i.e., television, newspaper, interpersonal communication). If a person believes that the use of a certain communication medium meets his or her needs, it is expected that this person will possess a higher sense of media self-efficacy with regard to the corresponding medium. As I am mainly interested in young adults' political information-seeking behavior, I will focus on media self-efficacy concerning an individual's need for information.

In recent years, the consideration of media-related self-efficacy became an important topic of various social-scientific studies. Therefore, there are a lot more conceptualizations of media-related self-efficacy, such as for example *computer self-efficacy* (Compeau & Higgins, 1995), *Internet self-efficacy* (Eastin & LaRose, 2000; LaRose & Eastin, 2004) or *social media self-efficacy* (Hocevar, Flanagin, & Metzger, 2014). In contrast to media self-efficacy by Hofstetter and colleagues (2001) the concepts of computer self-efficacy (Compeau & Higgins, 1995) as well as Internet self-efficacy (Eastin & LaRose, 2000; LaRose & Eastin, 2004) rather focus on self-efficacy regarding technical aspects of the medium. According to Hocevar, Flanagin, and Metzger (2014), social media self-efficacy comprises the belief that a person is able to deal with social media technologies in particular. However, a comprehensive discussion of the above mentioned and further related concepts as well as their characteristics exceeds the scope of the present paper.

As the Internet and television news provide a large quantity of content with great diversity, especially young adults may perceive these types of media to be quite challenging to understand. Educational research has shown that students are developing an impression of how well they are learning while working on a task (e.g., Schunk, 1984). The perception that they are able to understand the presented material and that they can get the information they want to get enhances their task-related efficacy and motivation. The same should be true during exposure to and processing of political information from news media. Additionally, media self-efficacy has been demonstrated to be positively related to the perceived intellectual impact of the respective media outlet (Hofstetter et al., 2001). If a person believes that the use of a certain communication medium meets his or her needs concerning the acquisition of political information, he or she is more likely to possess a higher sense of media self-efficacy with regard to the corresponding medium. This assumption is backed by survey studies on related self-efficacy concepts (Austin, Pinkleton, Austin, & van der Vord, 2012; Compeau &

Higgins, 1995; Eastin & LaRose, 2000; Hocevar et al., 2014; Peters, Rickes, Jöckel, Criegern, & van Deursen, 2006; Rains, 2008). Also, experimental results by Salomon (1984) indicate that the use of a certain medium influences the respective media-related self-efficacy. People who use a medium or a specific media outlet more intensively are able to make more relevant experiences. Consequently, they are feeling more self-confident concerning their ability to acquire proper (political) information by using the medium.

According to Bandura (1986) self-efficacy develops with successful experiences. Thus, it seems plausible to assume that to attain internal political efficacy to enable one to participate in politics, young adults also need to develop high self-efficacy regarding the use of news media, namely media self-efficacy. A study by Hofstetter, Zuniga, and Dozier (2001) underlines this notion as the researchers found a meaningful correlation between media self-efficacy (television-related, newspaper-related self-efficacy) and internal political efficacy ( $r \leq .26, p < .001$ ). By feeling informed about politics, the recipient may perceive a stronger motivation to actively take part in the political process and, thereby, to affect processes of societal change.

To conclude, I suggest that news exposure can positively influence political participation through media self-efficacy and internal political efficacy. As I will concentrate on media self-efficacy concerning the exposure to online news and television news I will address media self-efficacy in the following as *Internet-related self-efficacy* or *TV-related self-efficacy*. I assume the following relationships:

*H3a: Internet news exposure positively influences Internet-related self-efficacy.*

*H4a: Internet-related self-efficacy, in turn, positively relates to internal political efficacy.*

The same assumptions apply to television news exposure:

*H3b: Television news exposure positively influences TV-related self-efficacy.*

*H4b: TV-related self-efficacy, in turn, positively relates to internal political efficacy.*

The presumptions made up to this point make it appear most likely that there is an indirect influence of news exposure (Internet/television) on political participation through media self-efficacy and internal political efficacy. Therefore, I additionally predict:

*H5a: Internet news exposure positively influences Internet-related self-efficacy, which, in turn, positively influences internal political efficacy, which, in turn, positively relates to political participation.*

*H5b: Television news exposure positively influences TV-related self-efficacy, which, in turn, positively influences internal political efficacy, which, in turn, positively relates to political participation.*

## 4. Method

### 4.1 Procedure and sample

The data used in this analysis originated from an online survey<sup>1</sup> that was conducted in 2011 in Germany. A total of 149 participants (63.8 % female;  $M_{\text{age}} = 19.8$ ,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 1.33$ ) were recruited via mailing lists of different youth organizations, German universities and social network sites. Thus, the sample must be considered a convenience sample.

### 4.2 Measures

**Media self-efficacy.** The media self-efficacy scale concerning the need for information was adapted from Hofstetter, Zuniga, and Dozier (2001). The original instrument focused on self-efficacy with regard to television and newspaper exposure as well as to the assessment of self-efficacy concerning interpersonal communication. As the present study concentrates on television and Internet news exposure, the television scale by Hofstetter and colleagues (2001) was used, and an equivalent scale for Internet-related self-efficacy was developed. The scales both comprise two items that refer to the need for information that can be fulfilled by news media exposure.

The media self-efficacy of each medium was measured in two steps. In the first step, the ability to meet the need for information was addressed. Regarding Internet news exposure, the respondents were asked to rate the following items: “Concerning Internet news, circle *Yes* or *No* with regard to whether you are able to find out specific things about public affairs that are useful to you”; “Concerning Internet news, circle *Yes* or *No* with regard to whether you are able to find out specific things about groups that are trying to solve problems in your community that are useful to you”. The items regarding television news exposure were formulated equivalently. For each item, *yes* responses were scored as 1 and *no* responses were scored as 0. In the second step, the respondents were asked to assess their confidence regarding the use of the medium, either Internet or television: “Now, rate how confident you are that you can get what you want from Internet news [TV news] on a scale of zero to 100, where 100 indicates that you are certain you can influence the situation, zero that you are certain you cannot influence the situation. Give numbers between zero and 100 to indicate other levels of certainty with regard to whether you can get what you want from using Internet news applications [TV news]”. To combine the *ability* and the *confidence* aspects, the *confidence* response was multiplied by the *ability* responses to produce items scored from zero to 100. Internet-related self-efficacy ( $M = 134.53$ ,  $SD = 51.79$ ) showed good reliability Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .91$ . The reliability for the television-related self-efficacy ( $M = 83.42$ ,  $SD = 54.67$ ) was also acceptable with Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .72$ . For further analysis, a mean index for each scale was calculated.

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1 The complete German questionnaire can be found in the appendix.

**Internal political efficacy.** The items concerning internal political efficacy were taken from Niemi and colleagues (1991) who reduced the internal political efficacy scale by Craig, Niemi and Silver (1990) to four items with the best psychometric properties. In the framework of the present study, I rely on an adapted version of the original scale by Craig and colleagues. Based on the definition of internal political efficacy by Niemi et al. (1991) the scale included both aspects of internal political efficacy: the belief to *understand* and the belief to *participate effectively in* politics (Niemi et al., 1991, p. 1407): “I always understand about current political developments and decisions.”; “I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country”; “I consider myself well-qualified to participate in politics”; “I feel I could do as good a job in public office as most other people”; “I think that I am better informed about politics and government than most people”. The items were translated into German language. For each item, *yes*-responses were scored as 1 and *no*-responses were scored as 0.

**Political participation.** Seven different political activities, such as participating in demonstrations, engagement in political or social organizations, as well as political discussion, were given (e.g., “I am actively engaged in a political organization”). Respondents had to rate how often they accomplished the political activities that were mentioned. The ratings ranged from 2 (*yes, often*) to 1 (*yes, seldom*) to 0 (*no, never*).

**Internet news exposure.** The Internet news exposure scale assessed the frequency of exposure to online newspapers, online news magazines, public television web pages, online radio news stations, and social networking sites (0 = *never*; 5 = *(nearly) daily*). For data analysis a sum index was calculated ( $M = 7.56$ ,  $SD = 4.54$ ). The measurement of Internet news exposure reflects the participant’s preference for a certain online news outlet as a function of his or her access frequency. It can be assumed that different news sources are competitive to some degree or are used in alternative ways (Eveland, Hutchens, & Shen, 2009). Thus, heterogeneous answers to the different items could be expected. As a consequence, it did not seem appropriate to conduct a reliability test for the calculated mean index of Internet news exposure.

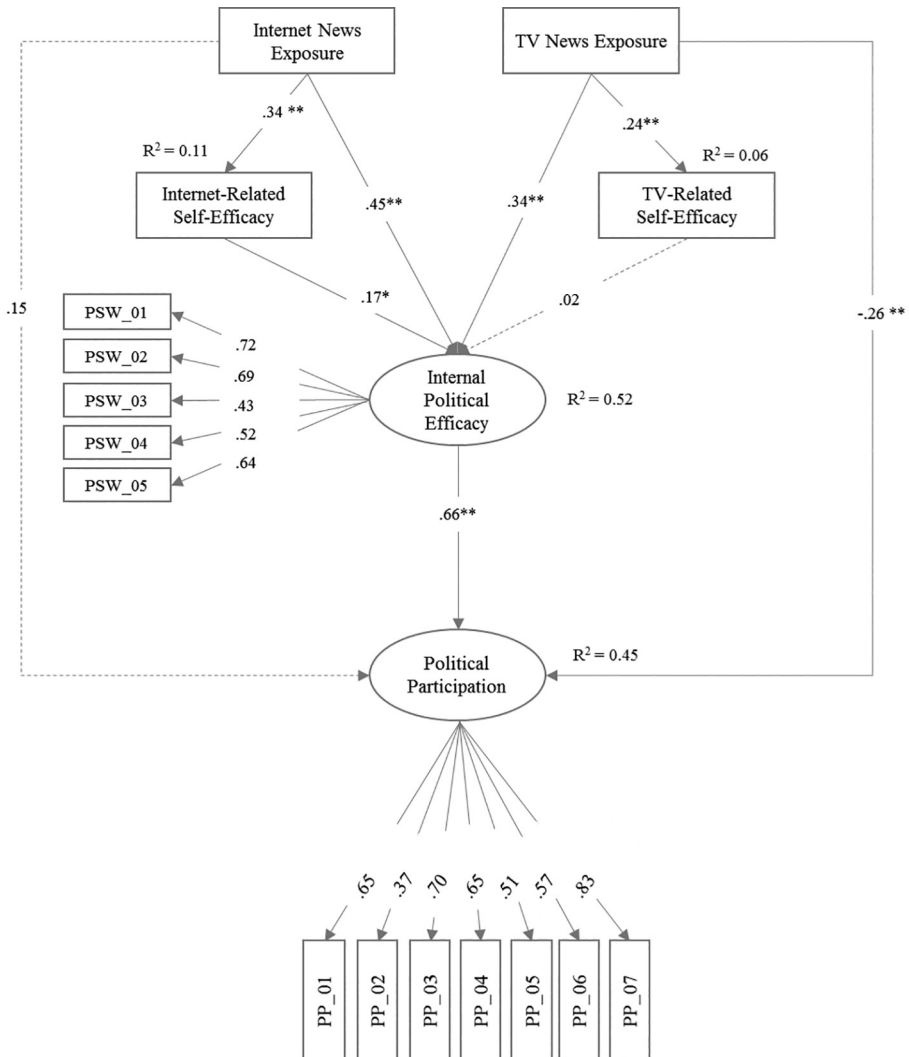
**Television news exposure.** The television news exposure scale asked for the frequency of exposure to political talk shows, films, documentaries, news magazines, other television magazines, news channels, public news, and private news (0 = *never*; 5 = *(nearly) daily*). For data analysis a sum index was calculated ( $M = 16.74$ ,  $SD = 7.31$ ). Again no measurement of reliability of television news exposure has been calculated.

## 5. Results

The hypotheses (H1–H5) focus on the relations between news exposure (i.e., online news, television), media self-efficacy (i.e., internet-related self-efficacy, television-related self-efficacy), internal political efficacy, and political participation. In order to test our hypotheses, I calculated a structural equation model (SEM). The fit indices indicate an satisfying overall fit of the model (Hu & Bentler, 1999):

$\chi^2(91) = 113.2, p = .06, CFI = .97, TLI = .96, RMSEA = .04, 90\% \text{ CI } [0.00; 0.06]$  and  $SRMR = .06$ . I thus concluded that the predicted model is consistent with the data (see figure 1).<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 1: Structural equation model with the results for H1a/b, H2, H3a/b, H4a/b, H5a/b**



Notes: Values are standardized coefficients; \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .001$ .

2 As there is no meaningful relationship between age, gender and political participation, variables are not included in the model.

## 5.1 News exposure, media self-efficacy and internal political efficacy

Hypothesis 1a/b predicted a positive relationship between news exposure and internal political efficacy. Confirming H1, a positive relationship can be found between Internet news exposure and internal political efficacy (H1a;  $\beta = .45, p < .001$ ) as well as between TV news exposure and internal political efficacy (H1b;  $\beta = .34, p < .001$ ).

Hypothesis 2 assumed that there is a relationship between internal political efficacy and political participation. Consistent with my expectation (H2), there was a significant relationship between internal political efficacy and political participation ( $\beta = .66, p < .001$ ). Hypothesis 3a/b predicted a positive relationship between news exposure and media self-efficacy and was confirmed for both media outlets. Internet news exposure is positively related with Internet-related self-efficacy (H3a;  $\beta = .34, p < .001$ ), whereas TV news exposure is positively related to TV-related self-efficacy (H3b;  $\beta = .24, p < .001$ ). Hypothesis 4a/b concerned the relationship of media self-efficacy and internal political efficacy. The results indicated that Internet-related self-efficacy is positively related to internal political efficacy (H4a;  $\beta = .17, p < .05$ ). To confirm H4b, the same exact pattern would need to be observed for television news exposure. However, data did not replicate the assumed relationship (H4b;  $\beta = .02, ns$ ). Consequently, H4b had to be rejected.

## 5.2 Serial mediation of news exposure on political participation through media self-efficacy and internal political efficacy

Hypothesis 5a/b assumed a serial mediation of news exposure on political participation through media self-efficacy and internal political efficacy. Methodologically, the hypothesized relationships can be termed a serial mediation. A serial mediator model can have at least two, and up to four potential mediators. The model “assumes a causal chain linking the mediators, with a specified direction of causal flow” (Hayes, 2012, p. 14). Hence, the serial mediator model hypothesizes how, or by what means, an independent variable ( $X$ ) affects a dependent variable ( $Y$ ) through two to four potential, sequentially chained mediators ( $M1, M2, M3, M4$ ). In the present study two serial mediators are assumed as being part of the mediation model. Results suggest a small serial indirect effect of Internet news exposure on political participation through Internet related self-efficacy and internal political efficacy (H5a) [0.004; 95% CI with 1000 bootstrapping samples: 0.001; 0.008]. Results testing H5b indicated no serial indirect effect of television news exposure on political participation through TV-related self-efficacy and internal political efficacy [0.000; 95% CI with 1000 bootstrapping samples: -0.001; 0.002]. Consequently, Hypothesis 5b had to be rejected. Concerning television news exposure, higher media self-efficacy did not lead to higher internal political efficacy and, in turn, to political participation.

## 6. Discussion

Given the fact that the voter turnout among the younger parts of the population (18 to 29 years old) still runs far behind the turnout of the same age group 30 years ago (The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, 2012) and that youth engagement has been decreasing (Pew Research Center, 2012c), it seems justified to ask what makes young adults participate in politics. Previous research has shown a strong relation between media exposure, internal political efficacy, and political participation (e.g., Hoffman & Thomson, 2009; Jung et al., 2011). The present study aimed at complementing this line of research by suggesting that media self-efficacy leverages internal political efficacy, which, in turn, triggers political participation. Results show that internal political efficacy evolved as a pathway from Internet and television news exposure to political participation. News exposure – both exposure to online and television news – positively fosters political participation through internal political efficacy.

Concerning online news exposure, the model shows that besides the positive indirect effect, there is no direct relationship between the frequency being exposed to online news and political participation ( $\beta = .15, ns$ ). Moreover, I found a direct negative relationship between the intensity of television news exposure and political participation ( $\beta = -.26, p < .001$ ). People, who spend more time watching TV, are less likely to politically participate. These findings are backed by previous studies (Gil De Zuniga et al., 2009; Quintelier, 2015; Quintelier & Hooghe, 2011; Quintelier & Vissers, 2008). Quintelier and Hooghe (2011) argue that television exposure only fosters political participation given that young people make an effective selection of information programs. The same holds true for the exposure to websites. Quintelier and Vissers (2008) and various other researchers suggest to analyze specific forms of online activism (e.g., reading news, using social media, chatting) and their relation to political participation (Gil De Zuniga et al., 2009; Quintelier, 2015; Quintelier & Vissers, 2008). However, another feasible explanation for these findings may be the outstanding importance of internal political efficacy as mediator for the relationship between online news exposure and political participation. People need to feel confident to translate online news exposure into effective political participation.

Besides, for Internet news exposure, I showed that the perception of Internet-related self-efficacy fosters the feeling that one is able to influence the political process – internal political efficacy – which, in turn, relates to active political participation. Regarding television news exposure, the present analysis revealed that media exposure positively relates to media self-efficacy, but did not necessarily translate into the feeling of being capable to actively participate in politics. The positive relationship between media exposure and media-self-efficacy is backed by previous research (Austin et al., 2012; Hofstetter et al., 2001; LaRose & Eastin, 2004). I suspect that the interactive nature of online news – in contrast to a rather passive consumption of political news watched on television – provides opportunities for participation and, thus, facilitates the development of media self-efficacy and internal political efficacy as foundations on which political participation can be built. Though, the diversity and quantity of information on

the Internet may complicate the selection of content. The interactivity of the Internet was found to challenge young recipients and was able to promote a feeling of competence regarding efficient and goal-directed media usage.

The missing relationship between television media self-efficacy and internal political efficacy can be attributed to the passive consumption of political news watched on television. Television news usually do not demand the user to be as active as Internet news. Moreover, television is often used as a background medium while other tasks are performed such as playing computer games, using the Internet, or doing homework (Foehr, 2006; Roberts & Foehr, 2008). Therefore, television exposure may be connected with a lack of attention and involvement with the provided news content (Brasel & Gips, 2011) that are needed to process information effectively (Chaffee & Schleuder, 1986; Eveland, 2002).

Moreover, previous research argues that there are diverse types of media users, who differently compose their information repertoires based on their individual preferences and attitudes (Hasebrink & Popp, 2006; Hasebrink & Schmidt, 2012). Therefore, it seems plausible to assume that people who prefer TV programs as their main information source and people who mainly rely on online news sources may differ in terms of their motives to seek information, their political interest as well as concerning their willingness to politically participate. Results by Lupia and Philpot (2005), for example, indicate that people who use websites to gather information about politics are more politically interested. Higher interest, in turn, positively influences the attention regarding media content, the elaboration of the provided information as well as the willingness to take part in political actions (Eveland, 2002; Liu et al., 2013; Strömbäck & Shehata, 2010).

Further, the different results found for Internet and television news exposure may be explained by the different measures of Internet and television news, and this may also be a limitation of the present study. The television measure reflects only exposure to (audiovisual) television content, whereas the measure of online news exposure included a much more diverse set of items that consisted of exposure to newspapers, magazines, websites of television channels, as well as typical online sources such as social networking sites. Although the online news sources I asked for reflect a wide range of media outlets, most of them are widely text-based. Text-based information needs more effort and attention to be processed and elaborated (Chaffee & Schleuder, 1986; Eveland & Scheufele, 2000). Previous studies suggested that media recipients gain more political knowledge through print news exposure than through television news exposure (Druckman, 2005). Further, online news exposure has been shown to increase learning through a higher demand of selection and elaboration (Eveland & Dunwoody, 2002) and to widen the political agenda (Tewksbury, Weaver, & Maddex, 2001).

## 7. Limitations and implications for future research

The present study's results are limited in terms of methodological and theoretical issues. Of course the process of gaining media self-efficacy and internal political efficacy by using news sources to enhance political participation behavior does not happen in a vacuum. The assumption that there are two sequentially chained



mediators, media self-efficacy and internal political efficacy, may be statistically biased because important variables may have been left out of the regression model. Therefore, it can be assumed that there are more potential mediators (e.g., communication about politics) between news media exposure, internal political efficacy, and political participation. These potential mediators should be the focus of future research.

Further, as already discussed above, it seems plausible to assume that media exposure and self-efficacy may only be two important indicators for political participation. Having that said, research has shown that – particularly for adolescents and young adults – political participation is influenced through further aspects such as social agents such as parents, peers and school (Amnå, 2012; Erentaitė, Žukauskienė, Beyers, & Pilkauskaitė-Valickienė, 2012). They may foster political interest and, thereby, influence media selection, the intensity of media exposure, and political knowledge. Political knowledge, in turn, has been shown to be a meaningful precondition for various forms of political behavior (Becker & Dunwoody, 1982; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Eveland & Hively, 2009; Eveland & Scheufele, 2000). An individual's sociodemographic background (e.g., parents, peer, school) also seems to be responsible for the development of self-efficacy (Schunk, 1995; Schunk & Meece, 2006). Future studies concerning political participation of adolescents and young adults should, therefore, consider the role of socialization agents.

The present study was based on a small self-selective and homogeneous sample. More research is needed to gain representative data on how media self-efficacy is related to media exposure, internal political efficacy, and political participation. Another concern is the issue of causal ambiguity. The present study is based on cross-sectional data, thereby, making it impossible to confidently demonstrate causality or the absence of reverse causality. Even though a causal relationship between media exposure, media self-efficacy, internal political efficacy and political participation is assumed, this theoretical argument should be put to another meaningful empirical test, such as an experimental or a longitudinal study. In this context, it could be worth to analyze and discuss the idea of a reinforcing spiral of efficacy, media usage and participation. Additional limitations can be found with regard to the self-reporting of news exposure. Previous research has shown that self-reports increase the probability of error. Further, they have been criticized as imprecise and prone to error (Price, 1993; Scharrow, 2016). Merely being exposed to the news does not necessarily presume that the recipients are paying attention to the news content (Price, 1993).

## 8. Practical implications

Self-efficacy has been criticized to be rather an *indicator* than a *cause* for behavior (Hawkins, 1992). In a broader sense, self-efficacy is a subjective evaluation of a person's confidence to succeed in a specific task. Oftentimes, different forms of self-efficacy mainly serve as *indicators* for an successful execution of a behavior or behavioral intentions (e.g., Jung et al., 2011). Regarding political participation, factors such as political socialization, political interest, and political knowledge

are the most influential *causes* (Amnå, 2012; Cohen et al., 2001; Holt et al., 2013; Verba et al., 1971). Nevertheless, the importance of self-efficacy as a possible cause for behavior must not be neglected. Imagine a person who is objectively *very politically knowledgeable*, but who does *not have enough confidence* in his or her abilities. Presumably, this person *will not get actively involved* in political actions. Addressing both the media exposure of adolescents and young adults and their media self-efficacy seems to be a very effective way to increase political participation. Especially, parents and teachers are challenged to support young adults in their development of an active and goal-directed news media exposure, the latter for example in the context of media literacy education. With an increased media self-efficacy young recipients may generate a higher internal political efficacy. This, in turn, leads to more political participation.

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## Appendix: Questionnaire

Der Umgang mit Politik (politische Ereignisse, Politiker etc.) ist ein zentrales Element unseres Alltags. Informationen über Politiker und politische Themen sind in den verschiedensten Medien zu finden. In diesem ersten Abschnitt der Befragung möchte ich gerne wissen, welche Medien du nutzt, wenn du dich über Politik informierst und wie oft du dies tust.

### Welche Fernsehsendungen nutzt du, wenn du Informationen über Politik (politische Ereignisse, Politiker) erhalten möchtest?

	<i>(fast) täglich</i>	<i>Mehrmals pro Woche</i>	<i>1 x pro Woche</i>	<i>1-2x pro Monat</i>	<i>seltener</i>	<i>nie</i>
Politische Talkshows (z. B. Anne Will, Hart aber fair ...)	5	4	3	2	1	0
Filme	5	4	3	2	1	0
Dokumentationen	5	4	3	2	1	0
Öffentlich-rechtliche Nachrichten (z. B. ZDF Heute, Tagesschau)	5	4	3	2	1	0
Private Nachrichten (z. B. RTL Aktuell, Pro7 Newstime)	5	4	3	2	1	0
Nachrichtenmagazine (z. B. Heute Journal, Tagesthemen)	5	4	3	2	1	0
Nachrichtensender (z. B. N24, Phoenix)	5	4	3	2	1	0
Magazinsendungen (z. B. Stern TV, Weltspiegel)	5	4	3	2	1	0

### Welche Internetseiten nutzt du, wenn du Informationen über Politik (politische Ereignisse, Politiker) erhalten möchtest?

	<i>(fast) täglich</i>	<i>Mehrmals pro Woche</i>	<i>1 x pro Woche</i>	<i>1-2x pro Monat</i>	<i>seltener</i>	<i>nie</i>
Internetseiten von Tageszeitungen (z. B. tageszeitung.de, sueddeutsche.de)	5	4	3	2	1	0
Internetseiten von Zeitschriften oder Nachrichtenmagazinen (z. B. Spiegel.de, Zeit.de)	5	4	3	2	1	0
Internetseiten der öffentlich-rechtlichen Fernseh-/Radiosender	5	4	3	2	1	0
Soziale Netzwerke (z. B. Facebook, Twitter)	5	4	3	2	1	0

Menschen nutzen Medien mit unterschiedlichen Zielen. Bitte gib bei den folgenden Fragen jeweils an, ob die genannte Aussage auf dich zutrifft oder nicht.



**Durch das Fernsehen...**

	<i>Ja</i>	<i>Nein</i>
...kann ich bestimmte Dinge über öffentliche Angelegenheiten erfahren, die für mich nützlich/relevant sind.	1	0
...kann ich (für mich) nützliche/relevante Informationen über Gruppen erhalten, die versuchen (gesellschaftliche) Probleme in meiner Gemeinde lösen.	1	0

Nun gib bitte einen Wert zwischen 0 und 100 an, wie sicher du bist, durch die Wahl von Fernsehprogrammen Einfluss auf die eben genannten Aspekte/Bedürfnisse (wie z. B. „ich kann relevante Informationen über Gruppen erhalten, die versuchen (gesellschaftliche) Probleme in meinem Umfeld zu lösen“ oder „ich kann bestimmte Dinge über öffentliche Angelegenheiten erfahren...“) zu haben. 100 bedeutet dabei, dass du dir sehr sicher bist, durch die Wahl von Fernsehprogrammen Einfluss zu haben. 0 bedeutet, dass du dir sehr unsicher bist.

**Durch das Internet ...**

	<i>Ja</i>	<i>Nein</i>
...kann ich bestimmte Dinge über öffentliche Angelegenheiten erfahren, die für mich nützlich/relevant sind.	1	0
...kann ich (für mich) nützliche/relevante Informationen über Gruppen erhalten, die versuchen (gesellschaftliche) Probleme in meiner Gemeinde lösen.	1	0

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Ich habe dich ganz am Anfang bereits gefragt, mit welchen Medien du dich über Politik informierst. Nun möchte ich gerne etwas über dein **bisheriges politisches Engagement** erfahren.

Wenn du dir nun dein bisheriges Leben vor Augen führst, in welcher Form hast du dich politisch engagiert? Denke bei der Beantwortung der Frage an dein Verhalten bis zum heutigen Tag.

	<i>Ja, oft</i>	<i>Ja, selten</i>	<i>Nein, nie</i>
Ich beteilige mich an Demonstrationen.	2	1	0
Ich habe Flugblätter verteilt.	2	1	0
Ich beteilige mich an Unterschriftenaktionen.	2	1	0
Ich engagiere mich in einer politischen/ sozialen Organisation.	2	1	0
Vor der Wahl habe ich Wahlveranstaltungen besucht.	2	1	0
Ich habe als Wahlhelfer gearbeitet.	2	1	0
Ich schreibe Briefe an Politiker/Parteien, wenn ich ein Anliegen habe.	2	1	0
Ich besuche politische Diskussionen.	2	1	0
Ich lese Texte über politische Ereignisse.	2	1	0

Denk nun darüber nach, wie du dich über politische Ereignisse und Themen informierst. Gib bei den nächsten vier Fragen an, welche Folgen dies auf dein Verhalten hat.

	<i>Ja</i>	<i>Nein</i>
Ich halte mich selbst für kompetent genug, um am politischen Leben teilzunehmen.	1	0
Ich glaube, dass ich ein recht gutes Verständnis von den wichtigen politischen Fragen habe, die unser Land betreffen.	1	0
Ich glaube, ich könnte ebenso gut wie die meisten anderen Menschen ein politisches Amt bekleiden.	1	0
Ich denke, dass ich über die politischen Vorgänge und die Regierung besser als die meisten Menschen informiert bin.	1	0
Ich weiß immer über aktuelle politische Entwicklungen/ Ereignisse Bescheid.	1	0

Abschließend hätte ich gerne noch ein paar Angaben zu deiner Person.

Wie alt bist du?

Welches Geschlecht hast du?

Gib bei der nächsten Frage deinen bisher höchsten schulischen oder universitären Abschluss an.

Schüler	Realschul- abschluss	Hauptschul- abschluss	Abitur	Bachelor	Diplom/ Master
In Aus- bildung	Abgeschlossene Ausbildung	Student	Promotion		