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TRUST, NEWS MEDIA USE, CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, AND SOCIAL
CAPITAL AFTER SEPTEMBER 11, 2001

JOHNNY V. SPARKS, JR.

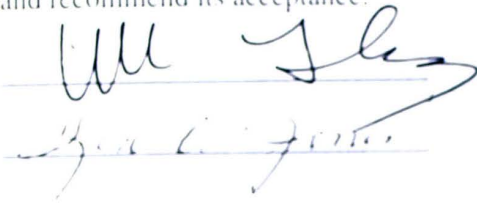
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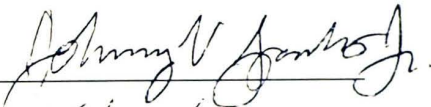
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Trust, News Media Use, Civic Engagement, and Social Capital
after September 11, 2001

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
Austin Peay State University

Johnny V. Sparks Jr.

May 2002

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my wife, son, mother, and father

Mrs. Tammy Sparks

and

Mr. Johnny Elijah Sparks

and

Mrs. Linda Faye Sparks

and

Mr. John V. Sparks Sr.

who have given me invaluable educational opportunities.

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ABSTRACT

A pervasive decline in civic engagement during the last quarter of the 20th Century prompted scores of scholars to explore the media-citizenship relationship. The present investigation examines the relationship between news media use, trust, civic engagement, and social capital, following September 11, 2001. A leading scholar (Putnam, 2001) contends that trust underlies civic mindedness. Putnam's research points to media use as an agent of mistrust and civic decay.

The hypotheses under investigation run counter to notions that contend media use and trust are negatively related. It was hypothesized that trust, civic engagement, and social capital would significantly increase with news media use in the present study. The study occurred in the wake of the September 11, 2001, attack on America. The findings provide a cross-sectional summary of primary civic determinant relationships following the critical incident.

A survey of 338 Clarksville, Tennessee, residents produced significant results in support of several proposed news media use, trust, and civic engagement hypotheses. As respondents' news media use increased, their overall level of trust, social capital, and civic engagement increased. The findings did not support the premise that trust underlies civic engagement. The findings illustrate a potentially dynamic relationship between news media use, trust and civic engagement in our democracy.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Self-sacrifice and cooperation represent core American values. Civic virtue rests at the foundation of our democracy's success and longevity. Throughout U.S. history, individuals have worked together for the common good. The pursuit of that common good often required selflessness. Self-sacrificing working-class heroes and heroines adorn our history books.

In the wake of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on America, working-class men and women have again emerged at the forefront of our nation's consciousness. Firefighters working at the World Trade Center raised the American flag and hoisted a national icon. Images of civic virtue, like those emerging from ground zero fortify our national self-image. We may only know them as the Tennessee volunteers, New York police or the working women on the home front, but their place in history is unquestioned.

The power of individual citizens working together has preserved the great experiment of American democracy for more than two centuries. However, fewer and fewer Americans were working together during the last quarter of the 20th Century. At first the decline went relatively unnoticed. It followed the greatest surge in civic involvement in the nation's history (Putnam, 2001).

The disengaging trend garnered much attention at the close of the 20th Century. Individualism gradually replaced cooperation as an American trademark (Eberly, 1994). The sociological symptoms of shift forced academicians to take notice. As we entered a

new century, a new urgency emerged. Social scientist feared the unprecedented decline in civic involvement and responsibility threatened the American way (Putnam, 2001; Eberly, 1994; Cappella and Jamieson, 1996; Patterson, 1996). However, following the September 11, 2001, attack on America, examples of civic virtue abound. Americans gave of their blood, time, and money to help fellow citizens in their hours of need.

Our nation's leaders recognized the importance of a continued sense of citizenship. President George W. Bush called citizens to action in the war against terror and for the preservation of democracy. Bush sent an act before the U.S. Congress in April 2002 designed to promote a continuation of the postattack civic vitality. Bush's Citizen Service Act would encourage Americans to provide 4,000 hours of civic service. Following September 11, 2001, Americans asked, "How can I help?" and "What can I do?" Bush's Citizen Corps provided Americans with an answer to those questions (*Volunteering for America*, n.d.) "We want to be a Nation that serves goals larger than self. We have been offered a unique opportunity, and we must not let this moment pass" (*President Delivers State of the Union Address*, 2002, January 29, ¶ 51).

Before the Citizen Corps and the Citizen Services Act, researchers focused much attention on sources of civic virtue. Reciprocity, trust, and honesty were commonly investigated variables within the construct of social capital. Public opinion polls are used to measure these. Opinions regarding social capital, reciprocity, trust, and honesty may result from media, personal experience, and interaction with others (Putnam, 2001; Eberly, 1994; Shah, Kwak, and Holbert, 2001a).

This study investigates the relationship between media use, determinants of civic virtue, and civic engagement in a post-September 11, 2001, sample. At this time in

history, it grows increasingly important to increase our understanding of the relationship between media use and civic life through new research approaches (Putnam, 2001; Bennett, 2001; McLeod, 2001; Bimber, 2000; Dahlgren, 2000; Mutz, 2001; Chaffee, 2001; Iyengar, 2001).

First, this paper will briefly discuss rise and fall of civic life during the 20th Century with attention to three generations of Americans – the Civic Generation, Baby Boomers and Generation X. Then, it operationally defines terms relevant to civic research along with the predictors of engagement including social capital, community integration, and trust. The role of public opinion research will be discussed.

With that evidence in mind, it introduces hypotheses and methods of evaluation. The proposed hypotheses will be tested using a randomly selected survey sample including 338 residents of Clarksville, Tennessee, interviewed by telephone by two research methods classes. Trust and news media use are expected to correlate positively. Both are expected to relate positively to civic engagement and social capital.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

From the dawn of the 20th Century, Americans' civic participation increased with the exception of a brief decline during the Great Depression. After World War II, participation skyrocketed. "World War II occasioned a massive outpouring of patriotism and collective solidarity" (Putnam, 2001, p. 54). This engaged generation of Americans set the standard of civic virtue in the 20th Century and earned the Civic Generation label. The generation represents all those born prior to the Baby Boom of 1946. These Americans include those who endured the Great Depression and won World War II.

Civic service is expected to peak when a generation matures into mid-life. When the Civic Generation came of age, civic life peaked in America. With each passing year, new membership records were established in civic and religious organizations during their social reign (Putnam, 2001).

The children of the Civic Generation were less engaged in community life. The Baby Boomers represent Americans born between 1946 and 1964. They came of age during an era of increasing political and social cynicism. Watergate and Vietnam broke their trust and marred their civic spirit. Like their predecessors, the Boomers were expected to step up to the plate of civic engagement when the cohort reached middle age. Instead, the Baby Boomers disengaged, and all indicators of civic participation steadily decreased during their generation (Putnam, 2001). Nearly three decades of political cynicism followed Watergate and fostered the decline in American citizenship (Perloff, 1998).

The children of Baby Boomers were even more civically detached. Generation X, defined as the cohort born following 1964, matured in the post-Watergate era. Generation X marks the most cynical and civically inactive generation yet according to all measures of engagement (Putnam, 2001).

Although we are still the most civically engaged country in the free world, America entered a pervasive-downward civic trend in the last quarter of the 20th Century. Following the peak of the Civic Generation, Baby Boomers began a slow, steady withdrawal from civic life. Political, civic, religious, and recreation organizational participation plummeted by more than half. The decline was equally distributed across all demographic groups. “On average across all these organizations, membership rates began to plateau in 1957, peaked in the early 1960s, and began the period of sustained decline by 1969” (Putnam, 2001, p. 55).

Alarming relative changes are evident from Roper’s Social and Political Trends Survey data between the 1973-74 and 1993-94 surveys. Individuals who reported serving as an officer of a club or organization and working for a political party each fell by 42 % over two decades. Thirty-nine percent fewer respondents reported working as a committee member for some local organization. Thirty-five percent fewer reported that they had attended a public meeting on town or school affairs.

Education, long serving as the primary predictor of civic engagement, lost its engaging strength. While increasingly more Americans were better educated, increasingly fewer well-educated Americans participated. The participation decline among the well educated matched that of other demographic groups. “In absolute terms, the declines are greatest among the better educated” (Putnam, 2001, p. 56).

Today, Americans join national interest organizations in an attempt to promote their interests. Organizations like the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), dominate the civic landscape. National support-a-cause organizations like the AARP, the nation's largest, have replaced traditional organizations with local chapters in our society.

AARP continues to grow and demand attention. Despite the organization's politically powerful status, few members have direct contact with other members in an organizational capacity. Membership often means "moving a pen, not making a meeting" (p. 51). The organization is based in Washington, DC. "The AARP is politically significant, but it demands little of its members' energies and contributes little to their social capital" (p. 51).

Membership in traditional civic, religious, and recreation organizations fell by 90 % during the last quarter of the 20th Century. However, the list of cause-supporting organizations has tripled in the last 25 years. "So the vigor of the Washington-based organizations, though they are large, proliferating, and powerful," Putnam argues, "is an unreliable guide to the vitality of social connectedness and civic engagement in American communities" (p. 52).

Civic participation has long been measured by organizational membership rosters and self-reported involvement on national surveys. However with the new phenomenon of more distant, non-local organizations, Putnam suggests more telling measures are those that ask individuals to report the frequency of attending or leading meetings, for example. When this latter measure is used, the decline in American civic engagement is well documented and pervasive (Putnam, 2001).

Generation X is challenging traditional constructs and methodologies of civic engagement inquiry. When the Internet became available to average citizens, the technology promised to break traditional barriers in the democratic process. On-line citizens would enjoy access to a mass communication medium devoid of gatekeeper restrictions. The access promised to revitalize and revolutionize civic life in America. Unfortunately, Delli Carpini (2000) found that the most connected citizens are the most civically detached by those traditional measures.

As the Internet continues to grow, the implications of this finding alone are alarming. Delli Carpini's (2000) work suggests that America's civic disengagement is likely to continue. Some scholars agree and believe the downward spiral may spell trouble for our democracy (Eberly, 1994).

Others paint a more positive picture of civic engagement in the information age. Since we live in a new era, they argue that the constructs and variables of civic engagement have changed too. Civic virtue has traditionally been measured by evaluating variables like volunteerism, voting, organizational participation, and membership. Some researchers contend that the economic globalization promoted by the Internet has further blurred the boundaries of communication, political science, economics, and marketing (Scammell, 2000; Shah et al., 2001a; Shah, McLeod, & Yoon, 2001b).

Scammell (2000) proposed that Americans are still engaged, but citizenship has taken on a new meaning in our global economy. Citizen-consumers engage in civic commerce. The citizen consumers bypass traditional avenues of civic action in favor of more effective economic measures. Civically engaged citizen-consumers now cast powerful dollar votes in their buying choices. For example, citizens exerted economic

influence for political gain in the fight for protection of animal rights. Civically responsible citizen-consumers demanded dolphin-free tuna. By buying only dolphin-free brands of tuna, they promoted their civic interests. Scammell's (2000) notion is encouraging, but incongruent with the traditional paradigms of civic research.

Eberly (1994) represents one traditional perspective, which contends that such behavior promotes social isolation and may be illustrative of civic decay rather than evidence of a revolutionary resurgence. He extended a call to action to Americans and argued that policy makers are incapable of leading the much-needed civic reform. He placed the responsibility squarely on citizens. According to Eberly's philosophy, Americans must renew their core values. In order to do this, everything must change. One of the carriers of the new disengaged order is self-centered language in a society composed of right-seeking litigants rather than citizens. Eberly targeted the potential agents of reform while endorsing language that promotes community against the trend of individualism. With all social signs pointing toward diversity, he suggested that only verbalized homogenous cultural values will save the American spirit. Since September 11, 2001, real-world indicators point toward such a trend.

Civic Engagement and Political Participation

Civic engagement "refers to participation in civic and community activities" (Shah et al., 2001a, p. 146). The definition covers a broad range of social activities from bowling in leagues to civic organizational leadership. Simply put, a civically engaged individual is involved in the community. A clear understanding of civic engagement requires knowledge of the associated concepts of community and citizenship. In order to

be a citizen, an individual must do much more than may be commonly expected in today's culture. Citizenship requires active community and political participation.

"For democracy to work, community is necessary" (Friedland, 2001, p. 358).

Community represents more than a group of people living in proximity to one another. Networks of social reciprocity and social capital distinguish a community. Trust and honesty are important social norms. Cooperation is the cornerstone of the concept of community. Communities are systems of social networks, and citizens are the working components within the system (Eberly, 1994).

According to Putnam (2001), discussions of citizenship too often start and stop with political participation. He contends that political participation represents only one facet of civic engagement. Political participation includes behaviors like voting and attending a political speech or rally. While such activities are not central to the construct of civic engagement as defined by Putnam (2001), he acknowledges that the constructs of political participation and civic engagement certainly overlap. Citizenship, however, requires much more than voting. A general definition of a citizen would be a civically engaged individual (Eberly, 1994). Engagement for the purposes of this discussion would encompass communal and political activities outside the scope of work. According to this definition, New York firefighters running toward the burning World Trade Center would be excluded. Citizens lined up outside the Red Cross on September 12, 2001, and those who have participated in similar activities or joined a community organization would be of primary interest. Volunteering, altruism, and philanthropy activities serve as popular measures of engagement (Putnam, 2001).

McLeod, Dietram, Scheufele, and Moy (1999) defined civic engagement as a type of political participation. In their study, “forum” (p. 323) participation encompassed the type of participation Putnam (2001) calls civic engagement. The actions that define the synonymous terms fall slightly outside the scope of traditional political participation. Forum participation included speaking up at meeting, expressing an opinion different from others at a meeting, and volunteering to work on an issue with others.

Traditional political participation involves activities like attending a neighborhood meeting, writing a letter to the editor or calling a radio station, voting, working for a political campaign, and contacting a public official. The participation is always local. In contrast with forum participation, McLeod et al. (1999) called these activities “institutional” (p. 323) participation. In this study, all forms of participation will be called civic engagement.

Social Capital

Social capital theory provides a parsimonious explanation of the processes underlying civic engagement. Eberly (1994) and Putnam (2001) present detailed summaries of social capital and social reciprocity. Social capital is the currency of community that fuels collective action. “The core idea of social capital theory is that social networks have value” (Putnam, 2001, p. 19). Lubell and Scholz (2001) experimentally examined the construct. They manipulated levels of niceness and reciprocity across groups and found that subjects were indeed most cooperative within the nice and reciprocal group.

According to Putnam (2001), social capital’s value rests in the “social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (p. 19). Much like

financial capital, social capital serves both a public and private good. Capitalism requires networks of reciprocity and trustworthiness. The dollar is the currency of capitalism. The value of the dollar depends on the stock market, which depends on individual businesses and investors. Businesses gain financial capital from trusting investors. The investors in turn expect to benefit privately from their investment. The economy benefits from the trust and exchange of capital. The value of money rises and falls with trust. If businesses fail, investors lose their money and faith in the financial network.

Social capital is a currency of democracy. The value of social capital rises and falls in much the same way as the dollar. Citizens invest their social resources of trust and honesty. These investments are manifest in volunteering and altruism. The investment may be as simple as helping a neighbor harvest a crop or giving money to a charitable organization.

Previous exchanges, private and public, set the value of the social capital. For example, if you were robbed the last time you picked up a hitchhiker, your social capital may be low with regard to hitchhikers. However, if your car had recently broken down in a remote location forcing you to hitchhike, you may place a higher value in the social capital of the exchange because an altruistic traveler helped you. These are examples of private exchanges of social capital within the community. Although we may not expect the same hitchhiker to help us when we are in need, we expect someone else to return the favor.

With the generalized other, the public facet of social capital comes into play. Someone did a good deed for you. You may not ever repay this person, but you will be

more apt to help someone else like you. Additionally, you may find someone helping you with no expectation of repayment or merely hear of such altruism. The value of social capital is high because you perceive your investment to be worth much to you and others. Social capital will run low when examples of abuse in social transactions are prevalent. To return to the hitchhiking illustration, Americans do not typically pick up hitchhikers. It is commonly known that these transactions are low in social capital and potentially deadly. They are not worth the investment.

The investment aspect of the equation relates specifically to the expectation of social reciprocity. Social capital determines worth of citizenship, which is determined by social reciprocity. The concept returns to the premise that I will help you with the expectation of you or someone else returning the favor. "A society characterized by generalized reciprocity is more efficient than a distrustful society, for the same reason money is more efficient than barter" (p. 19).

High social capital may enrich or condemn a community. Social capital may be used to accomplish positive and negative outcomes. The positive outcomes include mutual support, cooperation, trust, and institutional effectiveness, while negative outcomes include sectarianism, ethnocentrism, and corruption. This discussion focuses on positive outcomes treating high social capital as a desirable feature.

Social capital may serve bridging or bonding functions in society. Bridging characterizes linkages with heterogeneous populations, while bonding usually applies to homogenous groups. "Bonding social capital constitutes a kind of sociological superglue, whereas bridging provides a sociological WD-40" (p. 23).

Community Integration

The community integration concept provides another explanation of processes underlying civic engagement. Community integration similarly contends that one's perceived level of integration in one's community relates positively with civic engagement. Although social capital gained much notoriety with Putnam's recent work, discussions of community integration date back over a century (McLeod, Daily, et al., 1996). McLeod et al. (1996) recently revitalized the discussion when they defined community integration as "... a set of processes (or relationships or arrangements) (a) among institutions within the community; (b) between those institutions and the larger society; and (c) between community institutions and groups and individuals within the community" (p. 181).

Their study demonstrated the multidimensionality of community integration. The results suggested that community integration consists of five dimensions: psychological attachment, interpersonal discussion networks, city versus group, local versus cosmopolitan, and city versus neighborhood. A total of 15 indicators were used to measure the five dimensions. Strong psychological attachment, interpersonal discussion network connectedness, and identification with the city positively related with civic participation.

Like social capital theory, community integration involves individual judgments of satisfaction and interconnectedness, which theoretically influence civic participation. Trust, the principal variable in social capital theory, was not specifically addressed in the McLeod et al. (1996) study. However, interpersonal network connectedness,

psychological attachment, and city versus neighborhood dimensional indicators could arguably be measuring trust. Replication of the study including a trust index could distinguish or unite the theories.

McLeod et al. (1999) recognized a complementary relationship between at least two community integration dimensions — city versus neighborhood and interpersonal networks — and social capital. “Both of these dimensions of community integration link individual-level measures to more macroscopic community characteristics. Individual ties, in other words, produce social capital” (p. 318). It is important to recognize the complementary construct in this review. Relatively, few scholars have specifically evaluated media use in association with social capital theory. However, they have more frequently examined the relationship from a community integration perspective.

Interpersonal Trust

Trust and honesty underlie social reciprocity; they make it work (Putnam, 2001). The importance of these established cultural norms and expectations are so valued that our culture assigns clinical diagnoses to individuals embodying the antithesis of trustworthy and honest citizens. These extreme social deviants often earn the label of Antisocial Personality Disorder. The American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: Fourth Edition* (1994) identifies the essential feature of the disorder as “a pervasive pattern of disregard for, and violation, of the rights of others (p. 645).”

The expectation of honesty allows individuals to trust one another and survive. “Trustworthiness lubricates social life” (Putnam, 2001, p. 21). Human life depends on social reciprocity. Survival is less likely in isolation. Social trust is either thick or thin.

Thick trust represents the type of trust between individual citizens. It is more specific. I will help you today, because you helped me yesterday, or you will help me tomorrow. The trust is based on personal experience. The networks of these transactions have names, often family names within communities. For example, you trust given individuals because you know that they would give you the shirts off their backs, or you distrust them because they are known to take advantage of people. Thick trust is based on specific, personal experiences and may relate to thin trust, but thin trust is actually the important concept in social capital. Thin trust is a more abstract trust, extending to individuals and institutions that an individual has no concrete experience with.

We trust our doctors to help us when we are ill. Even though we may not personally know our doctor, our social expectation dictates that doctors may be trusted with our lives. We trust our farmers to raise the crops necessary for survival. In general, we trust others. We believe that others also abide by the Golden Rule. We trust in the belief that: You will do unto me, as I would do unto you. These examples exemplify thin trust. Thin trust is central to the concept of social reciprocity. Thin trust encompasses nameless networks and expected transactions (Putnam, 2001).

Institutional Trust

The media and our political leaders have suffered substantial setbacks in the realm of public trust (Cappella and Jamieson, 1996). The media provide citizens with information and cues regarding the trustworthiness of individuals and entities. As an institution, the media have been blamed for the pervasive political cynicism in Post-Watergate and Vietnam America. Media cynicism took root during the Nixon and Johnson administrations. Deception in those pivotal years spurred the new era in

journalism and distrust in America's politicians. Throughout the 1960s, only presidential candidate Barry Goldwater netted a negative Gallup rating. Since then, virtually every candidate has (Putnam, 2001). Measures like Gallup's Public Opinion Poll indicated a decline in public trust in government officials over the last 40 years.

National indicators pointed toward a sharp decline in the public's trust in the institution of media in the 1990s. "The National Opinion Research Center (NCOR) found that the drop in the public's confidence in news media has been especially steep in recent years" (Cappella and Jamieson, 1996, p. 83). Individuals reported less confidence in individuals running the press. Only 11% said they had confidence in the individuals running the press, while those saying they had no confidence climbed to 39% in 1993 (Cappella and Jamieson, 1996).

The Role of Public Opinion

Evidence points to trust, social reciprocity, and honesty as predictors of social capital. If, as Putnam (2001) argues, social capital is a currency of social life and the cornerstone of civic virtue, it is important researchers focus their attention on these variables. Since the variables are social science constructs, surveys function as the primary measure of these variables. Public opinion polls are used to measure trust-employing questions like the following: "Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you cannot be too careful in dealing with people?" (p. 137).

It is clear that trust, social capital, and social reciprocity are not as readily indexed as financial capital on the New York Stock Exchange. There is no single daily indicator like the Dow Jones Industrial Average. Our opinions are, however, based on the weight of the evidence. Therefore, our daily news may serve as our daily indicator of the value

of our social capital. "Citizens form their ideas from sorely incomplete accounts, having little or no contact with actual events; they filter all they see through their own prejudices and fears" (Price, 1992, p. 17). Putnam (2001) indicates the importance of further advances in the measurement of these constructs through the use of public opinion polls.

Incomplete accounts and limited contact with the actual events serve as the source of public opinion (Price, 1992). Although the 2001 terrorist attacks occurred in the United States, in post-September 11, 2001, Americans had limited contact with the actual events. Since the government controlled much of the information, media use for news would be expected to affect citizen perceptions in a way consistent with the media message.

For example, dominant themes of patriotism and unity would be expected to enhance the social capital index. Accounts of civically virtuous heroes and heroines, like those on United Airlines Flight 83 on September 11, 2001, would likely boost the index of social capital in the court of public opinion. United Flight 83 crashed near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, after passengers allegedly confronted their hijackers. Courageous passengers would seem to have exemplified the American spirit in the government's message following the attacks.

Media Use

The influence of the mass media on public opinion regarding interpersonal trust, institutional trust, civic engagement, and political participation remains widely debated. One body of empirical literature argues that the media promote cynicism and disengagement (Putnam, 2001; Hart, 1996; Iyengar, 1996; Weaver, 1996; Cappella and

Jamieson, 1996; Patterson, 1996). Another argues that the effect depends on individual and use variables (Brehm and Rahn, 1997; Eveland and Shah, 2000; Scheufele and Shah, 2000; Valentino, Beckmann, and Buhr, 2001). The bulk of the evidence offered by this group indicates that media use often promotes trust and engagement.

Political science and communication scholars point to the mass media as a culprit of social cynicism and civic disengagement (Putnam, 2001; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorielli, 1980; Hart, 1996; Iyengar, 1996; Weaver, 1996; Cappella and Jamieson, 1996; Patterson, 1996). This faction primarily contends that the mass media report and frame issues in a way that promotes cynicism — the antithesis of trust (Iyengar, 1996; Putnam, 2001; Weaver, 1996; Cappella and Jamieson, 1996; Patterson, 1996). Others argue that television creates a false sense of engagement for viewers (Putnam, 2001; Hart, 1996). Another argument asserts that the media extend a worldview that promotes distrust through portrayals of violence (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorielli, 1980). Putnam (2001) promotes a time-displacement hypothesis, which argues that hours spent watching television viciously consumes civic vitality hour-by-hour.

Growing evidence contradicts many of these premises and suggests that news media use exerts positive influence on civic life. As digital interaction has replaced face-to-face contact, accepted variables of trust, engagement, and contentment within the existing paradigms of civic life have been applied to understanding their functions in the new social arena of the Internet. Shah et al. (2001a) examined the relationship between various media uses and social capital. Three indicators of social capital were tested including civic engagement, trust, and life satisfaction across three generations. The three indicators were combined to provide an overall index of social capital. They found that

media influence depended on generational and use variables. Overall, the use of the Internet for recreation correlated negatively with social capital, while information exchange including financial management correlated positively. Television hard news use was positively associated with social capital, but overall use was negatively related. Newspaper use seems to serve an engaging function fostering social capital. These results were consistent across generations.

However, Shah et al. (2001a) found generational difference in the relationships between media use and social capital. Generation X's social capital was best predicted by Internet use. In contrast, social capital among Baby Boomers was most related to hard news use of television, while newspaper use predicted social capital in the Civic Generation. Based on their findings, they reiterate the possibility of a life cycle and cohort effect similar to Putnam's (2001) proposal. According to this premise, the variables should be measured over time due to the dynamic influence of mediums of communication.

McLeod et al. (1996) and McLeod et al. (1999) examined the relationship between political participation, local newspaper, and local television news use from a community integration perspective. The 1996 study found strong positive and significant relationships between local media use and political participation. Psychological attachment to the community, political knowledge, interpersonal discussion group connectedness, and community knowledge also increased with television and newspaper use. Newspaper use did not predict activity, connectedness, attachment, or knowledge any better than television use.

McLeod et al. (1999) reevaluated the same data set using a structural modeling equation. The statistical design allowed them to infer causal relationships among community integration, political participation, and media use variables. In the 1999 analysis, researchers differentiated between institutional participation, which includes attending a meeting, and forum participation, which includes actually speaking at that meeting.

Local newspaper use had the strongest overall impact on institutional participation, while interpersonal communication had the strongest overall impact on forum participation. Local television news use closely followed interpersonal communication in predicting forum participation, but newspapers had no effect. The finding challenges other observed evidence, which indicates the opposite to be true. However, the authors recognized that the observation of no newspaper effect on forum participation could be an artifact of the questionnaire used.

McLeod et al. (1999) present evidence pointing to the local news media as a civic catalyst. "Overall, it is clear that communication plays a central role in stimulating and enabling local political participation" (p. 330). Their results indicate that local news media use promotes knowledge that prompts interpersonal discussions, which promote participation.

Eveland and Scheufele (2000) examined this notion using a differential-gains hypothesis. According to the hypothesis, "People who process news content more carefully by talking it over with others are more likely to extract relevant pieces of political knowledge" (p. 51). They contend that it is hard for some users to extract politically useful content from the media. Therefore, they turn to other people for

analysis. Their results supported the differential-gains hypothesis. Hard-news newspaper use related positively with political participation. The significant relationship was even stronger when interacting with interpersonal communication. Scheufele and Shah (2000) also assessed the role of informational variables in the production of social capital and found only weak effects “that were limited to civic engagement” (p. 107).

Hypotheses

- H1: Overall trust increases with news media use.
- H2: Interpersonal trust increases with news media use.
- H3: Media trust increases with news media use.
- H4: Political trust increases with news media use.
- H5: Civic engagement increases with overall trust.
- H6: Civic engagement increases with news media use.
- H7: Social capital increases with news media use.

Rationale

The predicted relationships correspond with previously observed empirical evidence in mass media research. It has been argued that media use corresponded with cynicism (Putnam, 2001; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorielli, 1980; Hart, 1996; Weaver, 1996; Cappella and Jamieson, 1996; Patterson, 1996). However, hard news uses have consistently fostered trust and civic virtue (McLeod et al., 1996, 1999; Shah et al., 2001a, 2001b; Scheufele and Shah, 2000).

Because media use means informational or news consumption in this study, civic engagement would be expected to increase with media use. Overall media use encompasses use of media for informational purposes including television news,

newspaper, and Internet news sites. In the wake of the September 11, 2001, attacks, real-world observation and media reports indicated a widespread rebirth of unity and trust among Americans.

Since trust theoretically underlies social capital, which drives civic virtue, the attacks may have initiated a new cycle in American civic life – a new Civic Generation. The hypothesized relationships should support the theoretical construct of social capital as it relates to civic engagement theory. Trust should positively correlate with civic engagement. Although it is impossible to measure a national shift in trust and civic engagement using the city survey conducted, the study may serve as an indicator of relationships researchers may expect with forthcoming national surveys in a potentially new American era.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Two mass communication research methods classes authored and administered a random-city telephone survey, November 12-28, 2001, at a regional university in the Southeastern United States ($N = 338$). The response rate was 43.8%. The survey measured civic engagement, patriotism, information media use and trust in November 2001 following the attacks on America. The survey included 45 items. Fifteen items were directly addressed in the hypotheses under investigation (See Appendix).

News Media Use Measures

Media use items in this study focus on news exclusively. The first 11 items measured reported news media use. From those items, seven were retained for evaluation. Items 2, 3, and 4 respectively addressed how closely the respondent had been following the news about the war in Afghanistan, the anthrax letters, and the terrorist attacks. Responses were based on a four-point Likert Scale ranging from very closely to not closely at all. The items were recoded so that scores ranged from not closely (1) at all to very closely (4).

Item 7 measured newspaper use. Respondents were asked how many days they read a newspaper in the preceding week (0-7). Item 9 addressed the frequency of specific newspaper content uses and included five submeasures with a 10-point thermostat response scale ranging from rarely (1) to everyday (10). The areas of content addressed included international affairs, national government and politics, local news, local

editorial, and local human interest. The local human-interest question represented the only soft-news measure included in the study.

Item 10 measured viewing of evening news broadcasts and included three submeasures with a 10-point thermostat response scale ranging from rarely (1) to everyday (10). Respondents were asked how often they watched the national evening news, local news at 6 p.m., and local news at 10 p.m.

Item 12 measured Internet news use. The item asked respondents how often they check out news Websites on the Internet. Respondents reported frequencies on a six-point scale, including never, ranging from less than once a week (1) to several times a day (5). Never responses were excluded from the analyses.

Media use items were recoded so that higher scores reflected higher media use. The media use items were standardized using z-scores. The z-scores were summed to form a single “news media use” index. High news media use index scores equal high use of news for informational purposes.

Trust Measures

Items 26-29 measured trust. Item 26 asked, “Generally speaking do you believe that most people can be trusted or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people?” The question represents a standard measure of social trust on the DDB Needham Lifestyles survey. Item 27 asked, “Do you think people in general today lead as good lives – honest and moral – as they used to?” The yes-or-no response question has served as a common measure of public opinion regarding trustworthiness by pollsters including Roper and Gallup since 1952 (Putnam, 2001). Item 26 was originally coded “most people can be trusted” (1) and “you can’t be too careful in dealing with people” (2). Item 27 was

originally coded “yes” (1) and “no” (2). The items were recoded as dummy variables, where 0 represented low trust and 1 signified high trust. The items were combined to create an index of “interpersonal trust.”

Two items were used to measure institutional trust. Item 28 measured “political trust” and asked, “Generally speaking, would you say our political leaders are trying to do what is in the best interest of the country or our political leaders are more interested in getting reelected than in serving the public?” The item measures trust versus cynicism in public opinion regarding government officials. The item was originally coded “our political leaders are trying to do what is in the best interest of the country” (1) and “our political leaders are more interested in getting reelected than in serving the public” (2). The item was recoded as a dummy variable, where 0 represented cynicism and 1 signified trust.

The last trust question, Item 29, measured “media trust.” The item asked, “Would you say, for the most part, the mass media report fairly on what we need to know?” or “The mass media sensationalize stories to attract a larger audience?” Again the item was recoded as a dummy variable with 0 representing cynicism and 1 signifying trust. The four trust items were combined to form a single “overall trust” index. Each trust item included neutral response options, which were excluded from the analysis.

Civic Engagement Measures

Item 32 measured civic engagement activities in the past year. Item 32 included 10 yes, no, or don’t know response subitems. Respondents were asked “which, if any” of the following community activities they had performed in the past year. The activities included serving as an officer of some club or organization, working for a political party,

attending a public meeting on town or school affairs, attending a political rally or speech, speaking at a political or community event, writing letters to a congressman or senator, signing a petition, holding or running for political office, and writing a letter to the newspaper.

Individual item responses were recoded to ensure that higher scores reflected higher levels of civic engagement. Originally, they were coded yes (1), no (2), and don't know (3). They were recoded no (0) and yes (1) as dummy variables. Don't know responses were excluded from evaluation. The civic engagement items were summed to form a single "civic engagement" index.

Social Capital Measure

The civic engagement and trust indexes were summed to provide an index of "social capital."

The media use, political trust, media trust, interpersonal trust, social capital, and civic engagement indexes were subjected to Pearson correlation analyses to test the proposed hypotheses. Cronbach's alpha analyses were calculated to measure the reliability of the indexes.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Variables and indexes were subjected to Pearson's correlation analyses. Four of seven hypotheses were supported. News media use positively and significantly correlated with overall trust, interpersonal trust, social capital, and civic engagement. The overall trust index did not significantly relate to civic engagement. The observed relationship was negative. Neither media trust nor political trust correlated significantly with media use. Low reliability estimates were achieved for the trust index using Cronbach's alpha. However, the trust items were significantly and positively correlated. A complete correlation matrix is presented in Table 1.

Several observations were documented outside the scope of the hypotheses. Among the most noteworthy, 43% reported most people can be trusted and 60% said our political leaders are trying to do what is in the best interest of our country. However, 74% indicated that they believe that the mass media sensationalize stories to attract a larger audience.

Cronbach's alpha estimates gauged interitem reliability. The 13 items comprising the media use index produced the strongest consistency, $(\alpha) = 0.847$. The four items comprising the overall trust index correlated, $(\alpha) = 0.329$. The two items of the interpersonal trust index correlated positively, $(\alpha) = 0.262$. The 10 items comprising the civic engagement index produced a strong reliability estimate, $(\alpha) = 0.695$.

In testing the individual hypotheses, the data yielded the following results:

H1: Overall trust increases with news media use.

 Pearson's Correlation Matrix

	NMU	IT	T	CE	PT	MT	SC
NMU	1.000						
IT	0.194 *	1.000					
T	0.202 ***	0.789 ***	1.000				
CE	0.355 ***	0.044	-0.011	1.000			
PT	0.086	0.145 *	0.592 ***	-0.015	1.000		
MT	0.079	0.101	0.505 ***	-0.087	0.113	1.000	
SC	0.410 ***	0.430 ***	0.488 ***	0.867 ***	0.086	0.079	1.000

NMU = News Media Use Index

IT = Interpersonal Trust Index

T = Overall Trust Index

CE = Civic Engagement Index

PT = Political Trust

MT = Media Trust

SC = Social Capital Index

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

The results of the Pearson correlation analysis supported H1. Overall trust was positively related to news media use, $r(266) = 0.202, p < .05$. The relationship was significant.

H2: Interpersonal trust increases with news media use.

The results of the Pearson correlation analysis supported H2. Interpersonal trust was positively related to news media use, $r(308) = 0.194, p < .05$. The relationship was significant.

H3: Media trust increases with media use.

The results of the Pearson's correlation analysis failed to support H3. Trust in the media was positively related to media use, $r(312) = -0.079, p > .05$. The relationship was not significant.

H4: Political trust increases with news media use.

The results of the Pearson's correlation analysis failed to support H4. Trust in political institutions was positively related to media use, $r(301) = 0.086, p > .05$. The relationship was not significant.

H5: Civic Engagement increases with overall trust.

The results of the Pearson's correlation analysis failed to support H5. Civic engagement was negatively related to overall trust, $r(264) = -0.011, p > .05$. The relationship was not significant.

H6: Civic engagement increases with news media use.

The results of the Pearson correlation analysis supported H6. Civic engagement was positively related to media use, $r(323) = 0.355, p < .001$. The relationship was significant.

H7: Social capital increases with media use.

The results of the Pearson correlation analysis supported H7. Social capital was positively related to media use, $r = 0.410$, $p < .001$. The relationship was significant.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Although it is impossible to generalize the findings of our November 2001, city survey on a national level, several interesting observations were documented outside the scope of the hypotheses. Respondents were substantially less cynical than those polled nationally prior to September 11, 2001. Perhaps the attack on America and subsequent surge in patriotism turned back the tide of cynicism. It will be important to track these variables along with patriotism over time to determine the impact of the attack on the variables of civic engagement.

In 1999, only 25% of Americans reported most people could be trusted in a nationwide sample (Putnam, 2001). In November 2001, 43% reported, “most people can be trusted.” In 1997, 57% of Americans agreed, “the people running the country don’t care what happens to you” (Putnam, 2001, p. 47). However, in the November 2001 survey, 60% said our political leaders are trying to do what is in the best interest of our country. A national survey would have been necessary to determine if Americans opinions were so dramatically different in November 2001, but the results indicate a potentially significant shift and the need for nationwide polling.

Generalizations based on correlational analyses involving trust variables must be tempered by the reliability of the trust indexes. The overall trust index was based on only four measures, while the interpersonal index was comprised of only two. One item each measured political and media trust. The interpersonal trust index produced an unacceptably low alpha coefficient. The questionnaire was designed for another study.

The trust items were specifically included to test the hypotheses under investigation.

The administrators only allowed the addition of the four items. Future studies should include more trust items. Cronbach's alpha estimates revealed high interitem consistency within news media use and civic engagement indexes.

News media use correlated positively with interpersonal trust, social capital, and overall trust, but did not relate to political or media trust. News media coverage of patriotism may have promoted the apparent shift from cynicism toward trust in interpersonal spheres, but the public remains very critical of the media. Seventy-four percent of those polled in November 2001 said that they believe the mass media sensationalize stories to attract a larger audience.

News media use positively related to civic engagement. Therefore, the result contradicts a time displacement explanation of the relationship. Civic engagement would be expected to increase with trust. Interpersonal trust and civic engagement were not significantly related and overall trust was negatively associated with civic engagement. These findings challenge the social capital concept as explained by Putnam (2001), which contends that trust underlies social capital, which prompts engagement. However it is difficult to take this challenge as damaging when one looks at the low alphas for the trust measures.

Shah et al. (2001a) conceptualized social capital as a multidimensional construct including life satisfaction, trust, and civic engagement. Based on this, trust and civic engagement indexes were combined to form a social capital index. No life satisfaction items were included in our social capital index. Nevertheless, news media use and social capital were positively related.

Future studies are needed to empirically distinguish or unify the concepts of social capital and community integration. Both seem to lead to higher levels of engagement. Although Shah et al. (2001a) include civic engagement as part of social capital, perhaps a better approach would be to look at trust, psychological attachment, interpersonal networks, and life satisfaction as variables which lead to higher levels of civic engagement. Scholars would benefit from a unified concept. Although the two concepts are complementary in many respects, the line between the two concepts remains unclear. It would also be beneficial to analyze the post-attack news content with special attention to patriotic themes.

Simple correlation analyses were used to test variables. Multiple regression analysis would have permitted the estimation of the variance explained by each variable. For example, variables other than media use, like patriotism, may explain the observed trust variation.

The results extend civic engagement knowledge because of the observed positive and significant relationships between news media use and civic engagement in a post September 11, 2001 sample. Both indexes were strong measures of their constructs. Repeated measures would allow empirical tracking of the potential long-term effects of the attacks on the news media use, trust, civic engagement, and social capital relationship. Ultimately, the study reaffirms the evidence that news media use promotes civic vitality and documents the potential shift from cynicism toward trust in post-attack America.

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APPENDIX

SURVEY ITEMS

The following survey items reflect the recoding described in the methods section of the paper. "Don't know" responses were excluded from the analyses and the appendix.

News Media Use Items

Since September 11, 2001, how closely have you been following the news about the current war in Afghanistan?

1. Not closely at all
2. Not too closely
3. Somewhat Closely
4. Very Closely

How closely have you been following the news about the letters contaminated with the anthrax bacteria being distributed by mail?

1. Not closely at all
2. Not too closely
3. Somewhat Closely
4. Very Closely

What about the terrorist attacks in general? How closely have you been following the news about the combat with terrorism?

1. Not closely at all
2. Not too closely
3. Somewhat Closely

How many days did you read a newspaper last week?

1. 0 or don't know
2. 1
3. 2
4. 3
5. 4
6. 5
7. 6
8. 7

On a scale from 1 to 10, where one means rarely and ten means everyday, how often do you read each of the following types of newspaper content?

International Affairs?

National government and politics?

Editorials and opinion columns about local affairs?

Human interest stories about people in the Clarksville area?

Let's us a 10-point scale again, where one means rarely and ten means everyday; How often do you watch each of the following types of content?

National news in the evening?

Local news at 6 p.m.?

Local news at 10 p.m.?

How often do you check out the news Websites on the Internet/

1. Never or less than once a week

Trust Items

Generally speaking, would you say

1. Most people can be trusted or

0. You can't be too careful when dealing with others

Do you think people lead as good lives — honest and moral — as they used to?

1. Most people can be trusted or

0. You can't be too careful when dealing with others

Generally speaking, would you say

1. Our political leaders are trying to do what is in the best interest of the country or

0. Our political leaders are more interested in getting reelected than in serving the public.

Would you say for the most part,

1. The mass media report fairly on what we need to know or

0. The mass media sensationalize stories to attract a larger audience

Civic Engagement Items

Which of the following, if any, of the following community activities have you performed in the past year? (Yes = 1, No = 0)

Served as an officer for some club or organization?

Worked for a political party?

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Served on a committee for some local organization?

Attended a public meeting on town or school affairs?

Attended a political rally or speech?

Spoken at a political or community event?

Written to a congressman or senator?

Signed a petition?

Held or ran for political office?

Written a letter to the newspaper?

VITA

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