

To Reinforce or To Mobilize?

Tracing the Impact of Internet Use on Civic
Engagement in Taiwan

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Research purpose

- Due to the real effects of ICTs on society have not yet been demonstrated clearly and empirically, this paper aims to answer the question of whether the Internet reinforces or mobilizes civic engagement.

Declining civic engagement

- ✓ drop in voter turnout, public trust and confidence in government
- ✓ Lots of political apathy: for example, younger generations
- ✓ Crisis of democracy

Can Internet use provide helps?

Potential of Internet use...

- reduce the cost of providing government services and introduce more efficient means of information exchange
- deliver more information to people than traditional approaches can, thus enhancing public interaction and participation in the decision-making process and allowing citizens to further engage in public affairs.

An ambiguity

- the real effects of ICTs on society have not yet been demonstrated clearly and empirically.
 - ✓ the mobilization effect: the Internet will inform, organize, and engage those who are currently inactive in public affairs.
 - ✓ the reinforcement effect: online resources will be utilized by those citizens who are already well connected via traditional channels.

Can Internet use provide helps? There are two necessary conditions of YES, IT CAN

- Condition I---a positive association between internet use and online civic engagement; people with higher internet use are more likely to engage in public affairs online
- Condition II---this association must be existed in both disengaged people and engaged people; Both the reinforcement effect and mobilization effect are proven.

Research method

- Taiwan's Social Change Survey
- face-to-face interviews. from September 28 to October 24, 2003
- Internet users (sub-sample n=1,026) among the 2,161 completed samples.

Variables

- the main dependant variable is ONLINE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT (OCE); the main independent variables are REAL WORLD CIVIC ENGAGEMENT (RWCE) and INTERNET USE (INT)
- Other independent variables: Domestic Character, Political Efficacy, and Political Knowledge

Results: this table shows that Internet use can enhance civic engagement

Liner Regression of OCE (model I)

Independent variables		β	s.e	Tolerance
Constant		4.92	1.034	
Internet use (INT)		.142 ***	.033	.839
Gender (GEN)		-.327	.242	.934
Age (AGE)		-.061 ***	.014	.672
Education (EDU)		.084	.129	.816
Political Efficacy (EFF)		-.015	.052	.694
Political Knowledge (KNOW)		-.039	.069	.704
RWCE	Opinion expression (EXP)	.338 ***	.051	.679
	Political Trust (TRU)	.053	.034	.736
	Community Participation (COM)	.127	.072	.890
	Election Participation (ELE)	.124	.064	.626
	Political Attention (ATT)	.259 ***	.047	.560
F=21.653, p<0.001; R ² =.282; Adjusted R ² =.269				
Durbin-Watson=2.031; ***p<0.001 ; **p<0.01 ; *p<0.05				

What kind of ‘enhancement’?

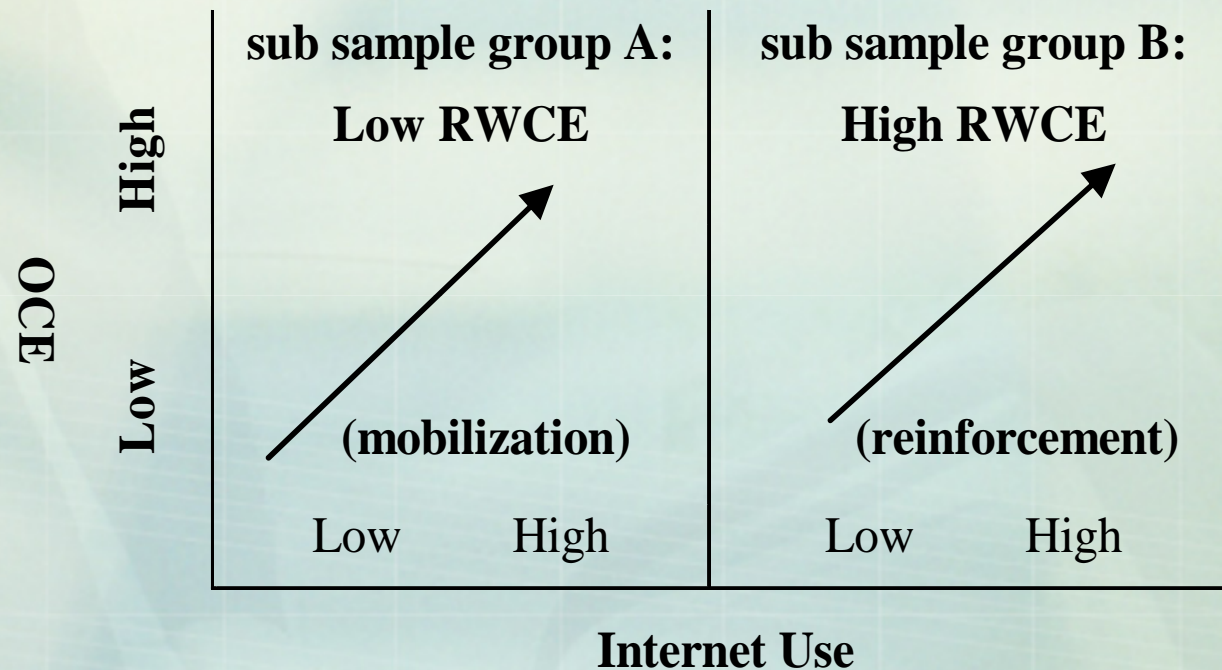


Figure 1. “mobilization” and “reinforcement” effects

To divide the sample into three sub-sample groups that have been identified as Low-RWCE, Med-RWCE, and High-RWCE

Table 1. Cluster Analysis of RWCE

statistics		Low-RWCE	Med-RWCE	High-RWCE
Political Expression	n	292	517	217
	Min.	5	5	8
	Max	12	14	25
	Mean	7.92	9.77	13.69
	S.E	2.146	1.611	2.393
Political Trust	n	184	334	142
	Min.	7	7	7
	Max	25	28	28
	Mean	15.49	16.82	17.87
	S.E	3.376	3.91	4.163
Community Participation	n	292	516	217
	Min.	3	3	3
	Max	11	12	12
	Mean	3.64	4.07	4.48
	S.E	1.321	1.772	1.998
Political Attention	n	272	484	208
	Min.	5	13	11
	Max	16	24	25
	Mean	11.6	16.71	17.87
	S.E	2.109	2.041	2.543
Election Participation	n	292	517	217
	Min.	3	3	6
	Max	12	13	15
	Mean	5.12	6.68	9.72
	S.E	1.583	1.479	1.887

Model II---Low RWCE

Linear Model of sub samples

Models	Indep. Variables	B	s.e.
Low RWCE (Model II) F=2.38, p=0.009 R ² =.143 Adj. R ² =.083 Durbin- Watson =2.212	Constant	5.912	2.182
	Internet use	.052	.058
	Gender	-.606	.450
	Age	.004	.029
	Education	-.039	.271
	Political efficacy	-.062	.103
	Political Knowledge	-.021	.111
	Political expression	.116	.117
	Political Trust	.060	.074
	Com. Participation)	-.140	.189
	Election Participation	.355 *	.158
	Political Attention	.320 **	.107

Model III---Med RWCE

Linear Model of sub samples

Models	Indep. Variables	B	s.e.
Med-RWCE (Model III) F=9.052, p<0.001 R ² =.250 Adj. R ² =.223 Durbin- Watson =2.105	Constant	2.128	2.139
	Internet use	.136 **	.042
	Gender	-.343	.302
	Age	-.086 ***	.019
	Education	.138	.162
	Political efficacy	-.008	.067
	Political Knowledge	-.064	.091
	Political expression	.627 ***	.094
	Political Trust	.022	.043
	Com. Participation	.087	.085
	Election Participation	.108	.100
	Political Attention	.351 ***	.081

Model II---High RWCE

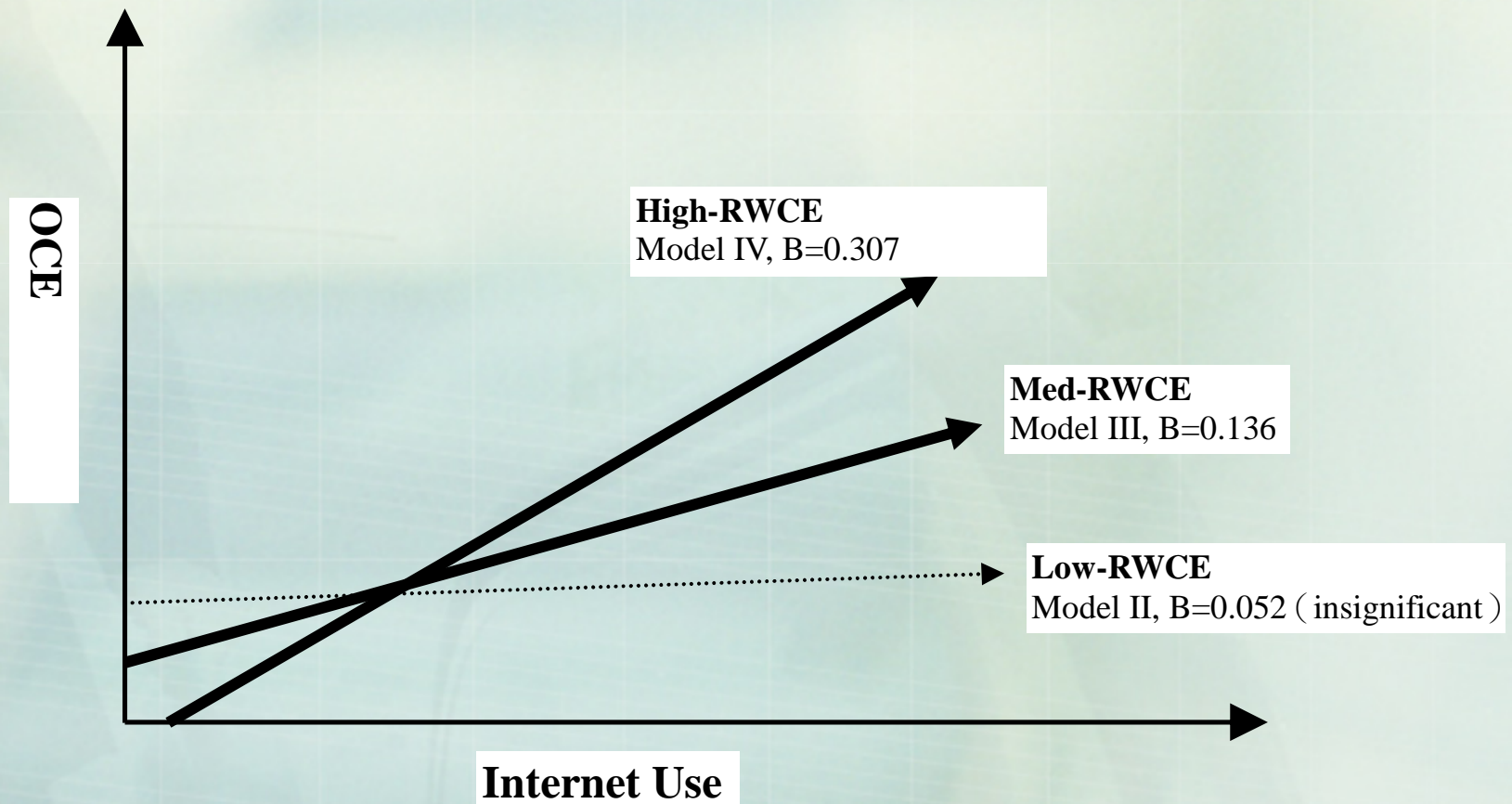
Linear Model of sub samples (Model II,III,IV)

Models	Indep. Variables	B	s.e.
High-RWCE (Model IV) F=4.487, p<0.001 R ² =.281 Adj. R ² =.219 Durbin- Watson =1.901	Constant	-1.06	3.866
	Internet use	.307 ***	.085
	Gender	.163	.673
	Age	-.081 *	.034
	Education	.315	.313
	Political efficacy	-.047	.124
	Political Knowledge	.140	.216
	Political expression	.180	.130
	Political Trust	.134	.085
	Com. Participation	.317	.172
	Election Participation	.172	.162
	Political Attention	.373 *	.147

Note: ***p<0.001 ; **p<0.01 ; *p<0.05; All models correspond to the assumption of Multicollinearity.

Finding:

The impact of internet use on online civic engagement are limited in those traditionally active in public affairs.



Conclusions

- the prerequisites for relying on Internet technology to improve civic engagement are still not developed. Internet use meets only the first condition.
- Internet use appear to has a reinforcing, rather than mobilizing effect

Thank you!

**Comments and Questions
are welcomed**