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**POLITICAL USE OF INSTAGRAM: THE RELATIONSHIPS
BETWEEN MOTIVATIONS, FREQUENT USE, INCIDENTAL
NEWS EXPOSURE AND ONLINE POLITICAL
PARTICIPATION**

by

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UNIVERSITY, SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA, 2018**

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
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DEDICATION

This thesis is wholeheartedly dedicated to my parents, who have been emotionally and financially supported me since I started master's program in the United States. I would not have accomplished it all without my mom and dad. I love you, Miyoung Jang, Youngho Kwon, Takyoung Kwon, Dalbong, and Julie.

**Political Use of Instagram: The Relationships Between Motivations, Frequent Use,
Incidental News Exposure and Online Political Participation**

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ABSTRACT

As Instagram is widely popular with young people, politicians and news media turn to Instagram and spread an array of political information. Despite the growing popularity, few studies have explored political use of Instagram. The purpose of this thesis is to investigate why and how college students use Instagram for politics. Based on the Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theory, this study examines students' motivations and political uses of Instagram, such as getting political information, expressing political opinions, and following political accounts. Lastly, this thesis explores how young people unintentionally get political information on Instagram. This thesis found that motivation for information seeking is positively associated with political information consumption and following news media accounts on Instagram. Motivation for self-expression is positively associated with political information consumption, political opinion expression and following politicians' accounts on Instagram. In addition to the motivations,

frequent use of Instagram use is positively associated with incidental news exposure on Instagram.

Key words: Instagram, uses and gratifications theory, political information consumption, political opinion expression, following politicians, following news media, incidental exposure

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Chapter 1

Introduction

People use digital and social media for various activities from shopping, searching, reading articles, watching videos and joining online networks to posting, expressing opinions and engaging in social events. In particular, many studies reveal that people utilize social media to consume political news, express their perspectives on social issues, participate in petitions and organize offline protests (Conroy et al., 2012; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012; Journell et al, 2013; Rojas & Puig-i-Abril, 2009; Vitak et al., 2011).

Young people are inclined to utilize social media for political communication. Previous studies have investigated the relationship between social media use, particularly Facebook and Twitter, and political engagement among young adults (Journell et al., 2013; Loader et al., 2014; Park, 2015; Yang & DeHart, 2016). For example, Vitak et al. (2013) found college students, during presidential elections, use Facebook to join political groups, gain information about candidates, share their opinions, and engage in online political participation such as volunteering and signing petitions. Journell et al. (2013) found that Twitter is more likely to serve as a political conversation sphere in which students can easily follow candidates, retweet the candidates' posts, and share commentary about election issues. Therefore, Facebook and Twitter have attracted scholarly attention as places for political communication.

In recent years, Instagram has become one of the most appealing social media platforms for young adults (Alhabash & Ma, 2017). In fact, user rates of Instagram have already overtaken those of Twitter. Instagram is dominated specifically by relatively younger age groups (18 and 24 years), compared to Facebook, in which people of all ages (18 to 65+ years) utilize proportionately (Pew Research Center, 2019).

Given the popularity of Instagram among young adults, politicians are creating and operating Instagram accounts to attract Instagram users for the benefits of their political campaigns. For example, Alexander Van der Bellen was elected the Austrian President in 2017 by successfully utilizing Instagram as an election campaign channel (Liebhart & Bernhardt, 2017). The key strategy of his team was to make all stories, from those about his political competence to those about his personal background, visualized on his Instagram account. His visual political communication made a strong impression on Instagram users, and ultimately helped to mobilize them. Also, during the 2016 U.S. primaries and general election, a number of major party candidates utilized Instagram to convey their election messages (Duffy, 2016; Parmelee & Roman, 2019).

Despite the trend, there are few studies examining the way young people use Instagram for political information and political communication (Muñoz & Towner, 2017; Russmann & Svensson, 2016). Although existing literature on political use of social media abounds, it mostly reports on Facebook and Twitter (e.g., Journell et al., 2013; Vitak et al., 2013). Furthermore, some people even underrate the possibility of using Instagram to gain real-time political information and trending news (Forsey, 2020). As mentioned above, the majority of Instagram users are young people, between 18 and 24 years, compared to those using Facebook, which is used evenly by members of all age groups. Previous studies suggest that young people are less politically interested and engaged than older citizens (Cassel & Luskin, 1988; Henn et al., 2002). Therefore, it is possible that Instagram, a platform that attracts young people, is yet to be considered as a political venue in the same way as Facebook and Twitter. Given the growing trend in politicians' turning to Instagram ahead of the 2020 election as well as lack of evidence on young people's use of Instagram for politics, this thesis posits a two-pronged question:

whether young people use Instagram to gain political information and to express their own political opinions.

Young people's political use of Instagram can be studied through two different perspectives: proactive and passive media use. Proactive use refers to purposive and conscious media consumption, while passive use refers to mindless, unconscious, habitual use of media (Finn, 1998). One example of the proactive use is that people watch television in order to gather information about a specific issue or to feel enjoyment (Bryant et al., 2012). However, people do not always watch a television program with a particular purpose or reason in mind. They just turn on the television and unconsciously consume the broadcasted program. Based on these perspectives, this thesis studies purposive Instagram use with the framework of Uses and Gratifications theory (U&G), and passive Instagram use in the context of incidental exposure.

With the advent of technology, young people spend more time using digital media than ever before. As a result, young people's political participation has been shifting to the online platform instead of the conventional face-to-face participation such as voting and demonstration (Della Porta & Mosca, 2005). They prefer the cheap, fast, and convenient political activities offered in the online environment to offline political engagement which requires more time and effort (Calenda & Meijer, 2009). Online political participation can take various forms, from reading online news, posting online comments about political issues and sharing political news, to joining online activism and signing online petitions (Bakker & De Vreese, 2011; Ekström & Shehata, 2018; Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010; Rojas & Puig-i-Abril, 2009; Valenzuela, 2013).

Altogether, this thesis aims to explore why and how young people use Instagram in relationship to politics. To accomplish the goal, this study first investigates what kind of motivations young people have when they are using Instagram and how the motivations of

Instagram use relate to their political participation on Instagram, such as getting political information, expressing political opinions, and following political accounts. In addition to the motivated political use of Instagram, this study further investigates how young people's habitual Instagram use increases the possibility to be incidentally exposed to political information on the platform. This study is particularly important given that young people are heavily involved in Instagram, many politicians have opened Instagram accounts with the specific intent of communicating with Instagram users who are potential voters and political information is readily available now on Instagram. Ultimately, this thesis expects to lay out a foundation for future studies about the relationships between young people and their political uses of Instagram.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter will review Uses and Gratifications theory as a fundamental framework to investigate Instagram usage. Since this thesis is related to political use of Instagram, it will then review scholarship about various types of political engagement that have appeared on Instagram. Based on these issues, it will examine work on the relationships between motivations and online political participation (e.g., political information consumption, political opinion expression). Also, this chapter will investigate scholarship on types of political posts provided by two different political accounts (e.g., politicians and news media) on Instagram, and then explore the relationships between motivations and following these accounts. Lastly, in addition to motivated political use of Instagram, this chapter will review studies on incidental exposure to political information, which motivates further political activities.

Uses and Gratifications: A Theoretical Framework

This thesis is grounded in the Uses and Gratifications approach. The uses and gratifications (U&G) theory explains why and how people actively choose specific media by focusing on individual specific motivations (Basilisco & Cha, 2015). The U&G views people as active users who purposefully use the media to gratify certain needs (Katz et al., 1974).

U&G is contrasted with early studies/theories of mass communication. The early mass communication scholars regarded audiences as *passive viewers* who were directly influenced by mass media, and thereby the foci of their studies were related to the effect of media on the audience (McQuail & Windahl, 1993). For example, one of the early, non-scholarly theories of mass media effects is “hypodermic needle theory.” It argues that mass media serve as hypodermic needles to inject messages into viewers, who are unable to resist the messages since

they are passive and uncritical (Lasswell, 1970). In other words, mass media such as film and radio had enormous power to affect the audience (Bryant et al., 2012). During 1940-1960s, social scientists claimed that mass media has limited effects on consumers, which means there are numerous intervening variables between consumers and media (Berelson, 1959; McQuail, 2010). In other words, it was argued, people are indirectly affected by media through the influence of opinion leaders, social relationships, and cultural contexts (McQuail, 2010). Starting in the mid-1960s, scholars rejected the limited-effects hypothesis and argued that media indirectly or directly have strong effects on consumers (G. Lang & K. Lang, 1981). They rediscovered the powerful and long-term effects of media and developed several theories such as agenda-setting and cultivation theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Gerbner & Gross, 1976).

However, in response to these early theories that focused on media effects, scholars such as Herzog (1944) and then Katz et al. (1974) looked first at audiences to view the relationship between media and audience in a different way. They developed the U&G as one of several audience-centered approaches to the study of media and society. Katz et al. (1974) focused on what people do with media by considering the nature of users and functions of media. First, they claimed, audiences are active, and thereby their media use is goal oriented. Compared to passive viewers, active audiences are responsible for choosing media and have the power to interpret media messages. Specifically, the audiences choose and use media in order to satisfy certain needs and motivations and then achieve gratification (Bryant et al., 2012). As they are self-aware of what needs and motivations they have when selecting media, they accomplish goals such as enhancing knowledge and reducing stress through their media consumption (Katz et al., 1974). Also, media itself constantly compete with other sources to fulfill audiences' needs and motivations (Bryant et al., 2012). Each medium from traditional media to social media has

different functions and the different characteristics satisfy distinct needs and motivations. Therefore, active audiences have expectations about whether certain media will fulfill their specific motivations. For example, when people need to get information about the 2020 presidential election, they consider which media gives them relevant information effectively. In this case, they may choose Internet rather than television. This is because once they turn on CNN these days, news regarding COVID-19 is reported first and primarily. Therefore, they have to wait until the information they need is broadcasted. However, when they select the Internet, they type the topic and acquire information of the 2020 presidential candidates quickly and easily.

Many previous studies on U&G identified and classified audiences' needs and motivations for television and other traditional media (Bantz, 1982; Berelson, 1949; Bryant & Zillmann, 1984; Cazeneuve, 1974; Dobos, 1992; Eastman, 1979; Katz et al., 1974; Mcilwraith, 1998; Rubin, 1983). For example, Berelson (1949) examined the reasons people read newspapers and found that people are motivated to read newspapers to get information about public affairs, pass time without thinking, appear informed in social groups, and feel connected with society.

Several studies examined the motivations of watching television (e.g., Bantz, 1982; Bryant & Zillmann, 1984; Cazeneuve, 1974; Dobos, 1992; Katz et al., 1974; Mcilwraith, 1998; Rubin, 1983). People watch television because they need to relax or kill time through entertainment content and spend time with their family at home (Katz et al., 1974). In addition, those who have a motivation to stay generally knowledgeable and up-to-date on current issues turn on television, especially news channels, and get the information they seek (Rubin, 1983).

Communication scholars have expanded and applied the U&G theory to explore why and how people use new media (Basilisco & Cha, 2015). Compared to old media such as radio and television, new media are computational and include the Internet, computer games, digital TV,

social media and social networking services (Leinonen, 2010). A distinct feature of new media is “user-generated content,” which describes media content that users themselves create and distribute (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010). In other words, the distinction between producer and consumer becomes blurred in the new media environment. For example, Facebook users easily build a profile, upload pictures and videos, update their status, write on other users’ walls, and comment on posts and shared articles. Since users can in this way be more involved in a larger variety of activities as than with old media, media scholars have explored what motivations new media users have and what gratifications they gain through media use (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Quan-Haase & Young, 2010).

For example, Shao (2009) reviewed existing studies that examined motivations and uses of the Internet, Facebook, MySpace, Wikipedia and YouTube (e.g., Bowman & Willis, 2003; Hamilton, 2007; Lenhart et al., 2007; McGirt, 2007; Miller 2007), and found four common motivations for user-generated media use, including motivations for information seeking, entertainment, social interaction, and self-expression. First, people use MySpace and Facebook in order to learn the way their peers understand any subject and visit Wikipedia to get information on topics they are interested in (Bowman and Willis, 2003). Miller (2007) analyzed data on the most popular channels on YouTube and concluded that most people use YouTube to get enjoyment, seek emotional release, and reduce stress. In addition, Lenhart et al. (2007) conducted research about American teens’ Internet use and found out that 93% of teens use the Internet as a social venue to reinforce pre-existing friendships and make new friends.

Another key shift from traditional media to new media is that users *anonymously* produce and share their own contents (Al-Kandari et al., 2016). That is, they are able to post and comment frankly on whatever they express. Therefore, motivation for self-expression is

significantly emerging when media scholars examine what motivates individuals to choose and use social media rather than traditional media (Shao, 2009). Papacharissi (2002) defined the motivation for self-expression as a desire to tell others a little bit about oneself; we see this on social media in the use of personal webpages to display users' identity and personality. Kaye (2005) and Shao (2009) expanded the definition of motivation for self-expression to "represent deliberate expression of one's feeling and thoughts" (p.14). They found out that individuals consider the Internet and weblogs convenient venues to present and share their opinions and ideas.

Uses and Motivations of Instagram in 2020

Instagram was launched in 2010 and quickly became one of the fastest growing social media platforms (Alhabash & Ma, 2017). Instagram has convenient features similar to Facebook (its parent company) and Twitter (e.g., News feed, following, Instagram live, Instagram stories, Direct Message). When a new technology is introduced to the world, media scholars are interested in knowing why and how people actively select the media technology. The U&G perspective guides researchers to find the answers (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010).

To date, there are only a few studies about the relationship between motivations and general Instagram use (e.g., Alhabash & Ma, 2017; Sheldon et al., 2017). Alhabash and Ma (2017) examined which motivations strongly predict college students' Instagram use intensity. They measured the Instagram intensity by asking about time spent daily on Instagram and the extent to which college students feel attached to Instagram. They found that motivations for entertainment and convenience are the strongest predictors of the intensity of Instagram use. In other words, college students actively engage in Instagram activities because the platform is convenient to use and provides enjoyable content. Sheldon et al. (2017) compared motivations

for Instagram use between Croatian and American students to explore whether Instagram use motivations are different depending on a user's cultural background. They found that Croatian students primarily use Instagram to see friends' activities (i.e., motivation for social interaction), while American students use Instagram to report their memories with photos they want to remember (i.e., motivation for self-documentation). This suggests that Croatian culture reflects collectivist trends, while American culture reflects individualistic tendencies. Further, both of these studies found that college students mainly use Instagram for entertainment, social interaction and self-documentation.

The Instagram environment has changed a lot in the last several years. The number of Instagram users have rapidly increased since 2016, for example, from 400 million in 2016 to more than 1 billion in 2020, leading to 150% growth for four years. It became the second biggest social media platform in 2018 (Parmelee & Roman, 2019; Statista, 2020). As a number of users increased, Instagram launched new functions such as Instagram Stories/live and IGTV, respectively in 2016 and 2018, to help users to engage in a variety of activities on the platform (Wagner, 2018). Instagram Stories is a feature within the Instagram app where users can capture and post related images and video content in slideshow format. Instagram lives allows users to broadcast video to followers in real time (Danao, 2018). IGTV serves as a small television on Instagram, in which users can upload videos with a maximum length of an hour (Carter, 2018). In other words, as Instagram provides various features that allow users to create and distribute contents, an array of information is now disseminated on Instagram. Therefore, young people may consider Instagram as a convenient tool to get information and news they are interested in and learn something about what is happening in the society as well as gain entertainment.

Given the current trends concerning Instagram, this thesis poses the following research question.

RQ: What are the primary motivations for Instagram use among college students?

Understanding of Instagram Use for Politics

As Instagram is quickly gaining popularity, many politicians, political organizations, and news media have created their own Instagram accounts and have begun actively engaging in the platform. As a result, considerable amount of political information is currently available on Instagram (Murphy, 2019). News organizations upload posts several times a day on Instagram to update important news regarding a wide range of topics (Russell, 2015). Also, politicians increasingly use Instagram as part of their own communication strategy, an issue which has been studied by several scholars (e.g., Ekman & Widholm, 2017; Towner & Muñoz, 2018). Ekman and Widholm (2017) analyzed Swedish politicians' posts on Instagram. They found that politicians uploaded video clips from television news interviews and added their own comments on those interviews. Their posts also included screen shots of opinion articles written by other politicians and they provided negative or positive stances on those articles. They often talked about news media and political issues to show their own political orientation. The most frequent posts the Swedish politicians uploaded were related to self-promotion of policies and current works. Similarly, Towner and Muñoz (2018) found that the 2016 U.S. presidential primary candidates used Instagram to disseminate campaign and election messages and mobilizing information.

Although diverse political information provided every day by politicians, political organizations, and news media, as well as friends, family, and acquaintances is available on Instagram, few studies have examined why and how young people seek out and consume such

information. Therefore, this thesis aims to explore young people's motivations for their use of political information on Instagram and how these motivations influence their political behaviors on Instagram. To analyze the relationship, this thesis first defines and conceptualizes political behaviors on Instagram. Then, this thesis explores the relationships between motivations and political participation on Instagram based on previous literature of the U&G on political use of social media.

Online Political Participation: Political Information Consumption and Political Opinion Expression on Instagram

Political participation can take a variety of forms such as voting, sending letters to government, signing a petition, attending governmental meetings, participating in protests, making donations, and the like (Delli Carpini, 2004; Hong & Rojas, 2016; Sylvester & McGlynn, 2010). Della Porta and Mosca (2005) argued that young people are less interested in the traditional and offline forms of political participation, but rather are involved in politics in a new way, one that is in line with the emerging digital age. This is because digital media provides faster and more convenient forms of political participation than conventional forms, and thereby people easily engage in various types of political activities in the online environment. As young people are heavily immersed in digital media, they have a great chance to participate in online political activities (Bennett et al., 2009).

Online political engagement can be distinguished by passive and active types (Bakker & De Vreese, 2011; Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010). Passive use incorporates one-way communication, such as consuming political information and news online, while active use embodies two-way communication, such as participation in online political discussions. In social media, passive engagement includes reading online political news, comments, and videos. On the

other hand, active engagement consists of posting political text or photos, joining political groups, writing comments, and participating in online conversation (Muntinga et al., 2011).

Several studies have classified political participation on social media into three categories: political information consumption, political opinion expression and mobilization (Ekström & Shehata, 2018; Rojas & Puig-i-Abril, 2009; Valenzuela, 2013). First, political information consumption refers to information seeking and gathering by browsing friends' profiles, following news media, searching for political or societal issues, reading news and watching video clips about public issues. This is private, low-cost and easily accessible online political participation (Ekström & Shehata, 2018). Second, political opinion expression refers to cognitive and expressive participation, during which people reflect on news content they consume and present opinions on political issues. People may engage in deep information processing by commenting, sharing, and posting (Bergström & Jervelycke Belfrage, 2018). Opinion expression can be riskier than information consumption since it is a public activity (Ekström & Shehata, 2018). That is, when a person leaves comments and posts news on his or her account, online friends easily see the content and recognize what the person is thinking about on a specific issue. Lastly, mobilization is related to joining causes and participating in activism. It includes following or signing up to be a member of interest groups, gaining information about instructions about how to get involved in a protest, encouraging other contacts to participate in the protest by spreading mobilizing information, organizing online protest, boycotting, participating in online petition, and donations (Ekström & Shehata, 2018; Valenzuela, 2013).

Based on the review, this thesis focuses on two types of political participation on Instagram: political information consumption and political opinion expression. To be specific, political information consumption includes seeking and acquisition of news regarding public

matters (e.g., reading news, posts and comments about political issues). Political opinion expression includes presenting and sharing personal opinions about public issues (e.g., clicking “like” button, posting, commenting, sending direct message to politicians, adding news to Instagram Stories). Mobilization activity was excluded because it is more demanding and requires more efforts, costs and commitments when comparing to other two types of participatory behaviors. It is possible to assume that college students who are not interested in politics may be rarely motivated to engage in mobilizing behavior on Instagram. Reading news and writing comments are less demanding, and thereby young people are easily involved in the processes on Instagram.

Political Instagram Uses and Motivations

Motivation for information seeking is common and salient in political use of social media as well as traditional media (Ancu & Cozma, 2009; Gantz, 1978; Kaye & Johnson, 2002, 2015; Raine, 2008; Rubin & Perse, 1987; Quan-Haase & Young, 2010; Wu & Atkin, 2017). Information seeking refers to a motive to actively search out information about current issues (Kaye, 2005). Previous studies determined a significant relationship between informative motivation and television news consumption (Gantz, 1978; Rubin & Perse, 1987). In both cases, people need to gather information from news to personally keep knowledgeable about public issues, stay abreast of major issues of the day, and learn about uncertain things and what happens in the society (Ko et al., 2005). Therefore, those who have a strong motive for information acquisition are more likely to pay attention to information itself and be interested in diverse issues. To this end, the Internet and social media are convenient and accessible for people seeking to get a wide range of information about a diversity of topics (Raine, 2008). As politicians, political organizations, and news media turn to Instagram, information about public

matters is now abundant on Instagram (Murphy, 2019). Therefore, when people want to acquire the latest information, Instagram easily fulfills their needs to seek out and acquire information about specific issues. In addition, when scrolling down the page on News Feed, users easily encounter political news that is incorporated into other posts that their friends create and share (Bergström & Jervelycke Belfrage, 2019; Fletcher & Nielson, 2018). It is expected that those who have a strong motivation for information seeking read carefully the information on their News Feed to keep up with main issues of the day.

Accordingly, this thesis posits the following as its first hypothesis:

H1: Motivation for information seeking will be positively related to political information consumption on Instagram.

In addition, the need for self-expression is another important motivation for political use of social media (Kaye, 2005; Parmelee & Bichard, 2012; Shao, 2009; Parmelee & Roman, 2019). Motivation for self-expression refers to a need to present personal opinions (Kaye, 2005) and critique (Parmelee & Bichard, 2012). Wu and Atkin (2017) explored motivations in relation to individuals' online news comment behavior. They found that self-expression is positively associated with posting on online news comments sections. In addition, college students who use Facebook primarily for self-expression are willing to list their party identification on their Facebook profile in order to reveal their political positions (Pempek et al., 2009).

Social media provides convenient functions to fulfill the self-expression need. Social media users easily disclose and share feelings/thoughts through easy-to-use functions anytime anywhere (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010). For example, a previous study found that those who have a strong motive for self-expression frequently entered Facebook, clicked "like" button and commented on posts to reveal their opinions on issues (Hunt et al., 2012). Instagram has similar

functions with Facebook, and thereby people easily present their ideas of certain issue by using convenient functions of posting, commenting, and clicking “like” button. Moreover, politicians and news media actively utilize “Instagram Live” to communicate with Instagram users (Thompson, 2019). Therefore, those who want to express views on public issue can engage in politician’s live-streaming video, ask questions, and send comments on Instagram live.

As noted above, opinion expression on social media is a public activity, which means that any users see what other people post, comment and share (Ekström & Shehata, 2018). People who want to express their experiences and opinions about key issues search and acquire more information to solidify and elaborate their viewpoints in order to influence others (Lyons & Henderson, 2005). Therefore, it is expected that people seek out and consume information carefully before sharing opinions with social networking contacts in an attempt to post coherent and persuasive arguments about issues.

All of these taken together, it is possible to assume that people who want to express personal thoughts and feelings about major issues of the day use Instagram to acquire news and share opinions by posting, commenting, clicking “like” button, and engaging in Instagram live.

Therefore, the second hypothesis is as follows:

H2: Motivation for self-expression will be positively related to (a) political information consumption, and (b) political opinion expression on Instagram.

Following Accounts on Instagram

People “follow” various accounts on Instagram from their friends and celebrities to politicians and news media. Following is a unique activity in social media, where a person chooses specific users to be listed on his or her social media networks. Once following others’

accounts, the person can receive constant updates of posts, articles, photos and videos from the followed accounts (Notopoulos, 2019).

Previous studies have found that motivations for social media use are related to following certain accounts on social media. (Frederick et al., 2012; Whitemkaper et al., 2012). For example, people who have strong motivations to keep a parasocial relationship with a celebrity, keep updated on athletes' schedules and news, and feel enjoyment tend to follow athletes on Twitter (Frederick et al., 2012).

However, there are only few studies that examine why people follow political accounts on social media. Therefore, this thesis aims to provide an in-depth examination of the relationships between motivations of Instagram use and following political accounts on Instagram. In particular, this study distinguishes following political accounts into two types: following news media accounts (e.g., CNN, NPR, *The Washington Post*, Fox News, etc.) and following politicians' accounts (e.g., Donald Trump, Elizabeth Warren, Joe Biden, Bernie Sanders, etc.). While both types of accounts offer various political posts on Instagram, the types of information might be quite different.

On the one hand, the trend of political posts on Instagram provided by news media is an example of what is sometimes called "poster news." Instead of presenting long articles and captions, news media rely on images to create the equivalent of a poster with a photo and short, concise, fact-centered text (Towner & Muñoz, 2018). For example, with regard to the recent issue of Bernie Sanders dropping out of the 2020 Democratic race for president, news organizations (e.g., Fox News, The Washington Post, NBC news, New York Times, CNN, Huff Post, Buzz Feed News) posted content on Instagram, including Bernie Sanders's photo with only one sentence of short messages such as "Bernie Sanders drops out," "Sen. Bernie Sanders ends

presidential bid,” “Bernie Sanders is dropping out of the presidential race,” “Sen. Sanders suspends presidential campaign,” or “Bernie Sanders is ending his presidential campaign.” It is possible to assume that news media developed a strategy to approach young people, the majority of Instagram users, by disseminating eye catching and accessible news. Therefore, people easily catch what the current important issue is.

On the other hand, political posts on Instagram offered by politicians contain lengthy, one-sided, opinion-centered information. In the digital age, politicians can directly communicate with citizens without going through news organizations and journalists (Rauchfleisch & Metag, 2015). Therefore, they create their own social media accounts to disseminate what they want to say to the public without filtering and gatekeeping from news media. Shogan (2010) analyzed the content of the tweets of U.S. politicians and found specific patterns of messages. Politicians mainly posted tweets to describe an official action they were planning and to articulate their own positions on a particular policy or issue. Also, politicians use Twitter for self-promotion by announcing their upcoming campaign events, criticizing a counterpart’s policy, and devaluing another’s political competence (Jackson & Lilleker, 2011). Thus, it is possible to assume that political figures obviously express their own political beliefs and ideology (i.e., right-wing or left-wing) on their social media accounts. In other words, the messages posted by politicians are more likely to be subjective, opinion-centered, and biased than objective and fact-centered. Furthermore, news media provide relatively more diverse news from living, social and health issues to political issues, while politicians post content by focusing on political issues and sharing their political viewpoints and strategies about controversial issues (Reuters Institute, 2017). Therefore, it is expected that politicians spread relatively opinion-centered messages,

which means people grapple to understand implication and reasoning of politician's words, compared to readily understandable posts from news media.

Since these two types of accounts that provide political information on Instagram are distinct, Instagram users' motivations to access each account type and use the different forms of information may be different. On the one hand, those who want to know about what is going on around them (i.e., motivation for information seeking) may feel uncomfortable when they encounter complicated political information provided by politicians. For them, simple, infographic-dominant news offered by news media on Instagram may be enough to keep up-to-date on diverse issues. On the other hand, those who want to present opinions on public issues (i.e., motivation for self-expression) desire to show their knowledge and positions about the issues or to persuade others (Macafee, 2013). Since expressing opinion is a public behavior, social networking contacts easily encounter what others post, see what others think about certain issues, and evaluate other's political stances on the issues. Therefore, people who are motivated to show their own viewpoints may need to get in-depth information that helps them to deliberate the issue and the reasoning of their arguments. It is expected that if they follow politicians and visit their accounts, they can easily acquire and learn how politicians interpret current issues/policies to make strong arguments about these issues.

This leads to the third and fourth hypotheses:

H3: Motivation for information seeking will be positively related to following news media accounts.

H4: Motivation for self-expression will be positively related to following politicians' accounts.

Incidental Exposure to Political Information on Instagram

Particularly, in terms of political information consumption, there are two ways in which people are exposed to political information on social media. Users actively seek out political news online or users are incidentally exposed to information while doing other things (Stroud, 2017). Information seeking refers to a conscious process of searching for facts about specific issues and acquiring information on those issues, while incidental exposure refers to occasions when people are using social media and accidentally encounter political information without having any prior intention to look for such news (Fletcher & Nielsen, 2018).

Incidental exposure to news is important as it leads to further political behaviors, ultimately resulting in participatory democracy. For example, people intentionally search and seek further information after they randomly come across news because their interests on specific issue are spontaneously motivated by a headline, picture, or item in the news (Tewksbury et al., 2001). In other words, incidental news exposure can serve as a gateway which encourages viewers to search for and consume additional relevant political information (Baum & Jamison, 2011). Such attention to specific political issues has a positive influence on political knowledge by informing citizens. Furthermore, when people inadvertently encounter mobilizing information, they are more likely to engage in political participation, such as demonstration (Kim et al., 2013). Given the significance, this thesis examines how the incidental exposure to political information happens on Instagram. In a study of Facebook users, for example, Purcell and colleagues found that more than half (59%) responded that they unexpectedly stumble upon news almost every day (Purcell et al., 2010). More recently, Boczkowski and colleagues found that incidental exposure to news on social media has increasingly risen in recent years, particularly among young people (Boczkowski et al., 2018).

The inadvertent news exposure on social media is related to the structures and features of the platforms. Social media users have a possibility to be exposed to diverse information from non-politics to politics. This occurs because users' networks are connected with many others from friends to news organizations. For example, "News Feed" is assigned in the first page of Facebook, in which friends' updates (e.g., profile change, upcoming events, hyperlinks of news, posts that friends click like button, comments) are shown every time users visit their feed (Bode, 2016). Friends post and comment on political news as well as daily information. Therefore, the functions of loose boundaries and openness easily expose users to a variety of information and engagement in discussion on public issues. In addition, when users tag specific friends, the tagged persons are directly and unconsciously connected to specific information that users share. Also, news organizations have their own social media presence, and thus users are easily exposed to diverse news stories in which they are interested once they follow the channel (Ju, Jeong, & Chyi, 2014). Instagram provides the similar function of News Feed. Furthermore, young people intensely use the "Instagram Stories" function (Mohsin, 2020). People upload various types of information from daily life to political posts on Instagram Stories. Instagram Stories is always located at the top of users' app when they log in, and colorful circles around each friend's profile photo are shown up on the top of the first page in order to notify users of their friend's update of new stories (Rouse, 2018). Most Instagram users first click the eye-catching circles and check friends' stories. This is because the posts shared through Instagram Stories disappear within 24 hours, and the time limit may motivate users to promptly open the stories. (Hsiao, 2019). Once they tap to view a person's stories, the page is automatically moved to next person's stories within 20-30 minutes. Therefore, unless they click the exit button, they are incidentally exposed to next posts that other friends share on Instagram stories. Accordingly,

the features of Instagram increase the possibility that people accidentally come across political information.

Some scholars consider incidental information as a by-product of other online activities (Kim et al., 2013; Tewksbury et al., 2001). In other words, people randomly encounter political information while using social media for other things. This is because the social media environment has a complicated information cycle rather than the linear news cycle of traditional media (Bergström & Jervelycke Belfrage, 2018) and provides abundant and ubiquitous political information. According to a study by Bakshy et al. (2015), more than one in ten posts on News Feeds included hard news content. Many news organizations and political figures now have their own Instagram presence and share their contents (Jung et al., 2017). A recent study found that frequency of Web use is positively related to incidental exposure to news on the Web (Tewksbury et al., 2018). Therefore, it is expected that the more that people routinely use social media, the more they are unintentionally exposed to an array of news from non-political to political information.

Along the same lines, when people log into their Instagram accounts, a bunch of new posts is automatically disseminated on their News Feed. Therefore, it is possible to assume that overall time spent in Instagram predicts inadvertent exposure to political information.

Based on the literature review and understanding of the characteristics of Instagram, the fifth hypothesis is proposed:

H5: Frequent use of Instagram will be positively related to incidental exposure to political information on Instagram.

Chapter 3

Methods

This chapter will cover data collection, measurement, and analytical framework. In terms of data collection, this study aims to look at Instagram use in relationship to politics among young people who dominantly utilize the platform. According to previous studies, college population can represent young adults despite the limited generalizability of findings (Cooper et al., 2011; Wiecko, 2010). Therefore, the unit of analysis in this study is college students, particularly UNM undergraduate students. In addition, to test the research question and hypotheses, this chapter will describe scales that measure the extent of *motivations, political information consumption, political opinion expression, following politicians/news media, frequent use, and incidental news exposure*. Also, in terms of data analysis, this study uses hierarchical regression analyses.

Data collection

A total of 399 college students were collected between February 3 and February 28, 2020, from University of New Mexico (UNM) and asked to participate in a survey as part of a research project being conducted by a UNM graduate student. (See Appendix, which provides the complete survey.) The minimum number of necessary samples is 377 among 17,859 UNM undergraduate students, when confidence level is 95%, margin of error is 5%, and population proportion is 50%. Survey respondents were selected using a random sample procedure. The UNM Registrar's Office randomly selected 3,000 email addresses among total UNM undergraduate students which was used as a sampling framework. The 3,000 selected students were sent the first recruiting email, including information about online survey and compensation, on February 3. Four times reminders were sent to increase participation in the online survey on

February 5, 7, 10, and 12. Once they clicked the survey link on email, they encountered the informed consent form to be asked about whether they were willing to participate in the survey. The survey was proceeded after respondents clicked “Next” button. Most respondents completed the survey within 15 to 20 minutes. The response rate was 13.3%. This survey was approved by UNM IRB office. 15 winners were randomly chosen via “Pretty Random” number generator app and offered a \$15 Amazon gift card for compensation.

Among the total number of participants, UNM students who currently use Instagram are only included in the analysis. The reason is that this thesis examines the political use of Instagram. Therefore, the number of samples was 341 (86.3%).

The final participants included 219 females (66.4%), 108 males (32.7%), and 3 individuals identified as non-binary and/or queer (0.9%). 146 participants (44.1%) self-identified as having Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin, and 157 participants (47.4%) self-identified as either Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish. 28 participants (8.5%) revealed that their ethnicity is White, Mixed, Asian, Native American, Caucasian, and/or Swiss-American. In terms of race, most of the participants identified as White (70.9%), while 34 identified as Asian or Asian American (10.4%), 20 identified as American Indian or Alaska Native (6.1%), 10 identified as Black or African American (3.1%), and 1 identified as Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (0.3%). Moreover, 30 participants (9.2%) responded that they identified as Mexican, Mixed, Latino, Hispanic, and/or Mestizo. In terms of class standing, 66 participants were freshmen (19.9%), 59 participants were sophomores (17.8%), 77 participants were juniors (23.2%), and 130 participants were seniors (39.2%). The annual family income of the participants averaged between \$35,000-\$49,999 and \$50,000-\$74,999.

Table 1. Demographics

Variable	<i>N</i> (%)
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Gender	Female	219 (66.4)
	Male	108 (32.7)
	Other	3 (0.9)
Ethnicity	Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin	146 (44.1)
	No Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin	157 (47.4)
	Other	28 (8.5)
Race	White	232 (70.9)
	Asian or Asian American	34 (10.4)
	American Indian or Alaska Native	20 (6.1)
	Black or African American	10 (3.1)
	Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	1 (0.3)
Class standing	Other	30 (9.2)
	Freshman	66 (19.9)
	Sophomore	59 (17.8)
	Junior	77 (23.2)
income	Senior	130 (39.2)
	Less than \$35,000	92 (28.7)
	\$35,000 - \$49,999	54 (16.8)
	\$50,000 - \$74,999	70 (21.8)
	\$75,000 - \$99,999	42 (13.1)
	\$100,000 or more	63 (19.6)

Measurement

Motivations for Instagram use. To measure the motivations for Instagram use, I adapted the existing scales of motivations for Internet, Facebook, and Twitter use. I used 18 items primarily used and overlapped in previous studies of U&G (Chan et al., 2012; Hunt, Atkin, & Krishnan, 2012; Parmelee & Bichard, 2011; Parmelee & Roman, 2019). Respondents were asked to indicate how much the following statements describe their motivations for using Instagram on a 5-point scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree; see Table 2).

Table 2. Structure Matrix for Instagram Use Motivations with Oblimin Rotation of Factor Analysis

Motivations	Information	Entertainment	Social interaction	Self-expression
To get useful information	.86	.26	.30	.30

To keep up with issues of the day	.85	.25	.35	.33
To broaden my knowledge base	.83	.18	.17	.35
To find out information about public issues	.83	.26	.36	.42
To understand events that are happening	.81	.28	.36	.26
To access information quickly	.80	.28	.31	.15
To forget about my problems	.28	.78	.26	.09
Because it relaxes me	.38	.73	.24	.05
To put off something I should be doing	.16	.62	.32	.17
To pass time when bored	.13	.61	.41	-.16
Because it is entertaining	.34	.61	.51	-.21
To keep in touch with friends/followers	.27	.23	.76.	-.04
To show others encouragement	.33	.29	.76	.09
Because I wonder what other people are doing	.13	.37	.67	.07
To share my views, thoughts, and experiences about current issues	.46	.22	.66	.32
To give me something to talk about with others	.47	.42	.52	.20
To criticize politicians	.36	.07	.12	.88
To engage in discussion with political figures	.47	.19	.23	.86
Eigenvalue	6.42	2.38	1.31	1.21
Variance accounted for, %	35.66	13.20	7.25	6.70

Note. Extraction method: Principal component analysis. Rotation method: Oblimin with Kaiser normalization. **Bold** values represent items included in each factor.

First, I conducted factor analysis, which indicate the 18 items fell into 4 categories. First, motivations for information seeking include (a) to get useful information, (b) to keep up with issues of the day, (c) to broaden my knowledge base, (d) to find out information about public issues, (e) to understand event that are happening, and (f) to access information quickly ($M = 2.78$, $SD = .99$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$). Second, motivations for entertainment include (a) forget

about my problems, (b) because it relaxes me, (c) to put off something I should be doing, (d) to pass time when bored, and (e) because it is entertaining ($M = 3.51$, $SD = .76$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .77$). Third, motivations for social interaction include (a) to keep in touch with friends/followers, (b) to show others encouragement, (c) because I wonder what other people are doing, (d) to share my views, thoughts, and experiences about current issues, and (e) to give me something to talk about with others ($M = 3.44$, $SD = .78$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .73$). Fourth, motivation for self-expression include (a) to criticize politicians, and (b) to engage in discussion with political figures ($M = 1.82$, $SD = .84$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .81$).

However, Kaye (2005) and Shao (2009) defined motivation for self-expression as a need to represent deliberate expression of one's feeling and thoughts. Parmelee and Bichard (2011) also conceptualized that self-expression refers to the expression of personal opinions. Based on the evidence, I decided that the item "to share my views, thoughts, and experiences about current issues" fit in with motivation for self-expression rather than motivation for social interaction. Therefore, I tested reliability analysis for three items (e.g., to share my views, thoughts, and experiences about current issues, to engage in discussion with political figures, to criticize politicians) to check their consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .66$) ($M = 2.23$, $SD = .81$). Based on the change, motivation for social interaction is changed to include (a) to keep in touch with friends/followers, (b) to show others encouragement, (c) because I wonder what other people are doing, and (d) to give me something to talk about with others ($M = 3.55$, $SD = .77$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .68$).

Political information consumption. Acquisition of political information was measured averaging six items (Cho et al., 2009) that asked respondents how frequently they do the following activities on Instagram on a 5-point scale (1=not at all to 5=frequently): (a) get

political information from politician's posts, (b) get political information from friends or acquaintances, (c) get political information from celebrities' posts, (d) read posts about political issues, (e) read other's comments about political issues, and (f) read news ($M = 2.00$, $SD = .88$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .80$).

Political opinion expression. Political opinion expression refers to active political behaviors of sharing personal opinions on public issues, compared to political information consumption (Rojas & Puig-i-Abril, 2009; Cho et al., 2009). The variable was measured averaging eight items that asked respondents how frequently they do the following activities on Instagram on a 5-point scale (1=not at all to 5=frequently): (a) express own political views or opinions, (b) click "like" button on political posts, (c) post a photo or video that have something to do with politics, (d) add other's political posts to your story, (e) send direct message (DM) to politicians, (f) comment on posts about politicians, (g) comment on posts about the 2020 presidential election, and (h) comment on posts about current issues ($M = 1.44$, $SD = .60$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$).

Following politicians. Respondents were asked to indicate how many politicians and political organizations they have among their Instagram "following" with open-ended question. The answers varied from 0 to 900 ($M = 16.30$, $SD = 72.15$). The value of skewness is 8.61 and greater than 1.0. Thus, the distribution is right-skewed. Except the outliers, answers were recorded based on the value of cumulative relative frequency to closely make normal distribution. Thus, following politicians become a 5-point scale, including those who did not follow politicians coded as 1 (N = 148, 47.9%); those who followed 1-4 politicians coded as 2 (N = 54, cumulative percent 65.4%); those who followed 5-10 politicians coded as 3 (N = 59, cumulative percent 84.5); those who followed 11-25 coded as 4 (N = 25, cumulative percent

92.6%); and those who followed 30-100 politicians coded as 5 (N = 23, cumulative percent 100.0%) ($M = 2.10$, $SD = 1.29$).

Following news media. Respondents were asked to indicate how many news media accounts (e.g., CNN, CBSnews, etc) they have among their Instagram “following” with open-ended question. The answers varied from 0 to 900 ($M = 7.94$, $SD = 52.47$). The value of skewness is 15.91, and thus the distribution is right-skewed. Except the outliers, answers were recorded based on the value of cumulative relative frequency to closely make normal distribution. Thus, following news media is a 5-point scale: Those who did not follow news media account were coded as 1 (N = 150, 48.1%), those who followed 1-2 coded as 2 (N = 63, cumulative percent 68.3%); those who followed 3-9 coded as 3 (N = 50, cumulative percent 84.3%); those who followed 10-15 coded as 4 (N = 32, cumulative percent 94.6%); and those who followed 20-100 coded as 5 (N = 17, cumulative percent 100.0%) ($M = 2.05$, $SD = 1.26$).

Frequency of Instagram use. Respondents were asked to indicate how frequently they use Instagram on a 5-point scale from “not at all” (1) to “frequently” (5), ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 1.33$).

Incidental news exposure. Respondents were asked to answer a question on a 5-point scale: “In the past 3 months, have you randomly come across posts about the following issues on Instagram?” (1=never to 5=frequently). The following issues included (a) the 2020 presidential election, (b) Trump administration, (c) environmental issues, (d) immigration policy, (e) gun ownership, (f) legalizing abortion, (g) impeachment of President Donald Trump, and (h) Iran missile attack ($M = 2.86$, $SD = 1.05$, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .92$). I chose eight specific issues for measurement items because these controversial, polarized issues are prevailing, repeated and discussed many times on social media.

Control variables. The study used demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, ethnicity, race, class standing, income), political ideology and political interest as control variables. These variables are known to be highly relevant to the associations that the present study is focusing upon, such as the relationships between motivations for Instagram use and political behaviors, and between frequency of Instagram use and incidental news exposure. For example, women are more likely to use Instagram than men (Duggan & Brenner, 2013). There is a significant difference in types and frequency of social media use among members of different ethnicities, races, and age groups (Chen, 2020). Furthermore, people with higher income are more likely to participate in politics than those with lower income (Solt, 2008). Also, political orientations, such as ideology and political interest, have been shown to be positively related to political behaviors. With regard to political orientations, political ideology was measured on a scale from “very conservative” (1) to “very liberal” (5), ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 1.00$). Political interest was measured using three items, how interested you were in (a) local, (b) national, and (c) international politics, on a scale from “not at all” (1) to “very interested” (5), ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 1.10$, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .88$).

Analytical Framework

To examine this study’s research question and hypotheses, various statistical analyses were conducted including descriptive statistics, reliability test, factor analysis and multiple regression analysis. All statistics were calculated using SPSS 26.0.

Chapter 4

Results

This study ran hierarchical regression models to test one research question and five hypotheses. First, the research question, “what are the primary motivations for Instagram use among college students?”, was posited to explore the relationship between specific motivations and frequency of Instagram use. As presented in Table 3, the regression analysis reveals that controlling for gender, ethnicity, race and class standing, motivations for information seeking and entertainment are significant predictors of frequent use of Instagram ($\beta = .25, p < .001, \beta = .40, p < .001$, respectively), together accounting for 34.8% of the total variance. Therefore, in terms of the research question, Instagram users with motivations for information-seeking and entertainment are positively related to their frequent use of Instagram in general. In terms of motivations for social interaction and opinion expression, there is no significant relationship between these motivations and frequency of Instagram use.

Table 3. Regression Model Predicting Frequency of Instagram Use by Motivations

Variable	Frequent use of Instagram	
	Model 1	Model 2
Block 1: Control		
Gender	-.07	-.02
Ethnicity	.04	.09
Race	.11	.03
Class standing	-.06	.01
Income	.08	.07
Block 2: Motivations		
Entertainment		.40***
Information seeking		.25***
Social interaction		.11
Self-expression		-.01
ΔR^2 (%)		34.8
R^2 (%)	2.6	37.4***

Note. Sample size = 257. Cell entries are standardized beta coefficients for Blocks 1 and 2. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Second, the first hypothesis expects that motivation for information seeking is positively associated with political information consumption on Instagram. To test the first hypothesis, I ran hierarchical regression analysis with motivations as independent variables, and news consumption as a dependent variable. As presented in Table 4, motivation for information seeking is a significant predictor of political information consumption ($\beta = .30, p < .001$). Thus, the regression model supported the first hypothesis, which predicted a positive relationship between motivation to seek out information and consuming political information on Instagram.

Third, the second hypothesis anticipates that motivation for self-expression is positively related to political information consumption and political opinion expression. As presented in Table 4, motivation for self-expression is a significant predictor of political information consumption ($\beta = .30, p < .001$) and political opinion expression on Instagram ($\beta = .49, p < .001$). Thus, the regression model supported the second hypothesis, which predicted a positive relationship between motivation to frankly express opinions and consuming political information, and between the motivation and expressing political viewpoints on Instagram.

Table 4. Regression Model Predicting Online Political Participation by Motivations

Variable	Online Political Participation on Instagram					
	Information Consumption			Opinion Expression		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Block 1: Control						
Gender	-.03	-.01	.07	-.07	-.04	.06
Ethnicity	-.08	-.11	-.05	-.01	-.04	.01
Race	.07	.06	-.03	.09	-.08	.01
Class standing	-.03	-.02	.06	-.04	-.04	.05

Income	.10	.13*	.09	.02	.06	.01
Block 2: political orientation						
Political ideology		.07	.06		.17**	.14*
Political interest		.35***	.27***		.31***	.21***
Block 3: Motivations						
Information			.30***			.04
Self-expression			.30***			.49***
ΔR^2 (%)		14.0	25.0		16.1	22.0
R^2 (%)	2.1	16.1***	41.1***	1.3	17.4***	39.4***

Note. Sample size = 258 for political information consumption; 257 for political opinion expression. Cell entries are standardized beta coefficients for Blocks 1, 2, and 3. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Fourth, the third hypothesis anticipates that motivation for information seeking is positively related to following news media accounts on Instagram. As presented in Table 5, motivation for information seeking is a significant predictor of following news media ($\beta = .25, p < .01$), explaining 6.5% of the variance. Therefore, the regression model supported the third hypothesis, which predicted a positive relationship between motivation to seek out information about major issues and following news media accounts on Instagram.

Fifth, the fourth hypothesis expects that motivation for self-expression is positively associated with following politicians' accounts on Instagram. As presented in Table 5, motivation for self-expression is a significant predictor of following politicians' accounts ($\beta = .32, p < .001$), accounting for 12.4% of the total variance. Therefore, the regression model supported the fourth hypothesis, which predicted a positive relationship between motivation to express personal opinions and following politicians' accounts on Instagram.

Table 5. Regression Model Predicting Following Political Accounts by Motivations

Variable	Following on Instagram					
	News Media Account			Politicians' Account		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3

Block 1: Control						
Gender	.09	.09	.11	.04	.06	.13*
Ethnicity	-.06	-.06	-.04	-.12	-.14*	-.11
Race	-.01	-.01	-.05	.01	-.01	-.06
Class standing	.07	.07	.10	-.02	-.02	.05
Income	.07	.08	.06	.03	.05	.02
Block 2: political orientation						
Political ideology		.02	.02		.01	-.01
Political interest		.08	.07		.31***	.24***
Block 3: Motivations						
Information			.25**			.09
Self-expression			.02			.32***
ΔR^2 (%)		0.8	6.5		9.7	12.4
R^2 (%)	2.0	2.8	9.3***	1.6	11.3***	23.7***

Note. Sample size = 258 for following news media; 257 for following politicians. Cell entries are standardized beta coefficients for Blocks 1, 2, and 3. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Sixth, the fifth hypothesis expects that frequent use of Instagram positively influences frequency of incidental news exposure. As presented in Table 6, frequency of Instagram use is a significant predictor of incidental exposure to political information ($\beta = .26, p < .001$), explaining 5.2% of the total variance. Therefore, the regression model supported the fifth hypothesis, which predicted a positive relationship between frequent use of Instagram and incidental exposure to political news.

Table 6. Regression Model Predicting Incidental Exposure on Instagram by Frequency

Variable	Incidental Exposure on Instagram			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Block 1: Control				
Gender	-.10	-.08	-.03	-.02
Ethnicity	.02	-.00	.04	.02
Race	.05	.04	-.03	-.04
Class standing	-.17**	-.17**	-.11*	-.11*
Income	.01	.03	.00	-.01
Block 2: Political orientation				

Political ideology		.02	.01	-.01
Political interest		.31***	.26***	.26***
Block 3: Motivations				
Information			.21**	.10
Self-expression			.22**	.21**
Block 4: Usage				
Frequency of Instagram use				.26***
ΔR^2 (%)		8.3	12.6	5.2
R^2 (%)	5.9	14.2***	26.8***	32.0***

Note. Sample size = 259. Cell entries are standardized beta coefficients for Blocks 1, 2, 3, and 4. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Instagram does matter in the social media network scene because this platform has a strong following among teens and young adults (Pew Research Center, 2019). In other words, although Facebook and Twitter are still popular social networking services, they are losing young people, and thereby Instagram may become the biggest platform for future generations. As Instagram has increasingly attracted young users, politicians and news organizations are turning to and using Instagram, an array of political information is currently available on Instagram, and Instagram provides convenient functions to engage in a variety of political activities on Instagram. Despite the rapid adoption of these many important Instagram uses, prior to the current thesis, few studies have examined the way young people engage in political behaviors on the platform. It is important to explore how they use Instagram in relationship to politics because social media influence processes of being political creatures among young people (Lee et al., 2013).

This thesis approached college students' political use of Instagram based on uses and gratifications theory. To be specific, it aimed to identify how motivations of Instagram use influence young people's political behaviors such as getting political information, expressing political opinions, and following politicians/news media accounts on Instagram. Furthermore, this thesis focused on how young people's Instagram use affect incidental exposure to political information on Instagram.

First, this study found that motivations for entertainment and information seeking are positively related to frequent use of Instagram. Previous studies found that young people intensely use Instagram to reduce stress and feel enjoyment. In addition to the evidence, the

present study also found that college students actively use Instagram in order to get information they need. This finding implies that Instagram plays an important role as a major information source, and thus young people select and enter Instagram frequently when they need to get various information.

Second, in terms of political use of Instagram, this study found that motivation for information seeking has a positive influence on political information consumption. That is, young people who want to learn about unknown things and keep abreast of current issues select and log in to Instagram to read news, comments and posts about public issues. This is because a large number of Instagram users update a myriad of posts every day, and thus they easily get necessary information on social and political issues on Instagram. Furthermore, this study found that motivation for self-expression is positively related to political opinion expression as well as political information consumption. It implies that young people who are strongly motivated to present their opinions on major issues and to criticize politicians enter Instagram and gather relevant information to organize and strengthen their ideas, and then upload posts and comments on the issue based on the consumed information.

These findings may be further interpreted with relation to following Instagram accounts of news media and politicians. In this study, motivation for information seeking predicts following news media, while motivation for self-expression influences following politicians. On Instagram, news media and politicians provide somewhat different types of political information. News organizations offer poster-type news, which contains a photo and concise message about various issues from daily life to politics. However, politicians upload lengthy opinion-based posts specifically about politics to promote their political competence and qualification on their Instagram accounts.

When all of these facts are taken together, it is possible to interpret them to mean that young people who have a strong motivation for information seeking want to know about what is going on around society, and therefore follow news media accounts that provide overall information about major issues of the day. Once following these news accounts, they easily encounter accessible political information and read news when they enter Instagram. On the other hand, young people who have a strong motivation for opinion expression need to show their knowledge about current issues and persuade others to support specific issues, and thus they need more in-depth information to strengthen their opinions. Once following politicians, they are exposed to contents the politicians share, and thus able to read and learn the way politicians interpret specific issues and policies. Based on these types of information, they can express their political viewpoints about the issue with logical reasoning on Instagram by posting, commenting, sending DMs, clicking the “like” button, and engaging in Instagram live.

Lastly, this thesis found that frequent use of Instagram is positively associated with incidental exposure to political information on Instagram. It means that young people who frequently enter Instagram inadvertently come across political posts on Instagram. This may be due to the functions of Instagram (e.g., openness). When college students do other things on Instagram, they are exposed to various posts updated by their Instagram contacts and the posts are mixed up with diverse information, including from daily life as well as politics. Therefore, those who frequently enter Instagram have a great chance to unexpectedly stumble upon political news. The incidental information is important since it leads to further political information seeking that result in knowledge gain, opinion expression, and protest participation (Baum & Jamison, 2011; Kim et al., 2013). Moreover, it has a potential to reach

out to young people who are less interested in politics and use Instagram mainly for entertainment (Boczkowski et al., 2018).

This thesis has several limitations. First, this thesis is grounded on U&G theory as a theoretical framework, but the approach has been often criticized as the focus is too individualistic and ambiguous (Rayburn, 1996). The approach does not consider other contextual and cultural factors that may influence motivations for social media use and political behaviors. Second, there is an issue of generalizability of the findings. The samples used in the study were collected from UNM undergraduate students. That is, the participants were college students. This study aimed to explore young people's political use of Instagram, however, not all young people attend college. Therefore, it is hard to assume that the samples can represent young people in general. Third, there is a significant discrepancy between total respondents and samples used in data analysis. This thesis set the minimum number of samples as 377 by using sample size calculator and successfully collected responses from 399 respondents. However, only 341 students currently use Instagram, and thus I lost over 50 samples. Among the 341 participants, about 80 respondents were also removed from analysis because they had missing responses mostly in demographic questions such as gender and race. When creating the online survey, the "required answer" function was not applied to the survey questionnaire. Thus, respondents could easily skip questions which they felt uncomfortable to answer. Fourth, there is an issue of the extent of credibility. As this study relies on an online survey, self-reported answers result in unclear and inaccurate data. This is because participants do not interpret questions and items in a similar way in accordance with researcher's intention. Also, their lack of memory about the subject could lead them to answer with uncertainty. For example, in the case of incidental news exposure, respondents

were asked to answer how often they randomly encountered political posts on Instagram in the past three months, using a five-point scale. It is hard to remember the experience of being inadvertently exposed to political news on Instagram, and thus participants could answer the question with speculation. Fifth, in data analysis, there are several assumptions to check for multiple regression model. Specifically, in terms of independence of residuals, the Normal P-P plot was skewed in the case of the second and third hypotheses, which entail dependent variables of political opinion expression and following news media. This suggests that the data set was not normally distributed (Pallant, 2007).

Conclusion

This thesis posited a question: whether young people use Instagram for political information and express their political opinions on Instagram. Instagram serves as a major political information source and provides convenient functions to easily engage in a variety of online political participation. Therefore, young people who are motivated to keep up-to-date on what is going on around the society are inclined to select and use Instagram to seek out and consume information on the latest issues. They may follow news media accounts to easily get various information they need. Furthermore, young people who need to present personal opinions on public issues and critique politicians are more likely to enter Instagram, gather relevant information to make a clear argument about the issues, and engage in various expressive participation such as posting, commenting on current issues, clicking “like” button on debated posts, joining politicians’ Instagram live to ask questions and share their political viewpoints, and sending direct messages to politicians. They may gather useful information to support their opinions by following politicians’ accounts on Instagram.

In addition to the motivated political use of Instagram, young people's habitual use also influences their political activity on Instagram. To be specific, their active access to Instagram increases the opportunity to incidentally encounter diverse posts, including political information. This is because users are connected to each other and a variety of contents are mixed up on Instagram like Facebook and Twitter. Therefore, when they frequently enter Instagram and scroll down their News feed without intention to seek out news, they are incidentally exposed to news shared by their social networking contacts and stumble upon political information mixed up with entertaining information.

Overall, despite several limitations, this thesis sheds light on the potential of Instagram being a political sphere in which young people consume political information and express political opinion. The findings indicate that Instagram is an appropriate and convenient platform for college students to easily get what they want to consume about public issues and express what they think about the issues.

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APPENDIX: Survey

A. How frequently do you use the following social media? (1=not at all, 2=rarely,

3=sometimes, 4=often, 5=frequently)

1. Facebook
2. Instagram
3. Snapchat
4. Twitter
5. TikTok
6. YouTube

B. Do you currently use Instagram? 0 No; 1 Yes

C. Among your Instagram “following,” how many politicians and political organizations do you have? (approximately)

D. Among your Instagram “following,” how many news media accounts (e.g., cnn, cbsnews, etc) do you have? (approximately)

E. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? “I use Instagram...”

(1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree)

1. To pass time when bored
2. Because it is entertaining
3. To access information quickly
4. To keep up with issues of the day
5. To broaden my knowledge
6. To give me something to talk about with others
7. To share my views, thoughts, and experiences

8. To keep in touch with friends/followers

F. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? “I use Instagram...”

(1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree)

1. To put off something I should be doing
2. Because it relaxes me
3. To forget about my problems
4. To understand events that are happening
5. To get useful information
6. To find out information about public issues
7. Because I wonder what other people are doing
8. To engage in discussion with political figures
9. To show others encouragement
10. To criticize politicians

G. How frequently do you do the following activities on Instagram? (1=not at all, 2=rarely,

3=sometimes, 4=often, 5=frequently)

1. Get political information from politicians’ posts
2. Get political information from friends or acquaintances
3. Get political information from celebrities’ posts
4. Read posts about political issues
5. Read other’s comments about political issues
6. Read news

H. How frequently do you do the following activities on Instagram? (1=not at all, 2=rarely,

3=sometimes, 4=often, 5=frequently)

1. Express own political views or opinions
2. Click “like” button on political posts
3. Post a photo or video that have something to do with politics
4. Add other’s political posts to your story
5. Send direct message (DM) to politicians
6. Comment on posts about politicians
7. Comment on posts about the 2020 presidential election
8. Comment on posts about current issues

I. In the past 3 months, have you randomly come across posts about the following issues on Instagram? (1=never, 2=rarely, 3=sometimes, 4=often, 5=frequently)

1. The 2020 presidential election
2. Trump administration
3. Environmental issues
4. Immigration policy
5. Gun ownership
6. Legalizing abortion
7. Impeachment of President Donald Trump
8. Iran missile attack

J. How interested are you in? (1=not at all, 2=rarely interested, 3=neutral, 4=somewhat interested, 5=very interested)

1. Local politics
2. National politics
3. International politics

- K. What is your political ideology? (1=very conservative, 2=conservative, 3=moderate, 4=liberal, 5=very liberal)
- L. What is your gender? (1=woman, 2=man, 3=other: please describe your gender identity)
- M. What is your ethnicity? (1=Hispanic, Latino, of Spanish Origin, 2=No Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin, 3=other: please describe your ethnicity)
- N. What is your race? (1=Black or African American, 2=White, 3=Asian or Asian American, 4=American Indian or Alaska Native, 5=Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, 6=other: please describe your race)
- O. What is your class standing? (1=freshman, 2=sophomore, 3=junior, 4=senior, 5=graduate student)
- P. When were you born? (year)
- Q. What is your major?
- R. What is your annual family income? (1=less than \$35,000, 2=\$35,000-\$49,999, 3=\$50,000-\$74,999, 4=\$75,000-\$99,999, 5=\$100,000 or more)