

Examining Differential Gains from Mass Media in Japan

by Masahiro YAMAMOTO*

Introduction

Information that enables citizens' active, voluntary participation is an important condition for a healthy democracy. However, mass media, the main information source in today's complex societies, provide only a limited amount of such information, particularly in non-electoral contexts (Lemert 1981, 1992). This suggests that citizens with limited political resources and access have difficulty engaging in political activities beyond the act of voting even when they are willing to do so and, therefore, making their opinions represented in the decision-making process (Lemert 1981, 1992).

Given such an information environment, recent studies have addressed a role of political discussion in increasing citizens' ability or motivation to obtain information that enables participation from mass media and ultimately engage in political activities (Hardy & Scheufele 2005; Nisbet & Scheufele 2004; Scheufele 2002). Specifically, a differential gains model from mass media posits that hard-news use has a stronger relationship with political participation among citizens who discuss politics with others more frequently, because political discussion helps them more effectively acquire such mobilizing information from mass media (Scheufele 2002).

Although previous research has provided support for the differential gains model, existing empirical evidence is limited to the United States. It is not clear whether the model generalizes to other Western and non-Western political contexts. Moreover, prior research on the differential gains model has treated political participation as a uni-dimensional construct (Hardy & Scheufele 2005; Scheufele 2002). This may fail to take into account several key differences between voting and other forms of participation (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady 1995). This issue is also important from a comparative perspective, as dimensionality of political participation may vary by political culture.

The purpose of this study is to examine the differential gains model from mass

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media in Japan, with a consideration of its political context. More specifically, using survey data from the Japanese General Social Survey (JGSS) 2003, this study assesses whether political discussion moderates the relationship between hard-news use and two forms of participatory behavior, general participation and voting. Japan serves as an interesting case. Despite its long history of democracy, Japanese political behavior and attitudes are static and passive compared to other democratic societies (Dalton 2006; Edelman, Ito, & Keppinger 1989; Huckfeldt, Ikeda, & Pappi 2005; Ikeda & Kohno 2008; Ito 1993; Richardson 1991; Verba, Nie, & Kim 1978; Wang, Dalton, & Shin 2006). This study will contribute to existing knowledge by assessing whether, in such a static and passive political culture, political discussion serves to facilitate political learning from mass media and ultimately encourage citizens' political participation.

Political Participation

In general terms, political participation refers to “activity that has the intent or effect of influencing government action – either directly by affecting the making of implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make those policies” (Verba et al. 1995: 38). Political participation is not necessarily restricted to activities directly concerning public institutions such as voting and assisting an election campaign for a party or candidate (Verba et al. 1995). It also includes more informal activities such as involvement in churches and voluntary groups (Conway 1991; Verba & Nie 1972; Verba et al. 1995). Although not always clear, what constitutes ‘political’ is the potential of an act to directly or indirectly convey citizens’ views and preferences and potentially affect the decision-making process (Verba et al. 1995).

Scholars have been debating whether political participation is a uni- or multi-dimensional construct. Verba et al. (1995) argue that voting and other forms of participation need to be distinguished, because their requirements and social functions are substantially different from each other. Specifically, voting does not require a high level of resources, skills, and motivation compared to other, more active forms of participation such as contacting a public official or politician, attending a town hall meeting, and working with neighbors to solve community problems (Verba et al. 1995). Voting also is not as effective as other participatory behavior in representing the voice of citizens and generating pressure on the decision-making process (Verba et al. 1995). Furthermore, voting is a unique political act in that it is viewed as “a norm of civic duty” (Wolfinger & Rosenstone 1980: 7) or “one’s duty as a citizen” (Verba et al. 1995: 360).

Dimensionality of political participation is an important issue in Japan. Although Japan has been practicing democracy for more than a half century, citizen participation is primarily limited to voting (Dalton 2006; Franklin 2004; Ito 1993;

Verba et al. 1978). Also, Japanese citizens tend to have a lower level of political interest, trust, satisfaction, efficacy, party identification, and voluntary participation than those in other societies (Dalton 2006; Richardson 1991; Verba et al. 1978; Wang et al. 2006). Ito (1993: 73) comments on Japanese political participation as follows: “[A]fter constituents choose their delegates for parliaments or congresses by whatever standards, they leave decisions on “difficult matters” to their delegates and government leaders.”

A recent study by Ikeda and Kohno (2008) may help explain the static and passive nature of Japanese political behavior. They conducted a nationwide survey of eligible voters to study Japanese attitudes and values toward democracy. When asked about the meaning of democracy in an open-ended form, only 9 percent of their respondents conceived democracy as a dynamic, process-oriented system, including concepts such as participation, citizenship rights, citizen empowerment, and institutions. They also found that among eight East Asian countries, Japanese respondents provided the highest percentage of “don’t know/no answer” responses to the same question. Ikeda and Kohno (2008: 164) noted that “[T]his may reflect the historical character of Japanese democracy as a system imposed after defeat in war rather than the product of indigenous political movements with broad grassroots involvement.” The present attempt to distinguish between voting and general participation reflects these characteristics of Japanese political participation.

Political Participation, News Media, and Political Discussion

Existing literature indicates that hard-news use is a key communication factor that affects political participation. In complex societies, the news media function as the primary source of what is happening in social and political arenas (Schramm & Roberts 1971; Severin & Tankard 1979). News helps facilitate political conversations, psychological involvement in politics, political learning, and the formation of political opinions (Conway 1991; Gamson 1992; Kim, Scheufele, & Shanahan 2005; Kwak, Williams, Wang, & Lee 2005; Pinkleton & Austin 2002; Scheufele 2000). News also provides so-called mobilizing information such as when and where a future political event happens or whom to contact to express one’s opinions (Lemert 1981, 1992).

Political discussion is another key communication factor that facilitates political participation. It allows citizens to think through personal opinions, experience, and social situations (Kim, Wyatt, & Katz 1999). In a Habermasian sense, by engaging in political talks, discussion, or conversations, “citizens construct and reveal their identities, understand others, produce rules and resources for deliberation, enhance their opinions, transform the domestic spheres into the public sphere, and bridge their private lives to the political world” (Kim & Kim 2008: 66). Indeed, prior studies have shown the positive effects of political discussion on

several political outcomes, including political interest (Austin & Pinkleton 1999), political knowledge (Eveland 2004; Scheufele 2000), and political participation (Kim et al. 1999; Kwak et al. 2005; Nisbet & Scheufele 2004; Scheufele 2000).

The importance of hard-news use and political discussion in prompting political participation has been documented in Japan. For example, Flanagan (1996) reported that exposure to political information in the news media was positively related to psychological involvement in politics and political knowledge, which in turn were positively related to political participation. Yasuno (2005) showed that newspaper hard-news reading and political discussion with friends and colleagues were positively related to political participation. Moreover, Ikeda (2005) and Ikeda and Richey (2005) reported that political discussion frequency was positively associated with political participation.

The Differential Gains Model from Mass Media

As mentioned earlier, the differential gains model focuses on a role of political discussion in affecting the degree to which various forms of news media facilitate political participation, such that hard-news use has a stronger relationship with political participation for people who discuss politics with others more frequently than their counterparts (Scheufele 2002). This essentially implies an interactive relationship, with the effect of hard-news use on political participation dependent on the value of political discussion. The effect of hard-news use on political participation should be highest if one reads or watches political news and also talks about it with others, and lowest if one does neither (Scheufele 2002). As is presented in Figure 1, the model essentially theorizes a contributory pattern of an interaction (Eveland 1997).¹

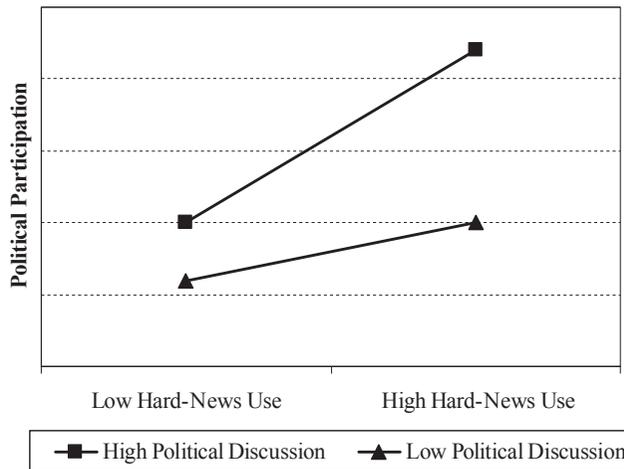


Figure 1: The Theorized Model for the Differential Gains Model:
Interactive Effects of Hard-News Use and
Political Discussion on Political Participation

A key assumption of the differential gains model is that mass media rarely provide information that enables political participation (Scheufele 2002). Existing literature indicates that this assumption is true of the Japanese media, partly because of institutionalized relations with public officials. While a close relation with them helps journalists efficiently and conveniently obtain information about their activities, it also leads to news coverage that merely legitimizes the interests of those in power (Farley 1996; Krauss & Lambert 2002). Also, commercial considerations put pressure on the Japanese media to report events in a way that attracts more audience (Farley 1996; Krauss & Lambert 2002). Under these conditions, the Japanese media are constrained from providing information that enables participation, because such information may mobilize citizen action that disrupts officials' activities and because it is typically considered dull and does not stimulate audience interest (Lemert 1981, 1992). As ordinary citizens lack political resources and access, limited mobilizing information in mass media hinders them from participating in political activities even when they are motivated to do so (Lemert 1981; 1992). The differential gains model addresses a role of interpersonal discussion in facilitating political learning from mass media and ultimately political participation in such a constrained information environment.

Two theoretical mechanisms help explain why political discussion moderates the relationship between hard-news use and political participation. The first mechanism is derived from differential learning. By talking about politics with others, citizens not only obtain clarification on unclear pieces of news information but also acquire other relevant information (Scheufele 2002). Applying news

information to daily interpersonal communicative contexts facilitates a better-processed and deeper understanding of politics and allows citizens to share additional politically useful information (Robinson & Levy 1986). The second mechanism is based on a uses and gratifications model. Those who frequently discuss politics with others are more likely to anticipate future discussions and disagreements (Scheufele 2002). This anticipation induces more careful processing of news information, because these people are more likely to talk about issues and arguments reported in mass media with others and express and/or defend their opinions on them (Scheufele 2002). Such active media use helps people more meaningfully extract information from mass media.

Prior studies have tested the differential gains model from mass media. Employing survey data from the 1990 American Citizen Participation Study, Scheufele (2002) assessed whether political discussion would moderate the relationship between hard-news use and political participation. Consistent with the model, he found that newspaper and television hard-news use had a stronger relationship with political participation among respondents who discussed politics with others more frequently than those who did so less frequently.

Hardy and Scheufele (2005) extended the differential gains model to online settings, testing whether political discussion would moderate the relationship between online hard-news use and political participation. Data from their national survey showed that the relationship between Internet hard-news use and political participation was stronger for those who talked about politics with others more often than those did so less often. Nisbet and Scheufele (2004) similarly reported that the relationship between Internet campaign exposure and campaign participation was stronger among respondents who discussed politics with others more frequently than their counterparts.

Goals of the Study

As is shown in the preceding review, prior research has provided support for the differential gains model. Empirical evidence, however, is limited to the United States and a uni-dimensional aspect of political participation. With a consideration of Japan's political context, the present study examines whether political discussion moderates the relationship between hard-news use and two forms of participatory behavior, general participation and voting.

It is not entirely clear whether the differential gains model holds true both for general participation and voting. A moderating role of political discussion may be observed for general participation, because information that enables activities that require a high level of resources, skills, and motivation is fairly limited in daily news coverage (Lemert 1981). By increasing citizens' ability or motivation to extract such information from traditional news sources, political discussion likely facilitates citizens' general participation. In contrast, an election is a salient social

and political event, and the news media typically disseminate information that enables voting participation such as a polling place and day (Lemert 1981). Also, voting does not require a high level of political resources, skills, and motivation and is considered as a political act based on social norms (Verba et al. 1995; Wolfinger & Rosenstone 1980). Therefore, hard-news use may have an independent effect on voting, whereas there is little reason to suggest that political discussion strengthens this relationship by affecting citizens' ability or motivation to extract relevant information from mass media.

In sum, the present study hypothesizes that hard-news use will have a stronger relationship with general participation for people who discuss politics with others more frequently than those who do so less frequently, whereas this moderating role of political discussion will not be observed for voting. Drawing on prior research (Hardy & Scheufele 2005; Nisbet & Scheufele 2004; Scheufele 2002), three general news sources, newspapers, television, and the Internet, are considered. Because of limited empirical evidence for news media effects on political participation in Japan, formal hypotheses for each medium are not formulated.

Method

Data for this study came from the Japanese General Social Survey (JGSS) 2003 ($N = 3,663$). The fieldwork was conducted between October 20 and November 30, 2003. The study population included eligible voters living in Japan aged between 20 and 89. The sample was based on a two-stage stratified random sampling technique. The survey used both face-to-face interview and placement method. The placement method used two forms of self-administered questionnaire. Form A ($N = 1,957$) was randomly distributed to a half of the sample. Form B ($N = 1,706$) was then distributed to the rest of the sample. The total response rate was 51.5%, with 55% for Form A and 48% for Form B. The present analysis is based on Form B data.²

Control Variables. Following prior research (Hardy & Scheufele 2005; Nisbet & Scheufele 2004; Scheufele 2002), several demographic and political predisposition variables were included as controls. *Sex* was coded with males as the high value (male = 42.3%). *Age* ranged from 20 to 89 ($M = 53.20$, $SD = 16.56$). *Education* was recoded as the year of the last school respondents had completed ($Mdn = 12$ or high school).³ *Occupation* was coded with the employed as the high value (58.2%).⁴ *Political ideology* was measured by a 7-point scale item asking respondents about their political views, with higher scores indicating more conservative political orientation ($M = 4.16$, $SD = 1.36$). *Political interest* was measured by a 4-point scale item asking respondents how regularly they paid attention to the political situation, with higher scores indicating greater interest in politics ($M = 2.60$, $SD = .96$). *Political efficacy* was measured by the extent to

which respondents agreed or disagreed with the following three statements on a 4-point scale: people like me don't have any say about what the government does; politics and government are too complicated for me to understand what is going on; and many people vote at elections, so it doesn't matter if I don't. These items, often used as a measure of internal political efficacy (e.g., Nisbet & Scheufele 2004), were combined into an additive index, with higher scores indicating higher political efficacy ($M = 7.55$, $SD = 2.03$, $\alpha = .61$).

Political Participation. *General Participation* was measured by nine dichotomous items. Respondents were asked whether in the past five years they had participated in an activity by a residents' association or a neighbors association, contacted an influential local person (meeting or writing a letter) by necessity, contacted a politician or a government official by necessity, visited an assembly or a governmental agency for submitting a petition, attended a meeting related to an election or politics, assisted an election campaign (including supports of a candidate), participated in civic/resident movement, signed a petition, and donated money or participated in fund-raising. These items were combined into an additive index ($M = 1.58$, $SD = 1.79$, $\alpha = .70$). *Voting* was measured by a single dichotomous item asking respondents whether they had cast a vote in an election in the past five years. Those who responded affirmatively were coded as the high value (91.4%).

Communication Variables. *Political discussion* was measured by two 4-point scale items that asked respondents how often they talked about politics with their family and how often they talked about politics with their friends and colleagues. These items were combined to form an additive index ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 1.58$, $r = .44$). *Newspaper hard-news reading* was measured by a 4-point scale item asking respondents how often they read political articles in newspapers ($M = 3.03$, $SD = 1.07$). *Television hard-news viewing* was measured by a 4-point scale item asking respondents how often they watched political news on TV ($M = 3.48$, $SD = .80$). *Online hard-news use* was measured by a 4-point scale item asking respondents how often they read political news on the Internet ($M = 1.29$, $SD = .75$).

Two regression models were estimated: an OLS regression model for general participation and a logistic regression model for voting.⁵ To test interaction effects, it is necessary to form a product term between main effect variables. To reduce multicollinearity problems, interaction terms were computed after three hard-news use and political discussion variables were standardized (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken 2003). Both regression models entered the demographic variables first, followed by the political predisposition variables, the communication variables, and the interaction terms. Before-entry betas were used to test an interaction effect, which control only for variables in prior blocks, but not in the same and/or subsequent blocks (Scheufele 2002).

Results

Table 1 shows the OLS regression model predicting general participation. Demographic variables accounted for 5.8% of the variance in the dependent variable. Age ($\beta = .08$) and occupation ($\beta = .13$) were positively associated with general participation. That is, higher age and being employed were related to a higher level of general participation.

Political interest, political ideology, and political efficacy as a whole significantly accounted for an additional 9.2% of the variance. Specifically, political interest ($\beta = .09$) and political efficacy ($\beta = .12$) were positively associated with general participation. As has been reported previously, higher political interest and efficacy were related to a higher level of general participation.

Table 1: Tests for Interactions Predicting General Participation and Voting

	General Participation		Voting	
	Before-entry	Final	Before-entry	Final
Demographics				
Sex	—	.02	—	-.18
Age	—	.08**	—	.04***
Education	—	-.02	—	.07
Occupation	—	.13***	—	.00
Incremental R^2 (%)	5.8***		11.5***	
Political predispositions				
Political interest	.29***	.09**	.55***	.18
Political ideology	-.02	.02	.01	.09
Political efficacy	.24***	.12***	.32***	.23***
Incremental R^2 (%)	9.2***		7.0***	
Communication variables				
Newspaper	.12***	.08**	.29**	.24*
Television news	.05#	-.04	.23#	.06
Online news	.06*	.03	-.02	-.13
Political discussion	.27***	.26***	.21*	.17#
Incremental R^2 (%)	5.4***		1.7*	
Interactions				
Newspaper x political discussion	.09**	—	.01	—
TV news x political discussion	.07*	—	-.02	—
Online news x political discussion	.02	—	.02	—
Incremental R^2 (%)	0.6**		0.0	
Total R^2 (%)	21.1***		20.2***	

Note. Entries for general participation are standardized regression coefficients. Entries for voting are unstandardized logit coefficients.

*** $p < .001$. ** $p < .01$. * $p < .05$. # $p < .10$.

The four communication variables significantly accounted for an additional 5.4% of the variance. Newspaper hard-news reading ($\beta = .08$) and political discussion ($\beta = .26$) were positively related to general participation. Specifically, more frequent reading of newspaper political news and more frequent political discussion were related to a higher level of general participation. Television hard-news viewing and online hard-news use were not significantly associated with general participation in the final model controlling for all other variables.

Hard-news use was hypothesized to have a stronger relationship with general participation among those who discuss politics with others more frequently. First, the interaction between newspaper hard-news reading and political discussion was positively related to general participation ($\beta = .09$). That is, the positive effects of newspaper hard-news reading on general participation were stronger if respondents also talked about politics with others more frequently (see Figure 1). Second, the interaction between television hard-news viewing and political discussion was positively related to general participation ($\beta = .07$). This interaction suggests that television hard-news viewing had positive effects on general participation only if respondents also discussed politics with others more frequently (see Figure 2). Third, the interaction between online hard-news use and political discussion was not significantly related to general participation. Overall, support for this hypothesis was limited to newspaper hard-news reading and television hard-news viewing.

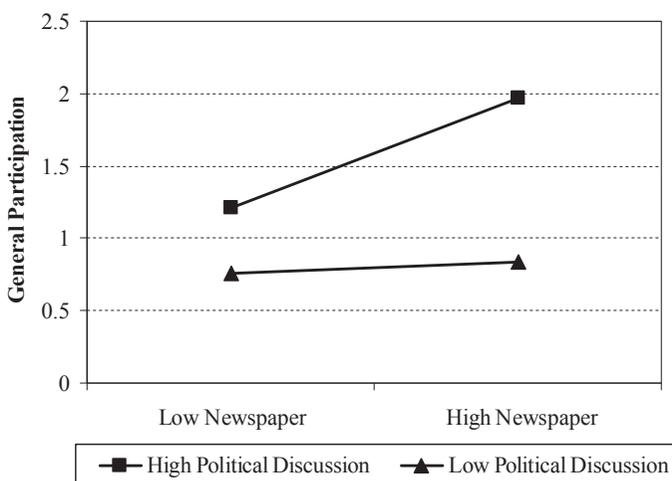


Figure 2: Interaction of Newspaper Hard-News Reading and Political Discussion Predicting General Participation

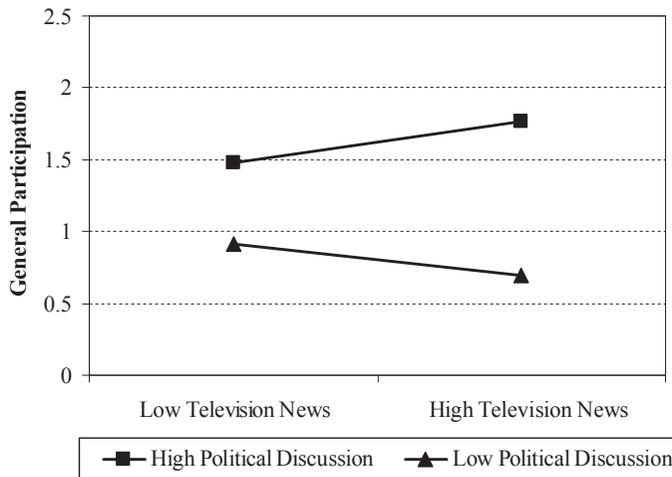


Figure 3: Interaction of Television Hard-News Viewing and Political Discussion Predicting General Participation

Table 1 also presents the logistic regression model predicting voting. Demographic variables accounted for 11.5% of the variance in voting. Age was positively associated with voting (log odds = .04), with older respondents being more likely to have cast a vote in an election in the past five years.

Political interest, ideology, and efficacy as a whole significantly explained an additional 7.0% of the variance. Political efficacy (log odds = .23) was positively associated with voting. That is, higher political efficacy was related to the odds of having cast a vote in an election in the past five years.

The four communication variables significantly accounted for an additional 1.7% of the variance. Newspaper hard-news reading (log odds = .24) was positively related to voting. Specifically, more frequent reading of newspaper political news was associated with the odds of having cast a vote in an election in the past five years. Political discussion was not significantly related to voting in the final model controlling for all other variables.

Finally, as expected, none of the interactions between hard-news use and political discussion were significantly associated with voting. This suggests that the differential gains model is not applied to Japanese voting behavior.

Summary and Discussion

The differential gains model from mass media posits that political discussion moderates the relationship between hard-news use and political participation. Using a nationwide survey of Japan, this study examined whether the empirical evidence

from previous research in the U.S. would be applied to Japanese political behavior.

This study has presented evidence that the model is applied to Japanese general participation for newspaper reading and television news viewing. Specifically, newspaper hard-news reading itself was positively associated with general participation. This positive effect was stronger if respondents also discussed politics with others more frequently. That is, political discussion served to strengthen the positive effects of newspaper hard-news reading. In contrast, television hard-news viewing had such a positive effect on general participation only for respondents who talked about politics with others more frequently. This implies that political discussion served to render television news meaningful in terms of general participation.

Two mechanisms help explain the observed significant interaction effects. First, political discussion increases citizens' ability to learn information that enables participation from mass media. By discussing politics with others, citizens construct political identities and become more politically sophisticated (Kim & Kim 2008), which may enhance their ability to make sense of news information and politics. Moreover, in their analysis of Japanese political behavior, Richardson, Flanagan, Watanuki, Miyake, and Kohei (1991: 370) note that "social interactions, including those with people upon whom the individual is dependent, provide information that complements intermittent mobilizing appeals and/or provides cues as to how persons in significant reference groups think and behave." In other words, citizens can acquire additional politically useful information by talking about politics with others.

Second, political discussion affects citizens' motivation to extract information that enables participation from traditional news sources, as anticipation of future discussions and disagreements increases more active information processing and gathering (Scheufele 2002). People who frequently engage in political discussion have a greater need to understand issues and arguments presented in mass media, because they are more likely to anticipate discussing and/or defending their opinions on them. Furthermore, past research on Japanese information behavior implies that citizens who frequently discuss politics with others may have a greater need to make sense of news information, as they tend to have a greater desire to communicate what they learn from mass media to others (Maeshima 1973). A uses and gratifications model suggests that these information needs are a key antecedent to active media use (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch 1973). That is, those who often talk about politics with others are more likely to actively engage in and process news information and, as a result, learn politically meaningful information. Additionally, it is possible that anticipation of disagreements plays a limited role in Japan, as literature indicates that Japanese people tend to express indeterminate opinions and avoid addressing disagreement in their discussion networks (Huckfeldt et al. 2005; Ikeda & Huckfeldt 2001). This possibility can be examined

by distinguishing between anticipation of discussions and disagreements and assessing which aspect of anticipation hard-news use interacts with in predicting political participation.

The observed significant interactions appear to reflect the characteristics of newspapers and television. Newspapers are shown to be an effective source of political learning, as the way they present news allows readers to quickly grasp the summary of an issue and later understand more in-depth, contextual information (Bogart 1989). As readers have control over time and story selection, they can effectively digest and learn information (Culbertson, Evarts, Richard, Sandell, & Stempel 1994). In contrast, television news may not effectively facilitate political learning, as the combination of verbal and visual information and limited control over time and story selection inhibit cognitive involvement (Bogart 1989; Culbertson et al. 1994; Grimes 1991). That is, newspaper readers are more likely to be able to actively engage in news information than television news viewers and, thus, acquire positive benefits from it. Indeed, past studies have shown the positive effects of newspaper reading on political participation, whereas the association between television news viewing and political participation has been mixed at best (e.g., Nisbet & Scheufele 2004; Scheufele 2002). Given these channel differences, it seems reasonable that political discussion enhanced the effects of newspaper hard-news reading on general participation, whereas it served to help television news become a meaningful source of information, allowing viewers to obtain the positive political benefits as they talked about politics with others.

This study has also shown that the differential gains model is not applied to Japanese voting behavior. It may be that citizens do not need to rely on the capacity of political discussion to extract relevant information from mass media, as they typically disseminate information that facilitates voting (Lemert 1981). This may be the case for newspaper hard-news reading. Newspaper hard-news reading had a positive main effect on voting, although its interaction with political discussion was not significant. This possibly implies that heavier newspaper hard-news readers can acquire sufficient information about an election and, as a result, reach a ceiling effect. Thus, political discussion may not help them extract any further relevant information from newspaper political news. On the other hand, television and online hard-news use had neither a main nor interaction effect, possibly because information that enables voting is not readily available in these channels. A possible alternative explanation is that voting does not require a high level of resources, skills, and motivation and also is a political act based on social norms (Verba et al. 1995; Wolfinger & Rosenstone 1980). From this perspective, there is little reason to believe that the likelihood of casting a vote in an election is attributable to the capacity of political discussion to increase citizens' ability or motivation to more effectively extract voting-related information from mass media.

Additionally, online hard-news use did not significantly interact with

political discussion in predicting general participation and voting, nor did it have a significant main effect on them. As recent studies have reported the positive effects of online news use on political outcomes (Hardy & Scheufele 2005; Xenos & Moy 2007), this finding of results may be somewhat unexpected. It is important to point out, however, that the data used in the present study were collected in 2003. Since then, the Internet has become an important source of information in Japan (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications 2007). Therefore, further examination with more recent data is warranted before drawing a conclusion with regard to the political utility of online hard-news use in Japan.

It should be noted that the measurement schemes of political discussion and hard-news use need to be improved. Recent studies have documented the importance of encountering disagreement and discussion with people who have different political views (Eveland 2004; Ikeda 2005; Mutz 2002). Whereas the differential gains model recognizes the importance of such aspects of political discussion, the present study could measure political discussion only in terms of frequency. The use of a frequency measure of political discussion in this context is implicitly based on the assumption that there is an increased likelihood of encountering disagreement, as people discuss politics with others more frequently. However, this assumption may be problematic in Japan's political context, because, as mentioned above, the Japanese tend not to address disagreement within their discussion networks (Huckfeldt et al. 2005; Ikeda & Huckfeldt 2001). To deal with this issue, future research on the differential gains model in Japan should directly measure discussion agreement/disagreement or network diversity (Eveland 2004; Ikeda 2005; Mutz 2002). Furthermore, hard-news use was measured only in terms of news exposure. Exposure measures alone cannot capture multi-dimensions of audience information behavior. It is important to consider including measures that assess an audience's conscious, active use of media such as attention to political news and intended purposes to read or watch it, as information obtained through such active use of media likely affects political learning (Chaffee & Schleuder 1986; Ikeda 1988; Kitamura 1970; Mikami 1991).

These limitations and considerations notwithstanding, the present study has demonstrated that political discussion moderates the impacts of newspaper and television hard-news use on Japanese general participation. While Japanese people may not be willing to discuss politics in a daily conversation (Okamoto 2003), the present findings suggest that frequent political discussion helps them more meaningfully acquire useful information from newspaper and television political news and engage in political acts that are effective in representing their views and preferences and potentially affecting the decision-making process. This role of political discussion is important in terms of the static and passive nature of Japanese political behavior.

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NOTES

1. This is a theoretically expected interaction, and it is possible that the plot of the model takes a different interaction form, especially in relation to the differential effects of news media on political participation. See Eveland (1997) for a through discussion of interactions in the context of mass communication research.
2. The sample size for the analyses varied due to missing data.
3. Responses were recoded as follows: ordinary elementary school in the old system (including national elementary school) = 6; higher elementary school in the old system = 8; junior high school = 9; junior high school/girls' high school in the old system, vocational school in the old system, and normal school in the old system = 11; high school = 12; higher school or vocational school in the old system/higher normal school and 2-year college/college of technology = 14, university/graduate school in the old system, university, and graduate school = 16.
4. Occupation was used as a proxy of household annual income, as the latter had substantial missing data. Respondents were asked whether they had a paying job last week, or they planned to work last week. Those who reported "I worked" or "I was going to work, but did not work" were coded as the employed.
5. Outliers, cases with greater than three standard deviations from the mean, were detected for general participation, television hard-news viewing, and online hard-news use. Minor outliers are not uncommon for large sample sizes. These cases were reassigned the nearest value that was not an outlier (Tabachnick & Fidell 1996), and the same regression analyses were performed using these recoded variables (results available upon request). Results were substantively equivalent to the original analyses reported in this study.

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