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Jakob Ohme is a researcher in the fields of digital media effects, political behavior and democratic citizenship.

He is affiliated with the 'Communication and Public Engagement' (CPE) research group at the Center for Journalism at the Department of Political Science and Public Management of the University of Southern Denmark. He obtained an M.A. in Applied Communication Research from the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Science at the Technische Universität Dresden (TUD). Before his PhD he worked as a research assistant at the Department of Media and Communication at the Technische Universität Dresden (TUD). His teaching experience in political communication during this time inspired him to research the interplay of digital media use and political participation in his PhD.



PhD Dissertation of

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at the Center for Journalism,
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New Media, New Citizens?

How Media Exposure in a Digital Age
shapes Political Participation

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New Media, New Citizens?

How Media Exposure in a Digital Age shapes Political Participation

The use of news media is regarded as a driver for citizens' engagement with society and their political participation. But as news media use increasingly shifts to digital platforms, it is crucial to understand the interplay between a change in media environment and recent patterns of political participation.

Citizens increasingly access news on social media platforms. Websites like Facebook or Twitter also offer new ways to keep informed about political developments, be it via friends and followers in a social network or directly by political actors. At the same time, social media platforms are regarded as spaces for political action. The thesis explores how differences in citizens' media use can affect various ways of their political behavior.

In a first step, a special survey tool is developed that assesses the frequency of peoples' exposure to political information online, offline and especially via social media. The smartphone-based diary measure was available to respondents as an app or via their mobile browser. Social media play an important role in the media diet of Danish citizens and although young citizens use them most frequently, Facebook or Twitter are also common political information platforms of older citizens.

New ways of political action - such as boycotting products, urban gardening or opinion expression on social media - make it difficult to distinguish different types of political participation. Studying these new ways is nevertheless important to receive a preferably up-to-date picture of citizens' poli-

tical activity. The second study in this thesis builds an empirical framework that includes an extensive number of political actions done by citizens. It suggests four different types of participation and prepares their application in future studies.

Social media offer a great diversity of political content to their users. It is therefore of interest, how mobilizing exposure to different content types is when it comes to political participation. In the setting of the 2015 Danish national election, effects of social media use on campaign participation are compared between first-time voters and experienced voters. Social media platforms are the main source of political information for first-time voters but older citizens' campaign participation is more strongly activated by political social media exposure.

Election campaigns are situations where citizens have to deal with the uncertainty on whom to cast a vote for. Information received via media can help to reduce citizens' vote choice uncertainty. With their potential to receive information directly from political actors or through political advertising, social media are seen as potentially helpful for citizens to find their political home. Indeed, evidence is found that social media use during an election campaign increases vote choice certainty among first-time voters as it mobilizes their active engagement with the election campaign.

Also outside election settings, citizens frequently use digital media for informational purposes, social interaction or other leisure activities. It is of

interested how these networking practices shape peoples' social coexistence. Can digital media use result in new ways to understand citizenship? Young and old citizens indicate comparable ideas about what citizenship means to them. Older generations appear to undergo a transformation in their understanding of citizenship on the basis of their digital media use while younger citizens already strongly subscribe to these new civic norms. For both groups it becomes visible: a changing understanding of citizenship is partly responsible for changes in political participation patterns.

In times of fake news, filter bubbles and Twitter presidencies, this dissertation helps to understand what the drivers of political action in a digital media environment are, who is affected and who is not. The discovered trend of direct communication between politicians and voters, especially among younger citizens, reflects changes that the recent political landscape is undergoing. The answer given to the question of how healthy it is for a democracy if ever more citizens receive their news via digital and social channels is a rather optimistic one: Compared to offline or online legacy media, social media are equally - if not better - suited as a mobilizer of political action.

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The Centre for Journalism stands for a new and, in Denmark, unique approach to both teaching and research in journalism through its organizational attachment to the Department of Political Science and Public Management and the Faculty of Business and Social Sciences at the University of Southern Denmark. Media research has been done in Denmark for several decades, primarily by researchers from the humanities. Journalism research is a more recent phenomenon, programmes in journalism having been taught only outside the university system until recently.

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