

THE POLITICAL STORYTELLING SYSTEM

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Doctor of Philosophy

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by  
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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

THE POLITICAL STORYTELLING SYSTEM

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I dedicate this work to my family, and those who have supported me even when the journey was difficult and the destination was uncertain. In particular, I dedicate this to Leslie and Ava, the two most important women in my life whom I love – unabashedly.

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I dedicate this work to my family, and those who have supported me even when the journey was difficult and the destination was uncertain. In particular, I dedicate this to Leslie and Ava, the two most important women in my life whom I love – unabashedly.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

As of March 31, 2011, there were approximately 31,000 broadcast television and radio stations across the United States transmitting a seemingly endless array of national, regional, and local content (Federal Communications Commission, 2011). For those seeking cable television service, a network of 1,100 cable companies offer programming to roughly 60 million American subscribers (National Cable and Telecommunications Association, 2011). Despite aggregate declines in readership and total number of print media outlets, there were approximately 1,400 daily newspapers in operation at the end of 2010 (State of the News Media, 2011); many of these dailies, as well as the aforementioned television and radio broadcasters, reproduce and distribute content on their online web sites. In fact, the *Pew Research Center's State of the News Media 2011* report found that between 2009 and 2010 the only media sector that grew its audience were online platforms (17.1%); local television (-1.5%), network television (-3.4%), newspapers (-5.0%), radio/audio (-6.0%), magazines (-8.9%), and cable television (-13.7%) all lost audience share (State of the News Media, 2011).

To be sure, political news is neither the only nor even the primary subject presented in the media. Television, radio, print, and online media modalities that cover politics frequently cover an array of educational, sports, comedic, dramatic, reality-based, and promotional content from which citizens can select; these choices generally outnumber the amount of politics-based offerings. Some scholars even contend that the exponential increase in media choice affects the general public's civic and political behaviors. Notably, Prior (2007) documented the frequency by which pre-cable television

Americans regularly consumed at least a modicum of political news (i.e. when there were only three broadcast networks available, and each carried a nightly news program at the same time), and how the “post-broadcast era” provides greater opportunities for Americans to forego paying attention to politics when other programming (especially entertainment programs) is available during the nightly news hour. He further identified how increasing media choice is associated with greater partisan polarization, less politically knowledgeable citizens, and lower turnout rates on Election Day.

Nevertheless, there are dedicated news sources on cable television (e.g., *CNN*, *FoxNews*, *MSNBC*) and the Internet (e.g. *Politico.com*, *HuffingtonPost.com*). Coverage of campaign events and legislative activities at the federal, state, and local levels abound on national network news and local network news programs. Newspapers, from prominent national dailies down to community weeklies, frequently demarcate civic matters (e.g., front-page headlines, op-ed pages) from other types of stories and are usually given prominent placement for maximum exposure.

These electronic sources of political information do not even take into account the fact that the more than 300 million Americans can talk and discuss national, regional, and local matters. Referring to “networks of recruitment,” Verba, Scholzman, Brady, and Nie (1995) argue that interpersonal networks facilitate the sharing of mobilizing information, convey attitudes of citizenship and community membership, and provide a gauge of one’s political efficacy. Americans’ freedom of association also allows them to commingle with others through any number of social milieu. For example, Mutz and Mondak (2006) found that one’s place of employment offers a ready forum for interpersonal political discussions including “cross-cutting discourse,” or talk involving dissimilar opinions or

perspectives. Other public venues for interpersonal discussion of politics might include one's church or house of worship, neighborhood association, organizations in which they volunteer, or one's extended families and peer groups. The importance of point-to-point communication as a conduit for political talk is made apparent by Chaffee (1982), who theorized that interpersonal discussion reinforces rather than competes with, mass communication modalities in conveying political information; subsequent empirical testing validated his position (e.g., Chaffee & Mutz, 1982).

The media choice and the political discussion literatures, respectively, inform what I label the "*political storytelling system*" in the current study. Despite historical shifts in Americans' news attention and means for acquiring political information, the notion of a political storytelling system adopts an ecological perspective that considers presumed audience reach and presentation format of mediated and interpersonal messages as important factors that influence citizens' normative democratic attitudes. That people perceive, understand, and formulate opinions derived from a multitude of "political storytellers" is the central focus of the present analysis.

### **The Process of Political Storytelling**

Political storytelling is a cognitive-affective process whereby an information source or agent communicates to audiences in an attempt to transform recipients from mere information consumers into political beings. Of course, American media companies are influenced by market conditions and the stories of the day are meant to increase news consumption and bolster advertising revenue to support this news production. National and community-based political organizations, likewise, are only as influential and effective as their financial resources allow. Notwithstanding practical business

considerations, it is suggested here that political storytelling engenders a more subtle attempt to build perceived commonality among others. This can occur, for example, when stories are characterized as affecting “us,” or provide audience agency to help consumers not only view themselves as part of the story but also as subject to the story’s consequences. Political storytelling describes the creation of an “imagined” discursive space of community or unity (Anderson, 1983) that facilitates a citizens’ building or “imagining” of their political identity.

This conceptualization of political storytelling invites an exploration of the numerous communicative modalities that constitute one’s “political storytelling system.” This system is made up of the various electronic media and interpersonal modalities through which an individual acquires their political information. On the one hand, electronic media modalities such as television (e.g., broadcast channels airing national and local news, cable programs, satellite-fed programming of alternative and non-American sources, etc.), print (e.g., national, regional and local newspapers; magazines; books, etc.), radio (e.g., talk radio channels, top-of-the-hour news summaries, satellite radio programs, etc.), and Internet-based services (e.g., blogs, online news sites, videos, email, etc.) offer users an unprecedented level of choice, customization, and audience-driven consumption possibilities that can now circumvent the traditional gatekeeping apparati that long defined the “typical” media news gathering and production processes. On the other hand, “old-fashioned” modes of political talk such as chatting over the proverbial neighbor’s fence or community discussions at the town hall meeting are now buttressed by online social networking services such as *Facebook* and *Twitter* in ways that facilitate mediated political talk among dyads and small groups. The enhanced ability

to attune to and discuss politics with others allows for greater opportunities to develop a more informed citizenry – or to tune out altogether from public affairs information.

A recent report by the *Pew Internet and American Life Project* articulates how American voters use multiple political information sources and how these sources constitute an individual's political storytelling system. This national survey of citizens' news use between 2002-2010 found that (a) television remains the main source of campaign news; (b) newspapers decreased as a primary information source; (c) Internet sources increased; and (d) radio and magazine dependency remained constant (Smith, 2011). The report further describes the most popular platforms that people are using to locate political information, which includes a combination of local and national programming as well as sources whose content may be explicitly (e.g., political candidates' websites, HuffingtonPost.com) or implicitly political (e.g., Google.com, Yahoo.com, and AOL.com as these common search engines all have political news sections on their sites). Thus, citizens' political storytelling systems contain a blend of information sources that provide varying degrees of political content.

The current study's focus on "political storytelling" as a multi-level system of political communication is inspired by and adapts Sandra Ball-Rokeach and colleagues' "storytelling neighborhood" concept explicated in their work on communication infrastructure theory (CIT; Ball-Rokeach, Kim, & Matei, 2001; Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006a, 2006b; Wilkin, Katz, & Ball-Rokeach, 2009). Specifically, political storytelling emphasizes the "act of constructing [political] identity through narrative discourse" as this communicative process is "embedded in daily practices that ideally move from communication of any form, to communication of a general storytelling or narrative form

(Fisher, 1987), to storytelling of a specific form...” (Ball-Rokeach, Kim, & Matei, 2001, p. 394). Although Ball-Rokeach and colleagues are mainly concerned with “storytelling neighborhoods” and the ways in which communication practices and infrastructures influence urban residents’ perceptions of their local neighborhood, the current project envisions political storytelling as a more general phenomenon of multiple information sources shaping audiences’ construction of political identity [image and attitudes] and political reality [knowledge] beyond the geographic boundaries of one’s local residential neighborhood.

Additionally, this study adapts Ball-Rokeach and colleagues’ concept of the “storytelling system,” or the complex of information sources that produce and disseminate news stories. For this study, the “political storytelling system” is comprised of national, regional, and local political storytellers. Kim and Ball-Rokeach (2006a) explain how political storytelling occurs at the national, regional, and local levels and why each level of storytelling matters:

macro [national-level] storytelling agents such as mainstream media tell stories primarily about the whole city, the nation, or even the world, where the imagined audience is broadly conceived as the population of the city, county, or region.

Meso [regional-level] agents are more focused on particular sections of...specific communities. The residents in their family, friend, and neighbor networks are

micro [local-level] storytelling agents. When residents talk about their community in neighborhood council meetings, at a neighborhood block party, at the dinner table, or over the fence with neighbors, they become local storytelling agents – participants in the active imagining of their community. (p. 398)

It is the multi-tiered nature of citizens' political storytelling infrastructure, comprising both electronically mediated and face-to-face modalities of communication, which represents the core of the political storytelling system concept elaborated here. The national, regional, and local-level political storytellers contain important differences in information content and purposes with respect to the "primary storytelling referent" and "imagined audience" (Ball-Rokeach, Kim, & Matei, 2001, p. 397). Although the labels of national-, regional-, and local-level storytellers are similar to the nomenclature of Ball Rokeach and colleagues' "macro-, meso-, and micro-level agents," the rationale that information sources at each of these levels provides citizens with news narratives remains vital to the present study.

Finally, the current study adapts the idea of "political storytelling network" from CIT scholarship and focuses on explaining the linkages among political storytellers across the national, regional, and local levels. The idea of a political storytelling network emerges from the fact that each level can influence storytelling that occurs within other levels, especially when realizing that people can attune to a multiplicity of sources and that these sources can address different audience types, sizes, demographics, and other narrower audience segments (Ball-Rokeach, Kim, & Matei, 2001). As Ball-Rokeach, Kim, and Matei (2001) explain:

Civil society is most likely to emerge when there is integration between storytelling systems that imagine cosmopolitan or global referents in a way that is meaningfully connected to local referents. Meaningful connections are not restricted to commonalities or consensual story lines – they also include conflicting stories. In other words, we are not suggesting a master narrative

construction; rather, we are suggesting connective tissues in the overall storytelling system wherein multiple narratives are constructed, engaged, and negotiated. (p. 398)

Ultimately, this analysis is concerned with how individuals make connections among the information they receive and what they “do” with the subsequent knowledge. Because citizens’ political storytelling sources may be varied, the “connective tissues” that form our political reality and hold our public sphere together may be influenced by the relative “health” of one’s political storytelling system. That greater – or fewer – political storytellers at each storytelling level, and the presence or lack of diversity among storytellers across each level, may influence how people think about the political world around them.

### **Study Justification**

It is important that we better understand the process of political storytelling, the political storytelling system, and political storytelling levels for at least three reasons. First, political storytelling and an individual’s political storytelling system represent the basic communicative foundations of a healthy democracy founded on an informed citizenry. Second, the political storytelling perspective provides a more communication-centered approach to political reality construction that examines the “storytelling” or narrative nature of political news use rather than relying on conventional measures that simply capture one’s frequency of use or perceived importance of specific communication modalities. Finally, by analyzing the “connective tissue” inherent in a political storytelling system through such analytic techniques as model building and model analysis procedures, this study will provide a more holistic understanding of the

direct and indirect effects that news sources have on citizens' political knowledge elaboration.

**Political Storytelling and Normative Democracy.** The communicative underpinnings of democratic life are described in the writings of such theorists as Tocqueville (1835/2003), Dewey (1927), Habermas (1962/1989, 1981/1987), and more recent scholarship from Schudson (1998), Putnam (2000), and McKinney, Kaid, and Bystrom (2005). Despite the often philosophical arguments advanced in these writings, the general consensus among normative democratic scholarship is that citizens' ability to acquire political information from a variety of sources establishes the conditions necessary for desirable democratic outcomes.

In particular, the present study identifies with Habermas's (1962/1989) concern for the construction and effective maintenance of a "public sphere" that provides citizens with opportunities and advantages typically associated with democratic life. Habermas' public sphere emerges from a historical-sociological account of how news and issues of societal importance could be discussed, deliberated, and acted upon by the mass public with few restrictions on this discourse imposed by ruling authorities. Spurred by increased literacy, accessible literature, and newly-established critical journalism practices, Habermas' public sphere envisions a space in which citizens' may engage and debate in open exchanges concerning the rules of the governors without fear, reprisal, or censorship from ruling interests. For Habermas, venues such as coffee shops, salons, and town squares encapsulated the qualities of an effective and meaningful public square. Nevertheless, consumerist interests and monopolized news media organizations were as much of a concern to Habermas at the time of his writing and thinking as they are to

modern democratic theorists. By analyzing the “average” citizen’s political storytelling system and the political storytelling networks that make up this system, the current project will better understand the quality of the public sphere in our 21<sup>st</sup> century, digital-politics environment.

This analysis also draws upon the “communicative engagement” perspective explicated by McKinney, Kaid, & Bystrom (2005), which argues that we might best understand the enactment of “democracy as a communicative achievement, with our civic or public sphere constructed through the interplay or dialogue of leader/candidate, media and citizen messages” (p. 21). The process of political storytelling is embedded within this perspective as political storytelling occurs through the exchange of media and citizen messages, the focus of which is often the actions of our political leaders. Individual citizens must ultimately “piece together” or make sense of the information to which they attune, and subsequently such message construction affects one’s political attitudes, interests, and behaviors. Democratic practices are not adopted or perpetuated merely for their innate worth; an active and engaged citizenry is often required to go beyond one’s own self-interests to maintain collective rights and freedoms. Accordingly, this study hopes to establish whether the structure of particular political storytelling networks facilitates the acquisition of more or less political knowledge, and also seeks to demonstrate how use of certain political communication modalities may enhance or impede democratic norms and processes.

The political storytelling system assumes that citizens can attune to the constant stream of political information and ferret out relevant information for rational decision making and public affairs engagement. American political history is replete with appeals

for a more knowledgeable, active, and deliberative populace. For instance, Thomas Jefferson is often attributed with the claim that “an informed citizenry is the bulwark of a democracy” (Monticello, 2003); other democratic thinkers have agreed with this perspective. Contemporary scholarship addressing the political knowledge of Americans likewise acknowledges and argues for a more informed citizenry. Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996, 2002) note that (a) the “average” American is poorly informed although not uninformed, (b) there are significant political knowledge gaps among certain socio-economic and racial groups, (c) most Americans are “information generalists” rather than issue or topic specialists, and (d) little change in political knowledge levels has been demonstrated in empirical research spanning almost 50 years. Nevertheless, this body of research, as well as Delli Carpini’s (2004) summary of research examining the effects of communication sources on political and civic engagement, conclusively explains how better informed citizens exhibit greater political interest, are more efficacious, can more easily formulate their opinion and maintain a stable opinion over time, and connect their political views to evaluations of elected officials and the actions of governing bodies. According to Gans (2003), “the country’s democracy may belong directly or indirectly to its citizens, but the democratic process can only be truly meaningful if these citizens are informed” (p. 1). The present study adopts a similar perspective by arguing that the connectedness or level of integration among storytelling agents within an individual’s political storytelling system portends an additional measure of an informed citizenry that can actively comprehend the issues of the day and transform this information into relevant and meaningful outcomes. Conversely, the lack of a cogent or developed political storytelling system might suggest that not only does one lack specific

information relating to important societal events, but that a lack of depth in integration among citizens' political storytelling agents represents a separate yet related challenge to creating a more engaged public.

**Political Storytelling and Sources of Political Information.** The political information environment of the typical citizen does not contain a steady or uniform stream of equally weighted pieces of information. Variations in the complexity, relevance, timeliness, and information modality all contribute to differences in how citizens acquire and utilize political information. The dynamic nature of the political storytelling process, then, is conceptualized as occurring via mass mediated, organization-based, and interpersonal information sources. Beck, Dalton, Greene and Huckfeldt (2002) note that:

at any given time, in any given place, citizens confront specific sources of political information: their own personal networks of social interaction and political communication, particularly newspapers, a range of electronic media outlets, and a variety of organized efforts at political persuasion (p. 57).

As such, the current study specifically examines how these different sources of political information – e.g., “political storytellers” – influence citizens' political cognitions and attitudes.

That mass mediated political information sources shape citizens' political thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors is well established (see Delli Carpini, 2004; McCombs & Reynolds, 2009; McLeod, Kosicki, & McLeod, 2009; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; Shah, Rojas, & Cho, 2009). At the same time, a substantial body of research has documented how increased political talk among individuals contribute to a more active

and participatory citizenry (e.g., Eveland & Thomson, 2006; Holbert, Benoit, Hansen, & Wen, 2002; Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995; Kwak et al., 2005; Mutz, 2002a, 2002b; Rill, 2009; Scheufele, Nisbet, Brossard, & Nisbet, 2004; Verba, Scholzman, & Brady, 1995; Wyatt, Katz, & Kim, 2000). Interpersonal discussion networks may consist of individuals with whom we share intimate or close connections and may feel more comfortable discussing politics. Such intimate connections may involve one's family members, relatives, and personal friendships. Additionally, politics can also be a subject of conversation among one's peers, co-workers, neighbors, and others that we associate with on a more infrequent basis.

Mass mediated and interpersonal information sources are buttressed by political parties and other group-based sources which play an important role in Americans' political sense making. Politically-oriented groups serve as reference points for citizens to understand their own political interests through the use of voting guides or public forums; provide a mobilizing influence for social and political change among group members; demonstrate the relative power or clout they possess through such actions as endorsing political candidates or pressuring government agencies to address perceived social ills and grievances; and facilitate the information flow among political elites and citizens (Beck, Dalton, Greene and Huckfeldt, 2002; Miller, Wlezien, and Hindreth, 1991). Although scholars such as Putnam (2000) point out that formal membership and affiliations with politically-oriented groups such as political parties, issue advocacy groups, and community-based organizations has precipitously declined (but see Bennett's (1998, 2003) discussion of "lifestyle politics" and refutation of Putnam's argument),

politically-oriented groups nevertheless are considered to be important political storytelling agents.

The current study integrates each of type of information source within the construct of “political storytelling level.” In this way, the current analysis incorporates political information sources from mediated, organizational, and interpersonal domains with respect to individuals’ political communication. Rather than following scholarship that seeks to understand citizens’ “media diet,” characteristics of one’s interpersonal discussion network, or the number and strength of affiliations one has to various politically-oriented groups, analysis of the political storytelling system accounts for each information source type. Such conceptualization and measurement techniques attempt to provide a deeper understanding of political communication effects.

#### **Political Storytelling and the Context of Political Communication Effects.**

The political storytelling system not only attempts to account for multiple types of information sources within each political storytelling level to help citizens in constructing their political reality, but it also allows for an examination of the outcomes occurring within different political contexts. That is, citizens’ political cynicism, factual political knowledge, and confidence in the political knowledge they possess can be viewed with respect to national politics, regional politics, and local politics rather than merely being treated as a more generalized construct. For example, in examining the effects of political campaign advertising on New Jersey residents located between the Philadelphia, PA and New York, NY media markets, Cho (2011) found that the political ads broadcast in the Philadelphia, PA media market about Pennsylvania politics contributed to greater news attention and interpersonal discussion of politics among New Jersey residents.

Contending that his findings “point to the multilevel nature of communication concepts (Pan & McLeod, 1991) and the importance of considering macrolevel factors in communication research, even when a macrolevel phenomenon is not of primary concern,” (p. 454), Cho (2011) concludes that “individuals’ everyday political communication behavior is shaped by the political information environment” (p. 453).

The current study seeks to examine the geography of political communication effects by sampling and testing the political storytelling system framework among residents of a single American community. Although examining a single American city limits the ability to explain contextual effects or how variations in communicative resources contribute to differences in citizens’ political storytelling system, the current study nevertheless takes an initial step towards understanding these differential effects.

### **Study Goals**

The current study is inspired by and adapts several components of Ball-Rokeach and colleagues’ communication infrastructure theory. The “storytelling system” framework, which encapsulates multiple tiers or dimensions of political discourse (i.e., macro, meso, and micro storytelling levels), is analogous to what I am labeling the “political storytelling system” and the “national,” “regional,” and “local” political storytelling levels which comprise the domains at which public affairs events are depicted to the populace. The “political storytelling system” articulated in this study and existing CIT scholarship both address the political information sources available to citizens and whether variations in one’s political information environment is consequential to normatively democratic outcomes.

Unlike CIT scholarship, though, it is expected that the political storytelling system embodies a framework for citizens' understanding of politics beyond their "storytelling neighborhood." Ball-Rokeach and colleagues' investigations of CIT are narrowly tailored to neighborhood-specific effects and outcomes. These include one's sense of belonging to a particular residential area, civic engagement in local or neighborhood organizations or associations, and other community-based activities. However, it is argued here that individuals are not just residents of a particular neighborhood or community; they are at the same time residents of a state or region, and of the nation. Citizens may not only use "geo-ethnic" or local media to learn about perceptions of their neighborhood; they may also read a metropolitan or regional newspaper to evaluate state officials, or watch cable television news to stay abreast of national or international news event. In other words, one's political community can be "imagined" beyond a neighborhood context. Accordingly, the current study examines citizens' local, regional, and national "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1983) and moves beyond a neighborhood-specific focus.

Similarly, political information does not only affect citizens' perceptions of their neighborhood or the local community; myriad political messages can be directed at issues encompassing local, state, or national domains, or some combination therein. Citizens, for example, may hold different opinions about members of the U.S. Congress with whom they may only hear about or see on television compared to local city council members that they may have more frequent contact with. Such variations in "political distance" among citizens to political elites, or even among citizens themselves as part of their "imagined communities," requires an examination of whether normatively

democratic outcomes may likewise be affected by political storytelling levels at these different domains. In addition to examining local, regional, and national political storytellers (or, in Ball-Rokeach and colleagues' terms, macro, meso, and micro storytelling agents), the current study also assesses normatively democratic outcomes at local, regional, and national levels to provide a more holistic understanding of how political information sources affect citizens' political "lifeworlds" (Habermas, 1981/1987).

Most people do not experience politics first-hand. Instead, they consume mediated information, participate in politically-oriented organizations, and converse with others in order to evaluate public affairs issues and make sense of the political world around them. The political storytelling system, and the storytelling levels which comprise this system, invites an exploration of the influences that political storytelling agents have upon citizens. This effects-based inquiry calls for empirically testing how political storytelling relates to political knowledge and reality construction. Accordingly, in this study I seek to examine the relationship among political storytelling levels and political communication effects resulting from variations in citizens' use of storytelling agents at these levels. The political communication effects include factual political knowledge, structural political knowledge, political cynicism, political information efficacy, and one's sense of identification or attachment to a geo-political space.

This introductory chapter has provided the broad purpose, rationale, and goals of the proposed study. Specifically, the concept of political storytelling networks will be the major focus of this investigation and will advance an examination of political information sources that extends beyond the number of media outlets one uses to acquire political

information, frequency of use, or the perceived importance of specific sources. Chapter 2 provides conceptual definitions and explicates the literature involving the main components examined in this study. This review will include a thorough examination of the political storytelling system, a review of empirical literature relating to political storytellers, the importance of political storytelling networks, knowledge elaboration, and address the variety of dispositional factors relevant to one's political storytelling system. Chapter 3 details the study's survey design and methodological procedures, including all operational definitions and a description of measures and scales, statistical tests employed along with power analysis, and sample characteristics. Chapter 4 provides the results of the research questions and hypotheses offered in the second chapter, which includes descriptive statistics as well as detailed analysis of each test conducted. Chapter 5 offers a discussion of the main findings, noting significant contributions to media and politics scholarship and the real-world implications the results hold for citizens, communities, and democracy writ large. Finally, Chapter 6 will discuss the limitations of the current analysis, articulate future research goals and directions, and offer concluding observations of the current study.

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

American citizens can consume political information from a multitude of sources that cater to national, regional, and local audiences. Moreover, the ability for citizens to engage in political talk among their family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, and other social networks create opportunities to understand politics from a personalized, experiential framework that may converge – or diverge – with news stories and mediated images portrayed through electronic media. The ecology of political information – that is, when considering political communication in the context of “a geography of relevance” (Rothenbuhler, Mullen, DeLaurell, & Ryu, 1996) rather than the amount of information consumption or the frequency of attention given to politics – is not well understood. Hence, the current study and this chapter in particular attempt to describe how and why greater attention should be provided to the nature of political information according to intended audience reach and audience perceptions of the news consumed.

This chapter reviews relevant literature related to the political storytelling system framework introduced in the first chapter. First, the philosophical and theoretical origins of the political storytelling system will be established. Drawing upon Jürgen Habermas’ (1981/1987) treatise on “communicative action,” this discussion describes how “lifeworld” and “system” forces affect the socio-political world and the efforts of contemporary communication scholars to adapt Habermas’ communicative action perspective into an empirically-testable framework.

Second, extrapolating from Habermas’s original theorizing as well as recent empirically-based iterations of his work, the political storytelling system’s analytic

framework is described. Although conceptual in nature, research supporting the basis for the political storytelling system – and the national, regional, and local storytelling levels that comprise this system – is provided. That audiences perceive these political storytelling levels in their consumption of political information serves as a foundational assumption that political communication effects can occur according to the presentational format and intended audience reach of political information sources.

Finally, this chapter describes several cognitive and attitudinal political outcomes that will be examined as consequences of consuming political information and how they may correspond to the political storytelling levels. These outcomes include the acquisition and recall of factual political knowledge, the cognitive structuring of political knowledge, one's confidence in the knowledge they possess, and one's level of trust in government officials and the political process in general.

#### **Origins of the Political Storytelling System: Habermas' Lifeworld-System.**

The political storytelling system framework draws from Jürgen Habermas' (1981/1987) theory of communication action, particularly his paradox of the “lifeworld” and the “system.” The “paradox” referred to here is the fact that neither the lifeworld nor the system can exist without the other – a point that will be expounded shortly. This paradox, which may be better understood as a dialectical tension (Bakhtin's, 1981), results from the contradictory nature of the “lifeworld” as a discursive space where citizens may participate and directly engage with others in common, whereas the “system” represents the removal of direct citizen participation in the rule-making and hence decision-making processes that sustain basic notions of civil society.

The lifeworld-system dialectic – Habermas labels it the “seam” that binds the lifeworld and system together – represents the fundamental problematic to his idyllic social world and the nature of what he calls “communicative action.” Communicative action refers to the manner in which individuals’ free and open exchanges create and sustain any social system via “the stock of knowledge from which participants in communication supply themselves with interpretations as they come to an understanding about something in the world” (p. 138). Because democratic life is inherently grounded in the interactions and mutual associations cultivated among a polity’s members, the communicative action perspective – and Habermas’ argument that communication is the currency sustaining any viable social system – meshes well with other aspects of normative democratic theory.

Given the primacy of communication within his social theory, Habermas contends that communicative action serves three functions:

Under the functional aspect of *mutual understanding*, communicative action serves to transmit and renew cultural knowledge; under the aspect of *coordinating action*, it serves social integration and the establishment of solidarity; finally, under the aspect of *socialization*, communicative action serves the formation of personal identities. (italics original; p. 137)

The characteristics of mutual understanding, coordinating action, and socialization are clearly evident and inform a communication-centered perspective of citizenship that eschews viewing citizens as atomistic or self-serving individuals who are only interested in their affairs and exist apart from their neighbors and fellow citizens. Rather, communicative action suggests that it is only through social relations that democratic

ideals such as self-governance and freedom have any meaning. As such, Habermas' communicative action perspective articulates how seemingly mundane, taken-for-granted communicative activities create and reproduce norms of mutuality, coordination, and learning.

Like much of Habermas' scholarship, the communicative action perspective adopts a pragmatic approach. His ideal society is based on romanticized visions of post-Renaissance European democracies and city-states whose citizens were restricted in political, economic and social mobility yet maintained a vibrant public sphere. Individuals, families, and community residents were more "localized" in their social relations and networks of relationships. This "everyone-knows-everyone" state of being reflects a "lifeworld" where dialogic communication, occurring among a relatively small yet densely connected group of citizens, is normative. However, the development of market-based economic systems, the expansion of global trade and industrialization, and advent of mass media created a series of layers or impediments that attempted to circumvent direct exchanges among individuals. By creating a series of rules, protocols, and standards that allowed individuals and communities to interact in commerce, politics, and various cultural and social norms across time and space, the "community" was no longer a space reserved for those immediately available or physically proximate to one's life; interactions could occur among disparate others so long as individuals knew the rules or standards that they were supposed to follow.

These economic forces coincided with the erosion of autonomous nation-states and the rise of sovereign nations and mass democracies. In order to meet the needs of its citizens, the development of bureaucratic organizations to administer and implement

legal statutes created an impediment for active citizenly involvement in public affairs. Against this historical backdrop, Habermas contrasts his concepts of lifeworld and system, and the manner in which system forces attempt to “colonize” the lifeworld, in the second volume of *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1981/1987).

The lifeworld envelops everyday acts of participatory democratic action. Broadly, the lifeworld makes it possible for citizens to know who they are, what they believe, to what goals or dreams they aspire, what offends or delights them, what sacrifices they will accept to maintain their way of life, and other socio-cultural mores. The lifeworld is:

the transcendental site where speaker and hearer meet, where they can reciprocally raise claims that their utterances fit the world (objective, social, or subjective), and where they can criticize and confirm those validity claims, settle their disagreements, and arrive at agreements. (p. 126)

Through even the most rudimentary communicative activities, the lifeworld facilitates a shared commonality and identification among others – a shared sense of “we.” The lifeworld “forms the indirect context of what is said, discussed, [and] addressed in a situation” and “...is the intuitively present, in this sense familiar and transparent, and at the same time vast and incalculable web of presuppositions that have to be satisfied if an actual utterance is to be at all meaningful, that is, valid or invalid” (p. 131). Because Habermas’ social system is communicatively constructed, citizens are naturally “lifeworldly” in the sense that their identities, coordinated actions, and solidarities are propitiated by past and present communicative exchanges. As a discursive repository, the lifeworld represents a social background containing “everything given in my experience,

and the unquestionable frame in which all the problems I have to deal with are located” (p. 131).

In the current study, the lifeworld concept is represented by the local storytelling level to be subsequently described. The lifeworld concept embodies archetypal images of citizen-to-citizen deliberation in the local town square, at the newspaper stand, the town hall meeting room, or across one’s backyard fence. Lifeworldly democratic participation may include such activities as writing a letter to the news editor, contacting elected officials about issues of public importance, volunteering for a public cause, and other “organic” political activities that do not require well-financed and/or politically-powerful individuals to affect public opinion. In the digital age, the “electronic lifeworld” is also replete with citizen-to-citizen communication. Activities such as posting one’s political preferences on a Facebook or Twitter page, forwarding an email to one’s circle of friends, discussing current events or issues on a listserv or forum, and other forms of communication between a citizen and their immediate social networks provide an additional dimension to normative democratic theory. These point-to-point exchanges among citizens could lend support to the perspectives and narratives portrayed on the evening news or that are printed in the paper – or they could be refuted based on the personal experiences or “real” story that citizens have witnessed and that informs what’s “really” going on in one’s life. Classical writings such as Alexis de Tocqueville’s (1847/2003) *Democracy in America* and John Dewey’s (1927/1954) *The Public and Its Problems*, in addition to more recent writings such as Michael Schudson’s (1998) *The Good Citizen*, Robert Putnam’s (2000) *Bowling Alone*, underscore the manner in which

the lifeworld represents – or, according to many of these authors, should represent – the core of American political and democratic life.

Yet, democracy is not sustained solely through interpersonal relationships occurring among small, homogenous social networks. Modern nation-states are comprised of more citizens than any one person could meaningfully associate with. In order to maintain the efficiency and efficacy of social relations that now exist beyond one's front door, community welcome sign, or national borders, "delinguistified media of communication such as money and power, connect up interactions in space and time into more and more complex networks that no one has to comprehend or be responsible for" (Habermas, 1981/1987, p. 181). Delinguistified media are system forces that remove the need for citizens to directly engage and interact with one another by instead instilling notions of conformity and standardization to certain agreed upon rules, customs, and social practices. In other words, delinguistified media are the layers or spheres of authority that attempt to remove the lifeworld from the reach of communicative actors.

With respect to political power, language is never entirely detached from public affairs (i.e., democracies based on the rule of law require judges and lawyers to interpret parliamentary edicts). However, the bureaucratization that is necessary for carrying out government services within modern mass democracies leads to power "operat[ing] as an objective force over the heads of actors in the social world [citing Weber, 1978]. As power becomes linked to [bureaucratization], it too becomes systematically removed from the reach of communicative actors in the lifeworld" (Friedland, 2001, pp. 371-372) as citizens are less able to act upon public issues when their efficacy is thwarted by

institutional and bureaucratic entities. In other words, system forces inexorably limit and discourage lifeworldly communication.

In this study, Habermas' system construct corresponds primarily with the national storytelling level and, to a lesser extent, the regional storytelling level; both of these are explicated more fully in the next section. Representing national and regional storytelling as conceptual indicators is based on the fact that American news media organizations are for-profit enterprises that operate according to economic (e.g., stockholder interests, ratings, advertising revenue) and political (e.g., broadcasting licenses, restrictions on broadcasting certain content) incentives rather than a public service orientation. The political and economic considerations for which these organizations adhere place them squarely as system forces.

National and regional storytellers similarly represent classical "monologic" models of mass communication. Although today's citizens enjoy greater opportunities to reply to journalists and news producers via online story comments, personal blogs, online videos, etc., news producers operate as autonomous actors with respect to their audience. Digital technologies are creating more dialogic forms of communication among news media organizations and their audiences, but this is neither consistently applied nor a standard journalistic convention in the field. National and regional storytellers, as monologic purveyors of information, do not encapsulate the lifeworld construct at this point in time.

Finally, news media as storytellers engage their audiences as spectators rather than active participants in political life. Murray Edelman, in his seminal book

*Constructing the Political Spectacle* (1988), argues that the discourse of political news is such that citizens must heed to the political realities constructed through media coverage:

Exposure to the news involves the public in a world of surprises and drama.

Defeats and triumphs, unexpected threats and gratifying victories, fears of profound changes in well-being, and hopes for the end of worrisome problems make news reports intriguing for some and the future uncertain for all. The

spectacle is unpredictable and fragmented, so that individuals are always

vulnerable and usually can do little more than react, chiefly by keeping abreast of

the news that concerns them and by acquiescing in the realities it creates. (p. 123)

The uncertainty and fragmentation of political narratives through news media, as argued by Edelman, directly alludes to a principal concern for Habermas: the “colonization” of the lifeworld. Colonization is a process of system forces altering the communicative activities of citizens with each other. Habermas’ pragmatic orientation led him to conclude that even though colonization of the lifeworld occurs through system forces, the system ultimately depends on the lifeworld. So, even if media audiences perceive news organizations as untrustworthy or that a partisan bias exists in their coverage of a campaign or public policy debate, so long as these storytellers (a) fulfill their financial and political duties and (b) provide a site for legitimating how citizens understand and perceive political reality, the colonization of citizens’ political activities via mediated interpretations remains omnipresent.

In summary, differentiating the lifeworld and system constructs creates opportunities to more thoroughly explore the communicative characteristics they engender with respect to political storytelling level. The lifeworld construct is embodied

by the local storytelling level while the system construct entails the national storytelling level most directly and regional storytelling to a lesser extent. Although Habermas' treatise only offered a broad theoretical framework for this endeavor, a handful of communication scholars have taken steps to further extrapolate Habermas' lifeworld-system rubric.

**The Lifeworld-System Construct and Communication Scholarship.** Limited communication scholarship has incorporated Habermas' lifeworld-system framework as a way to discern the relationship of communication and politics in contemporary America. This work is chiefly concerned with the discursive dimensions of "community" and the conditions affecting community viability. Although this work provides a general blueprint for the current study, certain limitations will be highlighted as they relate to the "political storytelling system" framework.

One adaptation of Habermas' lifeworld-system construction comes from Lewis Friedland's (2001) work on the "communicatively-integrated community" and the process by which communicative activities embody a community orientation. Similar to Habermas' ideal society, Friedland's communicatively-integrated community exists only to the extent that varied communicative activities among individual citizens and their interpersonal networks occur within publicly available and accessible spaces in order to promote collective identity, forms of solidarity, and the formation of public agendas. Friedland's community, though, is explicated to a higher degree of specificity than Habermas' society.

In particular, Friedland details the way in which six "integration levels" – system, macro, macro/meso, meso, meso/micro, and micro – act as sites where the "seam" of

Habermas' lifeworld and system are most visible and, hence, actionable. The "system" level signifies the province of global, national, and regional locations. He suggests that "system-wide elite media" (i.e. national news organizations) characterize the scope of communication at this level, and that system-wide legitimacy constitutes the *modus operandi* of this imagined community. The "macro" level focuses on metropolitan concerns where local media, specialized media, and interpersonal networks create and sustain a "metro-wide imagined community" that is supplemented through the legitimacy of local elites. The "macro-meso" level is more limited in its scope by focusing on metropolitan as well as community-specific concerns; the "macro-meso" level constitutes a "metro-wide" imagined community that is buttressed by normative obligations among its members. The "meso" level is contextualized in community-wide or even neighborhood associational networks; a "submetro imagined community" is constructed at the "meso" level by local or community media. The "meso-micro" level, in turn, is exclusively a "neighborhood imagined community" grounded upon associational and interpersonal networks. Finally, the "micro" level is entirely constituted by citizens' interpersonal networks and sustained through point-to-point forms of communication.

Friedland argues that based on these integration levels, the communicatively-integrated community is best understood according to four primary characteristics: its physical location (e.g., geographic space and size), network structure (e.g., scope or size of connections among people), medium of integration (e.g., system structures such as money and power; communicative resources of the lifeworld), and forms of symbolic integration (e.g., normative democratic outcomes associated with each integration level). Using a typology to demarcate how each integration level influences the aforementioned

community characteristics, Friedland contends that his framework accomplishes three tasks:

First, it suggests what intra-lifeworld [e.g., identity, cultural, social] processes are necessary to form and recognize the boundaries of communities and to make communication and coordination across them possible. Second, it allows us to locate local lifeworlds in relation to larger local structures and systems. Third, it links these multilayered dimensions of communication to formal communications media operating in the local and supralocal environments. (2001, p. 376)

Noting that each integration level is not mutually exclusive to one another, as well as the fact that communication does not solely occur or remain limited within an integration level, Friedland concedes that a community's boundaries are not fixed. For example, a community may exist within the perimeter of one's neighborhood (e.g. neighborhood association, families who arrange children's playdates) or extend beyond typical face-to-face interactions (e.g., virtual communities whose members converse and deliberate only through electronic media). This fluidity of the communicatively-integrated community leads to a discussion of a "community communication ecology," which Friedland describes as the intersection of "lifeworld structures of cognitive, moral, and imagined identity and the network structures of local community..." (p. 381).

Recognizing that information technologies have substantively affected community life, Friedland expands upon Habermas' treatise by suggesting that the six integration levels address the most relevant aspects relating to a community's welfare in addition to suggesting how forms of electronic and interpersonal communication necessarily impact community construction. Friedland's typology not only explores the

connections among integration levels (e.g., community media and interpersonal discussion may include deliberating national or global concerns; national media may focus on local issues or happenings in their coverage, etc.), but offers a nuanced understanding of the effects stemming from structural forces and communicative activities – including new communication technologies – across the broadest and narrowest notions of “community” to which most citizens ascribe.

A second strand of communication literature grounded on Habermas’s theorizing is communication infrastructure theory (CIT) scholarship developed by Ball-Rokeach and colleagues (e.g. Ball-Rokeach, Kim, & Matei, 2001; Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006a, 2006b). Similar to Friedland’s communicatively-integrated community, Ball-Rokeach’s work addresses how residents of urban neighborhoods discursively construct and maintain their identity and collective efficacy in the face of numerous physical, social, economic, and psychological exigencies, in addition to modern concerns stemming from globalization and enhanced mobility. Borrowing directly from Habermas, she notes that urban neighborhoods function as “communication action contexts” containing lifeworld resources and system structures that are unique to other communication action contexts.

The communication action context is the site where the “multi-level storytelling system” – that is, the types of storytellers within a communication action context – influence residents’ civic engagement practices and perceived community solidarity. In particular, CIT scholarship has focused on three specific “neighborhood storytellers” affecting the vitality, or waning, of one’s “storytelling neighborhood:” (a) “geo-ethnic local media,” or information that targets specific geographic areas or populations; (b) community organizations, including informal grassroots entities, formal nonprofit

organizations, political interest groups, church memberships, etc.; and (c) interpersonal networks of neighborhood residents. From this work, Ball-Rokeach and colleagues argue that community-level storytelling agents matter with respect to a variety of civic engagement outcomes such as neighborhood belonging, political efficacy, political and civic participatory behaviors, and residential stability.

Concurring with Friedland's perspective, Ball-Rokeach and colleagues argue that the "communication action context" and the "multi-level storytelling system" concepts parallel Habermas' lifeworld-system "seam" (1981/1987, p. 395) or, as I have been referring to it, a dialectic. Contemporary urban neighborhoods are generally demarcated by a variety of system structures (e.g., physical objects such as roads or buildings, zoned boundaries, critical infrastructure) that influence the type and quality of lifeworldly communicative opportunities occurring among residents of a neighborhood and perceptions of the neighborhood and its residents among outsiders. Focusing on metropolitan Los Angeles, Ball-Rokeach and colleagues found that whereas certain areas such as middle- and upper-class neighborhoods engender sufficient discursive resources (e.g., geo-ethnic media, strong interpersonal networks among neighbors and residents) that create a robust communicative infrastructure, low-income neighborhoods or those associated with violent crime and gang activity tend to prevent basic participatory activities among area residents as well as allow "storytellers" beyond the besieged neighborhood to articulate public narratives that impede efforts to improve the communicative infrastructure of those areas.

The Friedland and Ball-Rokeach approaches offer several important contributions for the present analysis. First, they articulate an array of "integration levels" or a "multi-

level storytelling system” which offers a more holistic perspective than Habermas’ effuse lifeworld and system concepts for explaining how and why communication matters to the formation of a viable public sphere. Explicating the system and lifeworld concepts frameworks using Friedland and Ball-Rokeach’s approaches allows for a manageable – and, ultimately, testable – set of concepts for understanding political communication effects. Second, Friedland and Ball-Rokeach’s perspectives reflect an understanding of contemporary challenges facing American social and community life. Specifically, external factors relating to globalization and shifting business practices, demographic shifts and immigration patterns, resource availability, and the growth of online and web-based communicative modalities are discussed by both scholars and given far more prominence than Habermas’ original theorizing. As such, Friedland and Ball-Rokeach’s works encapsulate a modern lifeworld-system duality in the American context rather than the more generalized democratic state envisioned by Habermas. Finally, these perspectives offer more than descriptive and typological analysis. Both frameworks theorize the effects or outcomes associated with communicative practices occurring within a community, regardless of how broadly or narrowly defined that community may be. Whether it is “localized effects” such as neighborhood involvement and perceived efficacy to address local issues, or more general democratic outcomes such as political learning or apathy towards politics, each perspective attempts to look beyond Habermas’ philosophical postulates by exploring how variations among lifeworld-system resources in a community are consequential.

Despite their contributions, both perspectives contain their limitations.

Specifically, Friedland’s theoretical framework remains just that – theoretical. Although

his elaboration of lifeworld and system as a set of integration levels and community characteristics offers a more holistic perspective than Habermas, the “communicatively-integrated community” analytical framework has seemingly disappeared from scholarly conversation. Thus, it is largely unknown whether his six integration levels contribute to differential political effects at the community level. Additionally, it is unclear whether the specificity of his six integration levels is appropriate as an analytical framework. For example, are there real differences between “macro” (e.g., metropolitan newspaper and broadcast television stations) and “macro/meso” (e.g., zoned editions of newspapers, specialized community media such as ethnic radio) media, and do citizens perceive such differences with respect to the communicative modalities in their “community ecology”? Although Friedland acknowledges the overlap in content that occurs in everyday talk and electronically-mediated commentary, the lack of subsequent empirical analysis related to his six-part typology leaves open the possibility that citizens do not make such fine distinctions among the political information sources to which they attune.

Unlike Friedland, Ball-Rokeach and colleagues’ CIT scholarship does empirically validate the viability of their lifeworld-system adaptation and the “multi-level storytelling system” concept in particular. Although the tri-part model developed in the CIT literature contains fewer categories or gradations than Friedland’s six “integration levels,” support for Ball-Rokeach and colleagues’ more parsimonious framework has been demonstrated across numerous studies stemming from their Metamorphosis research project and community belonging in the Los Angeles metropolitan area.

At the same time, CIT scholarship relies heavily on survey methodologies that seemingly imply a static or uniform process of “storytelling” that overlooks the type of

stories being told. That is, CIT scholarship only measures the presence or absence of storytellers rather than citizens' perceptions and understanding of the types of stories they encounter. Specifically, these studies ask whether citizens belong to certain community organizations (e.g., sports/recreational groups, cultural/ethnic groups, religious institutions, neighborhood/homeowner association, political activities, etc.), and whether they attend to local and national media sources (e.g., newspapers, television broadcasts, radio). From this, the researchers develop composite scores gauging citizens' connections to their community and the electronically mediated and face-to-face communicative modalities offered in their neighborhood without examining how audiences respond to the "story" itself. CIT scholarship yields useful insights regarding the challenges and opportunities to build healthy, normatively democratic communities; yet the "infrastructure" components (and their sociological implications) overshadow the "communicative" aspects associated with political storytelling.

**Testing the Lifeworld-System Construct: The Political Storytelling System.**

Accordingly, the present study articulates the "political storytelling system" framework as a derivation of Habermas's lifeworld-system construct. The political storytelling system analytic scheme examined in the present study adapts and builds on the conceptual underpinnings of Friedland and Ball-Rokeach's approaches to empirically examine the relationship between communication and politics in contemporary America.

Unlike these scholars' approaches, however, the political storytelling system offers an ecological approach to the study of political communication by articulating how political discourse is discursively situated and understood at three levels: (a) national, (b) regional, and (c) local. These levels correspond not only to Habermas' lifeworld and

system, but reflect how audiences are constructed or “imagined” (Anderson, 1983) at these levels. The term “imagined,” according to Anderson (1983), reflects how “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (p. 6). Anderson’s work is centrally concerned with tracing the origins of nationalism as a cultural and social phenomenon, but its application in the present study is warranted. Because political information can be delivered to audiences that may be “imagined” in many different ways (e.g., local resident, American citizen, etc.), the storytelling levels attempt to capture the discursive communities by which politics is disseminated and received. Because “all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (perhaps even these) are imagined” (p. 6), the storytelling levels explore citizens’ perceived sense of “we.” This “we-ness” that national, regional, and local storytellers attempts to empirically establish is what Rothenbuhler et al. (1996) describes as “geographies of relevance” for how citizens understand and think about politics.

**National-Level Storytelling.** The national storytelling level adapts the “macro-level” political storyteller concept from Ball-Rokeach and colleagues’ CIT scholarship and Friedland’s communicatively integrated community typology. National-level storytelling reflects the manner in which international and national news organizations typically target broad audiences through “mainstream” methods, and presume an audience size that is sufficiently large and homogenous. National-level storytellers primarily address issues of international or national scope, although this is not to say national storytellers do not address issues of international concern or report on events happening in specific regions or communities as part of their reporting; national-level

storytellers, in fact, may frequently comment on regional or even highly niche issues (e.g., natural disasters, human interest stories, reporting on the activities in one town or area as anecdotal evidence relating to a larger national trend). Rather, national storytelling implies that such sources address citizens as “Americans” or part of a larger, united collective.

The national storytelling level recognizes what Delli Carpini, Keeter, and Kennamer (1994) describe as the “nationalization” of political discourse:

This nationalization – standardization – has occurred not only because of the dominance of the federal government, but also because of technological and economic innovations such as wire services, radio and television networks, newspaper chains, satellite delivery, and facsimile transmission. (p. 433)

They further contend that “both the form and content of news has been nationalized, leading to an increasing homogeneity of information across the United States” (Delli Carpini et al., 1994, p. 443). It is argued here that national-level political storytelling not only addresses issues that are global or national-level in nature, but that this level of storytelling encompasses a dominant set of conventions by which national storytellers describe and convey such issues to the public.

Studies of news media offer some support for a national-level perspective of news coverage. For instance, a number of studies stress the degree to which electoral campaigns and legislative debates are characterized by strategic calculations of political elites and “horse-race” aspects surrounding a particular issue or topic rather than substantive analysis of the issue or topic itself (e.g., Ansolabehere, Behr, & Iyengar, 1993; Capella & Jameson, 1997; Patterson, 1993). Sports and war metaphors remain

common descriptors and linguistic devices for understanding American political discourse among nationally-focused political storytellers (Howe, 1988), potentially reinforcing a strategy-based mentality among political news consumers.

National storytellers, because they target and address an audience that is presumed to be large and relatively homogenous, foster a greater sense of national identity and connectedness to one's nation, which Schlesinger (1991) describes as "an inclusion that provides a boundary around 'us' and one of exclusion that distinguishes 'us' from 'them'" (p. 301). Gamson (1992), although not utilizing the terminology of "storytelling" set forth here, describes it in a similar manner:

National, general audience media are only one set of forums, but their discourse dominates the terms in which the issue is discussed. They serve a complex dual role. On the one hand, they are producers of the discourse. Journalists contribute their own frames and invent their own clever catch phrases and metaphors, drawing on a popular culture that they share with their audience. On the other hand, they are also, to quote Gurevitch and Levy (1985, p. 9), "a site on which various social groups, institutions, and ideologies struggle over the definition of social reality." (p. 24-25)

Although Gamson's (1992) analysis centered on citizens' participation in social movements, this perspective aptly describes the national storytelling level as both a context of political discourse for topics of national interest and an approach to understanding politics from storytellers at this contextual level.

**Regional-Level Storytelling.** Borrowing from the "meso-level" terminology utilized by Ball-Rokeach and colleagues (2001) and Friedland (2001), the "regional"

storytelling level denotes the discursive constraints imposed upon “sub-national” storytellers based on geospatial boundaries. Similar to the national storytelling level, regional-level storytelling is not meant to imply that, for instance, a local television news station or a metropolitan-area newspaper forgoes covering foreign affairs or national politics; in fact, many regional storytellers present an array of information on national, community, and even neighborhood issues that address politics, entertainment, business, sports, and other subjects. Rather, regional-level storytellers are primarily oriented towards and address their audiences as occupants of a regional area, a metropolitan city, residential community, or some other geographically-defined audience. The regional storytelling level encapsulates political discourse among more particularized collective groups that are addressed, or “imagined” (Anderson, 1983), as members of some proximate or geographically-fixed space that is less abstract than one’s national identity.

Invoking the term “regional” rather than other similar worded terms such as “state-level” political storytelling highlights how media markets often carry more than just information relating to one state or one local area. For instance, “media located in markets that cross state boundaries must divide air time and news hole[s] across two or more jurisdictions...” (Delli Carpini et al. 1994, p. 444), thereby rendering any neat compartmentalization of politics as a national, state, and local affair as less tenable.

Examining local newspaper coverage of an environmental waste site dispute, Nicodemus (2004) revealed how “...media are more than printed or electronic content; they are a meaning system in their own right with a complex set of symbols created by a series of journalistic conventions” (p. 164). Her analysis of two local newspapers – one was located in the vicinity of the proposed landfill, the other was based in an adjacent

county – explained how the affected community’s journalistic prose emphasized themes of collective identity, solidarity, and a sense “we-ness” (p. 166) to remind the townspeople of normative community values. Conversely, the newspaper in the non-affected community accentuated political and class differences in their reporting, thereby infusing frames of competition and strategy about the “winners” and “losers” of this local issue. Nicodemus’ (2004) analysis reveals how political storytellers who are less proximate to some event or issue communicate about politics in a more generalized and detached manner. Put another way, when the intended audience is further removed from the locus of action, storytellers adopt a more spectator-oriented communicative style.

Finnegan and Viswanath (1988) explored the connections among regional political storytellers and forms of community involvement. Specifically, they found that regular readers of weekly community newspapers are more likely to be involved in their neighborhood’s activities compared to regular readers of a metropolitan daily newspaper or those who acquired most of their news from cable television. Although their study only examined residents living in a single suburban community and acknowledges the fact that people can hold a variety of media diets, the authors concluded that “community newspapers more so than metro dailies appear to support and maintain the process of integration into local communities” (p. 463) and that “cable may develop useful ways of supporting and maintaining some community ties, as some of our findings suggest, but probably not in the same way or to the same degree true to community newspapers” (p. 473). Similar to the Nicodemus (2004) study, Finnegan and Viswanath (1988) allude to the ability of regional and community-oriented media to instill a greater sense of “we”

among geospatially-distinct groups compared to global or nationally-oriented storytellers that are more apt to convey a similar sense of “we” at a level of national consciousness.

**Local-Level Storytelling.** “Local-level” political storytelling constitutes the most dialogic, idiosyncratic, and “personalized” forms of political communicative interaction. Local-level storytelling parallels the “micro-level” tier within Ball-Rokeach and colleagues’ (2001) CIT framework as well as Friedland’s (2001) “micro” integration level of his communicatively-integrated community. Local-level storytelling does not mean average citizens do not talk about world affairs, federal government actions, campaign coverage of state and federal candidates, or local referenda. Local-level storytelling, rather, connotes a “geography of relevance” (Rothenbuhler et al., 1996) that is more particularized and idiosyncratic among interactants compared to national- and regional storytelling. According to Cho (2005), “one’s cognitive frame is rooted in an individual’s lifeworld in that it is shaped through social interactions with others” (p. 301).

The importance of interpersonal communication and its relationship to normative democracy is well established. Huckfeldt and Sprague (1995), for example, found that discussions of public affairs frequently emerges as a topic of conversation among an individual’s social network; Pinkelton and Murrow (1999) corroborated this finding as his study found that face-to-face discussions among friends, neighbors, and family members are significant sources of relevant political information. Verba, Schlozman, Brady, and Nie (1995) argue that interpersonal networks function as “networks of recruitment” where individuals may associate with others within various social milieu such as one’s workplace (e.g., Mutz & Mondak, 2006) or church membership and affiliation (Scheufele, Nisbet, & Brossard, 2003). Additionally, citizens’ interpersonal

communication of politics interacts with citizens' media use. Research on political socialization, for instance, has found that increases in political media contribute to more politics-oriented conversations (see Lee, 2005; McDevitt, 2005; McDevitt & Chaffee, 2000). These empirical findings buttress Chaffee's (1982) argument that interpersonal discussion reinforces, rather than competes with, mass communication modalities in conveying political information.

Research examining interpersonal communication and politics affords support for the local-level storytelling concept. Gamson's (1992) study of citizens' connections and understanding of social movement participation notes how one's experiential knowledge and a general sense of "popular wisdom" can integrate with – or even reject – media discourse as a framework for political consciousness and action. Newman, Just, and Crigler (1992) likewise investigated citizens' "common knowledge" of politics – what they actually know about politics rather than what they should presumably know. Local-level storytelling allows for citizens to translate political, or public, discourse through the perspective of personal beliefs and attitudes that may draw on one's past experiences or lived history as a guide for understanding a problem of the moment. Local storytelling is the most dialogic and participatory level of political storytelling, and offers a greater locus for experiential, individuated understandings of politics. Put simply, the local storytelling level is the heart and soul of Habermas' lifeworld or, as Kim, Wyatt, and Katz (1999) suggest, interpersonal communication is "the heart of democracy" (p. 380).

At the same time, local-level storytelling is not just atomistic or self-interested citizens engaged in politics within their own islands of relevance. Local-level storytelling helps bolster individuals' group affiliations and collective identity, albeit on a far smaller

scale compared to national and regional storytelling. Through dialogic and ritualistic communication, political talk shifts from being something that is “out there” or beyond one’s “geography of relevance” (Rothenbuhler et al., 1996) and transformed into a subject that contains personal relevance and interest. This is not to say that individuals agree with others’ perspectives; rather, local-level storytelling is a site of political discourse that is less homogenous in both the content and form of political discourse.

In summary, the local level storytelling network suggests that citizens’ interpersonal social networks – whether online or offline – are important determinants for how citizens’ acquire and understand politics. The political storytelling system framework acknowledges the role of dialogic communication as a complement to mass media communication in affecting civic and political outcomes, and investigates the nature of local political storytelling in its contemporary form.

**Establishing the Political Storytelling System Framework.** In conceptualizing the national, regional, and local storytelling levels as part of a political storytelling system, a plethora of methodological approaches have been utilized by the aforementioned scholars to explain the process of political storytelling and how the lifeworld-system dialectic is manifest at different storytelling levels. Through such techniques as rhetorical analysis, content analysis, and single person and focus group interviews, the parameters of the political storytelling system and the levels comprising this system have been examined (e.g., Finnegan & Viswaneth, 1988; Gamson, 1992; Newman, Just, & Crigler, 1992; Nicodemus, 2004; Rothebuhler et al., 1996). However, the political storytelling system framework requires a more systematic examination to

validate whether citizens utilize political information sources according to the previously describe storytelling levels. Thus, this study posits:

RQ1: What is the factor structure of citizens' national, regional, and local political storytelling use?

In the following section, several outcomes related to the political storytelling system are described. These outcomes – factual political knowledge, structural political knowledge, political information efficacy, and political cynicism – represent several effects which stem from one's political storytelling system.

### **Effects of the Political Storytelling System**

**Factual Political Knowledge.** The political storytelling system provides a theoretical framework that explains how national-, regional-, and local-level storytellers affect citizens' political knowledge. Citizens can select and attune to political information from a diverse array of mediated, organizational, and interpersonal sources whose presumed audiences vary dramatically in size and scope. With so many ways for individuals to talk about and/or consume politics, the current study examines how variations in the type and number of sources within a citizens' political storytelling system affect their political knowledge.

The present study assumes that citizens should be “informed” and that political knowledge is a critical component of one's citizenship. Calls for an “informed citizenry” are replete in political-philosophical treatises from the likes of Jean Jacques-Rousseau, John Stuart Mill, John Dewey, and Jurgen Habermas; and contemporary academic research on Americans' political knowledge provides similar justification (e.g., Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). Galston (2001) argues that “competent democratic citizens need

not be policy experts, but there is a level of basic knowledge below which the ability to make a full range of reasoned civic judgments becomes impaired” (p. 3). Because citizens may be thought of as “cognitive misers” (Hewstone & Macrae, 1994) who utilize “low-information rationality” (Popkin, 1991) such as stereotypes and other cognitive short cuts to “get the gist” of a political narrative (see Downs, 1957; Mondak, 1994; Popkin, 1991), the storytelling system framework should illustrate whether variations in the type and number of sources within each storytelling level contribute to differences in the acquisition and recall of public affairs content.

Conceptualizing and measuring political knowledge, however, is an oft-debated subject (see Delli Carpini, 2004; Graber, 2001). Neuman (1986) aptly summarizes the dilemma: “democratic theory has never been terribly explicit about the precise requirements of knowledge and cognitive skill that must be exhibited by each citizen for the system to work as intended” (p. 8). Lacking an objective standard for what constitutes an “informed citizenry,” empirical analyses have addressed normative concerns of citizens’ political knowledge using a variety of approaches. In the present study, the concept of political knowledge will be operationalized and evaluated according to two dimensions that are well documented in prior research: (a) the level of factual political information which a citizen possesses, and (b) the cognitive connections a citizen is able to construct given the factual information they possess. Focusing on factual and structural political knowledge corresponds with Eveland, Marton, and Seo’s (2004) emphasis on the “content” and “structure” of political learning, as well as Graber’s (2007) labeling and examination of the “denotative” and “connotative” functions of political information.

In general, there is a scholarly consensus that American citizens are poorly informed about current events, the political process, important governmental institutions, and even fundamental tenants associated with the Constitution. Such characterizations – and their justifications – have been discussed in many publications, but Michael Delli Carpini and Scott Keeter’s seminal work *What Americans Know About Politics and Why it Matters* (1996) offers arguably one of the most thorough analyses on the subject. Their work traces Americans’ political knowledge throughout the post-WWII period, examining citizens’ political knowledge across presidential election cycles by using similar measures to draw comparisons in knowledge over time. Although other scholarship, such as Putnam’s (2000) *Bowling Alone*, appeared after Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) and used similar data analysis procedures and longitudinal design, Delli Carpini and Keeter’s (1996) specific focus on political knowledge and its continued relevance in political communication scholarship merits detailed focus in the present study with respect to the political storytelling system framework.

Specifically, three of Delli Carpini and Keeter’s (1996) conclusions are important for present purposes. First, they concluded that Americans may be under informed but are not uninformed. After examining 60 years’ worth of national survey data, Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) reason that “although political knowledge levels are, in many instances, depressingly low, they are high enough among some segments of the population, and on some topics, to foster optimism about democratic possibilities” (p. 269). For instance, more than half of the citizenry correctly responds to questions about government institutions, federal legislative activities, and party positions on major issues of the day. Although Americans are typically less politically knowledgeable than citizens

in other democracies, the authors note that “what people know is driven not only by what is most important, but also by what is most readily available” (p. 103). Americans’ “under informed” status, then, “demonstrates that enough citizens are able to obtain and retain information in the current political environment...to believe that a more fully and equally informed public is possible” (p. 270).

Second, Americans’ political knowledge levels remained static throughout the post-World War II period. Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) contend that “offsetting forces” affected citizens’ motivation, opportunity and ability to acquire political knowledge, which left factual knowledge levels remarkably stable for almost 60 years:

The good news is that in spite of concerns over the quality of education, the decline in newspaper readership, the rise of sound-bite journalism, the explosion of national political issues, and the waning commitment to civic engagement, citizens appear no less informed about politics today than they were half a century ago. The bad news is that in spite of an unprecedented expansion in public education, a communications revolution that has shattered national and international boundaries, and the increasing relevance of national and international events and policies to the daily lives of Americans, citizens appear no more informed about politics. (p. 133).

Notwithstanding the long-term trend, the authors do acknowledge that short-term learning increases among citizens occur when there are appropriate motivations, opportunities, and abilities to do so.

Finally, Americans are “political generalists” to the extent that those who are knowledgeable about one area of public affairs tend to be knowledgeable about other

areas. Particularly relevant for the current study, Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) parsed their political knowledge construct into varied “knowledge dimensions” (e.g., knowledge about national politics, state and local politics, etc.) and found distinctions between Americans’ national political knowledge and knowledge of state and local politics. Although the author’s sample was drawn from a single metropolitan city (Richmond, VA), their results suggest that “the context of politics is critically important for what citizens learn” (p. 148-149).

There is also research which has examined citizens’ factual political knowledge beyond the milieu of national-level affairs. Becker and Dunwoody (1982), for instance, found positive correlations among newspaper reading, local television news viewing, and listening to radio news with respect to knowledge of mayoral and city council candidates in Columbus, OH during a local campaign. Moy, McCluskey, McCoy, and Spratt (2004), in a study of Seattle, WA residents, found that attention to local newspapers and local television news significantly predicted perceived political learning; similar results were found by McLeod, Scheufele, and Moy (1999) among Madison, WI residents. More recently, Shaker (2009) examined differences in national and local political knowledge among residents in Philadelphia, PA. He found that demographic factors (i.e. being white, male, older, greater income, more education) and political interest predicted one’s national political knowledge. In contrast, local knowledge was predicted by fewer demographic items (i.e. older, higher income, higher education) and more access to local mass media sources. Arguing that “changes in the media environment have tangible implications for local politics” (p. 820), he surmises that the growth of cable and satellite technologies has not only allowed citizens to opt-out of political content but enhanced the

ability for citizens to remove themselves from paying attention to local affairs. This is because “the problem wrought by increasing media access is not limited to only the citizens who opt for non-local content: their choices lead to a spiral that may result in a decline in local choices for all citizens” (Shaker, 2009, p. 821).

Political media, though important, are not the only sources of information from which citizens’ acquire political knowledge or develop political “knowledge domains” (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996). Notably, Scheufele, Nisbet, Brossard and Nisbet (2004) examined how “social structures” such as one’s interpersonal discussion networks and community-based affiliations influence citizens’ political participation and knowledge. They found that a citizens’ volunteer-based discussion network relates to political participation because volunteers can be channeled directly into political action through recruitment efforts and motivational congruence among members of the same organization. Volunteer-based discussion networks also correlate strongly with attention to newspaper and television news. Work-based discussion networks affect political participation and political knowledge to the extent that one’s workplace environment is heterogeneous, or consists of co-workers who hold differing political ideologies and perspectives. Church-based networks largely reflected work-based discussion networks in that those who were more politically active and knowledgeable tended to come from religious groups whose membership was more heterogeneous and diverse.

Finally, political knowledge is affected by neighborhood factors or communicative dynamics that exist beyond the scope of one’s membership in a formal community or regional organization. Kang and Kwak (2003), for instance, demonstrated that length of residence in one’s community affects civic participation levels such that

those who have been members of a community for longer durations have more interactions with their neighbors about local political issues and are more knowledgeable about local affairs (see also Moy, McCluskey, McCoy & Spratt, 2004). Borrowing the nomenclature of Viswanath, Kosicki, Fredin, and Park (2000), the authors suggest that length of residence connotes one's "investment in the community" and engenders an important factor for theorizing the political storytelling system. A plethora of studies (e.g., Bennett, Flickinger, & Rhine, 2002; Eveland & Thomson, 2006; Holbert, Benoit, Hansen, & Wen, 2002; Scheufele, 2000, 2002) have likewise found that greater discussion of politics is associated with greater political knowledge.

The veracity of national political storytellers, as evidenced by increasing use of cable and satellite communication systems and the decreased attention given to local news sources, portends serious consequences for citizens' ability to learn and retain political information. Shaker (2009), using a choir metaphor, argues that "[local political information] shifts from center stage in local newspapers or local television news to a place in the chorus, where it is much less prominent" (p. 814). Furthermore, Putnam's (2000) examination of Americans' civic and political participation notes that fewer citizens are affiliated or members of political interest groups, volunteer groups, or other national-, regional-, and community-based organizations compared to prior generations. Changes in how Americans process political information acquired through their mediated, organizational, and interpersonal political storytellers, in addition to the multilevel "political knowledge domains" (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996) they encapsulate, facilitate the current study's focus on the "contextualization" of citizens' political knowledge and whether the political storytelling system offers a general

framework to understanding politics as a series of “knowledge dimensions.” Accordingly, the following hypotheses are advanced to test the political storytelling system framework:

H1: Citizens’ level of national politics factual knowledge will be positively associated with more frequent use of national political storytellers.

H2: Citizens’ level of regional politics factual knowledge will be positively associated with more frequent use of regional political storytellers.

H3: Citizens’ level of local politics factual knowledge will be positively associated with more frequent use of local political storytellers.

H4: Citizens’ level of overall factual political knowledge will be higher for citizens using more political storytellers compared to those using fewer political storytellers.

**Structural Political Knowledge.** Delli Carpini and Keeter’s (1996) analysis, along with other scholarship examining citizens’ factual political knowledge, does entail two shortcomings. First, by arguing that political knowledge levels are basically static (at least over the long-term), the implication is that the general public is not particularly responsive to mediated, organizational, or interpersonal communication sources with respect to the amount of knowledge one acquires. The long-term focus ascribed to citizens’ factual political knowledge, then, limits the utility of factual knowledge measurements because they undercut the communicative factors that can – and do – affect political learning outcomes. Second, conceptualizing political knowledge as factual information acquisition and recall overlooks what citizens “do” with the factual knowledge they possess. Graber (2007) contends that “scholars who measure political knowledge routinely ignore the importance of [structural] thinking” because “they prize

people's ability to remember the facts and denotations, without testing whether they understand the significance of the information" (p. 22). This limitation requires the addition of a second dimension of political knowledge that examines how citizens cognitively organize the factual knowledge they possess.

Scholarly insights into the cognitive structuring of political knowledge have been advanced by researchers from an array of academic fields such as communication, psychology, political science, and journalism. For brevity and conceptual clarity, the present analysis is primarily interested in the work of William Eveland and his "knowledge structure density" (KSD) concept and measurement procedure. Eveland's work crystallizes the structure-based political knowledge literature, and is adapted and applied in the current study to provide a more holistic assessment of political knowledge as a consequence of the political storytelling system.

Like other theories of human information processing, the structure-based political knowledge literature utilizes the nomenclature and metaphors associated with schema theory to suggest that individual political facts represent specific, particularized nodes that are connected via links (Collins & Loftus, 1975; Eveland, Marton, & Seo, 2004). For example, Neuman (1981) characterizes "political thinking" as differentiation (how many pieces or bits of information one has) and integration (how this information is organized into abstract or ideological positions). Jonassen, Beissner, and Yacci (1993) articulated three forms of knowledge (declarative, structural, and procedural) that follow a similar framework, and Graber (2007) posits that audiences discern "denotative" and "connotative" information from the news. Each of these analytic frameworks offers a multi-dimensional approach to the concept of structural political knowledge.

Despite the attention researchers have given to concepts such as “political expertise,” “political sophistication,” “political interest,” and other cognition-based political knowledge measures, Eveland, Marton, and Seo (2004) argue that:

few of these operationalizations – either alone or in combination – are compelling and face valid representations of the structural aspect of knowledge, even if they might somehow indirectly tap it. Instead, most of them are more appropriately considered either causes or effects of knowledge structure as opposed to knowledge structure itself. (p. 88)

To overcome this deficiency, Eveland and colleagues borrowed techniques employed in educational psychology (e.g., Goldsmith, Johnson, & Acton, 1991; Jonassen, Beissner, & Yacci, 1993; Markham, Mintzes, & Jones, 1994) and social network analysis (Scott, 1990) to assess the number and strength of cognitive linkages among individual information items. For instance, Eveland, Marton and Seo (2004) found that in-text hyperlinks contained in online news stories produce more densely interconnected knowledge linkages among those who routinely acquire political news from online sources; however, structural knowledge decreased among those who infrequently used the Internet for political news. Incorporating KSD as an outcome associated with a web site’s design, Eveland and Cortese (2004) found that “linearly” designed websites (e.g., a web site featuring a uni-directional linking and navigation structure) facilitated greater factual learning while the nonlinearly designed website (e.g., web sites with a linking structure that allows users to go “back” to a prior web page) contributed to greater structural learning. Finally, Eveland and Hively (2009) examined whether variations in one’s political discussion network affect normative democratic outcomes, including

KSD. They found that (a) one's frequency of political discussion increases structural knowledge, and (b) those who maintain larger interpersonal discussion networks, who engage in more "dangerous" discussions, and who maintain more "diverse" discussion networks have greater KSD.

Whereas a plethora of scholarly attention has been devoted to understanding the antecedent factors and consequences associated with citizens' factual political knowledge, far less attention has been devoted to citizens' structural political knowledge as a normative democratic outcome and characteristic of one's "political knowledge domain" (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). However, it stands to reason that citizens who attend to a greater number of mediated, organization-based, and interpersonal political storytellers should have more factual information and hence a greater number of nodes in one's political schema. Furthermore, scholars investigating the role of increased media influence note that increased availability of programming options has contributed to citizens who avoid politics completely and those who attend to politics with great frequency (Prior, 2007; see also Shaker, 2009). Whether characterized as "political junkies" or civic-minded community residents, the increased frequency of attention an individual gives to public affairs corresponds with the principles of application and accessibility which embody schema theory. In other words, those who have more factual political knowledge should also be those who are most likely to have the densest structural knowledge because they are more likely to follow public affairs and synthesize what they consume into a more meaningful interpretation of political reality. As such, this study posits the following:

H5: The density of citizens' structural political knowledge will be positively associated with more frequent use of political storytellers.

**Political Information Efficacy.** The factual and structural dimensions of political knowledge give attention to cognition-based outcomes associated with the political storytelling system. However, the present study also examines attitudinal characteristics associated with political knowledge; that is, how confident citizens are in the political “facts” they possess. In particular, Kaid, McKinney, and Tedesco’s (2007) “political information efficacy” (PIE) concept offers a conceptual linkage between cognition-based aspects of political knowledge and “traditional” notions of political efficacy. Whereas traditional political efficacy corresponds to how a citizen feels about his/her ability to influence the political process (e.g., Campbell, Gurin, & Miller, 1954), PIE “focuses solely on the voter’s confidence in his or her own political knowledge and its sufficiency to engage the political process (to vote)” (Kaid, McKinney, & Tedesco, 2007, p. 1096).

PIE was developed as a means to understand young citizens’ (e.g., those in the 18-29 age cohort) civic attitudes, behaviors, and level of engagement. Stemming from focus group research during the 1996, 2000, and 2004 presidential campaigns, Kaid, McKinney, and Tedesco (2000, 2007) found that a central reason for young citizens’ abstention from voting or lethargic involvement in political campaign activities was due to their perceived insecurity about the information they possessed. In subsequent empirical testing, these scholars found that young citizens are less confident in their political knowledge than older citizens, and that PIE is strongly correlated to one’s decision on whether or not to vote (Kaid, McKinney, & Tedesco, 2007).

Several studies have examined citizens' PIE in relation to political media. Kaid, Postelnicu, Landreville, Yun, and LeGrange (2007) demonstrated how presidential debates may enhance young citizens' PIE more so than televised political ads. Because debates are "information-rich" sources of political information, sustained exposure to issues and major candidate positions over an extended period of time (typically 90 minutes) assuages one's perceived lack of knowledge compared to the truncated 15-, 30-, or 60-second advertisement message. McKinney and Chattopadhyay (2007) noted that young citizens' PIE not only increased after watching a 2004 presidential debate, but that post-debate information efficacy levels held steady even after Election Day – nearly two months after the initial measurement period – had passed; replicating this study for the 2008 presidential debate series led to a corroboration of these findings by McKinney, Rill, and Gully (2011). Tedesco (2007, 2011) also found that young citizens' PIE increased, at least in the short-term, following exposure to online political messages.

The scholarly attention afforded to political campaign messages and their influence on young citizens' voting decisions, though important, overlooks the possibility that PIE may be affected by political information that is not campaign-oriented. This is because campaigns for elective office generally saturate citizens with political information from mass mediated sources, political organizations operating at a community or state or national context, and one's interpersonal networks. Especially when a general campaign enters the "hot phase" (early October to Election Day), the sheer amount of financial and symbolic resources employed by individual candidates and their campaigns transforms the subject of politics into the "talk of the town," raising citizens' political knowledge confidence (Rill, 2009). Given the difficulty of tuning out

the “noise” of campaign politics – especially during the campaign season’s “hot phase” – PIE should increase almost by default with respect to elective office campaigns.

In the present study, though, Kaid, McKinney, and Tedesco’s (2000, 2007) PIE construct moves beyond examining specific political campaign message forms or explaining young citizens’ decision to vote. Instead, PIE is evaluated as a consequence of attention to greater or fewer sources of political information, and whether variations in the number of storytellers among each storytelling level contribute to differences in citizens’ PIE. Conceptually, PIE should be affected by citizens’ “lifeworldly” political activities. Coupled with the political knowledge literature discussed above, it stands to reason that those who attune to a greater number of national, regional, and local political storytellers should be more confident in their political knowledge and ability to act upon the information they possess. By having more storytellers in one’s political storytelling system, one’s knowledge is both legitimized more frequently than those who have fewer political information “validators.” Additionally, having more storytellers in one’s storytelling system should reinforce one’s confidence in the knowledge they possess, thereby reducing their uncertainty or inability to act as political beings.

Moreover, the multi-level framework of the political storytelling system allows the PIE construct to be analyzed at multiple levels rather than its conventional usage as a global attitudinal measure. By exploring how political storytellers, political storytelling levels, and the political storytelling system contribute to differential political communication effects, PIE can be empirically tested as a process of national, regional, or local politics to provide a more holistic understanding of citizens’ political knowledge confidence. Although PIE has not been distinguished according to specific political

contexts or levels, CIT scholarship supports the proposition that communities or neighborhoods with robust community organizations, geo-ethnic media, and interpersonal discussion networks facilitate greater collective efficacy among neighborhood residents even as national political storytellers – “outsiders” – denigrate or ostracize their residential area through news media reporting or everyday talk (e.g., Ball-Rokeach, Kim, & Matei, 2001; Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006a, 2006b). Shah, McLeod, and Yoon (2001) also contend that “communities that are structurally integrated likely provide frequent opportunities for political discussion and civic deliberation about publicly debated issues and condition certain patterns of media use among their residents” (p. 471), presumably allowing for differences in PIE among individual communities as well as between PIE for local politics compared to PIE for national politics. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H6: Citizens’ national level political information efficacy (PIE) will be positively associated with more frequent use of national political storytellers.

H7: Citizens’ regional level political information efficacy (PIE) will be positively associated with more frequent use of regional political storytellers.

H8: Citizens’ local level political information efficacy (PIE) will be positively associated with more frequent use of local political storytellers.

H9: Citizens’ overall political information efficacy (PIE) will be higher for citizens using more political storytellers overall compared to citizens using fewer political storytellers.

**Political Cynicism.** Political cynicism refers to one’s lack of confidence in, or feelings of distrust toward government officials, political candidates, and the political process in general (see Capella & Jamieson, 1997; Citrin, 1974; De Vreese & Smetko, 2002; Erber

& Lau, 1990; Miller, 1974). Niemi, Craig, and Mattei (1991) have suggested that cynicism is oppositional to political efficacy, and De Vreese (2008) notes that cynicism is often inversely related to measures of trust in different social, economic, and political agents.

Political communication scholars have examined whether political information sources act as antecedents to citizens' cynical attitudes (see De Vreese, 2008; Delli Carpini, 2004; Pinkleton & Austin, 2001). One of the more prevalent lines of research in this vein is the "video" or "media malaise" thesis (Bennett, Rhine, Flickinger, & Bennett 1999; Robinson, 1975, 1976), which suggests that exposure to political media in general and television in particular facilitates greater cynical attitudes among consumers. Delli Carpini (2004), in summarizing the existing literature exploring political cynicism, articulates several reasons for traction of the media malaise thesis. These include:

the increasingly negative and cynical coverage of politics in the news (Capella & Jamieson, 1997; Fallows, 1996; Kerbel, 1995; Patterson, 1993; Robinson, 1975; Sabato, 1993), to the negative portrayal of government and politics that dominates the entertainment media (Lichter, Lichter, & Amudson, 1999; Lichter, Lichter, & Rothman, 1994), to the debilitating effects of television on political discourse and social connectedness (Hart, 1994; Postman, 1985; Putnam, 1995, 2000). (p. 400)

In particular, Bennett et al.'s (1999) test of the media malaise thesis, which utilized data from the 1996 National Election Studies, found that exposure to entertainment television, national network news, local television news, and newspaper reading did not significantly correlate with citizens' trust in government. Instead, the authors found a positive relationship between media trust and political trust, suggesting that:

support for institutions in general has changed. It may indicate the emergence of the media as another power broker and thereby an institutional power in the eyes of the public. Such a judgment by members of the public may lead them to view the media through the same lens that they view the government. (Bennett et al., 1999, p. 17)

That shifting levels of media trust and political trust correspond, yet occur independently of citizens' general media consumption patterns, provides a conceptual opening for testing the political storytelling system and the storytelling levels provided by the current study. The lack of a *general* impact of media use on political cynicism, though noteworthy, does not preclude the effects of individual storytelling levels on these negative attitudes.

In fact, some research has demonstrated that despite not having consistent evidence for a generalized effect of political media exposure on political trust, exposure to politics through mediated and interpersonal sources nevertheless can affect cynical attitudes. Notably, Capella and Jamieson's (1997) test of their "spiral of cynicism" thesis found that the tone of political coverage matters. Specifically, using experimental designs they found that news coverage which utilizes a strategic frame (e.g., news stories which focus on politicians' motivations and efforts to sway public opinion rather than descriptions of policy) contributed to greater cynical attitudes and contributed to participants' greater learning of strategy-based information compared to issue-based knowledge. De Vreese (2005; see also De Vreese & Smetko, 2002) later tested the "spiral of cynicism" thesis from a cross-national perspective. She found that citizens' exposure to strategic news coverage of a national political issue increased their negative political

affect, even after controlling for one's initial level of cynicism at the beginning of a political campaign.

Scholarly concern with the effects of strategic- or game-oriented political discourse on cynical attitudes is abundant (e.g., Bennett, 1995; Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Entman, 1989; Fallows, 1996; Lichter & Noyes, 1996; Patterson, 1993; Sabato, 1993; Valentino, Beckmann, & Buhr, 2001). Patterson's (1994) summarization aptly describes the issue: "When journalists encounter new information during an election, they tend to interpret it within a schematic framework according to which candidates compete for advantage" (p. 57). Consequently, the increased utilization of strategy framing is not only important for understanding how media cover political news (e.g., Capella & Jamieson, 1997), but what effects strategic reporting have on citizens' cynical attitudes. Several analyses have posited a link between strategy framing of politics and the public's cynical attitudes. Luttbeg and Gant (1995), for instance, report that trust in the government to "do what is right" all or most of the time fell from 76% in 1964 to 29% in 1992 (p. 137). Putnam (2000) also found decreases in political and community participation, and increases in negative attitudes toward political officials and institutions spanning several decades.

Additionally, the nature of political cynicism as it relates to national and local news remains ambiguous. On the one hand, local newspapers and television stations, particularly in larger media markets, have increased their coverage of national and international news...Moreover, the increasingly tight budgets faced by local stations (Just, Levine, & Belt, 2001) have forced them to depend on national wire services for content. This has

allowed penetration of national news sources and values into local news outlets...  
(Carroll, 1992). (Gulati, Just, & Crigler, 2004, p. 245)

Thus, local storytellers might be more apt to incorporate the values or characteristics associated with national storytellers with respect to how they discuss politics and thus contribute to greater political cynicism. Yet, on the other hand,

...this has made the gap between horse race coverage and substantive discussion more pronounced on the local level. When local media do cover the issues and candidate qualities, their stories tend to be more positive and less cynical than the ones written and broadcast by their national counterparts (Just et al., 1996)  
(Gulati, Just, & Crigler, 2004, p. 245).

In other words, the relationship between political storytelling level and political cynicism remains unclear.

Delli Carpini (2004) draws attention to the lack of empirical scholarship that explores the differential effects of media modality, tone of coverage, and content of the political narrative on cynicism. The author's summation of political trust and cynicism research cites only three studies (Davis & Owen, 1998; Johnson & Kaye, 1998; Pinkleton & Austin, 1998) where scholars specifically addressed how media modalities such as talk radio, television news magazines, print newspaper, and the Internet affected political trust. De Vreese (2008) also notes that "our understanding of political cynicism in communication and politics is work in progress" (p. 3694). Little is also known about whether exposure to national, state, or local level storytellers induces differential effects on cynical attitudes. Research on the media malaise thesis has been directed towards

general media consumption, potentially overlooking the effects that political storytelling level has on citizens' cynical attitudes towards politics.

Moreover, there are also likely to be differences in cynical attitudes based on the political context to which one is referring. Jennings (1998), for instance, contends that scholars have not done enough to distinguish local and national forms of political trust – and, by extension, cynicism – in terms of understanding whether and how each might operate independently from one another based on one's information environment. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

H10: Citizens' level of national political cynicism will be positively associated with more frequent use of national political storytellers.

H11: Citizens' level of regional political cynicism will be positively associated with more frequent use of regional political storytellers.

H12: Citizens' level of local political cynicism will be positively associated with more frequent use of local political storytellers.

H13: Citizens' level of overall political cynicism will be higher among citizens who use more political storytellers compared to those who use fewer political storytellers.

**Political Attachment.** In general, the political storytelling system framework intends to demonstrate how multiple storytellers influence citizens' political cognitions and attitudes. To that end, political information not serves as a way to affect how citizens understand political reality but also how they perceive themselves as part of this political reality. In other words, one's political storytelling system should help create a sense of attachment, belonging or identification in regards to those contexts which form their

sense of political reality. Because the political storytelling system is conceived of being national, regional, and local in orientation, we can also assess whether political storytellers influences one's perceived attachment to their local community, their state or region, and the nation.

In the main, political attachment implicitly connotes the elements of sameness and difference among individuals. Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), for instance, argues that individuals construct and ascribe meaning to those characteristics, or traits, that demarcate "in-groups" from "out-groups" through the process of self-categorization. Self-categorization is a psychological process by which an individual must derive a sense of attachment to one's "in-group" and/or sense of dissociation from "out-groups." Because individuals possess multiple potential social identities that might overlap or embody varying characteristics, a person's self-concept and perceived connection to an in-group must be periodically reaffirmed through some types of association with the characteristics or behaviors embodied by the in-group. Bloom (1990), although not specifically referencing social identity theory, similarly argues that psychological attachment and identification are necessary for internalizing the myths, symbols, and discourses associated with the construction of a community. Although the present study does not specifically drawn upon social identity theory (i.e., the current study does not examine "in-groups" versus "out-groups"), the general notion of sameness and difference is appropriate to the political storytelling system framework. It is suggested here that as citizens attune to more political storytellers at national, regional, or local level, their sense of attachment to their "imagined community" will be stronger as

citizens maintain more connections and have greater discursive resources that connect them to their community, state/region, and nation.

With respect to political communication scholarship in the American context, the concept of attachment is frequently described in terms of identity and juxtaposed against our country's ethnic diversity and sense of uniqueness among culturally heterogeneous groups in urban locales or regional areas. Citrin, Wong, and Duff (2001) note that "as an immigrant nation, the United States has always faced the problem of coping with ethnic diversity; the motto *e pluribus unum* expresses the desire for a strong sense of common American identity without indicating the proper balance between the national "one" and the ethnic "many" (p. 4). Although the present study does not address the issue of multiculturalism, the specter of *e pluribus unum* and degree of commonality that Americans may hold to their local community, their state or regional area, and to the nation entails a similar one-many dialectic.

According to Hutcheson, Domke, Billeaudreaux, and Garland (2004), national identity is a "constructed *and* public national self-image based on membership in a political community as well as history, myths, symbols, language, and cultural norms commonly held by members of a nation" (emphasis original, p. 28). Some scholarship suggests that national identity and attachment entail a process of demonstrating otherness by creating a sense of inclusion around 'us' and exclusion around 'them' (see Schlesinger, 1991). Nevertheless, both descriptions mesh well with Anderson's (1983) notion of "imagined community" where national identity and national consciousness are constructed and maintained through communicative resources and shared discourses.

Understanding the content or meaning of national attachment, however, has proved more vexing. Huddy and Khatib (2007) provide an apt summarization and clarification of such problems in developing their measure of “national attachment” as distinguished from other constructs such as “symbolic patriotism,” “constructive patriotism,” “uncritical (e.g., blind) patriotism,” and “nationalism.” Noting that conceptualizations and operationalizations of national identity frequently evoke an ideological bias that is more aligned with patriotism (i.e., a sense of national pride), the authors established the validity of a non-partisan measure of national identity (i.e., sense of national attachment) to help clarify conceptual and measuring issues. Although their study examined national identity in relation to demographic (e.g., first- or second-generation American, age, gender, education, etc.) and attitudinal determinants (e.g., political ideology), the present study adopts her non-partisan measure of national identity as a way to examine whether political storytellers influence the sense of attachment individuals ascribe to the political contexts in which they are members.

Other research has examined citizens’ attachment to the local community. Kim and Ball-Rokeach (2006b), in fact, utilized communication infrastructure theory to examine how residents from various neighborhoods in the Los Angeles metropolitan area perceived their sense of belonging to their residential context and the residents’ patterns of interpersonal communication with their neighbors. Important for the present study and the general conceptualization of identity, the authors demonstrated that ethnic heterogeneity did not influence neighborhood belonging; instead, citizens’ sense of belonging and attachment to their neighborhood and community was strongly associated

with residents' connectedness to storytelling networks and the communicative resources within each locale.

Combining Huddy and Khatib's (2007) conceptualization of identity as one's sense of attachment (rather than sense of pride) with a multi-level framework of identity suggested by Kim and Ball-Rokeach (2006b), the current study posits the following hypotheses with respect to citizen identity:

H14: Strength of citizens' national political identity will be positively associated with more frequent use national political storytellers.

H15: Strength of citizens' regional political identity will be positively associated with more frequent use of regional political storytellers.

H16: Strength of citizens' local political identity will be positively associated with more frequent use of local political storytellers.

H17: Strength of citizens' overall political identity will be higher among citizens who use more political storytellers compared to those utilizing fewer storytellers.

This section discussed the theoretical assumptions implicit to the political storytelling system analytic framework. Explicating Habermas' lifeworld-system dialectic, the political storytelling system consists of three storytelling levels: national, regional, and local. Each of these storytelling levels corresponds with other communication scholarship – most notably Friedland's (2001) communicatively-integrated community, and Ball-Rokeach and colleagues' (Ball-Rokeach, Kim, & Matei, 2001; Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006a, 2006b) communication infrastructure theory – that

explores the nature of communication within modern democratic societies. Because of the hierarchical structure of America's political jurisdictions, the regulatory environment in which American media companies operate, and the "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1983) that may be constructed across time and space, it is argued here that the political storytelling system and the storytelling levels that comprise one's storytelling system affect citizens' factual political knowledge, the cognitive structuring of such knowledge, their confidence in the information they possess, and their cynical attitudes towards government.

Accordingly, the next section describes the procedures employed in this analysis that empirically assess how audiences perceive the storytelling levels and the effects that the storytelling levels have upon certain democratic outcomes. Utilizing a community-based survey design, citizens will be evaluated on the extent to which they perceive each storytelling level when they are exposed to political information. The next chapter describes the study's sample, procedures, measures, and data analysis techniques for examining the relationship among the political storytelling system, individual storytelling levels, and the political outcomes detailed above.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

This chapter explains the current study's design, sample, procedures, and means of analysis utilized to answer the research question and hypotheses stated in chapter two. This chapter describes the study participants and the demographic characteristics of the community from which they were drawn, provides a justification of the study's survey design, and articulates the procedures by which the data were obtained. An explication of the measuring instruments and the data analysis techniques concludes the chapter.

### **Participants**

To evaluate the relationship among use of political storytelling levels and political and civic engagement outcomes, 288 Columbia, MO community residents were sampled. Participants were considered to be a community resident if they were at least 18 years of age, resided within the city limits of the Columbia area, and were a resident for at least 1 year in duration. For this study, a community member sample provided several benefits. First, community members better represent the adult population compared to college students. Second, the nature of one's political storytelling system and the process by which sources may "speak" to national, regional, and local concerns required a sample that could adequately recognize themselves as political beings. As McLeod, Scheufele, and Moy (1999) explain, "although political participation can be aimed at both national and regional or local political processes, the actual act of participation will always take place in the community (i.e., at the local level)" (p. 316). Third, communication infrastructure theory scholarship as well as other research examining multi-level political communication effects has noted that context-specific characteristics are important

considerations. These characteristics include length of residence in one's community or state, income levels, sense of neighborhood attachment and perceived belonging, and other factors. Thus, the current study sought participants who were embedded within a community context.

Columbia is the fifth-largest city in the state of Missouri, it serves as the county seat of Boone County, and has a population just under 110,000 people (US Census Bureau, 2010). A sizable percentage of the city's residents work in higher education, health care, and the insurance industry. Columbia's position as the county seat and its proximity to Jefferson City, the capital of Missouri, also means government substantially contributes to the local economy. Slightly over half of Columbia's residents (52%) hold a bachelor's degree or higher (US Census Bureau, 2010). Other demographic features of Columbia include a median household income of approximately \$42,000; racial/ethnic composition of 77% White, 11% Black, 5% Asian, and 3% Hispanic; and slightly more females than males (52%) (US Census Bureau, 2010).

The study sample does reflect many of the demographic features of Columbia, although some caveats regarding the community-based sample are needed. For instance, participant's average age was 42.8 years, the average length of residency in Columbia was 16 years, and the mean family income before taxes is approximately \$50,000 which parallels the median household income in the United States (see Table 1). The sample did have a higher level of education relative to Columbia and the nation: approximately 81% of the participants reported having a bachelor's degree and/or graduate and professional school degree (see Table 2). The sample also contained an overrepresentation of White (92%) and female (71%) participants relative to Columbia's population (see Table 1).

Finally, participants were more left-of-center in their political ideology (see Table 2) and self-reported their affiliation with the Democratic Party (see Table 3), and exhibited relatively high levels of political awareness ( $M = 3.58$  on 1-5 low/high scale; see Table 3). Although the Columbia, MO area does exemplify many attributes of a “college town” with respect to residents’ higher than average levels of education, left-of-center politics, and high levels of political awareness, the community resident orientation provides a valuable context in which to assess the political storytelling system framework.

Statistical power analysis was conducted prior to recruitment and data collection using the G\*Power software program (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buckner, 2007). An initial sample size of 292 was derived using  $\alpha = .05$ , a power level of .95, 15 predictor variables, and an effect size of .10. Cohen (1988) recommends effect sizes of small ( $f^2 = .02$ ), medium ( $f^2 = .15$ ), and large ( $f^2 = .35$ ). For the current study, an effect size of .10 was selected to detect a small-to-medium effect size. Post-hoc power analysis was likewise conducted with a sample size of 288 valid responses,  $\alpha = .05$ , 18 predictor variables, and an effect size of .10. This resulted in a power level of .92. As reported in Frey, Botan, and Kreps (2000), “Cohen (1988) argues that a Type II beta of .20 is reasonable; therefore, Sirkin (1995) points out, statistical power should be .80 at a minimum” (p. 333). Therefore, the current study has sufficient statistical power to provide a reasonable chance of rejecting the null hypotheses.

### **Design and Procedures**

The focus of the study was to analyze the relationships among use of political storytelling levels and democratic outcomes including political cynicism, factual political knowledge, political knowledge structure density, political information efficacy, and

citizen identity. To assess these relationships, the current study utilized a survey design implemented via an online survey service. The survey design was chosen for two reasons. First, previously untested instruments were introduced in the current study as a means for examining political communication vis-à-vis the political storytelling level variables. As a matter of prudence, it was seen as a necessary first step to establish associations among storytelling levels and political outcomes rather than determine causal order or understand the psychological processes involved in this relationship. Second, citizens' information acquisition habits and their political attitudes reflect long-term developments related to, for instance, media access, socialization to politics, and political interest. As such, the effects of long-term political information acquisition from mediated, interpersonal and organizational sources on political and civic engagement, attitudes, and behaviors are best addressed using a survey design.

After receiving IRB approval, recruitment and data collection occurred from February-April 2012. Participants were recruited from the Columbia, MO area through community-based institutions, local non-profit associations, publicly available online listservs, online social networking sites, and word-of-mouth. Respondents were incentivized to participate through a sweepstakes award of a Kindle Fire electronic tablet device.

This study used the online survey service SurveyMonkey. Participants who were recruited to participate used a secure URL to access the survey. Participants were given informed consent and completed the survey anonymously. The presentation ordering of survey items was rotated to reduce potential order effects. It is commonly understood that when survey participants are presented with questions asking about their attitudes and

beliefs, changes in wording, form, and context of presentation can alter responses (e.g. Krosnick & Alwin, 1987; Schuman & Presser, 1981; Schwarz et al., 1991). At the completion of the survey, participants were presented with the opportunity to enroll for the sweepstakes award.

## **Measures**

The online questionnaire consisted of three groups of variables: (a) political storytelling levels, (b) democratic outcome variables, and (c) control variables. All measures are included in the Appendices.

**Political Storytelling Levels.** The political storytelling levels of national, regional, and local were assessed by asking respondents to identify the sources of political information they use to locate information relating to national, regional, and local political happenings. Conceptually, each storytelling level corresponds with a larger geographic space and sphere of proximity that citizens have between themselves and the object of political discussion. Demarcating these three levels operationally, though, entailed constructing three sets of political information sources according to national, state, and local politics. Although there may be differences in nomenclature and correspondence between, for instance, the regional storytelling level and the operational construction of state political happenings, the political storytellers identified with each domain attempted to provide “clear-cut” differences among levels.

For each source of political information, respondents were prompted to indicate how much they utilize each source, with possible responses ranging from “0” (*never*) to “5” (*a lot*). Political information sources were derived from an examination of available scholarship on social capital, media and politics, and political and civic engagement in

one's community; prior communication infrastructure theory scholarship was also consulted and utilized in constructing the storytellers for each level (Ball-Rokeach, Kim, & Matei, 2001; Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006a, 2006b). National storytelling was measured as a 19-item set of political information sources whose primary objective is to report on or disseminate national news stories, or to discuss stories of national-level interest. State storytelling was measured using 10 items where the sources of information concentrate on state- or regional-level political happenings; local storytelling utilized a 17-item scale whose focus is on local community politics. The design and intention of the storytelling level variables was not to create an exhaustive list of information sources for each level, but to identify the most popular sources from which citizens may attune to politics. As such, participants were also provided with an open-ended response of "other source of information" following each of the national, state, and local storytelling item series. Any responses labeled "other" were reviewed and were either (a) recoded into one of the existing item categories, or (b) removed from final analysis if the information source did not correspond to the storytelling level in question (i.e. listing a national program as a local news source).

Item wording and descriptive statistics for all political information sources at the national, regional, and local storytelling levels are listed in Tables 4, 5, and 6. Because the first research question addresses the factor structure of the political storytelling level variables, a detailed summary of the procedures, reliability coefficients, and factors are described in the following chapter.

**Factual Political Knowledge.** Factual political knowledge was assessed according to national politics, regional politics, and local politics. Participants were asked

several questions about politics; correct responses were given a value of “1” and incorrect responses were coded “0.” Participants’ factual political knowledge was scaled into an additive index (0-5 where “0” means no questions were answered correctly and “5” means all questions answered correctly) across each knowledge domain (national, regional, local) and into an aggregate political knowledge measure for all domains (0-15 where 0 means no questions were answered correctly and 15 means all 15 knowledge questions answered correctly). Higher scores represented greater factual knowledge. National political knowledge averaged 3.75 ( $SD = 1.41$ ), state knowledge averaged 3.59 ( $SD = 1.44$ ), local knowledge was 2.76 ( $SD = 1.53$ ), and overall factual political knowledge averaged 10.59 ( $SD = 3.63$ ). Table 7 contains item wording and descriptive statistics for each question.

The national political knowledge scale adapted Delli Carpini and Keeter’s (1996) five-item scale and asked participants about national-level politics. The questions allowed for open-ended responses and included current events-related questions (e.g., “What political office does Joe Biden currently hold?”; “Which political party currently has the most members in the U.S. House of Representatives?”, etc.). The regional political knowledge scale was also a five-item measure that adapts the design and approach taken by Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) who evaluated differences in citizens’ national political knowledge compared to their knowledge of state or regional politics as part of a broader analysis of political knowledge trends and patterns. State political knowledge items were specific to the proposed sample and referred only to Missouri state politics (e.g., “What political office does Peter Kinder currently hold?”; “Does the state of Missouri recognize same-sex marriage as a legal union?”, etc.). Finally, the local political

knowledge scale adapted items from Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996), Kang and Kwak (2003), and Shaker (2009). A five-item scale, the local political knowledge measure contained items specifically tailored to local political happenings in Columbia, MO (e.g., “What political office does Bob McDavid currently hold?”; “Does the city of Columbia recognize and allow its residents the right to officially register domestic partnership agreements?”, etc.). The overall knowledge measure combined each 5-item set from the national, state, and local domains.

**Structural Political Knowledge.** Structural political knowledge measures citizens’ ability to connect individual pieces of factual political knowledge into related, structured forms. Adapting the procedures of Eveland and colleagues’ (Eveland & Hively, 2009; Eveland, Marton, & Seo, 2004) political knowledge structure density (KSD) measure, participants were provided a series of concepts from national, state/regional, and local politics domains. Participants were then directed to indicate whether or not all pairs of the provided concepts were related to one another (“0” represents unrelated concepts), and if the concepts are related, to what extent (1 = Only Weakly Related, 5 = Very Closely Related). The concepts were (a) U.S. budget deficit, (b) U.S. health care system, (c) Missouri unemployment, (d) Missouri’s cigarette tax, (e) gas prices in Columbia, and (f) public school funding in Columbia. These concepts constitute a “proximity matrix” (Eveland & Hively, 2009; Eveland, Marton, & Seo, 2004), and include a combination of national, state, and local issues to better examine if connections among issues span various storytelling levels and political domains. Item wording and item pairs are enumerated in Table 8.

From each participant's "proximity matrix," tests of "network density" were applied. Conceptually, network density is "the degree of connectedness of [a network's] nodes" (Astleitner & Leutner, 1996, p. 292); operationally, network density demonstrates connections participants perceive among the concepts provided in the prompt. Following Eveland, Marton and Seo (2004), two operationalizations of KSD were calculated. The first was labeled "dichotomous density" (Eveland & Hively, 2009; Eveland, Marton, & Seo, 2004) and computed only a dichotomous "related" (any non-zero score coded as "1") versus "not related" (any zero score coded as "0") responses from participants' matrices. Drawn from Scott's (1990) work on social network analysis and following Eveland and colleagues' procedures, the formula for dichotomous density is calculated as

$$\frac{L}{n(n-1)/2}$$

where  $l$  is the number of lines (or links) in a network, and  $n$  is the number of nodes (e.g., concepts) in the network (Eveland, Marton, and Seo, 2004, p. 96). According to Eveland and colleagues, dichotomous KSD ( $M = .73$ ,  $SD = .27$ ) operationalizes the interconnectedness of political information in one's memory. The descriptive statistics for dichotomous KSD in this study parallel the descriptive statistics reported by Eveland and colleagues in their prior scholarship.

The second operationalization of KSD took into account the full range of values (scores between 0-5) on the strength of the relatedness of the concepts. This measure was labeled "valued density" by Eveland and colleagues and is called "value KSD" in this study. Borrowing from Scott (1990) and Wasserman and Faust (1994, p. 143), a "valued density" score is calculated for each participant's proximity matrix using the formula

$$\frac{\sum kv}{n(n-1)}$$

$$\frac{n(n-1)}{2}$$

where  $k$  is a given line (or link among nodes) in a network,  $v$  is the value (from 0 – 5) attached to the  $k$ th line, and  $n$  is the number of nodes in the network (6 for the current study). Unlike the dichotomous KSD measure which only takes into account connections among different topics or concepts, the valued KSD ( $M = 1.96$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ) measure takes into account the strength of connections one has made between topics/concepts. Similar to the dichotomous KSD measure, the valued KSD scale descriptive statistics for this study mirrors prior KSD-related scholarship. The dichotomous KSD and value KSD measures were also significantly correlated,  $r(285) = .78$ ,  $p < .01$ .

**Political Information Efficacy.** Political information efficacy (PIE; Kaid, McKinney, & Tedesco, 2007) was measured for the domains of national, regional, and local politics using four-item scales; an overall PIE measure combined each item from the national, state, and local sub-domains. Participants were asked to provide their level of agreement (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree) with four statements concerning the level of confidence they have in their own political knowledge (see Appendices for question wording). Responses for national, regional, local, and overall PIE were averaged to form a scaled measure with higher scores representing greater confidence in one's political knowledge. Mean National PIE was 3.53 ( $SD = 1.07$ ,  $\alpha = .90$ ), state PIE was 3.13 ( $SD = 1.12$ ,  $\alpha = .93$ ), local PIE was 3.10 ( $SD = 1.15$ ,  $\alpha = .94$ ), and overall PIE was 3.25 ( $SD = 1.03$ ,  $\alpha = .96$ ). Table 9 provides item wording and descriptive statistics for the scaled measures.

**Political Cynicism.** Individuals' cynicism towards politics was assessed using an adapted cynicism scale from the American National Election Studies (Rosenstone,

Kinder, Miller, & National Election Studies, 1997) and studies of communication and political behavior (Kaid, McKinney, & Tedesco, 2000; Rill, 2009). Political cynicism was assessed for national, regional, and local politics because it is plausible that citizens hold contrasting opinions about local officials who are perceived to be more accessible and approachable compared to national officials. Jennings (1998) suggests that local and national political trust – and hence cynicism – operate independently due to variations in one’s political information environment. An aggregate cynicism measure combining these three domains was also constructed.

Each of the cynicism scales constitutes an eight-item measure (1-5 disagree/agree scale) that assesses citizens’ levels of trust or confidence towards political officials and government (see Appendices for question wording). For each cynicism scale, responses were averaged with higher scores representing greater cynical attitudes. National cynicism averaged 3.74 ( $SD = .85$ ,  $\alpha = .94$ ), state cynicism averaged 3.32 ( $SD = .84$ ,  $\alpha = .95$ ), local cynicism averaged 2.73 ( $SD = .88$ ,  $\alpha = .95$ ), and overall cynicism was 3.26 ( $SD = .73$ ,  $\alpha = .96$ ). Table 10 reports descriptive for the scaled cynicism measures.

**Political Attachment.** Political attachment refers to one’s sense of belonging or attachment to a particular group, place, or object. In the context of the current study, political attachment was assessed according to how connected participants feel to their local community, the state/region in which they live, and the nation as a whole. This study also constructed an aggregate political attachment measure similar to the previously discussed outcomes. A four-item scale of attachment was adapted from Huddy and Khatib’s (2007) findings relating to national identity and patriotism scales. The authors demonstrated in their analysis that their national identity and belonging measure was

conceptually and empirically distinct from partisan- and ideologically-driven measures of identity that might be more appropriately considered as patriotic attitudes.

The current study adapted Huddy and Khatib's (2007) national identity measure to also include state/regional and local attachment. To measure political attachment for each level, a series of four items were scaled to compute participants' national, state, and local attachment measures (see Appendices for full question wording). Each item was measured along a 1-5 agree/disagree scale, with higher scores indicating greater attachment and belonging. National attachment averaged 3.89 ( $SD = .95$ ,  $\alpha = .87$ ), state attachment averaged 3.34 ( $SD = 1.10$ ,  $\alpha = .89$ ), local attachment averaged 3.70 ( $SD = .98$ ,  $\alpha = .91$ ), and overall attachment produced a mean score of 3.65 ( $SD = .82$ ,  $\alpha = .91$ ). Table 11 reports the descriptive statistics for each attachment scale.

**Control Variables.** This study incorporated a variety of control variables in accordance with contemporary research on political communication at the national, state/regional, and local levels (e.g., Ball-Rokeach, Kim, & Matei, 2001; Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006a, 2006b; Kang & Kwak, 2003; Moy et al., 2004). These included sex (female coded high), age (in years), race (White, Black, Asian, Hispanic, and Other), level of education, household income, and length of residence in the community (in years). Participants were also asked about their partisan ideological leanings (1 = Strong Liberal, 5 = Strong Conservative), political party affiliation (1 = Strong Democrat, 3 = Independent, 5 = Strong Republican), and a 4-item scaled measure of political awareness (1-5 rarely/a lot scale;  $\alpha = .84$ ,  $M = 3.58$ ,  $SD = .91$ ) adapted from McKinney (2008). Each of the control variables are further detailed in Tables 1-3.

## **Data Analysis**

To answer the research questions stated in chapter two, two data analysis methods were utilized: confirmatory factor analysis and hierarchical regression. CFAs were performed on the political storytelling variables to reduce the number of items and dimensions for national, regional, and local political storytelling levels. As discussed in the following chapter, exploratory factor analyses were also conducted to specify a more parsimonious relationship among information sources to the storytelling level. Hierarchical regression tests were conducted for each of the democratic outcome variables (political cynicism, political information efficacy, factual political knowledge, structural political knowledge, and citizen identity) at their specific levels (national, state/regional, local). For each regression analysis involving a level-specific criterion, control variables were entered into the first block, storytelling variables that were not concomitant with the level of the criterion variable were entered in the second block, and the storytelling variables that were concomitant to the level of the criterion variable were included in the third block. So, the criterion variable of “national factual political knowledge” was tested with controls entered in the first block, state and local storytellers entered in the second block, and national storytellers entered in the third block. This provides the most direct test of whether the level of storytelling is associated with certain cognitive and attitudinal dimensions of citizens’ political communication. Criterion variables that were not level specific (e.g., overall knowledge or overall cynicism, KSD, etc.) were tested with hierarchical regression that involved controls being entered in the first block and the storytellers entered in the second block.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

This chapter includes descriptive statistics as well as descriptions of the analytical procedures conducted for each research question and hypothesis in order to address the study's overarching goal: to understand how sources of political information occurring at various levels of "political storytelling" are associated with normative democratic outcomes. This project examines the relationship among use of political storytelling agents and normative democratic outcomes through a community survey, and explores the underlying constructs of national, state, and local political storytelling. This chapter presents the results of the research question and hypotheses outlined in chapter two.

### ***RQ1: Political Storytelling Levels***

The first research question sought to understand the factor structure of the posited political storytelling level variables. To answer this question, each political storytelling level variable was tested using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to determine whether the proposed measures were valid assessments of national, state, and local political storytelling. CFA was conducted using AMOS 19. Results indicated that the CFA tests for each of the proposed political storytelling levels fit the observed data poorly. Conclusions about CFA model fit were based on the recommendations of Holbert and Stephenson (2002, 2008) who recommend model fit be demonstrated by: (a) a non-significant chi square ( $\chi^2$ ) accompanied by degrees of freedom, sample size, and  $p$  value; (b) the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) statistic and a 90% confidence interval of RMSEA as an absolute index of model fit indicator (RMSEA values of .05 or less suggest good fit, .08 or less suggest marginal fit, and value .09 and up are of poor or

unacceptable fit); and (c) the comparative fit index (CFI) statistic to demonstrate an incremental index of model fit assessment (values of .90 or above are desired).

The CFA test for national storytelling included the 19 proposed information sources related to national politics predicting national storytelling level. Indicated visually by Figure 1 and detailed by Table 12, the initial model fit for national storytelling was poor:  $\chi^2 (152, N = 288) = 830.30, p < .01$ ; CFI = .62; RMSEA = .13 (90% CI: .12 - .13). Following the initial CFA, the model was re-specified by examining modification indices and adding covariance paths among items. However, even after re-specifying the model (see Figure 2 and Table 12), model fit remained poor:  $\chi^2 (140, N = 288) = 456.49, p < .01$ ; CFI = .82; RMSEA = .09 (90% CI: .08 - .10).

The state storytelling level variable was assessed in the same manner as national storytelling. An initial CFA test of the 10 state-level political information sources (see Figure 3 and Table 13) yielded poor model fit:  $\chi^2 (35, N = 288) = 204.47$ ; CFI = .80; RMSEA = .13 (90% CI: .11 - .14). Re-specification did improve model fit (see Figure 4 and Table 13), but only marginally:  $\chi^2 (30, N = 288) = 104.68$ , CFI = .91; RMSEA = .09 (90% CI: .07 - .11).

CFA for the 17 local storytelling items also revealed unacceptable fit for the initial ( $\chi^2 [119, N = 288] = 722.30, p < .01$ ; CFI = .61; RMSEA = .13 [90% CI: .12- .14]) and respecified models ( $\chi^2 [109, N = 288] = 348.15, p < .01$ ; CFI = .85; RMSEA = .09 [90% CI: .08- .10]). Figures 5 and 6 provide a visual depiction of the initial and respecified models, and Table 14 provides the coefficients for the initial and respecified local storytelling models.

Because CFA provided poor model fit for each political storytelling level, exploratory factor analysis (EFAs) was run to ascertain data-based insight into the structure of each political storytelling level. EFA tests were conducted using principal axis factoring (PAF), and were run using SPSS 19. PAF was chosen because, unlike the principal component analysis (PCA) technique which is meant to reduce the number of variables to the lowest number possible, PAF “explicitly focuses on the common variance among...items, and therefore, focuses on the latent factor” (Henson & Roberts, 2006, p. 398). Each EFA test utilized oblique promax rotation which allows the factors to be related to each other. In conducting the EFA, the following criteria guided the analysis and determination of final factor structure: (a) all factor loadings less than .30 were suppressed; (b) items which loaded onto a single factor were retained if they were .40 or higher; (c) items which cross-loaded on more than one factor were retained if their values were .50 or higher; any cross-loaded items .50 or higher were retained on the highest loading factor.

An initial EFA test for national storytelling demonstrated that the communality – the sum of squares of common factor loadings for a variable (Child, 2006, p. 46) – exceeded 1.0. To adjust for this result, the single item that was most highly correlated with all other items, “national news TV talk shows,” was removed. A second EFA test was then run with the remaining 18 national storytelling sources. Based on the item inclusion criteria described previously, the items “political entertainment TV shows” and “print or electronic newsletters from national political organizations” were removed based on their low loading value across factors. This led to a third EFA test of 16 national storytelling items, which resulted in a 4-factor solution: (a) National Television, (b)

National Informative News, (c) National Online Social Capital (OSC), and (d) National Opinionated News. Each of the factors was labeled according to the items which loaded on to each factor. See Table 15 for full national political storytelling factor results. The National Television factor ( $\alpha = .78$ ) includes: “national broadcast TV news,” “cable TV news,” “national morning TV talk shows,” and “late night TV talk shows.” The National Informative News factor ( $\alpha = .69$ ) includes: “online edition of a national newspaper,” “online news sites of TV news outlets,” “national news magazines,” and “National Public Radio.” National OSC ( $\alpha = .75$ ) consists of: “people in my online social network,” “popular search engines for national politics,” “face to face conversations about national politics,” and “online conversations about national politics.” Finally, National Opinionated News ( $\alpha = .69$ ) includes: “national online news sites,” “national political talk radio programs,” and “national political blogs.” Factor loadings, eigenvalues, and variance statistics for national storytelling are described in Table 15. The four factors accounted for 59% of the variance for national political storytelling.

The EFA test for the 10 state storytelling items followed the same procedures and guidelines as the national storytelling items. All of the items were retained, and EFA results indicated a three-factor state storytelling solution: (a) State Online Social Capital (OSC), (b) State Organizations, and (c) State Print. State OSC ( $\alpha = .74$ ) included four items: “popular search engines for state political information,” “people in one’s online social network for state politics,” “face to face conversations with others about state politics,” and “online conversations with others about state politics.” The State Organizations factor ( $\alpha = .78$ ) included: “updates from a state political party,” “updates from a state political organization,” “updates from a state non-profit organization,” and

“state political blogs.” State Print ( $\alpha = .51, r(288) = .34, p < .01$ ) consisted of only two items: “print edition of a regional or state newspaper,” and “online edition of a regional or state newspaper. Table 16 provides a full summary of the factor item loadings and other descriptive information for state storytelling; these factors accounted for 63% of the variance for state political storytelling.

For local political storytelling, the initial EFA indicated the need to remove the “online edition of a local newspaper,” “local university newspaper,” “popular search engine for local politics,” “local radio programming,” and “attend local church or religious services” items because they cross-loaded among factors and did not load at or above .50. This left 12 items for the final EFA test for local storytelling, which resulted in a four-factor solution: (a) Local Social Capital, (b) Local Television, (c) Local print, and (d) Local Interpersonal. Local Social Capital ( $\alpha = .84$ ) entailed five items: “attend meetings about a local political issue or advocacy group,” “attend neighborhood or homeowners association meetings,” “attend volunteer or non-profit organization meetings,” “attend local government meetings and forums,” and “local blogs.” Local Television ( $\alpha = .71, r(288) = .55, p < .01$ ) consisted of only two items: “local television broadcast news,” and “online news from a local TV affiliate.” Local Print ( $\alpha = .62, r(288) = .46, p < .01$ ) was also two items: “print edition of a local paper,” and “a local newspaper devoted to arts and entertainment.” Local Interpersonal ( $\alpha = .66$ ) consisted of three items: “people in one’s online social network discussing local politics,” “face to face conversations about local politics,” and “online conversations about local politics.” These four factors accounted for 69% of the variance for local storytelling, and the factor loadings and results are enumerated in Table 17.

**Reliability and Final Factor Structure.** From the EFA tests, issues of factor reliability emerged. Of particular concern were the State Print, Local Print, and Local Interpersonal factors which all had reliability coefficients below .70. Because the formula for computing Cronbach's alpha takes into account the number of items present in an index in addition to the amount of variance within those items, factors with fewer items will more often have lower reliability coefficients.

Therefore, after examining the reliability coefficients and the number of items constituting each factor, the State Print and Local Print factors were ultimately dropped while the Local Interpersonal factor was retained. For State Print, the low reliability coefficient (.52) and two-item scale were too problematic to retain. Additionally, the reliability coefficient of Local Print was .62 and included only two items and so was not retained. Although Local Interpersonal only had a reliability of .66, the coefficient was close to .70 reliability standard and constituted a three-item scale, meaning this factor is identified and has an adequate number of items to operationalize the concept (see Russell, 2002). Although the current study does generally utilize .70 reliability coefficient as a guideline for adequate reliability, it does not serve as a rigid "cut-off" threshold for present purposes. Therefore the Local Interpersonal factor was ultimately retained. Finally, despite the fact Local Television contains just two items and is therefore underidentified as a factor, its reliability coefficient (.71) did meet the conventional .70 Cronbach alpha threshold to warrant its inclusion for statistical analysis. The two items comprising Local Television also maintain face validity to warrant inclusion.

In sum, CFA tests of the proposed national, state, and local storytelling levels did not confirm that each level was a single measurement factor. Instead, EFA tests revealed

that each storytelling level encapsulates multi-modal communicative factors. Although participants were not tested on an exhaustive list of political information sources, the combination of mediated, organizational, and interpersonal influences which emerged from the data demonstrate that a nuanced approach is necessary to understand how political storytellers affect citizens' democratic engagement. Thus, the nine factors which emerged from the political storytelling levels – National Television, National Informative News, National OSC, National Opinionated News, State OSC, State Organizations, Local Social Capital, Local Television, and Local Interpersonal – will be utilized in the regression analyses that follow

### **Correlations**

**Political Storytelling Factors and Multi-Level Dependent Variables.** Each of the nine political storytelling factors was significantly correlated with one another (see Table 18). In a multi-modal political communication environment, the ability for citizens' to acquire political information from numerous sources among and within storytelling levels is well supported by the data.

Additionally, results showed that the political attachment, political cynicism, factual political knowledge, and political information efficacy variables were correlated across their respective national, state, and local levels (see Table 19). This suggests the potential for underlying cognitive or attitudinal component(s) that assist citizens' understanding of political information in a way that transcends storytelling level. Alternatively, the similar phraseology and formatting of the national, state, and local items for each series of variables could indicate homogeneity in content or operationalization. This issue will be taken up in further detail in the Discussion chapter.

While each of the storytelling factors – as well as those dependent variables measured at their respective national, state, and local levels – demonstrated strong correlations, more nuanced relationships did emerge.

**Political Attachment.** In general, those who exhibited greater overall political attachment held less overall cynical attitudes although not to a statistically significant extent; this was also the general pattern for the national and state dimensions of attachment and cynicism. Local attachment and local cynicism, though, were negatively related as those with less cynicism about local politics were more attached to their local community,  $r(278) = -.19, p < .01$ . Greater levels of local attachment were also correlated with greater state PIE,  $r(277) = .18, p < .01$ , and greater local PIE,  $r(278) = .25, p < .01$ . Interestingly, though, it was found that state attachment was negatively related to national PIE,  $r(274) = -.15, p = .014$ . Overall attachment and overall PIE, however, were not significantly correlated.

Greater overall attachment was positively related to overall factual political knowledge although this relationship only approached significance,  $r(286) = .11, p = .066$ . Local attachment, however, was positively related to state factual political knowledge,  $r(285) = .16, p < .01$ , and local factual political knowledge,  $r(285) = .233, p < .01$ . Local attachment was also negatively related to overall cynicism,  $r(281) = -.13, p = .028$ , positively related to overall PIE,  $r(281) = .18, p < .01$ , and positively associated with overall factual political knowledge,  $r(285) = .18, p < .01$ . Finally, local attachment,  $r(284) = .12, p = .037$ , state attachment,  $r(285) = .18, p < .01$ , and national attachment,  $r(285) = .14, p = .016$ , were positively correlated with valued KSD. State attachment also positively correlated with dichotomous KSD,  $r(286) = .14, p = .022$ .

**Political Cynicism.** It has already been noted that local attachment is correlated with local cynicism although overall attachment and overall cynicism are not. Similarly, although there is no statistically significant correlation between overall cynicism and overall PIE,  $r(281) = -.01, p = .81$ , local cynicism did negatively correlate with state PIE,  $r(274) = -.12, p = .041$ . Less cynical attitudes were also related with greater national factual political knowledge,  $r(278) = -.17, p < .01$ , and greater state factual political knowledge,  $r(278) = -.14, p = .019$ . Less cynicism further correlated with higher levels of overall attachment,  $r(278) = -.15, p < .014$ , and higher levels of overall factual political knowledge,  $r(278) = -.15, p = .012$ . Cynical attitudes were not significantly related to structural political knowledge, though.

**Political Information Efficacy.** It was reported above that there are significant correlations among state attachment and national PIE, and local attachment with state PIE and local PIE; the relationships between overall attachment-overall PIE and overall cynicism-overall PIE, however, were not significant. Turning to PIE's relationship to factual political knowledge, because political information efficacy measures how confident citizens are in the knowledge they possess, it is not surprising to see PIE for national, state, and local politics as being positively associated with factual knowledge across each of the national, state, and local politics levels. The nine PIE-factual knowledge pairs are all positively correlated at a significance level below .01. State PIE,  $r(277) = .13, p = .034$ , and local PIE,  $r(278) = .13, p = .037$ , were also positively associated with overall levels of political attachment. PIE was not related to KSD.

**Factual and Structural Political Knowledge.** Correlations for the factual political knowledge levels have mostly been described above. Greater state and local

knowledge levels are related to greater local community attachment; greater national and state knowledge is associated with less local cynicism; and national, state, and local knowledge levels are all positively correlated with national, state, and local PIE.

Additionally, state knowledge,  $r(286) = .14, p = .022$ , and local knowledge,  $r(286) = .14, p = .02$ , are positively associated with overall attachment; national, state, and local knowledge also relate to greater overall PIE and greater overall factual knowledge.

Interestingly, higher overall factual political knowledge was negatively although not significantly related to both forms of structured political knowledge. The only exception was national factual political knowledge which was negatively correlated with dichotomous KSD,  $r(286) = -.120, p = .043$ . The general lack of significant correlations among factual political knowledge and structural political knowledge variables suggests that these are two distinct components of political knowledge and that the FPK and KSD measures are tapping into different dimensions of a similar phenomenon.

### **Procedures for Hypothesis Testing**

Based on the previously reported factor structure for the political storytelling level variables, the 17 hypotheses enumerated in the second chapter were examined using the nine storytelling factors (National Television, National Informative News, National OSC, National Opinionated News, State OSC, State Organizations, Local Social Capital, Local Television, Local Interpersonal) rather than the three storytelling level variables (national, state/region, local) originally proposed.

Because the storytelling factors increased from three to nine across all storytelling levels, adjustments were necessary for interpreting the evidence and whether there were sufficient grounds for accepting or rejecting each research hypothesis. This resulted in

statistical tests that provided full support (all storytellers at a particular level were significantly related to the criterion variable at its concomitant level), partial support (at least one storyteller, but not all of the storytellers, at a specific level was significantly related to the criterion variable at the concomitant level), or no support (no storytellers at a particular storytelling level were associated with the criterion variable).

It is important to note that the present study is not focused on cross-level associations. A cross-level association refers to testing a variable belonging to a particular storytelling level (e.g. national political cynicism) and finding a significant association between storytelling factors not belonging to that same level (e.g. State Organizations, Local Television) and the criterion variable. The issue of cross-level associations taps into the core feature of the political storytelling system framework: the multidimensional and -- given the RQ1 results regarding the factor structure of the political storytellers -- multimodal use of political storytellers that influences citizens understanding of themselves as political beings and the political reality in which they live. These cross-level associations are not addressed in the research hypotheses and hence do not factor into whether a hypothesis is supported or rejected; however, cross-level associations are noted in the results for each regression model.

Each regression analysis includes model statistics to demonstrate how much influence the storytelling variables demonstrated. This included total variance, incremental variance from the storytelling block, and model significance. Because of the numerous correlations among storytelling factors as well as the dependent variables across their respective levels, multicollinearity was also assessed by examining and reporting the variance inflation factor (VIF) statistic for each regression model. VIF

scores are intended to show the degree to which a predictor variable's variance is inflated because it is highly correlated with other variables in a regression model. Although there is some debate about the "cut-off" threshold for detecting multicollinearity (see O'Brien, 2007), a scholarly consensus suggests that VIF values of 10 or higher connote excessive multicollinearity (e.g., Hair et al., 1995; Kennedy, 1992; Marquardt, 1970; Mason et al. 1989; Neter, 1989). For each regression model, VIF statistics are reported in their corresponding table; no variables were found to have VIF values over 10.

Several of the demographic items were recoded for analysis. Gender was re-coded as 0-1 (female = 1), race as "White" versus "non-White" on a 0-1 scale (White = 1), political ideology as 1-5 (strong conservative = 5), political party affiliation as 1-5 (strong Republican = 5), and education as 1-6 (graduate/professional school = 6). For all variables, non-responses were recoded as missing and were excluded from data analysis.

### ***HI: National Factual Political Knowledge***

The first hypothesis predicted that citizens' factual knowledge of national politics would be positively associated with more frequent use of national storytellers. Hierarchical regression found partial support for this hypothesis as use of National Informative News ( $\beta = .26, p < .01$ ) was associated with national factual political knowledge. Interestingly, Local Interpersonal ( $\beta = -.31, p < .01$ ) was also significantly related to national factual political knowledge although the relationship was negative. Political awareness ( $\beta = .23, p < .01$ ) was the only significant sociodemographic characteristic; participant's race/ethnicity ( $\beta = .10, p = .07$ ) and income ( $\beta = .10, p = .09$ ) both approached significance. The overall regression model ( $F = 7.78, p < .01$ ) was significant, and the final block of national storytellers (incremental  $R^2 = .05, p < .01$ ) was

also significant even after accounting for the controls as well as state and local political storytellers. The entire model accounted for 36% of the variance. Table 20 provides a breakdown of the predictor variables, standardized and unstandardized coefficients, and model summaries.

### ***H2: State/Regional Factual Political Knowledge***

The second hypothesis posited that factual knowledge of state politics would be positively associated with more frequent use of state storytellers. The data partially support this hypothesis as greater utilization of State OSC ( $\beta = .33, p < .01$ ) predicted state factual political knowledge. National OSC ( $\beta = -.23, p < .05$ ) was also a significant predictor, but the negative beta indicates that greater use of these national storytellers is associated with less state knowledge. Local Television ( $\beta = .19, p < .01$ ) also predicted state factual political knowledge and demonstrated a positive association.

Sociodemographic factors were similarly associated with state political knowledge.

Political awareness ( $\beta = .20, p < .01$ ) and participant age ( $\beta = .21, p < .01$ ) were positively associated with state knowledge, and party affiliation ( $\beta = -.15, p = .059$ ) and length of residency ( $\beta = .12, p = .06$ ) each approached significance. Although demographics ( $R^2 = .30$ ) accounted for the bulk of model variance (total  $R^2 = .39, F = 8.82, p < .01$ ), the second block of national and local political storytellers ( $R^2 = .07, p < .01$ ) and the third block of state storytellers ( $R^2 = .02, p < .05$ ) each significantly contributed to overall model variance. Table 21 enumerates the state factual political knowledge model.

### ***H3: Local Factual Political Knowledge***

Hypothesis 3 predicted that factual knowledge of local politics would be positively associated with use of local storytellers. Like the national and state factual political knowledge hypotheses reported above, this hypothesis was also partially supported because Local Social Capital ( $\beta = .27, p < .01$ ) was positively associated with local factual political knowledge. Significant sociodemographic predictors of local factual political knowledge included age ( $\beta = .22, p < .01$ ) and length of residency ( $\beta = .13, p < .05$ ). The regression model accounted for 38% of the variance (total  $R^2 = .38, F = 8.32, p < .01$ ); the national and state storytelling block explained 5% (incremental  $R^2 = .05, p < .01$ ), and the final local storytellers block contributed another 5% (incremental  $R^2 = .05, p < .01$ ). See Table 22 for a detailed summary of the regression analysis for local factual political knowledge.

#### **H4: Overall Factual Political Knowledge**

The fourth hypothesis was that citizens' overall factual political knowledge would be positively associated with greater use of all political storytellers. The data, presented in Table 23, partially support this hypothesis and show that overall factual political knowledge was associated with use of storytelling factors at the national, state, and local levels. National Informative News ( $\beta = .18, p < .05$ ), State OSC ( $\beta = .30, p < .01$ ), and Local Social Capital ( $\beta = .20, p < .01$ ) each were positively associated with overall factual political knowledge while National Opinionated News ( $\beta = .12, p = .08$ ) approached significance. Sociodemographic factors were also relevant as age ( $\beta = .19, p < .01$ ), income ( $\beta = .10, p < .05$ ), length of residency ( $\beta = .12, p < .05$ ), and political awareness ( $\beta = .22, p < .01$ ) demonstrated significance. Demographics accounted for 37% of the variance and the political storytellers contributed 11% (incremental  $R^2 = .11$ ,

$p < .01$ ) for a total variance of 48% being accounted for in the overall factual political knowledge model (total  $R^2 = .48$ ,  $F = 12.34$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

#### **H5: Structural Political Knowledge**

The fifth hypothesis was that structural political knowledge would be positively associated with the use of all political storytellers. Testing this hypothesis involved two hierarchical regressions: one for the dichotomous “connected-or-not-connected” KSD measure, and the other for the valued “strength-of-connectedness” KSD measure. Results from each regression test provide partial support for the hypothesized relationship.

Dichotomous KSD was analyzed using hierarchical logistic regression with controls entered in the first block of variables and the political storytellers entered in the second block. Taken together, both blocks significantly predict dichotomous KSD,  $\chi^2 (18, N = 264) = 34.92$ ,  $p < .01$ . Only 14% of those who did not mentally relate the topics together were predicted correctly by the model and 98% of those who did form such mental connections were predicted correctly, for an overall success rate of 82%. As indicated in Table 24, significant Betas and odds ratios indicate that dichotomous KSD is increased with greater educational attainment; more frequent use of National Television, National Opinionated News, and State Online Social Capital; and less use of National Informative News.

Valued KSD was tested using standard hierarchical regression analysis. As seen in Table 25, State OSC ( $\beta = .33$ ,  $p < .05$ ) was a positive predictor of valued KSD while National OSC ( $\beta = -.29$ ,  $p < .05$ ) was a negative predictor. Ideology ( $\beta = .29$ ,  $p < .01$ ) was a significant predictor of valued KSD. The storytelling block of variables (incremental  $R^2 = .06$ ,  $p = .05$ ) did significantly contribute to the overall valued KSD model (total  $R^2 =$

.13,  $F = 2.10$ ,  $p < .01$ ); however, the total variance accounted for in the model was low at just 13%.

### **H6: National Political Information Efficacy**

The sixth hypothesis posited that national political information efficacy would be positively associated with use of national political storytellers. This hypothesis was partially supported as National Informative News ( $\beta = .22$ ,  $p < .01$ ) predicted national PIE. National PIE was also associated with political awareness ( $\beta = .51$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and level of education approached significance ( $\beta = .09$ ,  $p = .055$ ). The control variables accounted for 53% ( $R^2 = .53$ ), state and local storytellers were 1% (incremental  $R^2 = .01$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and the national storytellers for the remaining 4% (incremental  $R^2 = .04$ ,  $p < .01$ ) of the total model variance. Table 26 summarizes the results for the national PIE regression model.

### **H7: State/Regional Political Information Efficacy**

The seventh hypothesis predicted state/regional PIE would be associated with use of state storytellers. Detailed in Table 27, this hypothesis received partial support. State PIE was positively associated with use of State OSC ( $\beta = .22$ ,  $p < .05$ ). National Informative News ( $\beta = .21$ ,  $p < .01$ ), Local Social Capital ( $\beta = .14$ ,  $p < .05$ ). National OSC ( $\beta = -.27$ ,  $p < .01$ ) also predicted state PIE but in the opposite direction. State PIE was also affected by sociodemographic factors of gender ( $\beta = -.10$ ,  $p < .05$ ), education ( $\beta = .10$ ,  $p < .05$ ), length of residency ( $\beta = .12$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and political awareness ( $\beta = .33$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The state PIE regression model accounted for 56% of the variance (total  $R^2 = .56$ ,  $F = 17.17$ ,  $p < .01$ ), with the national and local storytellers (incremental  $R^2 = .10$ ,  $p < .01$ )

and state storytellers ( $R^2 = .01, p < .05$ ) contributing 10% and 1%, respectively, both of which were significant. Table 27 provides further summary of state PIE results.

### **H8: Local Political Information Efficacy**

The eighth hypothesis posited that citizens' political information efficacy toward local politics would be positively associated with the use of local storytellers. Based on results detailed in Table 28, this hypothesis also received partial support. Local PIE was associated with use of Local Social Capital ( $\beta = .34, p < .01$ ) and Local Interpersonal ( $\beta = .22, p < .01$ ). Greater utilization of National Informative News ( $\beta = .19, p < .01$ ) also positively predicted greater local PIE. National OSC ( $\beta = -.22, p < .05$ ) was a significant predictor of local PIE but exhibited a negative relationship, and National Television ( $\beta = -.10, p = .07$ ) also demonstrated a negative association to local PIE but only approached significance. Local PIE was associated with length of residency ( $\beta = .16, p < .01$ ) and political awareness ( $\beta = .27, p < .01$ ). Gender ( $\beta = -.09, p = .06$ ) and education ( $\beta = .09, p = .067$ ) each approached significance. Similar to national PIE and state PIE, the local PIE model accounted for more than half of the variance at 58% (total  $R^2 = .58, F = 18.36, p < .01$ ). The third block of local political storytellers (incremental  $R^2 = .11, p < .01$ ) significantly contributed to the model beyond the control block ( $R^2 = .41$ ) and the national and state storytellers block (incremental  $R^2 = .06, p < .01$ ).

### **H9: Overall Political Information Efficacy**

The ninth hypothesis posited that greater use of all political storytellers would influence citizens' overall political information efficacy. This hypothesis received partial support as overall PIE was associated with National Informative News ( $\beta = .23, p < .01$ ), Local Social Capital ( $\beta = .16, p < .01$ ), and Local Interpersonal ( $\beta = .14, p < .05$ ).

National OSC ( $\beta = -.18, p < .05$ ) also predicted overall PIE but in the opposite direction. Gender ( $\beta = -.09, p < .05$ ), education ( $\beta = .10, p < .05$ ), length of residency ( $\beta = .12, p < .05$ ), and political awareness ( $\beta = .40, p < .01$ ) also predicted overall PIE. The regression model accounted for 63% of the variance (total  $R^2 = .63, F = 23.05, p < .01$ ), and the storytelling block made up 10% of the variance (incremental  $R^2 = .10, p < .01$ ). Table 29 provides a full list of the results for the overall PIE model.

### ***H10: National Political Cynicism***

The tenth hypothesis posited that national political cynicism would be positively associated with use of national storytellers. As detailed in Table 30, this hypothesis was rejected. None of the national storytelling factors predicted national cynicism, though use of State Organizations ( $\beta = -.29, p < .01$ ) and Local Social Capital ( $\beta = .18, p < .05$ ) were associated with national political cynicism. The only demographic characteristic that influenced cynicism about national politics was income ( $\beta = -.19, p < .01$ ). Despite having a significant overall model (total  $R^2 = .14, F = 2.09, p < .01$ ), the national political cynicism model explained only 14% of the variance. The national storytellers block contributed almost nothing to the model, although the state and local storytellers (incremental  $R^2 = .05, p < .05$ ) did contribute to the model beyond the controls block.

### ***H11: State/Regional Political Cynicism***

The eleventh hypothesis suggested that cynical attitudes towards state/regional politics would be associated with use of state storytellers. Similar to national cynicism, this hypothesis was rejected as use of Local Social Capital ( $\beta = .21, p < .05$ ) was the only storytelling source that predicted state cynicism. Use of State Organizations ( $\beta = -.16, p = .08$ ) did approach significance but its relationship was opposite than what was posited.

Cynicism towards state politics was also associated with income ( $\beta = -.16, p < .05$ ), and education ( $\beta = -.13, p = .07$ ) approached significance. The state cynicism model was significant (total  $R^2 = .11, F = 1.68, p < .05$ ) yet explained only 11% of the variance. As a block, the state storytellers (incremental  $R^2 = .02, p < .05$ ) did contribute above and beyond the controls and the second block of national and local storytellers; however, this is little consolation since none of the state storytellers individually were associated with cynicism toward state politics. Table 31 includes a detailed breakdown of the state political cynicism model and relevant statistics.

### ***H12: Local Political Cynicism***

The twelfth hypothesis was that cynical attitudes towards local politics would be positively associated with use of local storytellers, which was partially supported. The only storytelling factor associated with local cynicism was use of Local Social Capital ( $\beta = .17, p < .05$ ), although sociodemographic factors of race ( $\beta = -.20, p < .01$ ), political party affiliation ( $\beta = .20, p < .05$ ), and income ( $\beta = -.22, p < .01$ ) were also significant. Like national and state cynicism, the explanatory power of the local cynicism regression model was weak (see Table 32). Despite being a significant overall model ( $F = 2.52, p < .01$ ), it accounted for only 16% of the variance (total  $R^2 = .16$ ). Neither the second block of national and state storytellers, nor the third block of local storytellers, significantly contributed to the overall model variance explained.

### ***H13: Overall Political Cynicism***

The thirteenth hypothesis posited that greater use of all political storytellers would contribute to greater overall cynical attitudes toward politics. Results presented in Table 33 provide partial support for this relationship. Local Social Capital ( $\beta = .22, p < .01$ )

demonstrated a positive association with overall cynicism, while use of State Organization ( $\beta = -.19, p < .05$ ) exhibited a negative association. The overall political cynicism regression model accounted for only 15% of the total variance (total  $R^2 = .15, F = 2.27, p < .01$ ), and the storytelling block did not contribute above and beyond demographics (incremental  $R^2 = .04, p = .25$ ). Demographic factors of race ( $\beta = -.15, p < .05$ ) and income ( $\beta = -.23, p < .01$ ) were associated with overall cynicism, while education ( $\beta = -.13, p = .059$ ) approached significance.

#### **H14: National Political Attachment**

Hypothesis 14 suggested that citizens' sense of attachment, belonging, or identity to the nation would be positively associated with more frequent use of national storytellers. Given the results presented in Table 34, this hypothesis received partial support as use of National Television ( $\beta = .23, p < .01$ ) was associated with national political attachment. Conversely, use of National OSC was a significant and negative ( $\beta = -.34, p < .01$ ) predictor of national political attachment. Sociodemographic factors of race ( $\beta = .21, p < .01$ ), age ( $\beta = .14, p < .05$ ), and political ideology ( $\beta = .42, p < .01$ ) predicted national attachment, and gender ( $\beta = .11, p = .06$ ) approached significance. The demographic block accounted for 29% of the variance, the state and local political storytellers an additional 2% which was not significant (incremental  $R^2 = .02, p = .31$ ), and the national storytellers with a significant 6% (incremental  $R^2 = .06, p < .01$ ) for a total variance of 37%; the overall model was significant ( $F = 7.84, p < .01$ ).

#### **H15: State/Regional Political Attachment**

The fifteenth hypothesis argued that state or regional political attachment would be positively associated with more frequent use of state/regional storytellers. This

hypothesis was partially supported as use of State OSC ( $\beta = .36, p < .01$ ) was positively associated with state/regional political attachment. Use of National OSC demonstrated a negative association ( $\beta = -.38, p < .01$ ) to state attachment. Political ideology ( $\beta = .35, p < .01$ ) and length of residency ( $\beta = .17, p < .05$ ) predicted state attachment as sociodemographic factors. The third block of state storytellers (incremental  $R^2 = .03, p < .01$ ) contributed significantly to the model above and beyond the controls block ( $R^2 = .20$ ) and the second block of national and local storytellers (incremental  $R^2 = .03, p = .29$ ). The state attachment model (total  $R^2 = .25, F = 4.58, p < .01$ ) as a whole explained 25% of overall variance (see Table 35 for detailed statistics and information).

#### ***H16: Local Political Attachment***

The sixteenth hypothesis posited that local political attachment would be positively associated with use of local storytellers. Similar to state attachment, this hypothesis was partially supported based on the evidence provided in Table 36. Use of Local Interpersonal ( $\beta = .30, p < .01$ ) was positively associated with local political attachment, while National OSC ( $\beta = -.47, p < .01$ ) was negatively associated with local attachment. The sociodemographic factors of gender ( $\beta = .16, p < .05$ ), political party affiliation ( $\beta = -.18, p < .05$ ), education ( $\beta = .13, p < .05$ ), and income ( $\beta = .15, p < .05$ ) also predicted local attachment. The local attachment model (total  $R^2 = .22, F = 3.94, p < .01$ ) was significant and accounted for 22% of the variance; the national and state storytellers block (incremental  $R^2 = .05, p < .01$ ) as well as the local storytellers block (incremental  $R^2 = .05, p < .01$ ) were each significant and accounted for 5% of total variance apiece.

#### ***H17: Overall Political Attachment***

The seventeenth and final hypothesis was that citizens' overall political attachment would be positively associated with more frequent use of all political storytellers. Results in Table 37 indicate that this hypothesis received partial support in that use of National Television ( $\beta = .17, p < .05$ ) and State OSC ( $\beta = .30, p < .05$ ) were positively associated with overall attachment, while use of National OSC ( $\beta = -.49, p < .01$ ) demonstrated a negative association with overall attachment. Political ideology ( $\beta = .34, p < .01$ ) was a significant sociodemographic predictor, while gender ( $\beta = .12, p = .054$ ) and length of residency ( $\beta = .13, p = .072$ ) each approached significance. Demographics accounted for 18% of model variance and the storytellers accounted for 8% (incremental  $R^2 = .08, p < .01$ ), resulting in a total of 26% explained variance (total  $R^2 = .26, F = 4.89, p < .01$ ).

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to understand citizens' use of political information sources, how such use constitutes a political storytelling system, and how use of the political storytelling system relates to several normative democratic attitudes and outcomes. Augmenting Ball-Rokeach and colleagues' communication infrastructure theory, the political storytelling system framework was hypothesized as having multiple storytelling levels: national, regional/state, and local. The current study found several statistically significant findings, and the following discussion will focus on the patterns and relationships of those findings. This chapter examines the following topics: (a) the political storytelling system as a multilevel and multimodal analytic framework; (b) the nature of cross-level associations among use of political storytellers and outcomes; (c) the divergence in National OSC and State OSC; (d) the ubiquity of face-to-face communication; (e) factual political knowledge; (f) structural political knowledge; (g) political information efficacy; (h) political cynicism, and (i) political attachment. The chapter concludes by addressing limitations of the current study and noting future research that could further clarify the nature of the political storytelling system and its effects.

### **The Political Storytelling System: A Multi-Level, Multi-Modal Framework**

Results indicate that the national, regional/state, and local "political storytelling levels" are not uni-dimensional in nature. Multiple factors emerged for each storytelling level and spanned a variety of mediated, organizational, and interpersonal sources that represent one's "political storytelling system." This multi-level and multi-modal

framework makes sense despite the lack of scholarly attention given to the broader political information environment in which citizens live. After all, the 2007 United States Census of Governments reported that there were almost 90,000 governmental entities and jurisdictions in the United States; these span a variety of federal, state, county, municipal, and school districts in all of the states, territories and districts that comprise the United States (US Census of Governments, 2007). At any one time, the average citizen is a member or under the authority of multiple governments; the average citizen is also exposed to information regarding any number of political domains, and this information can come from a variety of mediated, organizational, and interpersonal channels.

Mediated sources of political information have long generated sustained interest among political communication researchers with respect to democratic attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Neuman, Just, & Crigler, 1996; McLeod, Kosicki, & McLeod, 2009; Shah, Rojas, & Cho, 2009). Despite questions of media bias, the digitalization of political media, and the fragmentation of media audiences, mediated sources remain prominent in shaping citizens' understanding of public affairs news. This was apparent from the current results as National Television, National Informative News, National Opinionated News, and Local Television factors emerged as significant factors of mediated political communication.

Interpersonal discussion networks are also important influences on citizens' attitudes and political behaviors. Whether it is one's peers, family members or relatives, or regular contacts such as with co-workers, political talk and dialogic exchange help citizens gauge how their knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors relate to the larger symbolic and public opinion environment (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995; Huckfeldt et al., 1998,

2000; Mutz & Mondak, 1998). Stemming from early studies of communication and voting (e.g., Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944; Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954), interpersonal discussion networks and citizen-to-citizen communication consistently demonstrate their importance for explaining a variety of democratic outcomes. This was affirmed by the current study in which the interpersonal communication factors of National OSC, State OSC, and Local Interpersonal emerged.

Finally, there are a variety of party, civic, and other secondary organizations that maintain important roles in contemporary democratic life. Political organizations at all storytelling levels serve as reference points for evaluating political candidates, public policy issues, and/or pending legislation (Miller, Wlezien, & Hildreth, 1991).

Organizational affiliation can also be linked to mobilization efforts via endorsements and fundraising, and facilitating personal contacts among citizens and political elites via organized forums or active campaigns. Although membership or affiliations to formal political organizations may be waning (Putnam, 2000), the sheer variety of groups that do exist means they should not be minimized. For instance, research has shown that citizens who are contacted by a political party during a campaign are more likely to contact government officials and participate in electoral politics than others (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993; Zuckerman & West, 1985). The factors of State Organization and Local Social Capital that were found here best correspond to the organizational storytellers that remain a key part of the political information environment.

The present analysis retained four national storytelling factors: National Television, National Informative News, National Online Social Capital, and National Opinionated News. The multiplicity of sources to which citizens attune and utilize for

understanding national politics – television, newspapers, magazines, websites, online and offline interpersonal discussion – have been noted by recent survey research efforts such as Pew’s *The Internet and Campaign 2010* (Smith, 2011) report, and are confirmed by the data collected here.

Given the voluminous scholarly literature documenting how television can affect social perceptions of politics and news events via agenda setting (e.g. McCombs & Shaw, 1972), framing and priming (e.g., Iyengar & Kinder, 1987/2010), the influence of the National Television factor is well established. The National Television factor includes broadcast and cable news shows, morning talk shows, and late night talk shows; in other words, these factors include some of the most visible and readily available sources of political coverage and commentary that can reach millions of Americans. Despite the plethora of political information outlets that have been created in the digital age or “post-broadcast” era (Prior, 2007), more Americans continue to rely on television as their main source of politics and campaign information (Smith, 2011), and the data of the current analysis bear this out.

The National Informative News factor, constituting “traditional” media outlets such as print newspapers and national news magazines as well as “new media” sources such as news websites, represents those storytellers that provide greater depth of analysis without relying on opinionated or personality-driven political news coverage. Although changes in the media landscape and media economics are a concern for the future of newspapers and other “traditional” sources of national politics, the present study affirms the beneficial role these sources continue to have for the public.

Perhaps the strongest national storytelling influence, though, was the National Online Social Capital factor (OSC). National OSC constituted interpersonal communication in online and offline environments about national politics, and seeking information about national politics via popular search engines. National OSC will be described in greater detail in the next section of this chapter.

A surprising finding was that the National Opinionated News factor – national storytellers that employ opinion-based coverage and/ or personality-driven news for talking about national politics – was not significantly associated with any of the outcome variables at the national, state, local, or overall levels. National Opinion News sources are much maligned for their overt partisan orientations, levels of incivility and vitriolic political discourse (e.g., Forgette & Morris, 2006; Mutz & Holbrook, 2003; Mutz & Reeves, 2005); results here, however, show that their influence is muted with respect to political knowledge and the political engagement variables examined in this study.

For state storytelling, two factors emerged: State Online Social Capital (OSC) and State Organization. State OSC comprised the same items as National OSC albeit at the level of state politics. The divergence between National and State OSC will be discussed in greater detail in the next section of this chapter, but results suggest that different types of political talk affect knowledge and democratic engagement differently. State Organizations included items relating to formal membership in state organizations such as political parties, advocacy or issue groups, and non-profit associations. State Organizations displayed minimal importance in the present study because they were only associated with national and overall cynicism. Because they did not significantly predict

any state-level outcomes, their influence could be more symptomatic of the declining influence of traditional formal organizational membership (e.g., Putnam, 2000).

Local storytelling comprised three factors: Local Social Capital, Local Television, and Local Interpersonal. Local Social Capital measured citizens' belonging and attendance at community-based functions such as neighborhood or homeowner's association meetings, volunteering in the community, attending local government meetings, and public forums. The importance of citizens' deliberating with each other through grassroots organizations and community groups is well established and is reaffirmed by the present study. Citizens seem to know more factual content, exhibit greater confidence in their own knowledge and aptitude to participate, and are less cynical about politics when they use more Local Social Capital storytelling sources.

Local Television demonstrated less influence as a local storyteller. This may be partly explained by the fact that only two items constituted Local Television. As an underidentified factor, Local Television is less robust as a statistical measure compared to factors with at least three items. However, the results may also suggest that use of Local Television is less important for local political storytelling than other sources. A typical local television news cast affords 22 minutes after accounting for commercials (Medoff & Kaye, 2010), and coverage of politics necessarily competes with non-political news stories such as sports, weather, and human interest pieces that are staples of local news. With the exception of state factual political knowledge, the data seem to confirm this.

Lastly, Local Interpersonal comprised interpersonal communication about local politics. Whether in town halls or across the proverbial picket fence, citizen-to-citizen communication about issues occurring in one's residential community are still relevant

for how citizens understand politics, and the results of the current study lend support to this notion.

Although State Print and Local Print were ultimately omitted for final analysis, this should not be constructed to mean that newspapers, in print or online formats, are not important or should be omitted from a political storytelling system framework. However, the data did not warrant their inclusion in the current study. Future research efforts must attempt to forge higher statistical validity and robustness for these two factors.

In sum, the political storytelling system framework articulated here comprises three levels – national, regional/state, and local – which correspond to Ball-Rokeach and colleagues' (Ball-Rokeach, Kim, & Matei, 2001; Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006a, 2006b) communication infrastructure theory and their multilevel storytelling concept in particular. To empirically examine the political storytelling system, though, required the various communicative modalities for each storytelling level be defined and independently tested to see what affect, if any, they might have on citizens' political attitudes and cognitions. Many political communication studies tend to focus on a select few mediated, organizational, or interpersonal sources. The present study, though, shows that political communication outcomes hinge on more than political media consumption, associational memberships, or political talk separately. Single-item measures for political information sources relating only to media effects, political organizations, or interpersonal discussion of politics are not sufficient given the results of this study

### **National Online Social Capital Versus State Online Social Capital**

Of the many associations examined in the present study, one result occurred with regular frequency: National OSC demonstrated a negative association with the criterion

variable while State OSC exhibited a positive association for the same outcome. These relationships occurred for the valued KSD, state factual political knowledge, state political information efficacy, overall political attachment, and state political attachment. Even for those regression models where these storytellers did not achieve statistical significance, National OSC was consistently negative in directionality to the criterion variables while State OSC was primarily positive in directionality.

One explanation for this finding may be that those who use more state-level storytellers are those who are more politically active and engaged in the first place. Drawing from Verba, Schlozman, and Brady's (1995) analytic constructs of "means," "motives," and "opportunities," McAtee and Wolak (2011) demonstrated that individuals were more likely to participate in state-level campaigns and political activities compared to the national or local level and that "the decision to participate in state politics is related to the proximal nature of subnational government and the social cues of the surrounding environment" (p. 50). Participants in the current study are generally older, more educated, and have resided in the community for a longer period of time, and the sociodemographic composition of the sample may be more suited for paying attention to and engaging in state-level politics. Thus, the state-level storytelling factors could be tapping into a more latent degree of motivation to attune to politics than regional or state-level politics.

This explanation is dubious, though, when compared to the data. First, the measure of political awareness utilized in the present study is not always significant when the National OSC and/or State OSC variables are significant. For instance, the state attachment regression model shows that National OSC is negative, State OSC is positive, and political awareness is not significantly associated to the criterion variable. Second,

political awareness was sometimes significantly associated with an outcome variable when National OSC and State OSC were not. National factual political knowledge is a case in point: political awareness was positively associated with this outcome, whereas the online social capital factors were not significantly related.

As a result, the findings of the current study suggest that paying attention to, discussing and deliberating about national- and state-level politics represent different storytelling levels, each of which has differential effects on citizens' normative democratic attitudes. Although the present study does not provide direct evidence concerning the nature, form, or tone of communication encapsulated by National OSC and State OSC, existing scholarship may help illuminate why these variables that are conceptually similar affect outcomes in divergent ways.

A comparative perspective regarding national- and state-level politics is useful. Hetherington and Nugent (2001) point out that whereas historically state governments have been viewed unfavorably by the public, the advent of the New Deal Era altered the role of state legislatures and governors to implement U.S. Congressional mandates and manage the federal subsidies necessary to achieve such mandates. The New Deal Era also coincided with the beginning of mass survey research efforts which could track public opinion. Based on studies cited by Hetherington and Nugent (2001), trust in the federal government reached its highest level in the 1960s, while trust in state government began a steady climb from the 1960s onward. Any number of factors could have contributed to this: the Watergate scandal; the increasing role of state governments to implement federal mandates such as Medicaid, educational requirements, and unemployment assistance; and

negative perceptions for how Congress conducts its business and funds federal programs compared to state legislative assemblies.

More recent polling data supports this trend as well. Pew Research Center for the People and the Press (2012) data reveal that Americans hold decidedly lower opinions about the federal government (33% favorable, 62% unfavorable) than they do about their state government (52% favorable, 42% unfavorable). State governments also received more positive ratings than the federal government on perceived honesty and corruption, addressing citizens' needs, perceptions of efficiency, perceived partisanship, and perceived fiscal responsibility (Pew Center for the People and the Press, 2012). Although citizens' trust in government may be correlated and fluctuate in tandem (see Uslander, 2001), evidence from the current study demonstrates that mediated, organizational, and interpersonal communication sources focusing on these different levels contribute to differential results and thus represent varying storytelling levels of political information.

So what accounts for the different directions of National OSC and State OSC? A possible explanation is the tone of national political discourse. Although the current study did not ask citizens to rate the negativity they perceived from using individual storytellers, empirical analyses have demonstrated that the discourse of contemporary political media contains much vitriol and rancor (Sobieraj & Berry, 2011), and that exposure to such sources and the uncivil discourse they promote elucidate emotional reactions, erode political trust, and decrease the perceived legitimacy of political officials (e.g. Forgette & Morris, 2006; Fridkin & Kenny, 2008; Mutz, 2007; Mutz and Reeves, 2005). This line of research generally focuses on national politics which has come to be defined by political pundits and partisan-oriented talking points, reporting stories related

to political matters via strategic discourse and potential electoral consequences, and the visibility that such messages have in contemporary political discourse. Although similar studies of state or regional political discourse are scarce, discourse about state politics among citizens may be less rancorous or driven by partisan politics. This could explain why engaging in state-level political communication seems to function in a normative or positive manner whereas national-level discourse does not.

The difference between National and State OSC may also be part and parcel of the storytelling framework itself. National politics presumably affect all citizens and maintain a high level of visibility among the numerous national storytelling agents. Local politics, in contrast, is the most immediate and hence “lifeworldly” political context for many citizens. This may result in greater mediated coverage from local news outlets or more neighbor-to-neighbor political talk. State politics, and therefore state storytelling, however, reflects a nexus or melting pot between the national and local storytelling levels. This “sandwiching” of state/regional storytelling was originally stated by Jennings and Zeigler (1970): “in a sense the states are caught between the immediacy of the local system and the glamour and importance of the national and international systems” (p. 524). However, this “sandwiching” means that talking about state politics forms something of a nexus where the Habermasian concepts of system and lifeworld actually operate. State OSC may offer citizens the best opportunity to comprehend how national political affairs “filter down” to a state; conversely, State OSC can serve as a forum for deliberating grassroots efforts and knowing how one another’s positions or attitudes congeal with broader political trends.

The National and State OSC measures included the same four items across their respective political storytelling level, and both measures contained acceptable levels of reliability. The online and offline nature by which citizens can seek out and converse about national and state politics means that political communication researchers should clearly differentiate these levels in their analyses. In other words, not all forms of talk or discussion are the same as the present study demonstrated here. Whereas the utilization of more National OSC seemed to contribute to deleterious effects on democratic outcomes, State OSC displayed the opposite trend.

### **The Importance of Face-to-Face Communication**

The results of the current study indicate that face-to-face communication remains a fundamental characteristic of political communication. This seems most evident by the fact that the face-to-face communication item loaded on to all eleven storytelling factors in the exploratory factor analyses; that is, face-to-face conversations for national, state, and local politics were above .40 for each factor within each storytelling level.

Whether is it labeled face-to-face political communication, political talk, interpersonal discussion of politics, deliberation, or something else, citizen-to-citizen talk has generated an impressive debate about the normative value that such discussion has within a democratic state. Philosophers and scholars such as Dewey (1927/1953), Tarde (1989), de Tocqueville (1823/2003), Habermas (1962/1989), Schudson (1997) and Putnam (2000) have thought about and articulated the manner in which citizen-to-citizen deliberation matters in American politics. Dewey (1927), in particular, argued that democracy begins and is sustained by interpersonal discussion whereby “in its richest sense, a community must always remain a matter of face-to-face intercourse” (p. 21).

Although empirical data cannot support the value claim Dewey promotes, the veracity by which face-to-face or interpersonal communication has within the political storytelling system framework and political communication research writ large remains apparent.

Empirical research on interpersonal discussion of politics, though, has been less voluminous. Early political communication research suggested that mass media serve as the original source of information while interpersonal exchange helps disseminate this information via a “two-step flow” of communication (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1948). Even after Chaffee and Mutz (1988) found that mass media and interpersonal communication are complementary rather than competing information modalities, it did not go unnoticed within the scholarly community that “research on the political impact of interpersonal communication has lacked the breadth and depth of work on the media” (Lenart, 1994, p. 63). Only recently have scholars begun to investigate the dynamics of political talk, the effects of interpersonal political discussion, and the consequences such activities have on citizens. To be sure, political discussion can lead to participation in a variety of political activities (Lenart, 1994; McLeod, Scheufele, & Moy, 1999; Wyatt, Katz, & Kim, 2000), increased political knowledge (Scheufele, 2000, 2002; Scheufele, Shanahan, & Kim, 2002), and community ties (Stamm, Emig, & Hesse, 1997).

The present study demonstrates that interpersonal discussion, whether through online or offline modalities, embodies a complementary source of political information relative to mass mediated and organizational storytellers. Storytelling factors related to interpersonal discussion of politics – National OSC, State OSC, Local Interpersonal – were significantly associated with citizens’ factual knowledge, structural knowledge, knowledge confidence, cynicism, and sense of belonging in many of the regression

models analyzed here. Although talk about national politics seemed to affect the outcome variables differently than talk about state politics, the interpersonal storytelling factors still constitute an important political information source that citizens turn to in order to make sense of national, state, and local political happenings.

Unfortunately, the current study did not take a more nuanced approach to the role of interpersonal political discussion within a storytelling system framework. For instance, Eveland and Hively (2009) note that measures of political discussion scholars should consider in conducting empirical scholarship are frequency of talk, size of one's discussion network, heterogeneity of discussants in one's discussion network, number or frequency of "dangerous" and "safe" discussions, and discussion diversity. Because the main focus of the present analysis was to establish interpersonal communication modalities as an element of the political storytelling system, these additional characteristics were not examined and hence cannot provide any additional insights about the data reported here. Furthermore, the design of the present study does not allow for a determination of causality and whether citizen-to-citizen talk influences democratic attitudes, or if one's attitudes make citizens more likely to talk about politics with others. Future research should build upon the storytelling system framework articulated here, and explore how differences in the kinds or types of interpersonal talk at different levels of political storytelling affect citizens' democratic attitudes. Nevertheless, findings here echo Chaffee and Mutz's (1988) conclusions about the complementary roles that mass mediated and interpersonal storytelling sources have on citizens' understanding of democratic life.

**Citizens' Political Knowledge: What They Know & What They Think They Know**

The current study augments a long history of scholarship investigating the communicative influences affecting what citizens know and what they think they know. In the current study, political knowledge was conceptualized as having objective and subjective dimensions; this led to the present analysis measuring political knowledge as factual content, mental or cognitive links among individual pieces of factual content, and perceived confidence in the content one already possesses. More than anything, the results show that citizens are not solely attuned to national politics, even if most of the research devoted to political knowledge excludes an examination of state and local political knowledge. Politics is not solely the purview of national mediated, organizational, or interpersonal sources; politics also entails a state/regional and local/municipal level focus, and with these areas the less visible yet no less important cadre of institutional actors, policy makers, advocacy groups, and constituencies that capture citizens' attention and serve as sources of political knowledge.

Factual political knowledge was assessed for national, state, and local politics in addition to an overall political knowledge index. Each of these knowledge dimensions were modeled on prior scholarship (e.g. Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1993, 1996; Shaker, 2009), and results demonstrated that scholars should measure citizens' use of political information sources across multiple storytelling levels to more accurately describe what citizens objectively know about politics. Structural political knowledge, or the mental connections individuals have among individual pieces of information, examined citizens' ability to associate national, state, and local political issues. Echoing Eveland, Marton, and Seo's (2004) critique of Delli Carpini and Keeter (1993, 1996), who claimed that political knowledge can be assessed and understood using a single measurement index,

the current study affirms that structural political knowledge is distinct from factual political knowledge and that storytelling factors from multiple storytelling levels influence structural political knowledge. Finally, political information efficacy (PIE) represents the confidence individuals have in the knowledge they do possess. Results provide clues about the impact that multiple political information sources have on citizens' PIE toward national, state and local politics as well as their aggregate PIE.

National Informative News was associated with overall factual political knowledge, national factual political knowledge, and all of the PIE dimensions examined in this study. These findings support previous research on political communication and citizen knowledge. Mass communication researchers have consistently found that citizens who pay attention to national public affairs media have higher levels of political knowledge (for reviews, see Delli Carpini, 2004; Sotirovic & McLeod, 2004). This includes citizens' reading and consumption of traditional print newspapers, online news sites (Dalrymple & Scheufele, 2007; Groshek & Dimitrova, 2011; Mossberger, Tolbert, & McNeal, 2008), hard and soft news magazines (Prior, 2003), and NPR (Dinges, 2000), which comprise the National Informative News factor in the present study. National Informative News sources also adhere to contemporary journalistic conventions of "partisan neutrality" (Patterson, 2005) and serve as a "surveillance" function for citizens to follow a number of political topics (Tewksbury, Hals, & Bibart, 2008). That use of National Informative storytellers affects state- and local-level PIE, though, suggests that this national-level storyteller may be a form of "information currency" that affects how confident citizens are about politics in general. In other words, National Informative News sources foster greater levels of exposure and retention of factual content, and instill

greater confidence in the political knowledge citizens possess even if such knowledge is factually incorrect.

Use of National Television was positively associated with the dichotomous measure of knowledge structure density employed in this study. This finding may stem from the fact that, despite the growth and increased presence of online websites, television remains Americans' main source of political information (Smith, 2011). Additionally, a long history of media effects scholarship has demonstrated the importance of television on viewers' cognitions and attitudes. Couched within the theoretical frameworks of agenda setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), priming (Iyengar, Peters, & Kinder, 1982), or framing (Entman, 1993; Iyengar, 1991), research has consistently demonstrated that television viewers can and do process new information in ways that can be integrated within existing mental templates. The associative nature of these processes (i.e. schemas, heuristics, cognitive cues, etc.) means that citizens can form mental links among seemingly disparate topics, and that such mental associations can even help citizens relate pieces of information or topics that span multiple political levels.

For certain dimensions of factual political knowledge and political information efficacy, in addition to the valued measure of knowledge structure density, National OSC was found to be negatively associated with the outcomes while State OSC was positively associated with these same variables. The divergence between National OSC and State OSC was discussed earlier in this chapter, but their relevance to political knowledge merits more attention. One possible explanation for this finding may be the sample drawn for this study. Participants in this study were recruited from Columbia, MO, a city whose residents display many attributes of a "typical college town" with respect to level of

education, political activism, and interest in public affairs. Columbia also sits a mere 30 miles from Jefferson City, the state capital of Missouri. Delli Carpini, Keeter and Kenamer (1994) note that

citizens living outside of state capitals, and especially those living in areas that border other states, are less informed about state politics than they would otherwise be. Despite the increasing importance of state politics, news coverage of state government and politics varies widely in amount and quality, and is generally less extensive and detailed than coverage of local and national government. (pp. 453)

As such, there may be greater opportunities for sample residents to engage in direct communication with state government officials, mobilize efforts related to state political campaigns, and to maintain social networks about state-level public affairs.

The nature of contemporary media economics might also provide Columbia residents with more coverage and attention to state politics from local media. Not only is Columbia proximate to Jefferson City and affords greater utilization of online and offline social capital resources, the state of Missouri is typically considered to be a “battleground state” during presidential elections for which Missouri residents receive more attention from candidates, political advocacy groups, and other national interests. The influence of State OSC may work as a counterweight to the otherwise “nationalizing forces” (McAtee & Wolak, 2011) such as professional political campaign techniques which are now commonplace within non-presidential races; the penetration of strategic or “horse race” political discourse across mediated, organizational, and interpersonal channels at all

levels of government and civil society; and the inherent nature of federalism and the subordination of state government to the federal government.

Regarding political information efficacy, the divergence between National OSC and State OSC may be indicative of citizens' overconfidence in the political knowledge they have compared to what they objectively know about politics. This could implicate the language and jargon of political discourse, especially for national politics. Political discourse is replete with military and sports metaphors that explain politics as a strategic game, and technical and bureaucratic terms that make it difficult for casual news observers to evaluate politics and its importance. Such language choices could be considered a "nationalizing force" (McAtee & Wolak, 2011) that separates national politics from state/regional- or local-level politics; that is, state/regional and local politics may be less a matter of ideological, partisan, or strategic discourse.

In sum, State Online Social Capital seems to provide citizens with more densely connected interactions among national, state, and local politics.

Local Television was positively associated with state factual political knowledge, a finding that makes sense given the close proximity of Columbia, MO, the site of the current study, to the state capital of Jefferson City and the hub of state governmental activity in Missouri. Local television affiliates are able to send reporters to cover state political affairs at a lower cost compared to other storytellers, and state issues can be readily inserted into the daily news cycle alongside local and national issues. As McLeod, Scheufele and Moy (1999) argue, "television provides local political information 'as it happens.' In other words, television has some impact on awareness of issues or problems and is primarily used for that purpose" (p. 329).

Local Social Capital was positively associated with various dimensions of factual knowledge and political information efficacy. That Local Social Capital links to local political knowledge and PIE affirms the importance of grassroots and community-level organizations (e.g. McLeod et al., 1996; Verba & Nie, 1972) and buttresses “classical” social capital literature (e.g., Coleman, 1990; Putnam, 1993, 2000). The influence of Local Social Capital on citizens’ confidence in politics shows the contributions that associational memberships have across multiple storytelling levels. Grassroots- and community-level organizations provide common venues for individuals to gather, deliberate, and ultimately take action regarding a variety of topics, issues, or areas of political concern. Individuals who participate in these activities also tend to be more politically interested and engaged, thereby contributing to a greater sense of confidence in the information and political knowledge they already possess.

The Local Interpersonal factor demonstrated positive associations with dimensions of PIE. Despite the dire warnings from scholars such as Putnam (2000) about the decline in civic membership and rates of participation in formal associations and organizations, informal networks and citizen-to-citizen political talk can nevertheless occur and instill a sense of surety in the knowledge, opinions, and attitude individuals hold. The effect of Local Interpersonal may reflect the homogeneity of citizens’ interpersonal discussion networks in which individuals converse with like-minded others and therefore become even more reassured that their interpretations on political matters are “correct” or at least won’t be rebuked or harshly critiqued (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 2005; Kwak et al., 2005). Alternatively, Local Interpersonal seems to embody characteristics of the “two-step flow” model of communication (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, &

Gaudet, 1944; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955) where otherwise politically ambiguous local residents converse with others, including those whom they consider to be opinion leaders” or others who are more politically active, in order to gain a better understanding of decisions, officials, and the processes involved in local politics.

Interestingly, though, Local Interpersonal was negatively associated with national political knowledge. This seems to contradict much of the existing research on interpersonal communication and political knowledge (e.g., Holbert, Benoit, Hansen, & Wen, 2002; Kwak et al., 2004; Moy & Gastil, 2006; Scheufele et al., 2004). However, because prior research has not considered the storytelling level at which interpersonal communication and political knowledge is related, the results of this study could suggest a “cognitive displacement” effect for citizens who follow public affairs news at multiple storytelling levels; that is, paying attention to and talking about local politics may tradeoff with one’s ability to follow and subsequently recall objective factual information about national politics. The finding also contrasts with the positive association found between Local Interpersonal and national PIE. As such, the current study demonstrates that not only are there conceptual and empirical differences between structural political knowledge and factual political knowledge, there are also differences between the “objective” political information citizens maintain and the “subjective” interpretations of this information. In other words, talking about politics may inhibit the acquisition or accumulation of knowledge (objective information) while at the same time it may instill greater confidence in the opinions and attitudes (subjective information) one has about politics.

From the results of the current study, we can begin to see the emergence of a political storytelling system for citizens' political knowledge that mirrors the multilevel storytelling concept explicated by Ball-Rokeach and colleagues (Ball-Rokeach, Kim, & Matei, 2001; Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006a, 2006b). As argued here, the political storytelling system comprises three levels – national, regional, and local – which parallel the macro, meso, and micro levels described by Ball-Rokeach and colleagues. It was theorized that these levels could be applied beyond the context of one's neighborhood and serve as a template for political communication generally. Although each level comprises multiple communicative modalities, the storytellers that did significantly predict political knowledge show the emergence of a political storytelling system that follows with macro-, meso-, and micro-level storytelling.

The national storytellers that predicted political knowledge were forms of mediated communication, whose immediacy and ability to disseminate information to large audience corresponds to a macro-level focus. Regional and local storytellers, in contrast, involved more organizational and interpersonal forms of communication where deliberation and dialogic exchange are more easily facilitated among smaller groups of people. The divergence between the storytelling levels for political knowledge, and how mediated communication is a national-level phenomena and interpersonal/organization is regional and local, is clearly evident in the results for National OSC and State OSC: talking with others about national politics seemed to inhibit political knowledge whereas talking with others about more proximate issues of one's state or municipality saw higher knowledge levels. Thus, the notion of a multilevel political storytelling system emerged as a viable framework for understanding citizens' political knowledge.

## **Attitudes of Political Engagement**

Use of political storytellers does not just affect what citizens objectively know or what they subjectively think they know about politics; use of political storytellers may also influence citizens' attitudes of political engagement. In the current study, two specific attitudes were examined: political cynicism and political attachment. Political cynicism refers to the level of trust one has in the institutions or individuals involved in the democratic process, and political attachment is the sense of belonging or identification one feels to a defined political space. Adopting the concept of multilevel storytelling community from Ball-Rokeach and colleagues, political cynicism and political attachment were measured and examined according to national, state/regional, and local/municipal dimensions. The results demonstrate that a variety of storytellers affect these specific political engagement attitudes.

National Television was positively associated with overall and national political attachment. This could reflect American citizens' continued reliance on television for acquiring political information (Smith, 2011). However, the results also suggest that National Television sources utilize a common discourse and series of images that connect political information with citizens' sense of "American-ness." Price (1995), in applying Anderson's (1983) "imagined community" concept within the television age, contends that

...what we think of as the content of television is, in fact, the very development of a new *kind* of language – read or interpreted in new *kinds* of imagined communities. Language here means not a series of words, but rather a vocabulary of images and a syntax of forms. There is the language of news presentation, or

the pattern of stories covered, or the inflections of the news presenters. (Price, 1995, pp. 53-54, emphases original)

To be sure, the current study took an interest in the “imagined communities” of the United States of America, the state of Missouri, and the city of Columbia. However, the forms, formats, genres, frames, images, and news reporting conventions in national television news are generally consistent from one national TV source to another. National Television storytellers may be encouraging television viewing citizens to identify with the common stories, images, and people that make up national stories.

Similar to the political knowledge variables described above, National OSC and State OSC diverged for state and overall political attachment whereby National OSC was associated with less political attachment and State OSC with greater attachment. National OSC also demonstrated a negative association to national and local political attachment. These results could mean that talking about national politics may involve political discourse that leads one to feel less connected to their country, state, and community of residence. If talking about politics is a matter of what political “side” one takes, arguing one’s position, or whether one side is most effective for “winning” a discussion or proving which perspective is best, then it may be harder for citizens to understand how they can be part of a common or broader imagined community.

Use of State Organizations was negatively associated with cynical attitudes about national politics and overall political cynicism. This finding conforms with normative theory about the positive role that formal organizational membership and participation within a group context provides to individuals (e.g. Coleman, 1990; Putnam, 2000). Organizations such as political parties, political advocacy organizations, and non-profit

groups facilitate citizens' understanding of the legislative process, establish and promote a particular agenda or series of goals, and promote collaboration among group members on basic tasks such as holding periodic meetings to more complex tasks of deliberating contentious proposals or carrying out a persuasive campaign.

The positive association of Local Interpersonal to local political attachment also conformed to theoretical expectations. As explained by Ball-Rokeach and colleagues' (Ball-Rokeach, Kim, & Matei, 2001; Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006a, 2006b) communication infrastructure theory (CIT), the connectedness that individuals have to one another in their "neighborhood storytelling network" not only predict neighborhood belonging but also feelings of political efficacy and civic engagement and participation activities. CIT scholarship has examined similar storytelling processes among Los Angeles, CA residents. Although the residential neighborhoods of Los Angeles, CA and Columbia, MO differ markedly with respect to socioeconomic status and racial/ethnic diversity, the findings for Local Interpersonal in the current study correspond to the important influence that micro-level storytellers have to creating and sustaining residents' sense of community. In the present study, it was found that communicative exchanges among residents create a greater sense of attachment and belonging to local politics and the community generally.

Finally, use of Local Social Capital was positively associated with state cynicism and local cynicism, suggesting that greater participation in localized or grassroots-level political groups is related to greater cynical attitudes to state and local politics. This contrasts with use of State Organizations that was associated with lowered cynicism. However, existing scholarship does make a valid argument for this finding. Specifically,

social capital and civic engagement researchers suggest that the decline of traditional, formal political organizations such as a state political party or state advocacy groups mean that “citizen group politics is almost by nature extremist politics, since people with strongly held views tend to be the leaders and activists,” potentially leading to “increase[d] cynicism about government’s ability to solve problems and decrease[d] confidence that civic engagement makes any difference” (Putnam, 2000, pp. 340-341).

Similar to political knowledge, the political engagement attitudes examined here also lend support to a political storytelling system that augments Ball-Rokeach and colleagues’ (Ball-Rokeach, Kim, & Matei, 2001; Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006a, 2006b) multilevel storytelling system concept beyond a neighborhood context. National Television, a form of mediated communication, was the only storyteller that was associated with cynicism and attachment in democratically “healthy” ways. In contrast, the regional/state and local storytelling levels consisted of interpersonal and organizational communication modalities which predicted these attitudes. Again, the divergence between National OSC and State OSC provides the clearest evidence that the storytelling level at which politics is communicated influences citizens’ democratic activities. Future research should continue to explore and explicate the unique relationships among storytelling agents and political outcomes.

### **Limitations**

The current study is not without limitations. The first concerns generalizability and whether the results here apply beyond Columbia, MO or the state of Missouri. However, the sample for this study consists of residents of a specific community because the political storytelling system framework requires a narrow geographic area for

determining the nature and functioning of national, state, and local political storytelling. In particular, measures and data identifying or relating to state and local storytelling levels are not readily available or conducive to large national datasets such as the National Election Study, General Social Survey, or major polling organizations such as Gallup. Lazarsfeld (1965), through his early work in political and mass communication, saw that survey-based research invariably requires a tradeoff between the generalizability provided by a national sample and the assessment of nuances or processes through the utilization of smaller, geographically bounded samples (see also Scheufele, Nisbet, & Ostman, 2005). The current study opted for nuance provided by a context-grounded political storytelling model.

A second limitation is whether the data collected and analyzed in the current study are applicable to the Columbia, MO area itself. The sample overrepresented Whites and females, and consisted of individuals who were more educated and more politically aware, and held left-of-center partisan leanings compared to data provided by the US Census Bureau about Columbia, MO as well as about the American population itself. Whether this is an inherent bias from sampling within a “typical college town” or a more serious design flaw is unknown, but it is clear that additional steps to attract and subsequently impel less affluent members of the community to participate are warranted to include more diverse perspectives.

A third limitation is the lack of information processing variables. The current study focused primarily on the political storytelling levels (and the factors which comprise these levels) and their effect on normative democratic opinions and attitudes. As noted in the previous chapter, though, the amount of variance accounted for by some

of the models was somewhat small. Moreover, prior research for each of the outcome variables has shown that factors such as “need for cognition” and “elaboration” are important mediating/moderating attributes for understanding political communication outcomes. Other concepts including trust of the media, perceptions of media bias, use of central versus peripheral processing for understanding political information, and other cognition and motivation-related measures were similarly not included in the present analysis. Therefore, future research should examine these potential moderators to determine whether differences in citizens’ cognitive dispositions influence the overall relationship between political storytellers and democratic outcomes.

Lastly, a fourth limitation was the measuring of the individual political storytellers themselves. Contemporary changes in technology and social exchange are evolving how citizens communicate with each other, communicate with or receive information from political elites, and communicate with or receive information from mass mediated channels. As such, the current study chose to focus on the most noteworthy or predominant sources of political information and not use an exhaustive list of survey items. It is possible that the final storytelling battery was too limiting in order to minimize concerns about respondent fatigue. Balancing the number of items against concerns with respondent fatigue, though, may have directly contributed to lower reliability coefficients for the storytelling factors and the inability to load at least three items on each storytelling factor. This could be a direct result of not including enough items in the survey, which future studies would have to address. In particular, the inability to include State Print and Local Print in the regression models probably means

that each of the regression models underestimates the importance of political storytelling for each outcome.

### **Future Directions**

Despite the aforementioned limitations, the current study raises a host of issues and offers some exciting opportunities for a more nuanced approach to the study of political communication. First, future research should examine how the political storytelling system framework operates across a variety of geographic, social, cultural, and mediated environments. Is the political storytelling system of Columbia, MO residents comparable to the political storytelling system of Fresno, CA or Ithaca, NY or the litany of other American cities? Or, are the idiosyncrasies and cultures of the various communities (and regions or states, for that matter) so large that efforts at establishing a macro-, meso-, and micro-level framework for understanding political communication effects simply are not practical. A comparative approach would be a good first step. Additionally, hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) procedures would provide even stronger explanations for the processes and contextual factors involved in national, state, and local storytelling. Efforts to include national, state/region, and local data within a large national survey that would be subsequently analyzed using HLM procedures constitutes the next phase for advancing this type of scholarship.

Second, future research should integrate the political storytelling factors within other theoretical and analytic frameworks. Among the more established and applicable frameworks are uses and gratifications, the theory of planned behavior, and the O-S-O-R model of political communication effects. The current study has established the communicative elements that comprise citizens' political storytelling system, but the

antecedent conditions and the behavioral consequences of political storytelling remain unresolved. By incorporating what we already know about citizens' political communication, we could gain a more holistic understanding of the political consequences of citizens' political information environment and the conditions affecting these outcomes.

Finally, future research should investigate the political storytelling system using a research design that facilitates causal claims. A longitudinal design would be particularly useful for providing evidence of causality as well as changes in citizens' political storytelling system and use of political storytellers over time. A longitudinal design could yield important insights regarding how citizens attune to politics during certain time periods such as a primary or general election campaign, or around key events such as a political scandal or crisis/emergency moment. Experimental designs could also prove fruitful for understanding the information processing that occurs while citizens use political storytellers for politically-motivated goals.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the data gathered for the present study. Results support a political storytelling system framework that parallels the multilevel storytelling system articulated in Ball-Rokeach and colleagues' communication infrastructure theory research (Ball-Rokeach, Kim, & Matei, 2001; Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006a, 2006b). Whereas CIT scholarship conceptualizes storytelling as a communicative process that occurs at the macro-, meso-, and micro-levels while focusing near-exclusive attention on micro-level storytelling, the present study argues that political storytelling may also be seen according to national, state or regional, and local level politics. Furthermore, each of

these levels merits empirical focus and explains a variety of political communication effects; that is, all levels of political storytelling should be analyzed concurrently rather than privileging one level of storytelling or failing to consider the multiplicity of information sources in citizens' everyday life.

Habermas' (1981/1989) theory of communicative action, and his preoccupation with the "lifeworld" and the "system," is largely abstract and philosophical in nature. In adopting a CIT framework and examining the numerous political information sources that are utilized at each of these levels, the present study provides empirical support that acknowledges the roles that both lifeworld and system influences have on citizens' understanding of and appreciation of American political life. Through this research project, it is hoped that future political communication scholarship will take more deliberate efforts to identify and assess how citizens use a variety of political information sources – political storytellers – and document how these sources affect citizens' cognitions, attitudes, and behaviors in more particularized ways.

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TABLES & FIGURES

*Table 1 – Descriptive Statistics for Sex, Race, Family Income, Age, & Length of Residency*

Variable	<i>N</i>	%	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Sex				
Male	83	29		
Female	201	71		
Race				
White	265	92		
Black	6	2		
Hispanic	7	2		
Asian	3	1		
Other	7	2		
Family Income			3.84	1.19
Less than \$10,000	5	2		
\$10,000-\$30,000	39	14		
\$30,000-\$50,000	63	22		
\$50,000-\$75,000	78	28		
\$75,000-\$150,000	81	29		
\$150,000+	15	5		
Age			42.80	13.67
Length of Residency			16.21	12.67

*Notes:* percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding.

*Table 2 – Descriptive Statistics for Highest Degree/Education and Partisan Ideology*

Variable	<i>N</i>	%	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Highest Degree/Education			5.13	.95
9-12 <sup>th</sup> grade, no diploma/equivalency	2	1		
12 grades, diploma /equivalency	7	2		
12 grades, diploma plus training or certification	3	1		
Some college; no degree; junior or community college	44	15		
BA/BS level degree	115	40		
Graduate/professional degree	117	41		
Partisan Ideology			2.72	1.15
Strong Liberal	45	16		
Liberal	85	30		
Moderate	84	29		
Conservative	52	18		
Strong Conservative	21	7		

*Note:* percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding.

*Table 3 – Descriptive Statistics for Political Party Affiliation & Political Awareness*

Variable	<i>N</i>	%	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Political Party Affiliation			2.66	1.25
Strong Democrat	60	21		
Lean Democrat	79	27		
Independent	72	25		
Lean Republican	58	20		
Strong Republican	14	5		
Other Party	5	2		
Political Awareness <sup>1</sup>			3.58	.91
Low	6	2		
Low-Medium	20	7		
Medium	97	34		
Medium-High	98	34		
High	67	23		

*Note:* percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding.

<sup>1</sup>Items for political awareness measure, measured along 1-5 low/high scales, are: (a) How interested would you say you are in politics?; (b) How often have you been exposed to media coverage of politics in the past week?; (c) How often have you talked with other people about politics in the past week; and (d) How informed to you think you are about politics?

Table 4 – Descriptive Statistics for National Political Storytelling Items (N=288)

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. Print edition of national newspaper	1.51	1.57
2. Online edition of national newspaper	2.50	1.84
3. National broadcast TV news	2.38	1.85
4. Cable national TV news	2.25	1.84
5. National TV news talk shows	1.26	1.52
6. National morning TV talk shows	1.61	1.81
7. Late night TV talk shows	1.12	1.33
8. Political entertainment TV shows	1.91	1.79
9. Online news sites of national/broadcast TV news	2.64	1.82
10. National online news sites	1.31	1.64
11. National news magazines	1.43	1.48
12. Print or electronic newsletters from national political org.	.92	1.37
13. National political talk radio programs	.78	1.33
14. People in online social network discussing national politics	2.08	1.79
15. National political blogs	1.55	1.70
16. Popular search engines for national politics	2.32	1.66
17. Face to face conversations about national politics	2.90	1.55
18. Online conversations about national politics	1.30	1.54
19. National Public Radio	2.10	1.93

*Table 5 – Descriptive Statistics for State Political Storytelling Items (N=288)*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. Print edition of regional/state newspaper	1.45	1.61
2. Online edition of regional/state newspaper	1.86	1.70
3. Popular search engines for state politics	2.31	1.70
4. Updates from state political party	.87	1.27
5. Updates from state political organization	.86	1.29
6. Updates from state non-profit organization	1.41	1.57
7. People in online social network discussing state politics	2.05	1.72
8. State political blogs	.55	1.09
9. Face to face conversations with others about state politics	2.86	1.57
10. Online conversations with others about state politics	1.27	1.54

Table 6 – Descriptive Statistics for Local Political Storytelling Items (N=288)

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. Print edition of local newspaper	2.33	1.89
2. Online edition of local newspaper	2.86	1.83
3. Local arts and entertainment newspaper	1.53	1.54
4. Local collegiate newspaper	1.06	1.20
5. Local broadcast TV news	3.08	1.78
6. Online news from local broadcast TV affiliate	2.56	1.72
7. Popular search engines for local politics	2.28	1.68
8. Local radio programming	2.52	1.83
9. Attend local issue/advocacy group meetings	.89	1.33
10. Attend religious services at local church	1.48	1.92
11. Attend neighborhood/homeowners association meetings	.92	1.39
12. Attend local volunteer/non-profit organization meetings	1.54	1.73
13. Attend local government meetings	.93	1.34
14. People in online social network discussing local politics	2.08	1.75
15. Local blogs	1.37	1.78
16. Face to face conversations about local politics	3.13	1.50
17. Online conversations about local politics	1.22	1.51

*Table 7 – Descriptive Statistics for National, State, Local, and Overall Factual Political Knowledge (FPK)*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
National Factual Political Knowledge	3.75	1.41
1. What political office does Joe Biden hold?	.91	.28
2. The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court is John Roberts. Is he generally considered to be a liberal, moderate, or conservative judge?	.66	.48
3. The national unemployment rate, as reported by the federal government, is closer to which rate: 5, 10, 15, or 20%	.74	.44
4. Which political party currently has the most members in the US Senate?	.54	.50
5. Which political party is typically more conservative than the other at the national level?	.89	.31
State Factual Political Knowledge	3.59	1.44
1. What political office does Peter Kinder currently hold?	.61	.49
2. Name one of Missouri’s two US Senators	.80	.40
3. Are members of the Missouri state legislature “term-limited,” meaning they can hold office for a certain amount of time?	.64	.48
4. Does the state of Missouri recognize same-sex marriage as a legal union?	.92	.28
5. The unemployment rate in the state of Missouri is closer to which rate: 5, 10, 15, or 20%?	.62	.49
Local Factual Political Knowledge	2.76	1.53
1. What political office does Bob McDavid currently hold?	.75	.43

2. The city council has suggested increasing the city lodging tax from 4% to 7%. What project or purpose would this increased revenue be used for?	.25	.44
3. Does the city of Columbia currently allow its police officers to carry and use Taser devices?	.81	.40
4. Does the city of Columbia recognize and allow its residents the right to officially register domestic partnership agreements?	.40	.49
5. The unemployment rate for the city of Columbia is closer to which rate: 5%, 10%, 15%, or 20%?	.55	.50
Overall Political Knowledge (composite measure of previous 15 knowledge items)	10.09	3.63

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*Table 8 – Descriptive Statistics for Structural Political Knowledge*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Knowledge Structure Density		
1. US budget deficit and MO unemployment	2.86	1.45
2. US budget deficit and US healthcare system	3.39	1.44
3. US budget deficit and COMO gas prices	2.10	1.66
4. US budget deficit and COMO public school funding	2.68	1.55
5. US budget deficit and MO cigarette tax	1.60	1.53
6. MO unemployment and US healthcare system	2.06	1.61
7. MO unemployment and COMO gas prices	1.64	1.55
8. MO unemployment and COMO public school funding	2.40	1.51
9. MO unemployment and MO cigarette tax	1.49	1.49
10. US healthcare system and COMO gas prices	1.10	1.47
11. US healthcare system and COMO public school funding	1.33	1.48
12. US healthcare system and MO cigarette tax	1.92	1.64
13. COMO gas prices and COMO public school funding	1.49	1.55
14. COMO gas prices and MO cigarette tax	1.28	1.48
15. COMO public school funding and MO cigarette tax	2.05	1.65
Dichotomous KSD (“related” versus “not related”)	.73	.27
Valued KSD (strength of relatedness)	1.96	1.09

*Table 9 – Descriptive Statistics for National, State, Local, and Overall Political Information Efficacy*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
National Political Information Efficacy (PIE)	3.53	1.07
1. I consider myself well qualified to participate in national politics.	3.34	1.32
2. I think that I am better informed about national politics and the federal government than most people	3.41	1.23
3. I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important national issues facing our country	3.79	1.04
4. If a friend asked me about the ongoing presidential primary, I feel I would have enough information to help my friend figure out who to vote for	3.56	1.25
State Political Information Efficacy (PIE)	3.13	1.12
1. I consider myself well qualified to participate in state politics.	3.11	1.28
2. I think that I am better informed about state politics and the state government than most people	3.05	1.21
3. I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important state issues facing our state.	3.31	1.14
4. If a friend asked me about issues affecting the state of Missouri, I feel I would have enough information to help my friend figure out the issue.	3.05	1.27
Local Political Information Efficacy (PIE)	3.10	1.15
1. I consider myself well qualified to participate in local politics.	3.16	1.28
2. I think that I am better informed about local politics and the city government than most people	3.02	1.26
3. I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of	3.28	1.27

the important local issues facing our city.

4. If a friend asked me about a local political campaign, I feel I would have enough information to help my friend figure out who to vote for	2.96	1.30
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Overall Political Information Efficacy (PIE)	3.25	1.03
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*Table 10 – Descriptive Statistics for National, State, Local, and Overall Political Cynicism*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
National Political Cynicism	3.74	.85
1. National politicians are more interested in power than in what the people think	3.98	.97
2. National politicians are corrupt	3.59	1.03
3. National politicians make promises that are never kept	3.89	.93
4. National politicians cannot be trusted	3.48	1.08
5. National politicians are too greedy	3.71	1.03
6. National politicians always tell the public what they want to hear instead of what they actually plan to do	3.96	.96
7. National politicians are dishonest	3.43	1.06
8. National politicians are more concerned about power than advocating for citizens	3.88	1.04
State Political Cynicism	3.32	.84
1. State politicians are more interested in power than in what the people think	3.54	.94
2. State politicians are corrupt	3.11	.98
3. State politicians make promises that are never kept	3.51	.90
4. State politicians cannot be trusted	3.10	1.06
5. State politicians are too greedy	3.20	1.04
6. State politicians always tell the public what they want to hear instead of what they actually plan to do	3.61	.93
7. State politicians are dishonest	3.06	.99

8. State politicians are more concerned about power than advocating for citizens	3.45	1.02
Local Political Cynicism	2.73	.88
1. Local politicians are more interested in power than in what the people think	2.90	1.05
2. Local politicians are corrupt	2.56	1.03
3. Local politicians make promises that are never kept	3.02	.97
4. Local politicians cannot be trusted	2.55	1.04
5. Local politicians are too greedy	2.55	1.05
6. Local politicians always tell the public what they want to hear instead of what they actually plan to do	3.03	1.05
7. Local politicians are dishonest	2.49	1.01
8. Local politicians are more concerned about power than advocating for citizens	2.78	1.07
Overall Cynicism	3.26	.73

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*Table 11 – Descriptive Statistics for National, State, Local, and Overall Political Attachment*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
National Political Attachment	3.89	.95
1. My sense of attachment to America is important to me	4.14	1.00
2. I see myself as being a typical American	3.57	1.24
3. Referring to myself as American describes me well	3.80	1.15
4. When talking about other Americans, I say “we” rather than “they.”	4.06	1.16
State Political Attachment	3.34	1.10
1. My sense of attachment to Missouri is important to me	3.65	1.14
2. I see myself as being a typical Missouri resident	3.02	1.32
3. Referring to myself as a Missourian describes me well	3.09	1.34
4. When talking about other residents of Missouri, I say “we” rather than “they.”	3.58	1.25
Local Political Attachment	3.70	.98
1. My sense of attachment to Columbia is important to me	3.85	1.05
2. I see myself as being a typical Columbia resident	3.55	1.09
3. Referring to myself as a Columbia resident describes me well	3.65	1.17
4. When talking about other residents of Columbia, I say “we” rather than “they.”	3.77	1.10
Overall Political Attachment	3.65	.82

*Table 12 – Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results for National Storytelling*

Variable	Initial Model		Respecified Model	
	$\beta$	B (S.E.)	$\beta$	B (S.E.)
1. Print edition of national newspaper	.37	.89 (.21)	.36	.80 (.18)
2. Online edition of national newspaper	.62	1.73 (.33)	.64	1.65 (.30)
3. National broadcast TV news	.48	1.34 (.28)	.48	1.22 (.24)
4. Cable national TV news	.55	1.53 (.31)	.49	1.28 (.25)
5. National TV news talk shows	.53	1.24 (.25)	.48	1.03 (.20)
6. National morning TV talk shows	.40	1.10 (.25)	.33	.85 (.21)
7. Late night TV talk shows	.38	.77 (.18)	.31	.58 (.15)
8. Political entertainment TV shows	.50	1.37 (.28)	.50	1.25 (.25)
9. Online sites of national/broadcast TV news	.60	1.67 (.32)	.60	1.54 (.28)
10. National online news sites	.59	1.48 (.29)	.60	1.38 (.25)
11. National news magazines	.55	1.25 (.25)	.58	1.21 (.22)
12. Print/electronic newsletters from nat. pol. org.	.45	.95 (.20)	.45	.87 (.18)
13. National political talk radio programs	.35	.72 (.17)	.32	.60 (.15)
14. People in online social network	.53	1.45 (.29)	.52	1.30 (.25)
15. National political blogs	.62	1.60 (.31)	.64	1.53 (.27)
16. Popular search engines for national politics	.62	1.57 (.30)	.63	1.49 (.27)
17. Face to face conversations	.66	1.56 (.30)	.65	1.43 (.25)
18. Online conversations about national politics	.52	1.21 (.25)	.47	1.02 (.20)
19. National Public Radio	.34	1.0	.37	1.0

*Table 13 – Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results for State Storytelling*

Variable	Initial Model		Respecified Model	
	$\beta$	B (S.E.)	$\beta$	B (S.E.)
1. Print edition of regional/state newspaper	.27	.47 (.11)	.23	.37 (.10)
2. Online edition of regional/state newspaper	.53	.91 (.12)	.46	.75 (.11)
3. Popular search engines for state politics	.58	1.0 (.12)	.58	.94 (.11)
4. Updates from state political party	.57	.74 (.09)	.51	.61 (.08)
5. Updates from state political organization	.67	.88 (.10)	.58	.71 (.09)
6. Updates from state non-profit organization	.68	1.08 (.12)	.65	.96 (.10)
7. People in online social network – state	.59	1.03 (.12)	.63	1.03 (.11)
8. State political blogs	.63	.70 (.08)	.61	.62 (.07)
9. Face to face conversations with others – state	.61	.97 (.11)	.63	.93 (.10)
10. Online conversations with others state – state	.64	1.0	.69	1.0

*Table 14 – Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results for Local Storytelling*

Variable	Initial Model		Respecified Model	
	$\beta$	B (S.E.)	$\beta$	B (S.E.)
1. Print edition of local newspaper	.32	.78 (.17)	.33	.78 (.16)
2. Online edition of local newspaper	.42	.99 (.17)	.42	.95 (.17)
3. Local arts and entertainment newspaper	.37	.73 (.14)	.33	.63 (.13)
4. Local collegiate newspaper	.28	.44 (.10)	.28	.42 (.10)
5. Local broadcast TV news	.25	.57 (.15)	.29	.63 (.15)
6. Online news from local TV affiliate	.28	.61 (.15)	.29	.59 (.14)
7. Popular search engines for local politics	.37	.79 (.15)	.37	.77 (.15)
8. Local radio programming	.44	1.04 (.17)	.45	1.02 (.17)
9. Attend local issue/advocacy group meetings	.78	1.34 (.16)	.71	1.17 (.14)
10. Attend religious services at local church	.32	.78 (.17)	.36	.86 (.17)
11. Attend neighborhood/homeowners meetings	.65	1.17 (.15)	.66	1.13 (.15)
12. Attend local volunteer/non-profit meetings	.67	1.51 (.19)	.68	1.46 (.18)
13. Attend local government meetings	.82	1.41 (.16)	.74	1.23 (.15)
14. People in online social network	.30	.69 (.15)	.29	.63 (.13)
15. Local blogs	.62	1.43 (.19)	.60	1.33 (.18)
16. Face to face conversations	.53	1.03 (.15)	.57	1.06 (.15)
17. Online conversations	.51	1.0	.53	1.0

*Table 15 –Exploratory Factor Analysis Loadings for National Storytelling*

Item	Factor			
	TV ( $\alpha = .78$ )	News Information ( $\alpha = .69$ )	Online Soc. Cap. ( $\alpha = .75$ )	News Opinion ( $\alpha = .69$ )
1. Print edition of national newspaper		<b>.46</b>		
2. Online edition of national newspaper		<b>.73</b>	.50	.48
3. National broadcast TV news	<b>.81</b>	.31		
4. Cable national TV news	<b>.64</b>	.36		.37
5. National morning TV talk shows	<b>.71</b>			
6. Late night TV talk shows	<b>.59</b>			
7. Online sites of TV news outlets	.48	<b>.53</b>	.42	.44
8. National online news sites		.61	.55	<b>.78</b>
9. National news magazines		<b>.61</b>	.37	.40
10. National political talk radio				<b>.51</b>
11. People in online social network		.38	<b>.79</b>	.37
12. National political blogs		.66	.63	<b>.70</b>
13. Popular search engines		.56	<b>.62</b>	.48
14. Face to face conversations	.42	.57	<b>.61</b>	.46
15. Online conversations		.40	<b>.61</b>	.46
16. National Public Radio		<b>.46</b>		
Eigenvalue	5.04	2.09	1.27	1.04
% Variance Explained	31.48	13.08	7.98	6.5

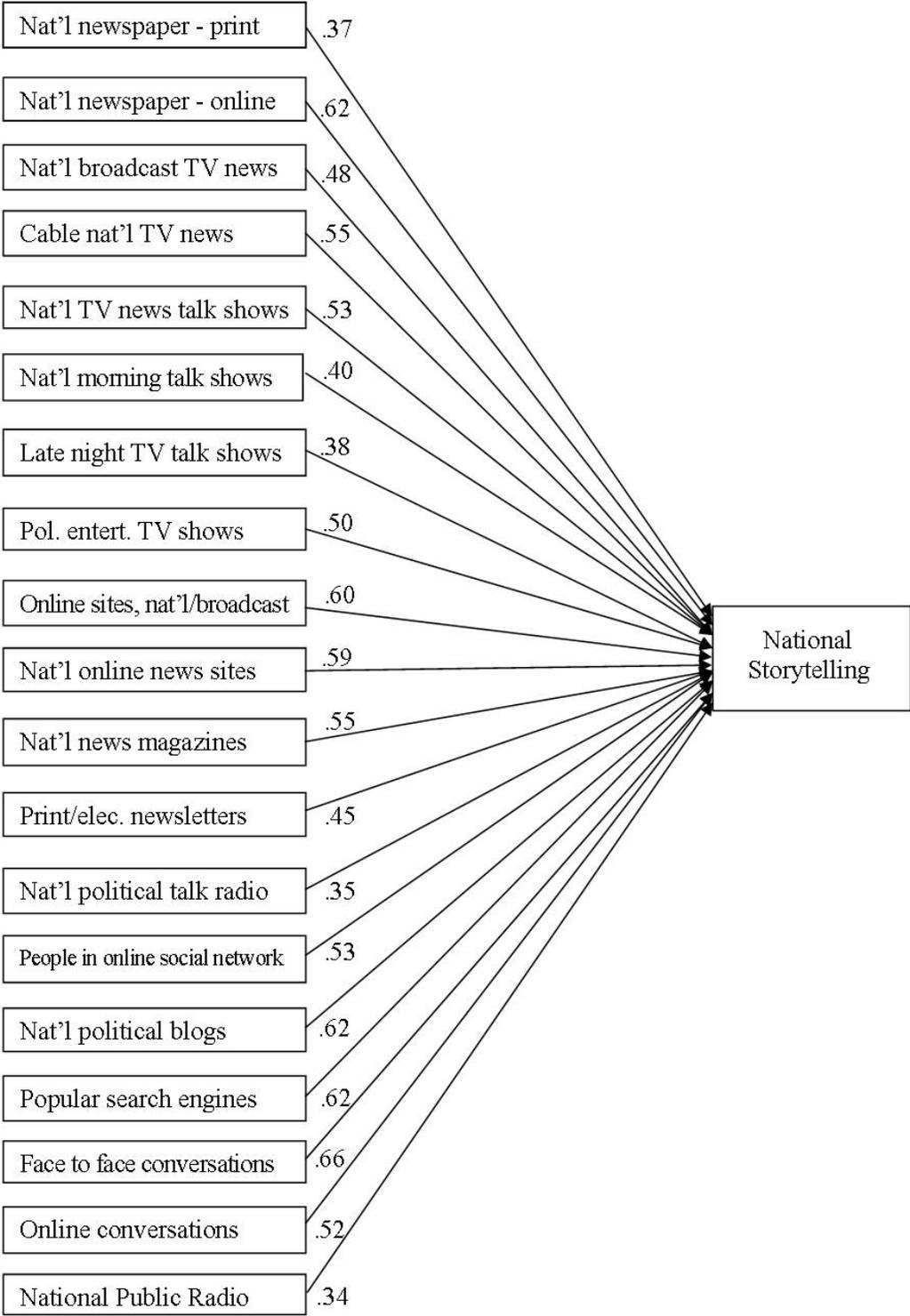
*Table 16 – Exploratory Factor Analysis Loadings for State Storytelling*

Item	Factor		
	Online Social Capital ( $\alpha = .74$ )	Organization ( $\alpha = .78$ )	Print ( $\alpha = .51$ )
1. Print edition of regional/state newspaper			<b>.45</b>
2. Online edition of regional/state newspaper	.51	.33	.77
3. Popular search engines for state politics	<b>.59</b>	.38	.50
4. Updates from state political party	.40	<b>.72</b>	.30
5. Updates from state political organization	.49	<b>.84</b>	.41
6. Updates from state non-profit organization	.61	<b>.62</b>	.38
7. People in online social network – state	<b>.73</b>	.35	.35
8. State political blogs	.55	<b>.56</b>	.44
9. Face to face conversations with others	<b>.60</b>	.41	.57
10. Online conversations with others state	<b>.68</b>	.49	.33
Eigenvalue	4.07	1.16	1.07
% Variance Explained	40.66	11.64	10.72

*Table 17 – Exploratory Factor Analysis Loadings for Local Storytelling*

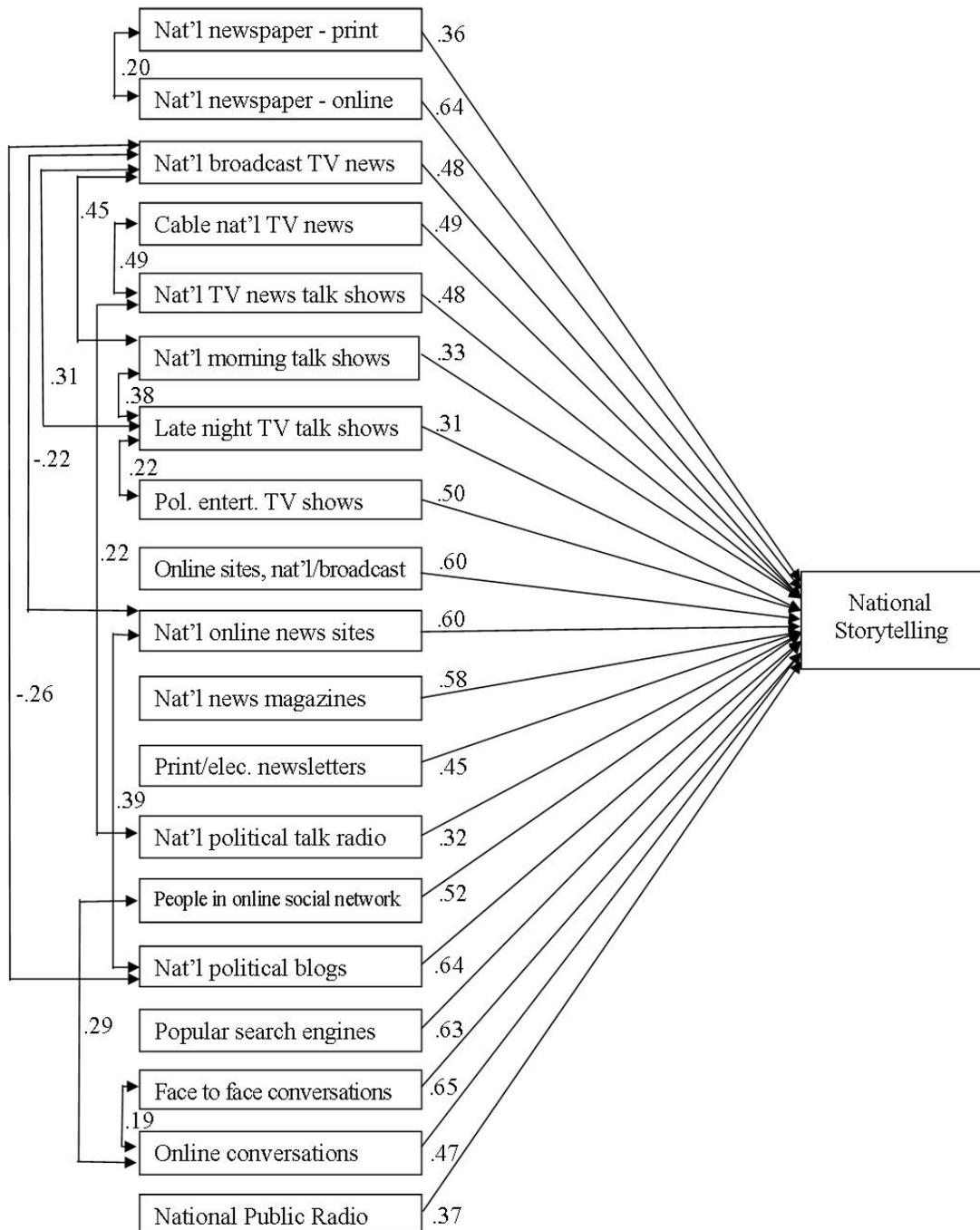
Item	Factor			
	Social Capital ( $\alpha = .84$ )	TV ( $\alpha = .71$ )	Print ( $\alpha = .62$ )	Interpersonal ( $\alpha = .66$ )
1. Print edition of local newspaper		.32	<b>.57</b>	
2. Local arts/enter. newspaper			<b>.80</b>	
3. Local broadcast TV news		<b>.81</b>	.32	
4. Online news from local TV affiliate		<b>.67</b>		.32
5. Attend issue/advocacy meetings	<b>.83</b>		.36	.33
6. Attend neighborhood meetings	<b>.68</b>			
7. Attend nonprofit meetings	<b>.67</b>			.36
8. Attend local government meetings	<b>.88</b>		.36	.31
9. People in online social network				<b>.76</b>
10. Local blogs	<b>.62</b>		.50	.42
11. Face to face conversations	.44	.49	.41	<b>.50</b>
12. Online conversations	.47			<b>.63</b>
Eigenvalue	4.16	1.82	1.30	1.02
% Variance Explained	34.63	15.18	10.80	8.45

Figure 1. Initial Model for National Political Storytelling



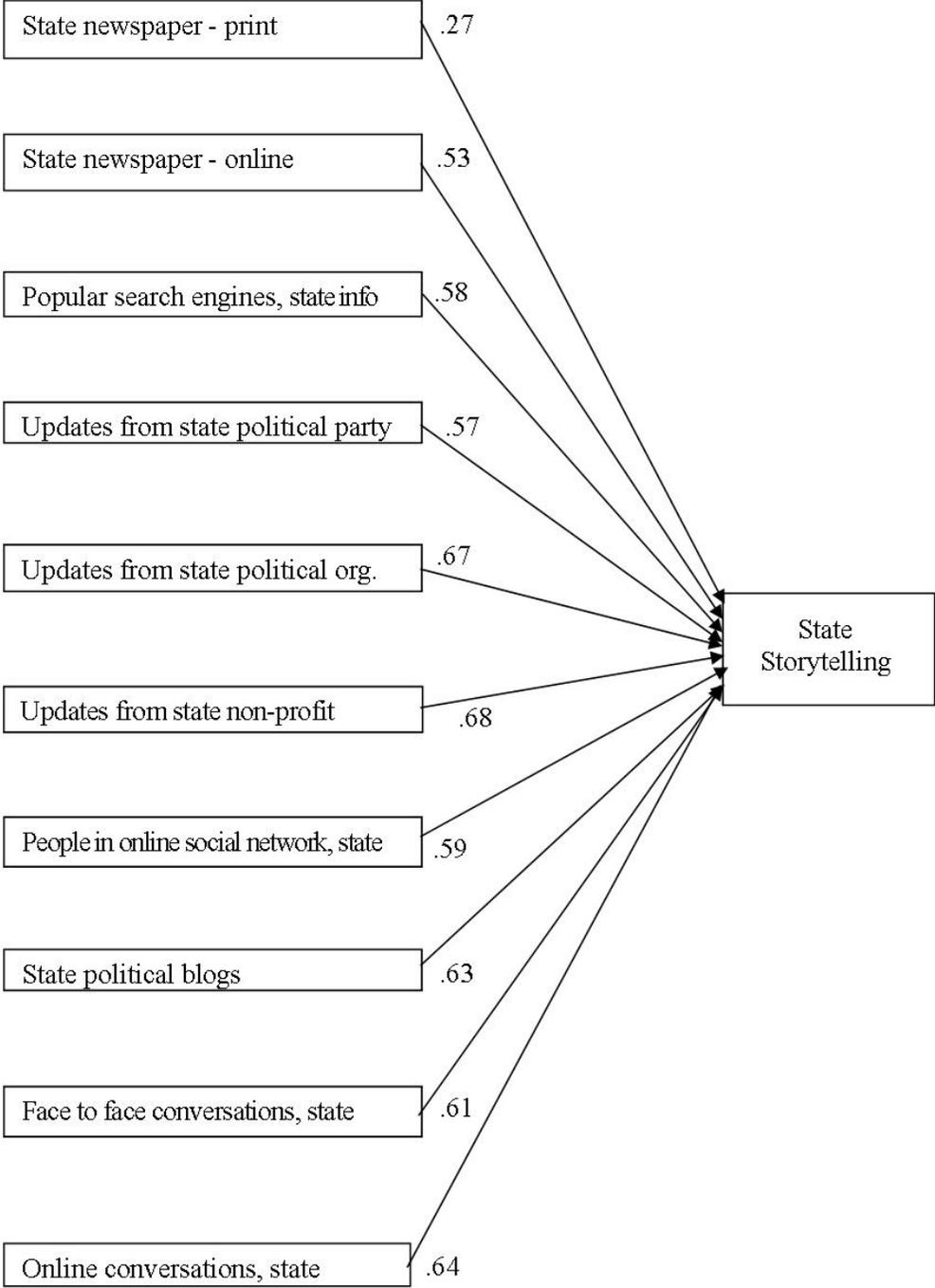
Model Fit:  $\chi^2 (152, N=288) = 830.30, p < .01, CFI = .62, RMSEA = .13 (CI 90\%: .12 - .13)$

Figure 2. Respecified Model for National Political Storytelling



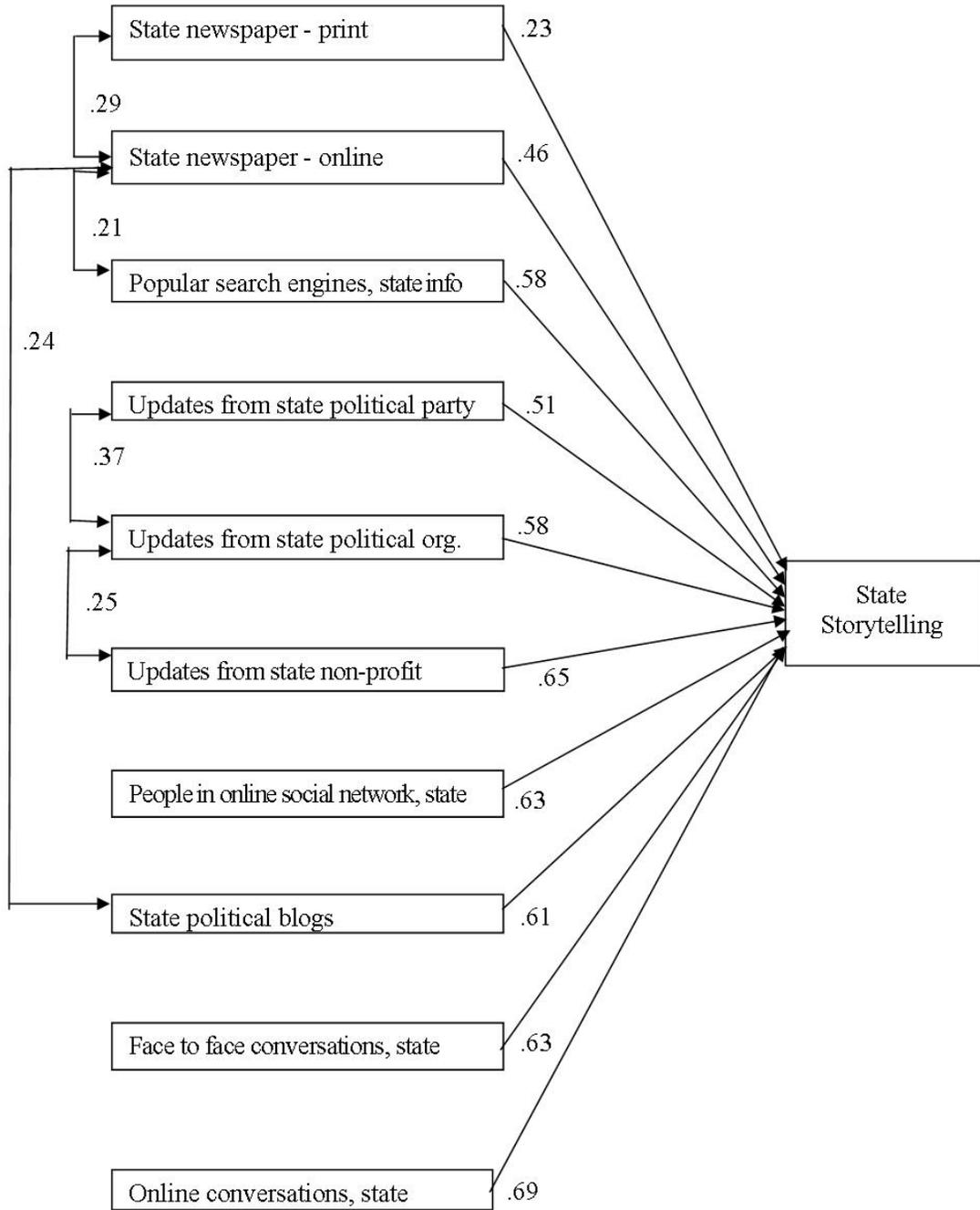
Model Fit:  $\chi^2(140, N=288) = 456.49, p < .01, CFI = .82, RMSEA = .09$  (CI 90%: .08 -.10)

Figure 3. Initial Model for State Political Storytelling



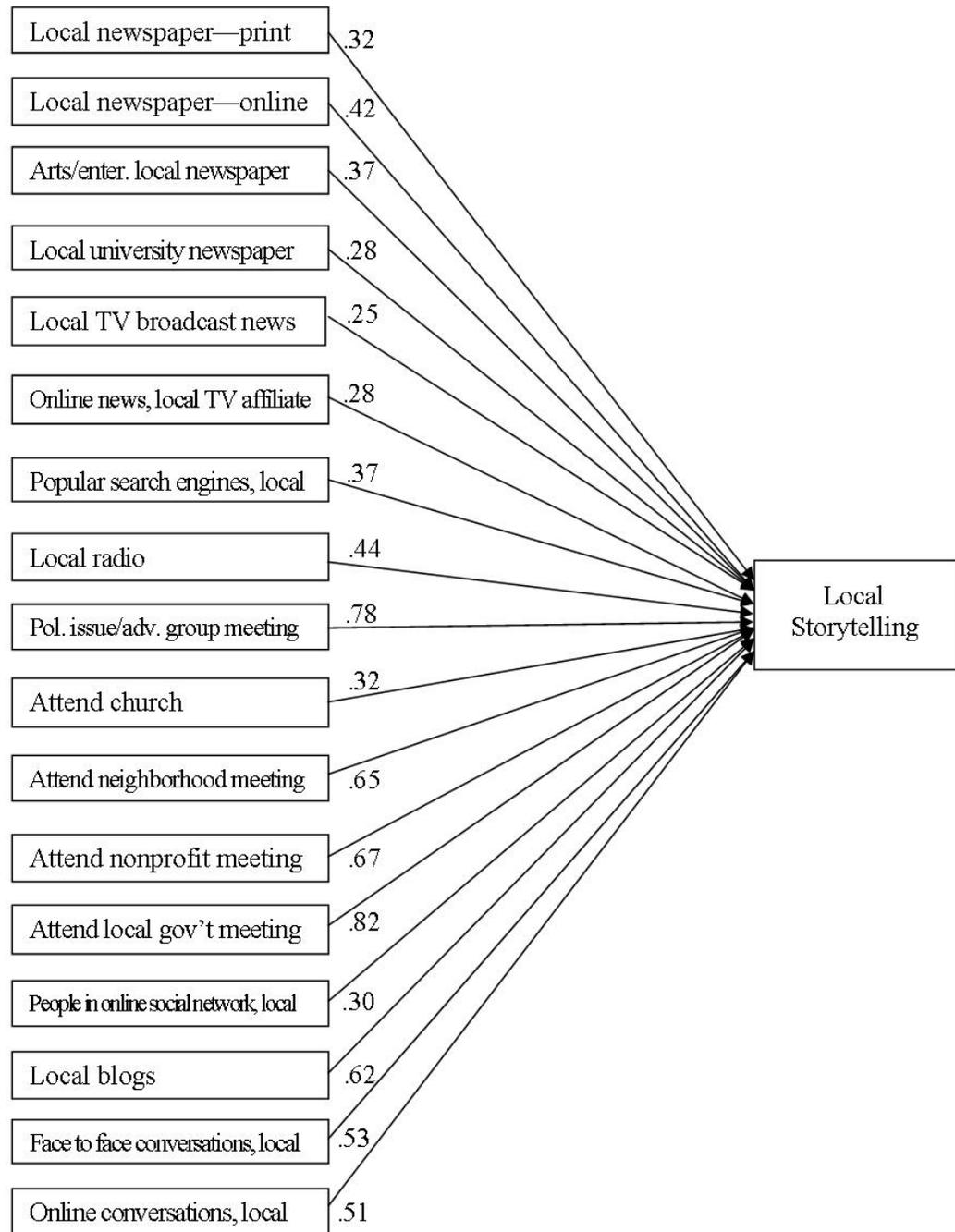
Model Fit:  $\chi^2(35, N=288) = 204.47, p < .01, CFI = .80, RMSEA = .13$  (CI 90%: .11 -.15)

Figure 4. Respecified Model for State Political Storytelling



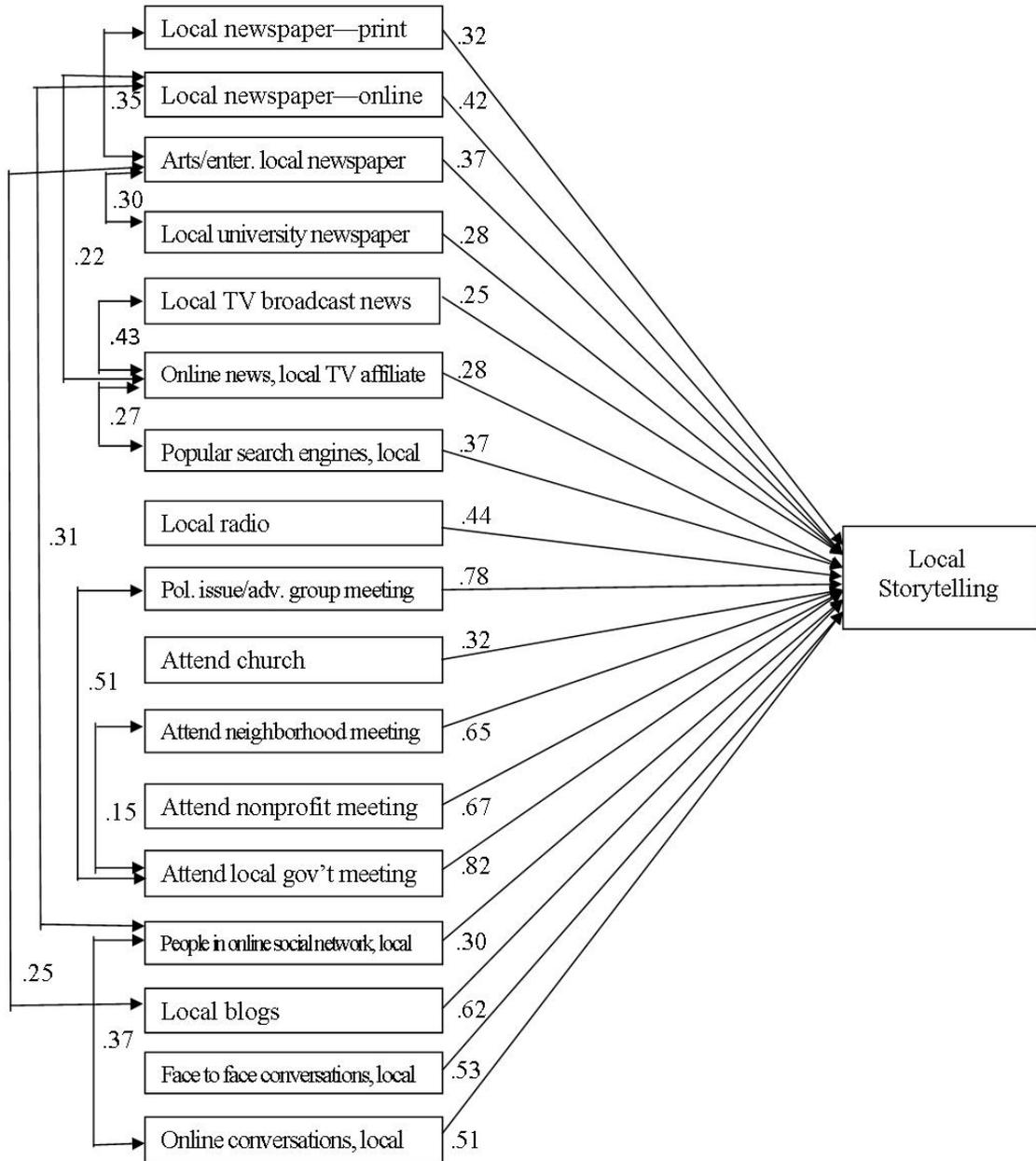
Model Fit:  $\chi^2(30, N=288) = 104.68, p < .01, CFI = .91, RMSEA = .09$  (CI 90%: .07 - .11)

Figure 5. Initial Model for Local Political Storytelling



Model Fit:  $\chi^2$  (119,  $N=288$ ) = 722.30,  $p < .01$ , CFI = .61, RMSEA = .13 (CI 90%: .12 -.14)

Figure 6. Respecified Model for Local Political Storytelling



Model Fit:  $\chi^2$  (109,  $N=288$ ) = 348.15,  $p < .01$ , CFI = .85, RMSEA = .09 (CI 90%: .08 -.10)

Table 18 – Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlation Coefficients for Political Storytelling Factors

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Nat TV	Nat Info	Nat OSC	Nat Op	State OSC	State Org	Loc SC	Loc TV	Loc IPC
Nat TV	1.84	1.33	—								
Nat Info	2.04	1.16	.38**	—							
Nat OSC	2.15	1.25	.36**	.51**	—						
Nat Op	1.21	1.23	.16**	.50**	.54**	—					
State OSC	2.13	1.23	.37**	.46**	.86**	.48**	—				
State Org	.92	1.01	.20**	.39**	.51**	.45**	.59**	—			
Loc SC	1.13	1.19	.20**	.37**	.33**	.34**	.38**	.52**	—		
Loc TV	2.82	1.54	.60**	.27**	.32**	.24**	.36**	.17**	.13*	—	
Loc IPC	2.15	1.22	.30**	.34**	.73**	.38**	.77**	.48**	.45**	.35**	—

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 19 – Correlation Coefficients for Dependent Variables

Variable	Natl Att	State Att	Local Att	Natl Cyn	State Cyn	Local Cyn	Natl PIE	State PIE	Local PIE
Natl Att	—								
State Att	.38**	—							
Local Att	.36**	.51**	—						
Natl Cyn	.16**	.50**	.54**	—					
State Cyn	.37**	.46**	.86**	.48**	—				
Local Cyn	.20**	.39**	.51**	.45**	.59**	—			
Natl PIE	.28**	.55**	.31**	.32**	.40**	.35**	—		
State PIE	.20**	.37**	.33**	.34**	.38**	.52**	.32**	—	
Local PIE	.60**	.27**	.32**	.24**	.36**	.17**	.23**	.13*	—

Variable	Natl FPK	State FPK	Local FPK	Overall Att	Overall Cyn	Overall PIE	Overall PK	KSD Value	KSD D
Natl Att	.03	.10	.06	.81**	-.04	.02	.08	.14*	.07
State Att	-.08	.07	.05	.90**	-.05	-.01	.02	.18**	.14*
Local Att	.04	.16**	.23**	.73**	-.13*	.18**	.18	.13	.06
Natl Cyn	-.04	.01	.10	-.01	.85**	.06	.04	.05	-.04
State Cyn	-.04	-.01	.04	-.08	.90**	-.01	.01	.04	-.02
Local Cyn	-.17**	-.14*	-.06	-.15*	.82**	-.11	-.15*	.09	.08
Natl PIE	.48**	.40**	.40**	-.07	-.01	.88**	.52**	.02	-.01
State PIE	.39**	.48**	.55**	.13*	-.05	.96**	.58**	.08	.04

Local PIE	.36**	.44**	.57**	.13*	-.01	.92**	.56**	.06	-.01
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Variable	Natl FPK	State FPK	Local FPK	Overall Att	Overall Cyn	Overall PIE	Overall PK	KSD Value	KSD D
Natl FPK	—								
State FPK	.55**	—							
Local FPK	.46**	.60**	—						
Overall Att	-.01	.14*	.14*	—					
Overall Cyn	-.07	-.05	.03	-.09	—				
Overall PIE	.45**	.48**	.55	.08	-.01	—			
Overall PK	.80**	.86**	.84**	.11	-.03	.60**	—		
KSD Value	-.11	-.04	-.06	.18**	.07	.06	-.08	—	
KSD Dich.	-.12*	-.05	-.07	.11	.01	-.01	-.09	.78**	—

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\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 20 – Hierarchical Regression for National Factual Political Knowledge

Variable	<i>B</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	$\beta$	<i>VIF</i>
Step 1			
Sex	-.04 (.18)	-.01	1.28
Age	.00 (.01)	.04	1.84
Race	.49 (.27)	.10	1.13
Ideology	-.08 (.10)	-.06	2.63
Party Affiliation	.08 (.10)	.06	2.49
Education	.07 (.09)	.05	1.30
Income	.11 (.07)	.10	1.22
Residency	.01 (.01)	.05	1.60
Political Awareness	.34 (.11)	.23**	2.04
$R^2$		.24	
Step 2			
State Online Social Capital	.24 (.14)	.21	5.41
State Organization	-.12 (.10)	-.09	2.18
Local Social Capital	.14 (.08)	.12	1.86
Local Television	-.05 (.06)	-.05	1.80
Local Interpersonal	-.36 (.10)	-.31**	3.08
Incre. $R^2$		.06**	
Step 3			
National Television	.02 (.07)	.02	1.85
National Informative	.31 (.09)	.26**	2.26

National Online Social Capital	.04 (.13)	.04	5.01
National Opinionated	.12 (.08)	.11	2.12
Incre. $R^2$		.05**	
Final $R^2$		.36	
Model $F$		7.78**	

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*Note:* \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 21 – Hierarchical Regression for State Factual Political Knowledge

Variable	<i>B</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	$\beta$	<i>VIF</i>
Step 1			
Sex	.04 (.18)	.01	1.29
Age	.02 (.01)	.21**	1.84
Race	.31 (.27)	.06	1.13
Ideology	.13 (.10)	.10	2.63
Party Affiliation	-.18 (.10)	-.15	2.49
Education	.11 (.09)	.08	1.30
Income	.10 (.07)	.08	1.22
Residency	.01 (.01)	.12	1.60
Political Awareness	.32 (.11)	.20**	2.04
$R^2$		.30	
Step 2			
National Television	-.03 (.07)	-.03	1.85
National Informative	.12 (.09)	.10	2.26
National Online Social Capital	-.26 (.13)	-.23*	5.01
National Opinionated	.11 (.08)	.10	2.12
Local Social Capital	.12 (.08)	.10	1.86
Local Television	.18 (.06)	.19**	1.80
Local Interpersonal	-.06 (.10)	-.05	3.08
Incre. $R^2$		.07**	
Step 3			

State Online Social Capital	.38 (.13)	.33**	5.41
State Organization	-.15 (.10)	-.11	2.18
Incre. $R^2$		.02*	
Final $R^2$		.39	
Model $F$		8.82**	

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*Note:* \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 22 – Hierarchical Regression for Local Factual Political Knowledge

Variable	<i>B</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	$\beta$	<i>VIF</i>
Step 1			
Sex	.08 (.19)	.03	1.29
Age	.03 (.01)	.22**	1.84
Race	.09 (.29)	.02	1.13
Ideology	.02 (.11)	.02	2.63
Party Affiliation	.02 (.10)	.02	2.49
Education	.11 (.09)	.07	1.30
Income	.10 (.07)	.08	1.22
Residency	.02 (.01)	.13*	1.60
Political Awareness	.19 (.12)	.12	2.04
$R^2$		.28	
Step 2			
National Television	-.04 (.08)	-.04	1.85
National Informative	.12 (.10)	.09	2.26
National Online Social Capital	-.25 (.14)	-.20	5.01
National Opinionated	.11 (.09)	.09	2.12
State Online Social Capital	.25 (.14)	.20	5.41
State Organization	-.09 (.11)	-.06	2.18
Incre. $R^2$		.05**	
Step 3			
Local Social Capital	.34 (.09)	.27**	1.86

Local Television	.10 (.07)	.10	1.80
Local Interpersonal	.02 (.11)	.02	3.08
Incre. $R^2$		.05**	
Final $R^2$		.38	
Model $F$		8.32**	

---

*Note:* \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 23 – Hierarchical Regression for Overall Factual Political Knowledge

Variable	<i>B</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	$\beta$	<i>VIF</i>
Step 1			
Sex	.09 (.41)	.01	1.29
Age	.05 (.02)	.19**	1.84
Race	.89 (.63)	.07	1.13
Ideology	.07 (.23)	.02	2.63
Party Affiliation	-.08 (.22)	-.03	2.49
Education	.30 (.20)	.08	1.30
Income	.31 (.15)	.10*	1.22
Residency	.04 (.02)	.12*	1.60
Political Awareness	.86 (.26)	.22**	2.04
$R^2$		.37	
Step 2			
National Television	-.05 (.17)	-.02	1.85
National Informative	.55 (.21)	.18*	2.26
National Online Social Capital	-.47 (.30)	-.16	5.01
National Opinionated	.35 (.20)	.12	2.12
State Online Social Capital	.87 (.32)	.30**	5.41
State Organization	-.36 (.24)	-.10	2.18
Local Social Capital	.59 (.19)	.20**	1.86
Local Television	.23 (.15)	.10	1.80
Local Interpersonal	-.40 (.24)	-.13	3.08

Incre. $R^2$	.11**
Final $R^2$	.48
Model $F$	12.34**

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*Note:* \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 24 – Hierarchical Logistic Regression for Dichotomous KSD

Variable	Estimated Models					
	1			2		
	$\beta$	SE	OR	$\beta$	SE	OR
Sex	-.23	.40	.79	-.14	.45	.87
Age	-.01	.02	.98	.00	.02	.99
Race	-.14	.68	.87	-.17	.73	.84
Ideology	.35	.23	1.42	.37	.25	1.44
Party Affiliation	-.10	.21	.91	-.17	.23	.84
Education	.38*	.18	1.46	.59**	.21	1.80
Income	-.15	.15	.87	-.15	.16	.86
Residency	-.02	.02	.98	-.03	.02	.97
Political Awareness	.12	.20	1.13	-.05	.28	.95
National Television				.47*	.19	1.60
National Informative				-.51*	.22	.60
National Online Social Capital				-.45	.32	.64
National Opinionated				.48*	.23	1.61
State Online Social Capital				.82**	.34	2.26
State Organization				-.09	.28	.91
Local Social Capital				.18	.19	1.20
Local Television				-.13	.15	.88
Local Interpersonal				-.16	.24	.85
Constant	.12	1.57	1.13	-.87	1.71	.42

Note: \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 25 – Hierarchical Regression for Value KSD

Variable	<i>B</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	$\beta$	<i>VIF</i>
Step 1			
Sex	.01 (.16)	.01	1.29
Age	-.01 (.01)	-.07	1.83
Race	-.08 (.25)	-.02	1.13
Ideology	.28 (.09)	.29**	2.63
Party Affiliation	-.08 (.09)	-.08	2.49
Education	.12 (.08)	.10	1.30
Income	-.06 (.06)	-.06	1.22
Residency	-.01 (.01)	-.09	1.59
Political Awareness	.03 (.10)	.03	2.02
$R^2$		.07	
Step 2			
National Television	.07 (.07)	.09	1.85
National Informative	-.06 (.08)	-.07	2.26
National Online Social Capital	-.26 (.12)	-.29*	5.01
National Opinionated	.01 (.08)	.02	2.14
State Online Social Capital	.30 (.12)	.33*	5.41
State Organization	.04 (.10)	.03	2.19
Local Social Capital	.09 (.07)	.10	1.89
Local Television	-.03 (.06)	-.04	1.80
Local Interpersonal	.05 (.10)	.05	3.08

Incre. $R^2$	.06*
Final $R^2$	.13
Model $F$	2.10**

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*Note:* \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 26 – Hierarchical Regression for National Political Information Efficacy

Variable	<i>B</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	$\beta$	<i>VIF</i>
Step 1			
Sex	-.14 (.11)	-.06	1.28
Age	.01 (.00)	.06	1.84
Race	.26 (.17)	.07	1.14
Ideology	-.07 (.06)	-.08	2.63
Party Affiliation	.05 (.06)	.05	2.49
Education	.10 (.05)	.09	1.32
Income	-.01 (.04)	-.02	1.21
Residency	.00 (.01)	.03	1.59
Political Awareness	.60 (.07)	.51**	2.04
$R^2$		.53	
Step 2			
State Online Social Capital	-.02 (.09)	-.03	5.51
State Organization	.01 (.06)	.01	2.15
Local Social Capital	-.04 (.05)	-.04	1.85
Local Television	-.03 (.04)	-.05	1.79
Local Interpersonal	.04 (.07)	.05	3.39
Incre. $R^2$		.01	
Step 3			
National Television	.03 (.05)	.04	1.80
National Informative	.21 (.06)	.22**	2.10

National Online Social Capital	.01 (.08)	.02	1.88
National Opinionated	.07 (.05)	.08	2.06
Incre. $R^2$		.04**	
Final $R^2$		.58	
Model $F$		18.04**	

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*Note:* \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 27 – Hierarchical Regression for State Political Information Efficacy

Variable	<i>B</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	$\beta$	<i>VIF</i>
Step 1			
Sex	-.25 (.12)	-.10*	1.27
Age	.01 (.01)	.08	1.84
Race	.32 (.18)	.08	1.14
Ideology	.00 (.07)	.00	2.64
Party Affiliation	.08 (.07)	.08	2.51
Education	.12 (.06)	.10*	1.31
Income	-.02 (.05)	-.02	1.21
Residency	.01 (.01)	.12*	1.61
Political Awareness	.42 (.08)	.33**	2.01
$R^2$		.45	
Step 2			
National Television	-.07 (.05)	-.09	1.79
National Informative	.20 (.06)	.21**	2.20
National Online Social Capital	-.25 (.09)	-.27**	4.71
National Opinionated	.03 (.06)	.03	2.09
Local Social Capital	.13 (.05)	.14*	1.82
Local Television	.06 (.04)	.08	1.74
Local Interpersonal	.12 (.07)	.12	2.93
Incre. $R^2$		.10**	
Step 3			

State Online Social Capital	.20 (.09)	.22*	5.09
State Organization	.06 (.07)	.05	2.13
Incre. $R^2$		.01*	
Final $R^2$		.56	
Model $F$		17.17**	

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*Note:* \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 28 – Hierarchical Regression for Local Political Information Efficacy

Variable	<i>B</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	$\beta$	<i>VIF</i>
Step 1			
Sex	-.23 (.12)	-.09	1.27
Age	.01 (.01)	.08	1.85
Race	.23 (.18)	.06	1.14
Ideology	.01 (.07)	.01	2.62
Party Affiliation	.05 (.07)	.06	2.50
Education	.11 (.06)	.09	1.31
Income	-.04 (.04)	-.04	1.21
Residency	.02 (.01)	.16**	1.60
Political Awareness	.35 (.08)	.27**	1.99
$R^2$		.41	
Step 2			
National Television	-.09 (.05)	-.10	1.81
National Informative	.19 (.06)	.19**	2.20
National Online Social Capital	-.20 (.09)	-.22*	4.84
National Opinionated	-.01 (.06)	-.01	2.11
State Online Social Capital	.10 (.09)	.11	5.27
State Organization	-.09 (.07)	-.08	2.16
Incre. $R^2$		.06**	
Step 3			
Local Social Capital	.33 (.05)	.34**	1.85

Local Television	.05 (.04)	.06	1.76
Local Interpersonal	.22 (.07)	.22**	2.98
Incre. $R^2$		.11**	
Final $R^2$		.58	
Model $F$		18.36**	

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*Note:* \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 29 – Hierarchical Regression for Overall Political Information Efficacy

Variable	<i>B</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	$\beta$	<i>VIF</i>
<b>Step 1</b>			
Sex	-.21 (.10)	-.09*	1.28
Age	.01 (.00)	.08	1.85
Race	.27 (.15)	.07	1.14
Ideology	-.02 (.06)	-.02	2.64
Party Affiliation	.06 (.05)	.07	2.52
Education	.11 (.05)	.10*	1.30
Income	-.03 (.04)	-.03	1.21
Residency	.01 (.00)	.12*	1.60
Political Awareness	.46 (.06)	.40**	1.98
$R^2$		.53	
<b>Step 2</b>			
National Television	-.04 (.04)	-.05	1.81
National Informative	.20 (.05)	.23**	2.19
National Online Social Capital	-.15 (.07)	-.18*	4.83
National Opinionated	.03 (.05)	.04	2.10
State Online Social Capital	.10 (.08)	.12	5.22
State Organization	-.01 (.06)	-.01	2.16
Local Social Capital	.14 (.05)	.16**	1.84
Local Television	.02 (.04)	.03	1.74
Local Interpersonal	.12 (.06)	.14*	2.98

Incre. $R^2$	.10
Final $R^2$	.63
Model $F$	23.05**

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*Note:* \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 30 – Hierarchical Regression for National Political Cynicism

Variable	<i>B</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	$\beta$	<i>VIF</i>
Step 1			
Sex	-.18 (.13)	-.09	1.28
Age	.00 (.01)	.05	1.84
Race	-.29 (.20)	-.09	1.13
Ideology	.10 (.07)	.13	2.63
Party Affiliation	-.01 (.07)	-.02	2.49
Education	-.09 (.06)	-.10	1.32
Income	-.14 (.05)	-.19**	1.21
Residency	.00 (.01)	.03	1.59
Political Awareness	.06 (.08)	.06	2.05
$R^2$		.09	
Step 2			
State Online Social Capital	.07 (.11)	.09	5.50
State Organization	-.25 (.08)	-.29**	2.15
Local Social Capital	.13 (.06)	.18*	1.85
Local Television	.00 (.05)	.00	1.80
Local Interpersonal	-.03 (.08)	-.04	3.39
Incre. $R^2$		.05*	
Step 3			
National Television	.01 (.05)	.01	1.79
National Informative	.01 (.07)	.01	2.11
National Online Social Capital	-.02 (.10)	-.03	4.87

National Opinionated	.04 (.06)	.06	2.06
Incre. $R^2$		.00	
Final $R^2$		.14	
Model $F$		2.09**	

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*Note:* \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 31 – Hierarchical Regression for State Political Cynicism

Variable	<i>B</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	$\beta$	<i>VIF</i>
Step 1			
Sex	-.15 (.13)	-.08	1.27
Age	.00 (.01)	.06	1.84
Race	-.33 (.20)	-.11	1.14
Ideology	-.04 (.07)	-.05	2.66
Party Affiliation	-.01 (.07)	-.01	2.52
Education	-.11 (.06)	-.13	1.31
Income	-.11 (.05)	-.16*	1.21
Residency	-.01 (.01)	-.07	1.62
Political Awareness	.02 (.08)	.02	2.00
$R^2$		.07	
Step 2			
National Television	.02 (.05)	.03	1.79
National Informative	.02 (.07)	.03	2.18
National Online Social Capital	.09 (.09)	.12	4.71
National Opinionated	-.01 (.06)	-.02	2.09
Local Social Capital	.15 (.06)	.21*	1.84
Local Television	-.03 (.05)	-.05	1.74
Local Interpersonal	.00 (.08)	.00	2.94
Incre. $R^2$		.02	
Step 3			
State Online Social Capital	-.12 (.10)	-.17	5.09

State Organization	-13 (.08)	-16	2.15
Incre. $R^2$		.02*	
Final $R^2$		.11	
Model $F$		1.68*	

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*Note:* \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 32 – Hierarchical Regression for Local Political Cynicism

Variable	<i>B</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	$\beta$	<i>VIF</i>
Step 1			
Sex	-.07 (.13)	-.04	1.27
Age	.00 (.01)	.05	1.85
Race	-.63 (.20)	-.20**	1.14
Ideology	-.03 (.08)	-.04	2.62
Party Affiliation	.15 (.07)	.20*	2.50
Education	-.09 (.06)	-.09	1.31
Income	-.17 (.05)	-.22**	1.21
Residency	-.01 (.01)	-.07	1.60
Political Awareness	-.04 (.08)	-.04	1.99
$R^2$		.13	
Step 2			
National Television	-.01 (.05)	-.02	1.81
National Informative	-.06 (.07)	-.08	2.20
National Online Social Capital	.11 (.10)	.15	4.84
National Opinionated	-.03 (.06)	-.04	2.11
State Online Social Capital	-.08 (.10)	-.10	5.27
State Organization	-.05 (.08)	-.06	2.16
Incre. $R^2$		.01	
Step 3			
Local Social Capital	.13 (.06)	.17*	1.85
Local Television	.00 (.05)	.00	1.76

Local Interpersonal	.00 (.08)	-.01	2.98
Incre. $R^2$		.02	
Final $R^2$		.16	
Model $F$		2.52**	

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*Note:* \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 33 – Hierarchical Regression for Overall Cynicism

Variable	<i>B</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	$\beta$	<i>VIF</i>
Step 1			
Sex	-.14 (.11)	-.08	1.28
Age	.00 (.00)	.06	1.85
Race	-.41 (.17)	-.15*	1.14
Ideology	.02 (.06)	.02	2.64
Party Affiliation	.04 (.06)	.07	2.52
Education	-.10 (.05)	-.13	1.30
Income	-.15 (.04)	-.23**	1.21
Residency	.00 (.01)	-.04	1.60
Political Awareness	.01 (.07)	.01	1.98
$R^2$		.11	
Step 2			
National Television	.01 (.05)	.02	1.81
National Informative	.00 (.06)	-.01	2.19
National Online Social Capital	.08 (.08)	.13	4.83
National Opinionated	.00 (.05)	.00	2.10
State Online Social Capital	-.06 (.08)	-.09	5.22
State Organization	-.14 (.06)	-.19*	2.16
Local Social Capital	.14 (.05)	.22**	1.84
Local Television	-.02 (.04)	-.03	1.74
Local Interpersonal	-.02 (.07)	-.03	2.98
Incre. $R^2$		.04	

Final $R^2$	.15
Model $F$	2.27**

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*Note:* \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 34 – Hierarchical Regression for National Political Attachment

Variable	<i>B</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	$\beta$	<i>VIF</i>
Step 1			
Sex	.22 (.12)	.11	1.29
Age	.01 (.01)	.14*	1.84
Race	.69 (.18)	.21**	1.13
Ideology	.34 (.07)	.42**	2.63
Party Affiliation	.02 (.06)	.03	2.49
Education	.01 (.06)	.01	1.30
Income	.05 (.04)	.06	1.22
Residency	.00 (.01)	.00	1.60
Political Awareness	.03 (.07)	.03	2.04
$R^2$		.29	
Step 2			
State Online Social Capital	.11 (.09)	.14	5.41
State Organization	.05 (.07)	.06	2.18
Local Social Capital	-.02 (.05)	-.02	1.86
Local Television	.00 (.04)	.00	1.80
Local Interpersonal	.00 (.07)	.00	3.18
Incre. $R^2$		.02	
Step 3			
National Television	.16 (.05)	.23**	1.85
National Informative	.04 (.06)	.05	2.26
National Online Social Capital	-.25 (.09)	-.34**	5.01

National Opinionated	-0.03 (.06)	-.04	2.12
Incre. $R^2$		.06**	
Final $R^2$		.37	
Model $F$		7.84**	

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*Note:* \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 35 – Hierarchical Regression for State Political Attachment

Variable	<i>B</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	$\beta$	<i>VIF</i>
Step 1			
Sex	.09 (.15)	.04	1.29
Age	.00 (.01)	-.01	1.84
Race	.22 (.23)	.06	1.13
Ideology	.33 (.09)	.35**	2.63
Party Affiliation	-.01 (.08)	-.02	2.49
Education	-.02 (.07)	-.01	1.30
Income	.03 (.06)	.03	1.22
Residency	.02 (.01)	.17*	1.60
Political Awareness	-.07 (.09)	-.06	2.04
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>		.20	
Step 2			
National Television	.10 (.06)	.13	1.85
National Informative	-.03 (.08)	-.04	2.26
National Online Social Capital	-.34 (.11)	-.38**	5.01
National Opinionated	-.02 (.07)	-.02	2.12
Local Social Capital	-.01 (.07)	-.01	1.86
Local Television	.00 (.05)	.00	1.80
Local Interpersonal	.03 (.09)	.04	3.08
Incre. <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>		.02	
Step 3			
State Online Social Capital	.32 (.11)	.36**	5.41

State Organization	.04 (.09)	.04	2.18
Incre. $R^2$		.03**	
Final $R^2$		.25	
Model $F$		4.58**	

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*Note:* \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 36 – Hierarchical Regression for Local Political Attachment

Variable	<i>B</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	$\beta$	<i>VIF</i>
Step 1			
Sex	.33 (.13)	.16*	1.29
Age	.00 (.01)	-.03	1.84
Race	-.07 (.21)	-.02	1.13
Ideology	.05 (.08)	.06	2.63
Party Affiliation	-.15 (.07)	-.18*	2.49
Education	.13 (.07)	.13*	1.30
Income	.12 (.05)	.15*	1.22
Residency	.01 (.01)	.13	1.60
Political Awareness	.01 (.08)	.01	2.04
$R^2$		.13	
Step 2			
National Television	.04 (.05)	.06	1.85
National Informative	.05 (.07)	.06	2.26
National Online Social Capital	-.37 (.10)	-.47**	5.01
National Opinionated	.04 (.06)	.05	2.12
State Online Social Capital	.16 (.10)	.20	5.41
State Organization	-.05 (.08)	-.05	2.18
Incre. $R^2$		.05*	
Step 3			
Local Social Capital	.06 (.06)	.08	1.86
Local Television	.04 (.05)	.06	1.80

Local Interpersonal	.24 (.08)	.30**	3.08
Incre. $R^2$		.04**	
Final $R^2$		.22	
Model $F$		3.94**	

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*Note:* \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 37 – Hierarchical Regression for Overall Attachment

Variable	<i>B</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	$\beta$	<i>VIF</i>
Step 1			
Sex	.21 (.11)	.12	1.29
Age	.00 (.00)	.04	1.84
Race	.28 (.17)	.10	1.13
Ideology	.24 (.06)	.34**	2.63
Party Affiliation	-.05 (.06)	-.07	2.49
Education	.04 (.05)	.05	1.30
Income	.07 (.04)	.10	1.22
Residency	.01 (.01)	.13	1.60
Political Awareness	-.01 (.07)	-.01	2.04
$R^2$		.18	
Step 2			
National Television	.10 (.05)	.17*	1.85
National Informative	.02 (.06)	.03	2.26
National Online Social Capital	-.32 (.08)	-.49**	5.01
National Opinionated	.00 (.05)	-.01	2.12
State Online Social Capital	.20 (.08)	.30*	5.41
State Organization	.01 (.06)	.02	2.18
Local Social Capital	.01 (.05)	.02	1.86
Local Television	.01 (.04)	.03	1.80
Local Interpersonal	.09 (.07)	.14	3.08
Incre. $R^2$		.08**	

Final $R^2$	.26
Model $F$	4.89

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*Note:* \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

## VITA

Darin Gully was born in Marshall, MN, and was raised in the wind-swept prairie community of Watertown, SD. He earned a double bachelor's degree in Political Science and Communication Studies with honors (*magna cum laude*), and completed the requirements of the University Honors Program, from the University of South Dakota in 2006; he received a Master of Arts in Communication Studies from the same institution in 2008. Gully completed his doctoral studies at the University of Missouri in 2012. He has co-authored a book chapter documenting the long-term effects of viewing presidential debates, and maintains research interests in the areas of mass media and political communication. He has accepted an assistant professor position in the Department of Communication Studies at Ithaca College where he will teach courses in communication.