A Review of Mass Media Models in Order to Better Understand Voter Turnout

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A Review of Mass Media Models in Order to Better Understand Voter Turnout.

Honors Thesis 1990

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Introduction

It is important to understand the phenomena of voting in the United States where disparity of turnout has plagued researchers over the past fifty years. Understanding voting phenomena may enable researchers to determine the disparity in turnout rates and eventually improve them. It is also important to understand the role of the mass media, and the effects it may have on the electoral system in the United States. In order to understand these effects, however, people must become familiar with the various models that attempt to explain how the electorate utilizes the mass media. It is also important to become familiar with the consequences of mass media consumption on voter turnout. Presently, the research that has been conducted in these areas is fragmented; various factors, models and approaches to voter turnout and mass media are isolated from one another. This makes it difficult to understand the act of voting in America, that is, the decision to vote or not to vote in a general election. More importantly, however, it is difficult to determine how the electorate reaches their decisions to participate in a general election or not, without a synthesis of all available research.

It is important to determine the interaction between voter turnout and mass media variables because in doing so research can further our understanding about the electoral process in the United States. Increased
understanding about voter turnout and mass media variables can also help to determine the causes of the fluctuating rates of turnout in the United States. Such research can also provide ways to improve turnout rates in our elections. This research will provide a greater understanding of why the electorate chooses to participate or abstain in an election.

This paper reviews the literature concerning voter turnout and mass media models. Such media models can provide insight and understanding about turnout in the United States. By examining the collective literature in these areas, I hope to demonstrate the weakness and strengths of some of the research in these fields. Also, by providing a brief overview of past and present research being conducted in these areas, I believe that this paper will supply a greater notion of where such research should go in the future to improve explanatory power.

SECTION 1: OVERVIEW

The effects of television coverage on campaigns has been heavily researched since the late 1950's. Various approaches have been taken and a multitude of theories exist which attempt to explain the relationship between television coverage and voter participation. These approaches range from television coverage as an overwhelmingly persuasive and powerful force,
through the Limited Effects Model, to focusing on the audience as active participants.

Such election studies are important areas of research. There are two primary reasons why we should conduct these election studies: for the sake of tradition and the need for pragmatic research. The traditional approach is grounded in the fact that the electoral process puts officials in office while simultaneously allowing voters to limit and check their behavior during the next election year (Niemi, 1986). Pragmatic approaches, on the other hand, seek answers to the questions as to why voting today does not seem to be as important determining if elections are, in fact, useless (Niemi, 1986). Both approaches have led researchers to collect information about our electoral system and our understanding of mass media influences. Television, as an influence on this process, is also an important area of study. Interest in television influences stems from the belief that television has effected the greatest change on the electoral system since World War II (Niemi, 1986).

Television Influence

Television is an important area to examine when conducting analysis of our electoral system. One of the main reasons for this is because television has become a major source of information, entertainment, and leisure time activity
for Americans today (Trent & Friedenberg, 1983). It has become a dominant force in our lives (Trent & Friedenberg, 1983). For example, forty percent of our time is spent in front of a television set, ninety-nine percent of all households have at least one television set, and fifty-two percent of these have two or more (Trent & Friedenberg, 1983). Television has also become the most credible and trusted source of news. That is, television is seen as presenting the fairest source of information to its viewers by the viewers themselves (Emery & Smythe, 1977). Television is also viewed as the most credible source of information. People believe what they see and hear on television, and often look no further for relevant information and facts. Researchers, such as Keeter (1987), believe that television has replaced political parties as the primary source of campaign information for voters. Researchers also believe that television determines the outcome of elections today. This assumption is based on the fact that television reaches millions of voters who do not have access or do not indulge in printed information (Donner, 1968).

In some respects television has been a revolutionary force in American politics. Television has changed the electorate's perception of news reality (Lang & Lang, 1968). Some researchers (e.g, Donner, 1968) believe that television has become too powerful and pervasive in American life. This claim is justified by researchers like Donner because television is generally in the forefront of creating major issues. In other words, television aids in
developing public concern or the demise of public concern about issues and events. Other researchers address the issue of television's impact with its combination of visual images and spoken messages which seem to have an immediacy effect on its viewers. Television influence on voters in general has been the focus of much research. Television is seen as the culprit in the revolution of rising expectations (Donner, 1968). Fanning the fires of the "Text Book Presidency," which refers to the high esteem in which Americans hold the presidency and the heroic expectations they place upon this office (Lowi, 1985). Television has also played a role in the growth of the Neo-Conservative movement. Beginning with television's coverage of Vietnam, Watergate, and the 1970's inflation rate crisis the president no longer receives protection from the media (Barone, 1983). Such coverage has helped hype American demands for a smaller, service democracy. That is, people are demanding smaller government (i.e., a reduction in the size of bureaucracy and embedded powers), but do not want to give up any valued services. Television focuses attention upon this paradox by examining the failures of President's to solve national problems, while at the same time, showing how President's are attempting to eliminate certain services. This is a problem for politicians since very few presidents can live up to such paradoxical expectations.

Concern also arises from the fact that people spend more time in front of the television set than they do with any other news source (Donner, 1968).
According to Schram (1987), television has enabled voters to make very personal decisions and judgments about election issues with very little active participation and facts to base such decisions upon. Concern about such vague decision making arises because television has fallen distressingly short of fulfilling its social responsibilities (Donner, 1968). That is, television has failed to fully inform its public about the facts. This has occurred, most likely, because television is first and foremost a business (Donner, 1968). Not covering the issues in an in-depth way has to do with good marketing rather than good journalism (Schram, 1987). Television must win maximum audiences over its competitors (MacNeil, 1968). Often times the result of this competition is low information output. As Rich Robinson, of the Helena television station, points out his job is to follow a sources' lead on as many stories as possible rather than thoroughly investigate one story. Television has also placed profits and commercials first, forcing reporters to cut and shorten their stories, squeezing them into the appropriate segment pattern (Skornia, 1968).

Because of factors such as these - television's broad audience appeal, TV credibility, the ability to create public concern, to raise expectations, and the fact that it is a business that ranks informing the public low on its agenda - researchers have begun to examine the potential impact television has on voter
turnout. For example, some researchers believe that it is difficult to discuss complex issues with voters who are primarily dependent on television for their information because they are gravely uninformed about present situations (Broder, 1980).

Voting

To understand the potential impact television coverage has on the electoral system, researchers must first understand the basic factors of the act of voting itself. The act of voting, basically, is the result of two cognitive choices, to vote or not to vote (Skornia, 1968). This decision to vote or not to vote, in turn, is the result of various influences and experiences. Such influences as civic duty, voting as habitual conduct, or political orientation also act as incentives to act in one of the two ways described (i.e. to vote or not to vote) (Skornia, 1968). Other component,s such as a voters' perception that the presidential election will be close, or caring about which political party wins, can also help explain voter turnout (Luttbeg, 1980).

The attitude of the voter is one of the most critical factors included in the decision to vote (Broder, 1980). Understanding the dimensions in attitude is one of the most helpful ways to account for turnout. For example, political efficacy is one of the most important attitudes of voters to study. Low feelings of political efficacy and mistrust about the political system often result in low turnout rates (Broder, 1980). Presently, turnout rates are low across the country and throughout the various classes.
Some researchers have explained the phenomena of low turnout rates through their study of legal barriers. Legal barriers constitute such things as registration laws. Registration laws can have adverse effects on voting behavior because of our mobile society (Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stakes, 1964). Although there is little doubt that registration laws do act as barriers to new residents, it is doubtful that this is the sole explanation for low turnout rates. Individuals who habitually choose to vote, or who have a desire to vote in a given election, will eventually overcome these legal obstacles.

Other research has focused on personal obstacles to voting (e.g. voter ability, voter interest, feelings of political efficacy, feelings of civic responsibility, voter perception about the closeness of an election). These are all affected by coverage of the campaign by television and other news sources. Researchers in this area suggest that if voters cannot overcome personal obstacles they will be less likely to act in the voting process at all.

Speculation by the media has also become an area of interest because of the enormous amounts of commentary which presidential campaigns produce (Rogers & Ferguson, 1980). Commentary starts months before even the first primary and is carried all the way through until election night. Commentary does not just include general information, but rather has moved into the realm of pollster prediction about the campaign results. Pollsters try to decide presidential races before the voting booths open (Ferraro & Bird,
Researchers have sought to determine the effects of polling and television's projection of election night news on the democratic process (Emery & Smythe, 1977). Some of the concerns researchers have about the effects on voting are that television polling may interfere with the choices people make. For example, it may enhance non-voting trends by convincing voters for the underdog to give up and stay home, or convince voters for the leading contender to stay home and not be bothered by going to the polls, or finally, to convince the undecided voters to jump on the band wagon for the leading contender (Emery & Smythe, 1977). It is obvious, as Sudman (1986) points out, that political polls can influence voter perception about the closeness of the election and even the value of their votes. This concern has been heightened because of the broad impact television coverage has on voters.

The ability of election night news to tell who has won before some people have voted has been studied at various times. The Mickelson (1972) study focused on the 1960 election night projections. During this election, at 8:12 pm (EST) networks predicted that Kennedy was the winner with only 4% of the precincts reporting. This prediction was based on the results of scattered, fragmented, and random reports collected by the networks (Mickelson, 1972). Mickelson feared that voters in the east and some midwestern states could exercise influence over voters in the Pacific Time Zones (1972). Mickelson found, however, that his concern was unwarranted and that data could not
support his hypothesis. Polling projections can have various effects on individuals. Some people may indeed be hampered by such news events, however, others may be spurred on to vote for their candidate whether they are the speculated winner or looser. Although public opinion polls are not neutral factors in any campaign, and they may indeed be a distorted picture of reality because results can be misinterpreted, these effects often cancel each other out through various voter interpretations and behaviors (Stovall & Soloman, 1984).

One of the best ways to understand voting is through the rational model, as explained in the *Theory of Economic Democracy* which states that the behavior of voting can be rational or irrational (Niemi and Weisberg, 1976). According to the *Theory of Economic Democracy*, voters will examine the costs and benefits associated with voting, although they may be unaware of this internal process (Niemi and Weisberg, 1976). Some of the costs, identified in the *Theory of Economic Democracy*, are the time and effort that the act of voting requires. That is, the time and effort it takes to get involved in the campaign and the time and effort exerted in getting and staying informed, registering to participate, and the act of voting itself (Niemi and Weisberg, 1976). These costs take away from other things that potential voters could be doing. Benefits to the act of voting are seen as feelings of contribution, and political efficacy. In other words, potential voters feel as though their behavior
has made a difference in the electoral system.

To understand the rational approach to voting, attention is given to the expected gains that have been identified by potential voters (Niemi and Weisberg, 1976). The notion of expected gains suggest that the probability of voting behavior will increase as a result of fulfilled expectations and potential benefits received. Television coverage of presidential elections can affect voters in a way that may decrease potential benefits because TV fails to meet expected gains. For example, television coverage of campaigns often disappoints voters because they are unable to distinguish the differences between the candidates. This often occurs due to inadequate coverage of the issues by television. Also television, by the way it structures and presents “political reality,” may contribute to a widespread distrust of the political system (Burdick and Brodbeck, 1959). This distrust is often grounded in the complexity of the political events and television’s presentation of the facts (Burdick and Brodbeck, 1959). Viewers are often overwhelmed and rarely receive detailed analysis from television coverage. Viewers, therefore, may feel as though they are being kept outside the process (Burdick and Brodbeck, 1959).

The Theory of Economic Democracy states that, consequently, the act of not voting is a rational alternative to voting behavior given the present style of campaign coverage (Kraus and Perloff, 1985). For example, in order for people to act politically they must form some credible picture of reality first
(Burdick and Brodbeck, 1959). If, however, potential voters have determined that the benefits do not outweigh the costs of voting, to vote despite this belief would be irrational. Voters who have high feelings of political cynicism, feelings of low political efficacy, feelings of powerlessness and meaninglessness, are more likely to see voting behavior as irrational and, therefore, fail to act in this basic ritual of democracy (Lang and Lang, 1968).

The role of the mass media in this process is not altogether clear. Presently no one theory can account for or predict all the related phenomena connected with election campaigns, mass media coverage, and voter turnout. Rather, there are a number of partial theoretical bits and pieces which individually account for certain media effects on voter turnout.

SECTION 2: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

Hypodermic Effect

Despite the fact that there is no one grand theory explaining the effects of mass media coverage on presidential campaigns, researchers have attempted to acquire knowledge about the effects of mass media on potential voters. Researchers in this field have thus far utilized the ad hoc approach to theorizing. That is, they have built upon previously known theories. One of the first major concepts in this area was the Hypodermic
Effects model. This model emerged prior to World War II during a period in which the use of radio had reached one of its all time highs. The Hypodermic Effects Model was then confirmed during World War II, when military specialists examined the effects of Hitler's propaganda machine (Trent and Friedenberg, 1983). Military experts believed that the mass media had a direct and sometimes adverse effect on the masses.

Researchers in the Hypodermic Effects Model made assumptions about the media (specifically radio) and its strengths. The first assumption was that the mass media is a powerful force (Trent and Friedenberg, 1983). Second, that the mass media could shape and change public opinion of the masses. Third, that the mass media could change a person's attitude, or the attitude of the masses as a whole. Finally, that the mass media could alter a person's behavior, or alter the behavior of the masses (Trent and Friedenberg, 1983). Researchers supported these assumptions because they believed that the effects would occur equally among individuals because people respond in a similar manner to stimuli (Trent and Friedenberg, 1983). This became known as the "group mind phenomena." "Group mind" means that individuals stop thinking independently and begin to adopt the tenets of the larger group. The group mind phenomena explains why researchers in this area believed mass media could produce changes in the masses as a whole. A modern day example of the group mind phenomena could occur at a rock and roll concert.
An example is a Grateful Dead concert, where individuals in the audience all have similar characteristics and join together in a group mind; in this case the mind of the dead heads.

Researchers in the Hypodermic arena also theorized that these phenomena occur through messages sent out through the channel of propaganda, or the mass media. Researchers assumed that messages sent out through the modes of the mass media would be directly fed into the minds of the viewers (Trent and Friedenberg, 1983). Researchers also assumed that viewers would receive these messages equally and would immediately assimilate these messages into their thought process (Trent and Friedenberg, 1983). In other words, researchers saw the messages as being injected directly into the minds of the media’s audience (Trent and Friedenberg, 1983).

Researchers in the Hypodermic Effects Model believe that the messages injected into the mind create changes desired in the viewers’ attitudes. Currently, researchers who lean towards some of the tenets of the Hypodermic Effects Model believe that television is the greatest communication mechanism known to man (Emery and Smythe, 1977). Some researchers, like Emery and Smythe (1977), even believe that television pumps an unending stream of information into the minds of media’s viewers. Emery and Smythe (1977) also believe that television can never be a neutral influence because every minute of its programing will teach people about something. Researchers also believe
that television has powerful effects on political knowledge, political attitudes, and political participation.

The *Hypodermic Effects Model* can help to explain voter turnout if its basic tenets are true. For example, voters would not be rational individuals, as believed in the *Theory of Economic Democracy*, rather they would engage or abstain from the voting process based on the priming effects of their news source. The cues voters receive from their media source would have an immediate impact on individual turnout.

**Limited Effects Model**

Despite the fact that through the 1940's much of the research was still attempting to confirm the *Hypodermic Effects Model*, some research began to challenge the notion that the media was potent (Trent and Friedenberg, 1983). One of the largest challenges came during the 1940 presidential election. Researchers from the University of Colorado discovered that the campaign propaganda used had seemingly very little impact (Trent and Friedenberg, 1983). This research, and other studies that followed, began to accumulate and form a competing hypothesis that was opposite to the *Hypodermic Effects Model* (Trent and Friedenberg, 1983). In some respects this new theory was a direct response against the old guard of a powerful and
pervasive media.

Researchers in the Limited Effects arena, as it has come to be known, believe that individual rationality and our social sense of order are powerful and cannot be overthrown by the mass media (Trent and Friedenberg, 1983). In one way, this theory caught on because it was a comforting notion, one in which everyone wanted to believe in (Trent and Friedenberg, 1983). The first study ever completed that supported the Limited Effects Model, as reported by Trent and Friedenberg (1983), was conducted by Lazarsfeld in Erie County, Ohio. Lazarsfeld's intent, as noted by Trent and Friedenberg (1983), was to conduct research on the 1940 presidential campaign, in order to demonstrate the effects of the Hypodermic Model on American elections and subsequent voter turnout. Lazarsfeld thought that the media would have three effects on potential voters. First, he believed that the mass media could arouse public interest in presidential elections. Secondly, he believed that the mass media could reinforce previously held beliefs. Finally, he believed that the mass media could convert or change public opinion (Trent and Friedenberg, 1983). Lazarsfeld, however, proved his hypothesis wrong. He found, as noted by Trent and Friedenberg (1983), that people did not change their votes merely by viewing increased media coverage. Lazarsfeld also found that those who had changed their votes did not attribute it to increased media information. Lazarsfeld also discovered that although there was a marked increase in
interest produced by mass media information, this interest was selective, that is, interest varied from voter to voter. Lazarsfeld explained his findings based on the tenets of the *Limited Effects Model*. For example, Lazarsfeld, as explained by Trent and Friedenberg (1983), explored the possibilities that other social characteristics, not necessarily the mass media, could determine political preference. Lazarsfeld examined such characteristics as party ideology, socioeconomic status, and other demographic variables to determine their impact on voter decision making. Later, researchers came to believe that voter choices are rooted in “social determinism” (Stovall and Soloman, 1984). That is, campaigns activate political predispositions, voters attach the candidates to these dispositions and the candidate who matches closest will win the support of that voter (Stovall and Soloman, 1984). Therefore, researchers in this area have concluded that mass media coverage plays a relatively small role by merely providing the voters with the information needed about the candidates.

Other early research, summarized in Trent and Friedenberg’s Text (1983), concluded that mass media effects are limited because when effects do arise in voters they most likely encompass other factors beyond mass media coverage of a campaign, (i.e. political orientation, disposition, socioeconomic status, environment, education, age, and gender). All of this research, the studies, and conclusions stood in direct conflict with the notion of the *Hypodermic Effects Model* (Trent and Friedenberg, 1983). This trend has
continued to affect present day research and is often seen as the base for contemporary approaches. This research has laid the foundation for examining the audience as active participants engaging in a form of interpersonal communication.

The *Limited Effects Model* can also help to explain the turnout rate. The decision to participate or abstain in a presidential election, according to this model, is based mainly on a voter's predisposition. Predisposition comes to voters through a combination of demographic variables. Media reports confirming such beliefs (e.g., meeting voter expectations) will increase the benefits of voting for that individual. If media sources, such as television, do not confirm voter beliefs, however, the opposite will be true. The perceived costs of voting, in that case, would be higher than potential benefits received.

**Social Influence Theory**

The *Social Influence* approach is one theory that is built upon the *Limited Effects Model*, using it as a foundation for research conducted in this arena. Also, the research and the findings from the *Limited Effects Model* have helped to feed this theory's perspective. In fact, these approaches are so similar they are often lumped together in literature reviews. The *Social Influence Theory* states that media messages will be adopted only if the messages presented are in accordance with group norms (Trent and Friedenberg, 1983). Researchers,
as discussed in Trent and Friedenberg (1983), believe that if messages presented by the mass media conflict with group norms they will be rejected by the group.

Researchers in the Social Influence arena have spent a great deal of time focusing in on opinion leaders. Opinion leaders are seen as transmitters of information; they transmit information to individuals in their social groups who do not attend to the mass media as often as opinion leaders do (Trent and Friedenberg, 1983). Opinion Leaders, according to researchers, often act as gatekeepers for their social groups. Gate keepers are defined, by Trent and Friedenberg (1983), as any person in the news gathering process with authority to make decisions affecting the flow of information to their public. The process of opinion leaders acting as gatekeepers for their social groups or publics results in a two-step flow of communication (Trent and Friedenberg, 1983). That is, messages from the media are picked up by opinion leaders, opinion leaders then decide to either disregard the message (if it is in conflict with the group norms), or to pass it along to their social groupings in order to have it act as a reinforcement (Trent and Friedenberg, 1983).

A study conducted in Illinois by Katz and Lazarsfeld, as reported by Trent and Friedenberg (1983), produced a more precise idea of the two-step flow of communication. Katz and Lazarsfeld wanted to compare mass media behavior of opinion leaders with non-leaders to see if opinion leaders are exposed more
to the mass media and are, therefore, more influential within their social groups than non-leaders. Therefore, Katz and Lazarsfeld, as reported in Trent and Friedenberg (1983), conducted research on 800 women examining four areas of decision making: Marketing, Fashions, Public Affairs, and Movie going. These women were also asked about their own behavior, people they influence, and people who influence them. These women admitted that they were influenced by other women seen as opinion leaders, although leadership roles were contextually bound to topical areas. That is, leadership roles are dynamic depending on the expertise and on the topical area at hand. More importantly, however, Katz and Lazarsfeld discovered, as reported by Trent and Friedenberg (1983), that opinion leaders were not any more likely than their followers to attribute any change or influence in their beliefs, or their groups beliefs, to mass media coverage and information.

Based on the findings in the area of Social Influence researchers have come to believe that the primary role of the media is to support and reinforce social group norms. Expansion in the area of the Social Influence Model has led to the multi-step flow of communication, rather than the simple two-step flow of communication. The multi-step flow of communication suggests that opinion leaders transmit information supplied by the mass media, within and amongst each other, before relaying it to their respective social groups (Trent and Friedenberg, 1983). The fact that any one of these individuals could act as
a gatekeeper, before mass media information had a chance to reach such publics, has reduced the role of the mass media (Trent and Friedenberg, 1983).

The Social Influence Model can also increase our understanding about the act of voting itself. Understanding the multi-step flow of information and the role of opinion leaders is useful knowledge. Opinion leaders will pass information along that reinforces group norms as long as reinforcement remains high and costs of voting in this particular election remain low. If, however, information supplied by the media continuously opposes group norms information will not be passed on and the costs of voting will increase.

By examining the Limited Effects Model and the Social Influence Model attention has been focused on responding to the theoretical framework of the Hypodermic Effects Model. That is, researchers have attempted to go to the opposite end of the scale by responding to their fear of an all pervasive and powerful mass media (Trent and Friedenberg, 1983). For as many as two decades researchers have been intent on “confirming the basic tenets of the Social Influence Model,” so much so that they have ignored mass media effects in such important areas as: voter turnout, political activation, and information seeking methods (Trent and Friedenberg, 1983).

Despite the neglect in areas which are now considered to be the contemporary approaches, these historical theories are important to
understand for essentially four reasons. First, as pointed out by Trent and Friedenberg (1983), they have helped lay the methodological foundation for current research being conducted. That is, these historical perspectives have led the way to quantitative analysis and scientific surveys that are the foundation of research today. Second, work in the Limited Effects Model and the Social Influence Model has provided an escape to researchers interested in voting turnout and mass media effects. That is, it has allowed researchers to get away from the “mass media hysteria” that developed during World War II and the Hypodermic Effects Model (Trent and Friedenberg, 1983). Third, research in the Social Influence arena has helped to bridge the gaps between mass media and interpersonal realms of communication, which has become critical in the study of political communication (Trent and Friedenberg, 1983). Finally, these models have served as a challenge to researchers who disagree with their conclusions that the mass media has little impact on voter turnout, thus, encouraging researchers to go back and focus their attention on the effects of mass media on voter turnout, activation, and interest.
SECTION 3: CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES

Diffusion of Information

The Diffusion of Information approach has bridged the gap between the Social Influence Model and contemporary studies. The Diffusion model developed during the same era as the Limited Effects Model and the Social Influence Model. The Diffusion of Information approach also recognizes the importance of interpersonal communication in the study of political communication and its effects on the electoral system (Trent and Friedenberg, 1983). The Diffusion of Information approach, however, differs from the Limited Effects Model and the Social Influence Model in one significant way. As I will show, the Diffusion of Information Model maintains that under certain conditions, information transmitted by the mass media will have a direct impact on individuals (Trent and Friedenberg, 1983). This assumption differs largely from the later two approaches and their views on mass media impact. I will also demonstrate how, in the Diffusion approach, information produced by the mass media can produce changes in knowledge and, therefore, may produce changes in behavior (Trent and Friedenberg, 1983).

Diffusion research has focused primarily on the impact of the media on the acquisition of political cognition (i.e., knowledge about the campaign,
knowledge about the candidates, and knowledge about public affairs) (Trent and Friedenberg, 1983). Diffusion research has also focused on the adoption and the spread of ideas, in space and time, from one group to the next (Trent and Friedenberg, 1983).

Research conducted in 1961 by Rogers, as reported by Trent and Friedenberg (1983), focused on the impact of mass media on the acquisition of political information. Rogers broke down a multi-stage process which he thought explained the diffusion of innovation stages. The first of these stages is the information or knowledge stage. This information is supplied by the mass media and is sent to the viewers in forms of coded messages. The second stage is the persuasion stage, this encompasses the style and content of the information supplied by the mass media. The third stage is the decision or adoption stage. This is the stage when the viewer makes a cognitive decision about whether to remain attentive to the messages or to discontinue viewing. The fourth and final stage is the confirmation or reevaluation stage, were the viewer either confirms the messages and their content supplied by the media or reevaluates his opposing position (Trent and Friedenberg, 1983). Other researchers have added to Rogers' stages. These researchers first suggested
that individuals must be willing to seek information about the innovation before any of the stages identified can occur (Chatman, 1986). Researchers, like Chatman, believe that after Rogers’ confirmation stage comes the trial stage. The trial stage is one in which individuals will employ the innovation or information on a small, temporary scale as a way of testing such informational material (Chatman, 1986). Following the trial stage, individuals will either discontinue use, or will apply the information on a full time basis (Chatman, 1986). Researchers believe that the media is most important during the first two primary stages. During these stages the media can create awareness, understanding and innovations about the topic(s) presented. Researchers have also found that mass media exposure is a factor that contributes to the acceptance of information (Chatman, 1986). This occurs because the mass media defines the innovation or information, determines how it is communicated, and influences the social structures the information is fed into (Chatman, 1986).

*Diffusion of Information* could help explain variations in turnout through several factors, the first being voter willingness to seek out mass media information about the campaign. This model also suggests that information
supplied by the media must be useful in order for voters to incorporate the innovation into their life. Mass media can affect the costs and benefits of voting. For example, television has failed to provide voters with incentives to become informed and then stay informed. By failing in this area, television has added to the costs of voting which may effect turnout rates.

Diffusion research has acted primarily as the bridge between the old existing frameworks and the new contemporary approaches because it views the audience as an active participant that interacts with mass media information. The Diffusion of Information Model is also seen as a bridge between the various approaches because it does not dismiss the mass media as ineffective and weak. Rather, it focuses on the context and the dynamic elements within and around mass media audiences.

Uses and Gratifications Model

The Uses and Gratifications Model is the second contemporary theoretical approach to be examined. The Uses and Gratifications Model suggests that there are certain inherent uses that people have determined about mass media consumption. The Uses and Gratifications approach attempts to determine what uses people have defined for the mass media. It also seeks to determine if individuals receive gratifications from their defined media
consumption (Trent and Friedenberg, 1983).

The Uses and Gratifications Model assumes that there is a wide range of motives or uses for mass media intake. It also believes that these motives or uses derive from such factors as social roles, social situations, and individual personalities (Trent and Friedenberg, 1983). The Uses and Gratifications Model does not see the audiences of the mass media as a “huge collective that watches television for the same reasons” (Trent and Friedenberg, 1983). Rather, the Uses and Gratifications approach focuses on the audience as being made up of diverse and active participants who consume mass media and their informational messages for specific purposes.

Researchers in this arena have attempted to pinpoint general uses of mass media consumption. Blumer and Mcquail, as stated in Trent and Friedenberg’s text (1983), suggest five common uses for mass media intake. The first is using the political content supplied by mass media for vote guidance. The audience uses media messages as a framework for assessing candidates. The second is using mass media reports to reinforce decisions they have already made. The audience will selectively attend media reports that reflect their previously held dispositions. Third is using the mass media to supply a general surveillance of the present political environment. The audience uses the information supplied by the media about the state of the economy, foreign, and domestic affairs in order to
determine whether they should engage in retrospective or prospective voting. Retrospective voting occurs when voters evaluate how the incumbent has performed within the areas of economics, foreign and domestic affairs. In retrospective voting, voters attempt to determine if the challenger could do a better job in the future, while rating their satisfaction with the incumbent. Prospective voting occurs when there are important issues discussed in the campaign. These issues must be pertinent to the voter, voters must understand the issues, and voters must be able to distinguish between the opposing positions represented by the different candidates. The fourth use is utilizing mass media to generate excitement about political events. The fifth use is utilizing the mass media because individuals anticipate a need for such information in future interpersonal settings such as at work, school, with family, or friends. Blummer and Mcquail also discuss three reasons why individuals avoid media consumption. First, individuals avoid political messages supplied by mass media because of feelings of political alienation. Second, individuals avoid political messages due to partisan loyalty. Third, individuals avoid political messages because they do not feel they need to consume such media messages. Generally, uses can be narrowed down into three categories of needs: informational or cognitive needs, diversionary needs, and personal identity needs (Trent and Friedenberg, 1983).

The *Uses and Gratifications Model* also seeks to go beyond motives
by examining people's responsiveness to mass media messages. This responsiveness is determined not only by their needs, but also by how well media meets these needs, (i.e., gratification of the viewer) (Burdick and Brodbeck, 1959). This approach examines the filtering effects individuals use in order to determine if the information being supplied by the mass media is useful (Kraus and Perloff, 1985). It is important to examine the motivations to become informed and to stay informed, as well as the reasons behind such motivations (Burdick and Brodbeck, 1959). In order to do this, research must focus on how well the mass media serves these varying degrees of motives. Researchers should focus on how well the mass media provides the potential voter with information that is useful. I believe that understanding this will enable us to determine voter satisfaction of campaign coverage, which may illuminate why a voter chooses to vote or not to vote.

Satisfaction is linked closely with how often media attention is given to distinguishing the differences between candidates, their stance on the issues, and opinions. It is important to note that television often fails in this respect because candidate image reporting is more important. Therefore, there is a predominant fear that voter satisfaction with campaigns will diminish due to television coverage. Researchers, like Chaffee (1975), fear that potential voters will tune out information supplied by television because it has been determined as useless.
Research in the *Uses and Gratifications* arena can be helpful in explaining voter turnout because it demonstrates how voters utilize their mass media sources. According to this model, voters need to distinguish differences between the candidates and have interest or use for the stories and facts supplied by their news source. If their news source fails in these areas then the costs of voting will increase. Presently, voters who are solely dependent on television as their primary news source are unable to determine the important differences between the candidates (Drew, 1981). This may increase the costs of voting for these individuals. Television news is not representative, responsible, or accountable to the American public, therefore, TV often fails to meet the uses and needs of voters (Schram, 1987). Television news often attempts to make stories as colorful and entertaining as possible, with the result being voters often miss important information (Schram, 1987).

The *Uses and Gratifications Model* is important because it can help further our understanding of the costs and benefits of voting and the criterion voters may use in making their decisions.

I believe that by examining voter uses and gaging the mass media's ability to gratify voters, researchers will better understand turnout rates. It is possible that as voter satisfaction increases with mass media coverage, so will their attention increase to political messages and events. However, as dissatisfaction occurs or increases, so will feelings of alienation from political
messages and events. As the *Theory of Economic Democracy* suggests individuals will internally weigh the costs and benefits of voting. If voters are dissatisfied with mass media information and coverage (i.e., mass media coverage does not fulfill the important audience motives) they may determine that the costs of voting are higher than the benefits. It is important to note that dissatisfaction with mass media coverage is correlated with mistrust about the political system (Kraus and Perloff, 1985). This correlation most likely developed during the 1960’s and 1970’s when television began reporting all the corruption, scandals, and failures of the presidency. Understanding this may lead to greater knowledge about the nature of voting and turnout rates.

**Agenda Setting Model**

The *Agenda Setting Model* follows in the tradition of both a powerful mass media and active audience participation. The *Agenda Setting Model* states that the mass media does not necessarily dominate how voters think. Rather, the mass media has significant influence over what the audience thinks about (Trent and Friedenberg, 1983). Researchers in the Agenda Setting arena, as noted by Trent and Friedenberg (1983), believe that the mass media is highly successful in telling its viewers what to think about. According to Patterson (1980) the mass media has considerable power to direct
audience attention and political responses. Patterson (1980) does not seem, however, to think that this means the audience is powerless. Agenda setting itself, according to Patterson (1980), merely influences an active public, and in a sense affects the choices they make.

Because the mass media has the ability to dictate what the issues will be, researchers in the Agenda Setting arena believe that the mass media is a powerful determinant in what people think about (Trent and Friedenberg, 1983). Mcleod conducted an experiment on the 1964 presidential campaign, and as Trent and Friedenberg (1983) report, he found that voters who attended different news sources interpreted political events and problems differently. For example, voters who received more information about the nuclear arms race from their news source ranked that as a larger problem than economic issues. Voters, on the other hand, who received more information about spending policies from their news source, ranked economic variables as more important than the nuclear arms race. Mcleod, as discussed by Trent and Friedenberg (1983), concluded that the time spent by the mass media covering the issues will, in fact, affect voter perception of the issues. Hence, the mass media has the ability to set the agenda for their respective publics.

There is an important relationship between the saturation of coverage by the mass media and the importance that their publics attach to the issues. In other words, the mass media sets public priorities by merely paying attention
to some issues, while ignoring others (Trent and Friedenberg, 1983). Mass media determination of what is an important issue has dramatic effects in the structuring of our political reality (Trent and Friedenberg, 1980). Saturation of coverage by the mass media helps build the public images of political figures and issues (lyengard and Kinder, 1987). Saturation by the mass media also helps create the standards by which government policies and candidates will be judged (lyengard and Kinder, 1987). Saturation is the amount of coverage by the mass media (lyengard and Kinder, 1987). That is, saturation is the number of references to the subject matter, the placement of subject matter (i.e., the lead story or front page coverage), and the duration and intensity of the coverage. According to Cook, Tyler, Goetz, Gordon, Protess, and Molotach (1983), high saturation of coverage leads viewers to be attentive, thus the issues become salient in the minds of media’s public.

Researchers in the Agenda Setting Model believe that the mass media will affect what potential voters learn about candidates, issues, and the events surrounding the campaign (Trent and Friedenberg, 1983). This occurs because the mass media shapes the patterns of expectations held by potential voters (Lang and Lang, 1968). Television is especially effective because it has the ability to place its own “peculiar perspective of the events on their audience” (Lang and Lang, 1968). This occurs because television does not just transmit information it also modifies the subject matter (Lang and Lang,
Agenda setting by the mass media can also affect the choices that potential voters make (Patterson, 1980).

The Agenda Setting Model can also be useful in understanding the difference in turnout. According to this model the mass media can determine the focus of their audience simply by paying attention to a given topic. The topics of media focus can have a direct effect on the costs and benefits of voting. For example, if media continuously focuses on topics that conflict with group norms, or that voters are not interested in, the costs of voting will be that much higher. Media attention given to crisis situations and dramatic replays are also a problem. For example, television often focuses on dramatic events to make stories more colorful and entertaining and what researchers have found is that this feeds the phenomena of learned helplessness (Levine, 1987). In conflict or crisis situations individuals feel powerless or helpless; in such situations individuals will generally become passive and apathetic if exposed to such events often enough. The possibility that television could feed this phenomena in campaigns should be researched in the future. If voters feel helpless about the political climate, or the election itself, they may find it useless to participate.
Social Cognition Approach

Social Cognition Theory states that a person's mind will create cognitive models which they impose upon the stimuli they receive in order to better understand the world around them (Trenholm and Jensen, 1988). Social cognition focuses on how individuals conceptualize and organize the stimuli they receive (Kraus and Perloff, 1985). In the Social Cognition arena, it is important to understand, how a person sees the world and how it affects the decisions they make (Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stakes, 1964). Also, in the Social Cognition arena the principle of schema has been identified as a crucial area of study.

Schema are mental categories developed from experiences, which shape perceptions about the world (Trenholm and Jensen, 1988). Schema are cognitive structures that help process and organize information (Trenholm and Jensen, 1988). In other words, schema is the process in which people view the world around them (Trenholm and Jensen, 1988).

The level of development in a person's schema will vary, this development will determine how well people organize and shape their thoughts (Kraus and Perloff, 1985). For example, a person with a well developed schema will have a deeper retention of facts and knowledge than a person with a underdeveloped schema. A cognitively complex person will have the ability to differentiate, abstract, and integrate better than a less cognitively complex
person (Trenholm and Jensen, 1988). A cognitively complex person will be able to connect new information, finding the appropriate bin in which this new information fits and is stored. This is important when examining mass media affects on an audience, information will be utilized and assimilated differently based on the level of development.

In the Social Cognition arena four primary types of schema- personal constructs, prototypes, stereotypes, and scripts have been identified. Personal constructs are mental yardsticks. These mental yardsticks help people to determine attributes such as: similarities and differences, or identification of the characteristics and the details of the situation (Trenholm and Jensen, 1988). In other words, personal constructs aid people in judging things appropriately. Prototypes are an organized set of knowledge (Trenholm and Jensen, 1988). This knowledge will reflect the best example of the situation, people, places, or objects (Trenholm and Jensen, 1988). In other words, prototypes organize sets of constructs and help us to determine what type of situation we will be dealing with by matching the appearances with known prototypes (Trenholm and Jensen, 1988). Stereotypes are a set of beliefs about the world, that is, they are prototypes with some element of prediction present (Trenholm and Jensen, 1988). Stereotypes help people determine the probable behavior or outcome of a person or situation. Scripts are the coherent sequence of events that are expected by an individual (Trenholm and Jensen, 1988). Scripts help
individuals to improve upon their prediction possibilities (Trenholm and Jensen, 1988).

Accordingly, schema can be used in future research to determine the way in which the electorate will make predictions and decisions about politics, candidates, and the act of voting itself. Generally, what researchers should find is that the electorate will hold common assumptions about how candidates should perform. Findings should also show that the electorate utilizes the information supplied by the mass media to evaluate a candidates performance, therefore, deciding whether or not to vote. Hamel and Lodge (1986) conducted a study observing the role of political schemata based on the various levels of partisan sophistication. Lodge and Hamel (1986) broke down the level of partisan sophistication into three broad groups: high interest and knowledge, moderate interest and knowledge, and low interest and knowledge. These three groups were exposed to political speeches given by pseudo candidates representing both the Republican and Democratic parties (Lodge and Hamel, 1986). Later these three groups were tested for their recall and recognition abilities. What the researchers found was that the high interest and knowledge group had the ability to distinguish between the two types of candidates present, they could also recall accurately what the candidates had said. What was surprising was that this group suffered from a bias. That is, they had a tendency to fill in the gaps in the candidate's speeches, drawing from
their previous knowledge or schema. Things that the candidates did not mention, but should have given his/ her party affiliation, suddenly appeared in the course of recall by this group (Lodge and Hamel, 1986). Lodge and Hamel (1986) also found that the low knowledge and interest group was biased in the opposite way. This group had a tendency to distort or change what the candidates said to fit their limited understanding of what the candidates should have said. Further research in this area may indicate what affect schema plays in voter participation.

Another study conducted by Miller, Wallenberg, and Malanchuk (1986) focused on what schema people use in order to act politically, or how individuals evaluate candidate performances. Miller et al utilized voting records from 1952 to 1984, focusing on what voters utilized most from their past experiences with candidates and media information (1986). Miller et al attempted to determine their: sensibility of the information, the relevance of the information supplied, and knowledge of politics prior to information supplied by the media (1986). Miller et al utilized factor analysis and found five main groupings which were correlated with educational levels. The first level was perceived competence (e.g., experience and statesmanship of the candidate), which was important to the highly educated group. The second level was perceived integrity of the candidate (e.g., honesty and trustworthiness), which was important to both highly and moderately educated groups. The third level
was perceived reliability of the candidate (e.g., their aggressiveness), which was important to the moderately educated group. The fourth level was perceived charisma of the candidate (e.g., leadership and inspiration), most important to the low educated group. The fifth and final level was perceived personness of the candidate (e.g., appearance and age), which was also important to the low educated group.

Mass media presentation of the candidates can affect each of Miller’s et al. five levels and the perceptions of potential voters. Television coverage of the Nixon/ Kennedy debate could have affected low educated individuals and their perception of the candidates personness- for example, Nixon appeared faded, old and sickly. During the Reagan/ Mondale debates much the same was true: Reagan’s age became a factor. Bush/ Dukakis coverage by the mass media could have affected the levels of reliability and charisma. Bush and the “wimp” factor could have affected the moderately educated groupings and their perception of his perceived reliability. Dukakis, the cold technocrat, could have been hurt with the low educated group, since he was not represented as charismatic. If the voters originally supported a candidate unfavorably represented as above, their decision to vote or abstain may be affected.

In social cognition the image of the political world can be both positive and negative because cognitive maps can be colored, that is, the world of politics will not simply be seen it will be evaluated as well (Campbell et al,
1964). When individuals engage in the act of voting or not voting they are in fact acting towards the political world whose objects or stimuli have been perceived and evaluated in some fashion (Campbell et al, 1964).

The Social Cognition Model, therefore, can be useful in understanding voter turnout. Voters need to be informed, obtain relevant facts, and understand the information they receive in order to act in the voting process. However, this does not seem to be occurring in current campaigns. For example, television coverage often leads to confusion because the information presented is in its briefest form (Patterson, 1980). Since television does not supply voters with the relevant facts that they need to make decisions they are often left with making a choice based on feelings or intuitions, which may increase the costs of voting for them. Mass media coverage, especially television, often appeals to the lowest common denominators, ignoring the needs of the other groups. For example, television often addresses the low educated groupings by creating stories that focus on perceived personness and charisma rather than perceived competence or integrity. Also, voters do not evaluate each political contender based solely on individual facts, but in terms of their own established perceptions (Miller et al, 1986). In other words, voters see political contenders in terms of their political role (Miller et al, 1986). Schema allows individuals to categorize and label political contenders. Inferences can be made from such categories which enable voters to predict
future behaviors (Miller et al, 1986). If media presentations (or the candidates themselves) counter such perceptions the costs of voting may increase during that election. All of these factors could contribute to higher costs of voting, hence, helping to explain the differences in turnout.

SECTION 4: SYNTHESIS

None of the contemporary or historical perspectives can explain completely how voters utilize the mass media. Nor can any of these approaches explain in full how the media affects potential voter turnout. In a sense, researchers have had a difficult time determining which occurs first, or if this process and its effects occur simultaneously. That is, researchers have not come to a consensus on whether the media has a causal relationship with their audience or whether the audience is affected by the media because they are acting as participants. Presently there is no one grand perspective, in this arena to explain probable behavior, in which everyone agrees. Interest has been fragmented and divisions in research have occurred. There is very little synthesis occurring and even less team effort in combining ideas and interest to improve the explanatory power of the various approaches.

The historical approaches have been criticized, in recent years, for a variety of reasons. I believe the primary concern with the Hypodermic Effects
Model is the fact that the audience is seen as a collective rather than as participants. This model ignores experience, socialization, demographic variables, and the cognitive makeup of audiences. The Limited Effects Model, however, discounts mass media influence and ignores any consequences mass media may have on audiences. Finally, the Social Influence Model limits mass media influence and focuses primarily on the role of opinion leaders.

Contemporary approaches have also been criticized in recent years. The primary concern with the Diffusion of Information Model is that it does not explore what occurs when media messages are not adopted. This model also does not focus attention on the possibility of negative consequences on the audience due to mass media messages. The Uses and Gratifications Model needs more in-depth research in the area of voter turnout. The link between this model and the rational approach to voting should also be developed and explored. The Agenda Setting Model has not explored the realm of turnout, or the possible affects it may have on it, in an in depth way. The Social Cognition Model needs more in-depth research in the area of turnout in order to increase our understanding of voters use of media messages and their affects.

To date, most of the studies that have been conducted have focused on one of the above models in which the division lines between the different models are clear. The historical perspectives, such as the Hypodermic Effects Model, the Limited Effects Model, and the Social Influence Model, are still
seen as being useful because they are the foundation of all contemporary approaches which focus on mass media and voter turnout. However, many researchers leave them at that, viewing them as being far too radical or extreme to be given further consideration. Researchers instead have become interested in such areas as voter interests, voter activation, and voter participation, areas which have been neglected by the historical perspectives.

However, there is still useful information to be found in these historical perspectives. For example, understanding the role and the influence of opinion leaders could help researchers in the long run to improve the educational and interest level of the general public by working through their opinion leaders. Thereby identifying ways to increase voter participation. Understanding the effects of the demographic variables identified in the Limited Effects Model can also be useful. Campaigners through their use of the mass media can address certain segments of the population viewed as important constituents for their candidate. They can speak to these segments directly about the concerns that are perceived to be prevalent within these demographics. Thereby, possibly encouraging higher voter turnout. However, the explanatory power of the historical perspectives is weak when it is isolated from contemporary approaches which focus on the psyche of the American voter.

The contemporary perspectives have expanded the horizons within the area of study of mass media consumption and voter turnout. The contemporary
approaches focus on the audience of mass media as active participants in a dynamic process. For example, the audience is seen as having a set of defined uses for mass media consumption, seeking gratifications from their mass media sources. The audience is also seen as having cognitive structures that affect the way they synthesize, understand, and make use of information supplied by their mass media source. Contemporary approaches such as these, have given their attention to understanding the psychological makeup of the audience of potential voters. If we can capitalize on this understanding, a solution may be found to the complex problem of low voter turnout. However, researchers often neglect the more static approaches that deal with more concrete variables, hence reducing the explanatory power of the contemporary approaches.

Theories that focus primarily on voting turnout, such as the economic models described by Niemi and Weisberg (1976), have also been isolated from both the historical perspectives and contemporary models. The Theory of Economic Democracy utilizes a rational model to explain potential voting behavior based on the perceived costs and benefits and expected gains determined by the individuals themselves. However, people are not completely rational beings. That is, people are affected by their emotional and physiological makeup. Therefore, to completely understand the act of voting or not voting, theorists need to understand both the perceived costs and benefits
of voting, as well as how voters determine those costs and benefits.

Understanding how potential voters perceive the world around them will increase the explanatory power of the rational approaches such as the Theory of Economic Democracy.

Presently, researchers are facing a need for synthesizing the perspectives both historical and contemporary in order to improve upon explanatory power. A combination between the psychological and rationale approaches would also prove to be very useful in understanding the full implications of voter turnout. First of all, by understanding how the minds of potential voters work (i.e., by understanding their perceived needs, motives, uses, and cognitive complexity), researchers will be able to better understand the perceived costs and benefits of voting or not voting. Secondly, researchers would be better equipped to understand the role of the media in this process: the role of the mass media in increasing voter expectations, the affects of the mass media on the political schema of potential voters and how the mass media effects this development. Finally, the role of the mass media in gratifying potential voters' uses and needs, all of which can be seen in terms of increasing or decreasing the costs of voting.

A combination of the contemporary approach, the Uses and Gratifications Model and the Theory of Economic Democracy should be considered in future research prospects. The Uses and Gratifications Model
attempts to determine the uses potential voters have for mass media information. Researchers currently believe that viewers will only tune into media information if gratifications are a possibility. This could be easily linked to the perceived costs and benefits of voting because the rational approach gives attention to expected gains that have been identified by voters (Niemi & Weisberg, 1976). The idea of expected gains suggests that voting behavior should increase as a result of fulfilled expectations. For example, if attending to the mass media does not look as though it will bring about gratifications, the cost in time to become informed and stay informed about the campaign and the issues may be seen as too great, hence, outweighing the benefits of voting behavior. This combination between the Uses and Gratifications Model and the Theory of Economic Democracy would be especially effective in light of what we know about television coverage and its perceived inverse effects on the electoral process.

Future research could expand this combination to include the tenets of Social Cognition and the Agenda Setting Model to increase understanding about turnout. For example, research in Social Cognition has helped us to understand what voters think are important presidential traits. Research in the Agenda Setting Model has helped us to understand the indirect power of the media to select and focus attention on certain topics. As was discussed earlier, all three of these models can be used to explain how the mass media can affect
voter decisions to act or abstain in the voting process, by understanding the *Theory of Economic Democracy*.

Social Cognition, for example, gives us insight into voter differentiation, (i.e., complexity difference between voters). Social Cognition research has also identified what voters with various educational backgrounds believe are important presidential traits. However, there seems to be an inverse relationship between this knowledge and potential benefits received for voting, (what we know and what actually occurs). Despite improved understanding of the voter, campaign coverage seems to increase the costs of voting rather than diminishing them.

The Agenda Setting Model can also give us insight into voter turnout. For example, the use of exit polls by the media may have direct affects on voters in the western states. Exit polls that predict early victories or landslide defeats may indeed affect the behavior of voters in Pacific Time Zones, maybe because of increasing costs in voting. One such cost would be the time wasted to vote, since their vote will not make a difference in an election that is perceived to be technically over. The Agenda Setting Model can also give us insight into the phenomena of learned helplessness, which may also affect the costs and benefits of voting. If the voter is helpless to effect the outcome the costs become to great to vote.

A combination of any of these contemporary models utilized in
conjunction with the *Theory of Economic Democracy* would improve our explanatory power and understanding of turnout rates in the United States. This occurs especially when utilized in light of our knowledge about mass media.

Conclusion

Enormous amounts of research have been conducted on our electoral system, voter turnout, and the role the mass media plays. However, very little synthesis has occurred amongst the various research approaches and theories. Since the 1940's research being conducted has sought to either confirm presently accepted theories, or to oppose current theoretical bases. Very little work has been conducted on coordinating the various propositions, in order to increase explanatory power and improve our understanding of the act of voting. I believe it would be valuable if researchers would attempt to synthesize the various approaches and data. I also believe that television, as an influence on voter turnout, should be given increased attention. I also believe that reforms in television's role as a news and information source are necessary in order to improve audience awareness and participation in our electoral process.
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