

**Annex 3.1 Groups' Composition<sup>a</sup>**

	Country	Size	Gender (M/F)	Age	Visible ethnic minority participants	Political orientation Left/right scale in 5 categories (EL/L/C/R/ER) <sup>1</sup>	Pro or anti European Position (For/Against/DK or abstention) <sup>b</sup>
Working Class and Unemployed Executives	French	6	3/3	42/26/33/42/35/41	3	1/0/0/1/0/4	0/1/5
	Belgians	6	4/2	43/27/38/32/23/27	6	1/1/1/1/1/1	1/1/4
	British	5	2/3	48/32/31/54/37	2	0/0/1/3/0/1	2/1/2
	French	7	4/3	35/31/59/24/39/42/26	1	0/4/1/2/0/0	2/4/1
	Belgians	6	4/2	59/29/40/28/51/45	0	0/2/0/3/1/0	3/2/1
	British	5	4/1	37/42/39/38/36	2	0/1/1/2/1/0	1/3/1

Note: For a detailed account of the recruitment process and evaluation, see Garcia and Van Ingelgom 2010.

<sup>a</sup> Ten values scale recoded in five categories: Extreme left (EL), Left (L), Centre (C), Right (R) and Extreme-right (ER). We also added a 'Don't know' category (DK). We also used a second indicator of political orientation, namely the vote intention at the next general elections.

<sup>b</sup> As referendum took place only in France, the question was asked hypothetically in Brussels and Oxford: "Would have voted for or against the Constitutional Treaty?".

## Chapter 4 Modeling the Process of Political Participation in the EU

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This chapter provides an empirical angle that sheds light over one of the key aspects of this volume: European identity reflected on a more engaged citizenry. And it does so within the context of Spain. There is a growing line of research explaining the existence of a European identity or multiple transnational identities. In recent years scholars have assessed the influence of people's media use in relation to important aspects of the European political realm. Research has shown that news consumption is positively related to certain attitudes (e.g. interpersonal discussion), mediating the effects toward political participation. Similarly, scholars have also provided evidence of the importance of social identity in issues pertaining to in-group/out-group relations and its potential in the participatory arena. However, in the context of the EU, little consideration has been paid to all these issues as one incorporated global model. Analyzing Spanish national data, this chapter provides insights into the effects of the mass media, and the internet in particular, towards the creation of a more cohesive and politically engaged European citizenry. In short, this chapter serves as an empirical case study of the relation between European integration and political cultures.

This chapter suggests that the concept of social geo-identity emerges as an important notion that clarifies different patterns of media use of both, conventional and digital media. Likewise, different media usage predicts the support for the integration of the EU, a European constitution and its currency. Ultimately, the chapter lends support to the idea that the support for the EU is a fundamental antecedent to predict that Spaniards participate politically at the European level.

### Modeling the Process of Political Participation in the EU

As recent national referendum outcomes have demonstrated, the EU faces a crucial and complex multidimensional process in establishing extensive popular support. Because citizens' experience with the EU political system is a mediated experience (Voltmer and Schnitt-Beck 2002), understanding the different social identities in Europe and how they interplay with the mass media is central in predicting and crafting political behavior. This chapter scrutinizes the influence media use has on one's political behavior and how it is dependent on one's social

geo-identity. In particular, this research contrasts local and European social ge-identities to determine how those identities affect news consumption, specifically about Europe.

Past research has demonstrated that news consumption within traditional and digital outlets is fundamentally related to political participation (Rojas et al. 2006; Shah et al. 2001); however, distinct social identities within Europe may influence the patterns of information about the Union. Past research on people's self-perceptions as part of a group (Tajfel 1970) found that simply including oneself as part of a group was sufficient to produce group-based behavior. Drawing from these findings this section tests the mechanisms that influence support for the EU generally and will specifically examine political voting behavior at the Spanish and the European levels.

#### *The EU, Circles of Geo-identity and the Mass Media*

The EU is one of many identitive categories with which Europeans identify, along with ties to their country, their region, and their local communities. Broadly defined, social identity is the way individuals put others and themselves into categories (Kiesler and McGuire 1984). Psychologically, social identity serves to define one's sense of belonging to a group and allows one to compare oneself to different groups. Social circles are generally embedded in larger groups (i.e., region → nation → state, etc.) that represent in-group and out-group interactions through concentric circles.

Some authors (Bruter 2003; Laffan 2000) argue that the key to solidifying the EU is for it to be accepted by the large variety of cultures within the Union, as well as to promote political engagement with its citizens. Applying Coser's functions of social conflict (1956) to the different social geo-identities in the EU system and the influence of media consumption, this research hypothesizes that a more politically and civically participatory group will result from the formation of the EU. As articulated by Tajfel and Turner's (1979) social identity theory, individuals acting as members of a group prefer a collective strategy when the outcomes ensure an advantage for the group with which they most identify. According to psychology research (Florack and Piontkowski 1997), if comparisons between an in-group (e.g. Andalusia) and a relevant out-group (i.e., Spain or the EU) lead to a positive outcome for the in-group, this will create an enhanced self-evaluation of all the different groups or concentric circles involved. Therefore, a somewhat unified EU identity is possible if the political system ensures political mechanisms that do not pose any threat to any in-group.

In this respect, news consumption is crucial in the political arena. Initial research blamed television for preventing civic and political participation generally. Bogart and Orenstein (1965) were some of the first to implicate television, claiming it was responsible for eroding community identity and creating disenfranchised and isolated individuals that lacked membership in a larger community. Television was theorized to deplete levels of trust in the government (Robinson 1976) as well

as social capital (Putnam 1995). Nevertheless, newer research has demonstrated that rather than a medium problem per se, the issue at hand is citizens' media content diet. As such, use of television for entertainment purposes may induce the aforementioned problems for civic and political life, whereas informational use of television will lead to political and civic engagement (Norris 1996, de Vreese and Boomgaarden 2006). And this occurs regardless of the news platform of choice. For example, initial digital media studies (Kraut et al. 1998) found a negative relationship between use of the internet and social involvement, as well as with increased levels of isolation and depression. However, as with television, further research has proven these findings to be ill-timed and ill-founded (Gil de Zúñiga 2002). In fact, the use of the internet to acquire information may encourage greater development of social capital among citizens (Shah et al. 2001, Gil de Zúñiga and Valenzuela 2010). Despite fears that online news would result in societal fragmentation and displacement of community concerns, research shows that online news provides a supplemental instrument rather than supplant traditional news consumption. Online information-seeking is positively related to group membership, community involvement, and political activity (Kwak et al. 2006, Moy et al. 2005), even when searching information in the blogosphere (Gil de Zúñiga 2009).

These findings have been replicated to some extent in Europe where researchers have found that informational uses of mass media, both traditional and digital, ultimately facilitate political participation (de Vreese and Boomgaarden 2006). But media consumption is not only related to political participation. Gabel (1998) conceptualizes the way citizens learn as an incremental increase in which citizens acquire a higher level of information that help them form attitudes about entities such as the EU and the individual nation-states (Kritzinger 2003). Additionally, their news use may also inform them about those very institutions of the EU. Thus, discerning which identities determine European news surveillance or are in opposition to its consumption contributes to shedding some light on the creation of the EU as political unit. If European integration is expected to be civically accepted, there must be an active intervention of the media that facilitates the process, so how these social identities spawn media consumption about Europe is also relevant.

The role of social identities has been tested in Europe (Lipset 1960), though not particularly much has been researched in the current context of the EU (Diez Medrano 2003, Thiel 2011). Moreover, previous research largely focused on how different identities interacted with one another (Kumar 2003) or may be formed or measured (Sinnott 2006), but not to how these identities may relate to media use about Europe in contrast to more local news interests. It has also been argued that the more citizens discuss politics, the more they tend to feel attached to their community (Neuman 1986; Norris 2002). Research indicates that the influence of the mass media is decisive, as they provide the necessary information to, first of all, perceive the advantages of being part of the EU, secondly, develop a collective social identity and thirdly, highlight and stress the common interests that would

result in collective action. The media are the primary conduit for such information, as well as for disseminating oppositional information. In either case, the media affect the political realm. In short, the importance of the media alone is not a new discovery but how social geo-identities interplay with media use matters is still an open question, as well as the subsequent effect of these antecedents on political and civic participation.

The concept of social identity is varyingly defined. Ijsselstein et al. (2000) distinguished a twofold category: social and physical presence. On one hand, the physical category refers to the sense of being physically located somewhere and implies that the perception of belonging or common social identity is based on geographical issues, while the social category refers to being, communicating or/and interacting with someone (Rogers and Lea 2005). Whichever the case, drawing on twenty years of survey research in Europe,<sup>1</sup> *proximity* (i.e., value and esteem) and *identification* (i.e., attachment) appear as the most reliable indices for measuring social identity and for that reason, a combination of these items have been used in this research (Simmott 2006).

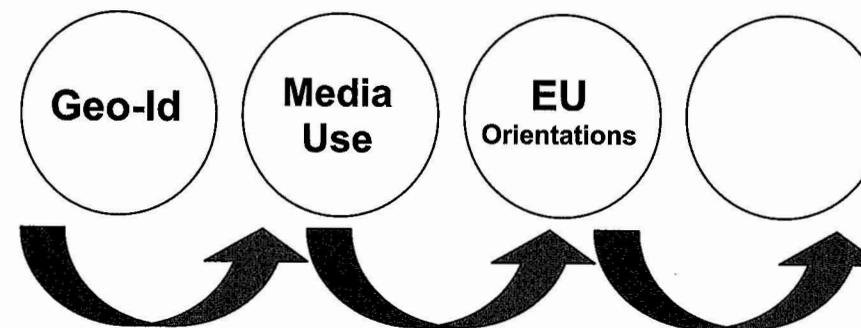
There is also evidence that the internet preserves and spurs a sense of belonging to or perceptual immersion in the group, which can be realized through the creation of a shared social identity between group members (Postmes et al. 2000). As Europeans have multiple identities (Scharpf 1998), not only may socioeconomic status, income, education and other social descriptors be important contexts predicting mass media use, but how these identities create or weaken interest for particular topics of information (i.e. local versus European politics) must also be considered. Even though there is great academic debate (Checkel 2001, Ratner 2000, Castano 2004) that revolves around the role of the media in the context of the EU, this literature has largely ignored the role of the distinct social geo-identities in predicting patterns of both traditional and new media use to seek information about Europe, and how this media-use contrast of local and European information may explain the level of support of diverse European orientations. Furthermore, the question remains to what extent support for the EU at large, a (future) European Constitution and the Euro-currency will affect participation in the civic and political realms at both European and Spanish levels.

#### *The Theoretical and Empirical Models*

Based on insights provided by the field of psychology and social identity, as well as relying on the theoretical account of Markus and Zajonc's (1985) O-S-O-R (Orientation-Stimulus-Second set of Orientations-Behavior) model (see Figure 4.1), this chapter lays out an empirical model that aims to test the effect of geo-identity and media use on the political and civic participation realms within the

<sup>1</sup> To see further information on how social identity has been measured, see the code books of the European Values Survey, International Social Survey Programme, Eurobarometer and World Values Survey.

context of the EU and, in particular, Spain. Recent research trends in the political science, mass communication and psychology fields have established that news consumption and social geo-identity have powerful effects on the political behavior of EU citizens, especially during in-group/out-group conflict. However, research has failed to explore 1) the empirical relationship between social geo-identity and media use and 2) the power media – both the traditional and the newer formats – exerts over Europeans' partisanship and political behavior. Social geo-identity may influence the types of media people select to further their knowledge as new media, such as the internet, provide more diverse perspectives for people to select from to fit their social geo-identity. Peoples' selection of media content can influence their perceptions about national and international issues and ultimately affect their political participation.



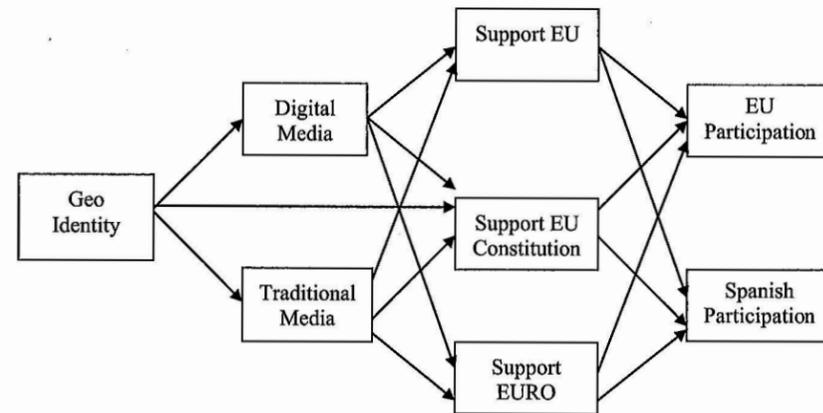
**Figure 4.1** Graphic Representation of Proposed Theoretical Model Based on O-S-O-R

This study hypothesizes that social geo-identity, a disposition concerning one's attachment to local versus European geographic units, shapes patterns of media use, influences attitudes regarding the EU (i.e. on issues such as support for the Union, support for the European Constitution and support for common currency etc.), and thus ultimately, voting behavior in EU and Spanish elections. Spanish EU citizens are an ideal group to study the impact of social geo-identity, as Spanish citizens experience dual citizenship, both as members of their country and of a larger European community. This circumstance creates an in-group/out-group conflict that moves beyond traditional conflict between groups within a nation, such as Republicans and Democrats in the United States, to look at a conflict between national (Spanish) and supra-national (EU) identities. The strength of this identity can differ dramatically depending on news habits and political perceptions and behaviors.

The proposed model uses structural equation techniques to analyze the influence of the aforementioned levels of social geo-identity on citizens' media preferences – traditional and the internet – how media preferences affect orientations related to the EU, and ultimately, political participatory behavior in both European and Spanish elections. The statistical analysis includes a set of controlling variables to

maximize the accuracy of the predictive power of the model. A set of demographic variables such as gender, age, income and education were residualized on the key independent variables to focus on their unique power in explaining the phenomena observed. In addition, different models will be compared to test for best fit for the data, challenging my theoretically proposed model.

These patterns of media use are then expected to have an impact in the levels of support for the Euro as currency, for the EU in general, and for the European constitution. The more one attends to media content that reflects information and outlooks beyond one's locality or nation, the more likely one is to support specific initiatives that move Europe toward a more integrated structure, such as a unifying constitution, a common currency, and representation in the European Parliament. In addition, this chapter contends that the level of support for all these features will have an impact on political and civic participation. That is, as people's opinions about these issues grow stronger, the more likely they begin to participate in politics at the level of the European system (e.g., voting for the EU parliament or participating in other forms of political engagement). Conversely, the weaker their attitudes are about these issues concerning EU integration, the more likely they are to focus their attention on community issues and collective action problems, all other things being equal. Thus, media and initial orientations may matter more for this group (see Figure 4.2).



**Figure 4.2** Theoretical Hypothesized Model of Geo-Identity, European Orientations and Civic and Political Participation

### Methods

The technique of choice used to gather the data is based on survey research methodology, with the particularity that interviews were totally conducted via

cell phones in Spain. The data collected yielded a total of  $N = 252$  interviews. Following the most conservative standards of the American Association of Public Opinion research, the response rate achieved was 39.9 percent, with a cooperation rate of 54.3 percent and refusal and contact rates of 30.7 percent and 73.5 percent respectively. An empirical implementation of the proposed theoretical model was pursued in this investigation in the form of structural equation modeling.

### Measures

#### Dependent Variables

*Voting in European elections* This variable was constructed by asking respondents if they remembered whether they voted in the last European general elections. A total of 60.3 percent of the subjects replied positively to the question.

*Voting in Spanish elections* In this case, the question of whether subjects remember having voted or not in the previous election was also used, but referring to the general Spanish elections. In this case, 74.2 percent of respondents replied affirmatively to the question.

*Community civic participation* Two items were combined in order to create this variable. The questions asked were if in the past year 1) they had "participated in civic or non-governmental groups or organizations" and if 2) they had "participated in a social services group or agency." Both questions were coded as yes = 1 (inter-item correlation = .365,  $M = .5$ ,  $SD = .7$ ).

*Local civic participation* Similar to civic participation, this variable was constructed using two items; however, this time the questions were tapping on a less broad scale of civic participation. Respondents were asked 1) if they had "participated in any meeting in your neighborhood, neighbor association or neighbor community" and also 2) if they had "attended any parents and students association meeting." Once again, both questions were coded as yes = 1 (inter-item correlation = .210,  $M = .8$ ,  $SD = .7$ ).

#### Endogenous Predictor Variables

*Support for European Union* The level of support for the EU was measured by creating an index composed of two items. Both items ranged from 1 to 10 tapping how much they "support the European Union integration" and by asking if they think "the EU is a supra-entity that conveys great advantages for most Europeans" (inter-item correlation = .77,  $M = 13.26$ ,  $SD = 4.89$ ).

*Support for European Constitution* Similarly, the support for the EU Constitution was established using two items. Again, both questions permitted responses ranging from 1 to 10. In this case, respondents were asked the degree of support they had over the European Constitution and how much they agreed to the statement that the "European Constitution will implement fair laws across Europe" (inter-item correlation = .65,  $M = 12.29$ ,  $SD = 4.75$ ).

*Support for Euro* The last orientation toward the EU tried to capture the level of support toward the unified European currency, the Euro. To that end, using a scale from 1 to 10, respondents were asked to what extent they "support the movement toward a common currency: the Euro" and if they agree to the statement that "the adoption of the Euro has helped European Economy." An index was created adding these two questions (inter-item correlation = .61,  $M = 11.84$ ,  $SD = 5.77$ ).

*New media use* The goal of this variable was to capture the variance of new media use with respect to subjects that use the Internet to acquire information about their city and Europe. Scoring higher in this scale would represent the tendency of respondents to practice news surveillance about Europe, while scoring lower would represent a larger interest in information about their city. The variable was constructed by first asking subjects on a scale from 1 to 10 "how much attention they pay to news" about both their city ( $M = 2.3$ ,  $SD = 2.6$ ) and Europe ( $M = 2.4$ ,  $SD = 2.8$ ) over the Internet. After that, an index was created from the subtraction of their attention to news about their city from their attention to news about Europe ( $M = -.119$ ,  $SD = 2.03$ ).

*Traditional media use* As with new media use, the process was repeated in order to create the traditional media use variable, using scores in a scale ranging from 1 to 10 for how much attention respondents pay to news about their city in the radio and the television. These two items were added ( $M = 5.6$ ,  $SD = 2.8$ ). The same two items were asked and added, but this time concerning the attention to news about the Europe ( $M = 5.5$ ,  $SD = 2.5$ ). Afterwards, a new index was created by subtracting the city traditional media use to the European traditional media use yielding the variable of interest ( $M = -1.24$ ,  $SD = 4.66$ ).

#### *Independent Variables*

*Geo-identity* The interest of this research was to create a variable that registered the contrast between the smallest and the largest circles of geo-identity. Thus, the geo-identity variable was computed by subtracting the respondents' European identity from City identity ( $M = -4.75$ ,  $SD = 7.0$ ). Both the European and City identity variables were created by adding 3 items asking respondents to rate on a 10 point scale their degree of attachment, value and esteem to either circle of geo-identity: European ( $M = 24.56$ ,  $SD = 4.99$ ) and City ( $M = 19.80$ ,  $SD = 6.31$ ).

#### *Control Variables*

*Political identification and geographical residence* These control variables dealt with respondents' geographical living environment and predispositions of their use of the news. Geographical residence was measured by a three point scale where 1 = small village, 35.3 percent; 2 = little or mid-city, 34.1 percent; and 3 = large city, 30.2 percent ( $M = 1.95$ ,  $SD = .81$ ). A second variable in this study looked at the level of political affiliation. However, as Spain has many different political parties,<sup>2</sup> rather than asking for a specific party affiliation, this variable looked at the level of political identification by asking people whether they consider themselves leaning toward "left" or "right" when talking about political issues. The strength of that identification was ranked from 0 = total left to 10 = total right ( $M = 4.49$ ,  $SD = 2.57$ ).

*Demographics* Several other demographic variables were included as controls in the models. Age is used as a continuous variable in this analysis ( $M = 34.4$ ,  $SD = 12.28$ ). Education was measured with a single item, asking respondents for their highest completed educational level on a six-point scale ( $M = 2.88$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ ). Income was measured with a single item as well, asking respondents for their household annual income in Euros on a six-point scale, with increments of €5,000.<sup>3</sup> ( $M = 2.36$ ,  $SD = 1.47$ ). Finally, gender was also included as a single item coded by the interviewer, yielding a result of 52.0 percent of the respondents being male.

#### **Results**

##### *Understanding the Path to the Final Model*

The results break down the findings of the model for political participation in both the Spanish and European elections. The variance explained by all proposed models for each of the endogenous variables must be understood as variance beyond the effect of the demographic, political affiliation and geographical residence variables, which were residualized.

<sup>2</sup> For instance the current legislature registers more than eight political parties with political power representation at the Spanish Congreso de los Diputados (Political Congress). Available at <http://www.congreso.es/>.

<sup>3</sup> The author did not want to exclude from the analyses people who had completed all the relevant questions in the model but income. Therefore, mean replacement was used for the system missing cases in this particular variable. Additionally, increments of only €5,000 were included based on results of a previously conducted pilot test. A much larger variance was found to be within subgroups between €15,000 to €40,000 than €40,000 plus.

**Table 4.1 Goodness of Fit Comparison between Geo-identity and Media Use Causal Flow for Political Participation and Other Alternative Models**

	$\chi^2$	df	RMSEA	NFI	CFI	IFI
ID → MU → O → PP (Fully Mediated)	194.6	19	.069	.927	.933	.931
ID → MU → O → PP	89.6	16	.059	.942	.944	.941
MU → O → ID → PP	396.5	18	.282	.848	.853	.854
MU → ID → O → PP (Fully Mediated)	81.6	15	.049	.952	.953	.971
O → MU → ID → PP	208.3	15	.227	.920	.925	.926
O → ID → MU → PP	169.5	16	.196	.935	.940	.941

Note: ID = Geo-Identity; MU = Media Use; O = European Orientations; PP = Political Participation.

#### Fully Mediated Model

Based on theoretical grounds established by previous research, the first proposed theoretical model of this investigation was tested in the form of a structural equation model with the following results (see Figure 4.3). According to the hypothesized theoretical model for this research, the effect of geo-identity on the support for European orientations and political participation is mediated through patterns of media use. Thus, this first model represents a fully mediated one which does not allow direct effects from endogenous variables over the exogenous.

The variance explained by this model for European political participation is 6.0 percent ( $R^2 = 6.0$ ), whereas variance accounted in the model for voting in the Spanish elections is 7.4 percent ( $R^2 = 7.4$ ). The fit statistics for the specified model were greater when compared to the baseline or saturated model. The first model presented in this research achieved a better fit than the least and the most restrictive models tested. The saturated model contained as many parameter estimates as there are available degrees of freedom, while the independence model contained estimates of the variances of the variables being studied. Simply put, the independence model assumed that all of the relationships between the observed variables were ultimately zero (Benter and Chou 1987, Bollen 1989).

The chi-square for the political participation model achieves statistical significance ( $\chi^2 = 194.61$ ;  $df = 19$ ;  $p < .001$ ), ruling out the possibility that the results are due to mere chance. Because the chi-square test of absolute fit is sensible to both the non-normality of the distribution of the observed variables and the sample size, many scholars tend to consider other descriptive statistics that allow the assessment of the overall fit of the model to particular data (Curran et al. 2003). Statisticians have explored different possibilities to further document

the measures that determine a goodness of fit for any given model. Usually, this is achieved by running a series of simulations that tap into the behavior of these different test statistics (Stevens 1996).

Therefore, the model that is finally presented, as this investigation does, is parsimonious and needs to perform better than the other competing models. The following table shows the results of how different models perform with the available data (see Table 4.1).

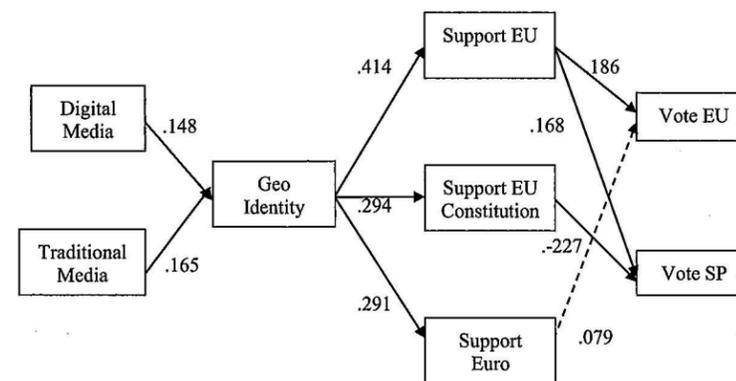
The last figure includes the full model providing a good sense of the directionality of the predicting exogenous variables over the endogenous. In the following paragraphs, a more detailed representation is offered, together with the steps of the utilized theoretical model (O-S-O-R).

*Geo-identity and media use* In this study, the relationship between the circles of geo-identity and media use gains clarity. Results indicate that the types of media use citizens report, both in more traditional and in emerging digital media, positively predicts the gravitation to a more supranational geo-identity. In other words, those who pursue information about Europe via digital media ( $b = .148$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and also through more traditional media outlets ( $b = .165$ ,  $p < .01$ ) are more inclined to show higher levels of identification or attachment to a circle of European geo-identity.

This indicates that the news consumption patterns of citizens determine the level of geo-identity identification. Citizens will tend to align the type of news they pursue to their geo-identity credentials. These results may also be rephrased in order to emphasize the local circle of geo-identity. Thus, this relationship indicates that people who are more inclined to seek out information about their region will also feel more attached to or identified with their local identity.

*Geo-identity* As shown above, media use predicts geo-identity. Additionally, in the figure above the effects geo-identity has on levels of support for the EU itself and its various initiatives are very important. The level of geo-identity identification predicts all sorts of support for European orientations. First, it predicts the degree of support for the EU at large ( $b = .414$ ,  $p < .001$ ). That is, people who feel more attached to their European geo-identity are inclined to express stronger support for the Union. Similarly, it also has a positive predictive effect on one's support for a European constitution ( $b = .294$ ,  $p < .001$ ) as well as support for the European currency ( $b = .291$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

*European orientations* Results also reveal effects of the second set of orientations on the voting behavior in both the Spanish and the European election. Until this point, the model presented in this research has illustrated the effect of the geo-identity variable on the patterns of media use and the subsequent effects of media use on an array of support for issues revolving around Europe and the EU. Finally, it must be explored how support for the Union, a European constitution, and the Euro affect citizens' voting behavior.



— P value at least < .05      - - - P = .10

$\chi^2 = 83.51$ ;  $df = 18$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $RMSEA = .053$ ;  $NFI = .955$ ;  $CFI = .957$ ;  $IFI = .968$

**Figure 4.3 Media Use, Geo-Identity, European Orientations and Voting in the EU and Spain**

Support for the EU along generally positively predicts both voting in the European elections ( $b = .186$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and in the Spanish elections ( $b = .168$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Thus, people who express higher levels of support for the integration of Europe will be inclined to cast their votes at both the Spanish and European referenda. The effects of support for a European Constitution reveal a negative tendency in terms of voting in the Spanish elections ( $b = -.227$ ,  $p < .01$ ) – in other words, people who generally show more support for a European constitution are less likely to vote in the Spanish elections. However, this result is even more compelling when rephrased in the negative. That is, people who do not support a European constitution will tend to vote in greater proportions in the Spanish elections. Additionally, support, or lack thereof for a European constitution has no effect whatsoever in predicting voting behavior patterns relating to the European elections. The last variable of European orientations included in the model is support for the Euro. Results indicate that supporting the Euro does not lead to a greater degree of political activity when considering voting behavior in Spain. However, results indicate that support for the Euro moderately and positively explains participation in the European elections, although the relationship is marginally significant ( $b = .079$ ,  $p < .10$ ).

#### Discussion

This investigation strives to shed light on some of the different mechanisms that take place when modeling political participation. Specifically, it focuses on testing the effects of geo-identity and media use on the political participation realm within

the context of the EU, and in particular, Spain. The most important contributions provided by this research are the inclusion of media use in conjunction with the foundation of geo-identity as a mediating variable that helps explore the mechanisms that operate when predicting political participation; establishing the influence of geo-identity over distinct European orientations; and finally, exploring how alignment within these distinct orientations affects both the political and civic participatory domains.

The concept of social geo-identity, the strength of one's attachment to local versus European geographic units, becomes central in this investigation as it shapes citizens' support for important pro-European issues. It is also important to note how different media use patterns shape the level of geo-identity. Depending on whether people pursue information about their locality or Europe, they were accordingly more or less likely to score higher or lower in the local versus European geo-identity contrasting scale. They tend to perceive their identity depending on their own gravitation towards local or European information. Interestingly, the choice of the media platform, digital versus traditional did not affect this result.

The inclusion of the geo-identity variable provided a more theoretical approach beyond the usual operationalization of social identity. Based on the assertions provided by Hooghe and Marks (2004), scholars need to seek the validity of identity preference and its effect on European integration using a more complex model than one built on economic factors alone. This investigation is a step in that direction. The conceptualization of identity made by most academics relates an economic phenomenon to, for instance, the market liberalization and the European integration at large. Some researchers speculate this reason as inadequate. This concept needed to include identities and group alignment to observe and explain the way citizens engage in politics in the EU. Identity is more salient in a proposed multi-level model that combines both demographic and other sorts of issues (Hooghe and Marks 2004). It was the aim of this research to not solely discern different constructs of identity and how this level of identification may have an impact in political objects but also to test the importance of the mass media as well.

As the literature review espoused, the concept of identity used widely by many disciplines is notoriously lacks operationalization standards. Christin and Treschsel (2002) stressed this fact by declaring the need for an accepted definition and measure for identity. This investigation does not present the ultimate solution to the employment of a single, unique definition of what identity means and how to measure it. This study learns from the interdisciplinary operationalization of identity and moves from a social identity to a geo-identity thereby. By doing so, it gains the social sense of identity that many authors describe as having different states of (territorial) belongingness (Mercer 1995, Luedtke 2005).

Additionally, the geo-identity concept introduced in this research facilitated a meaningful reconciliation between Harding (1995) and Benedict Anderson (1991). According to both of them, identity is an instrument of social action – the former argues that social identity draws from a cognitive sense, and the latter affirms it draws from an affective sense. The geo-identity concept operationalized

by this investigation empirically builds on the work of these two approaches. It is not meant to predict social action or political participation on its own. Rather it mediates the choice into different sorts of social preferences, and ultimately, participation. The notion of geo-identity does not solely deal with individuals' identification within social groups *per se*. This construct also shapes and influences the level of support of European preferences of those very groups. Furthermore, it is essential to understand that the notion of geo-identity gets somewhat shaped by the type of news consumptions. People's patterns of media use may endow the media with an important role on the mechanism of geo-identity formation.

The role of the media is of great relevance. As a zero-order correlation, browsing information – via online or traditional outlets – is positively related to voting in the general elections in Spain and Europe. This relationship also remains statistically significant when controlling for demographic factors. Conversely, the direct relationship between media use and participation dissipates once the variables are included in the final model. In this case, it is now mediated through geo-identification and also different European orientations. Patterns of media use do not directly predict political action at a national and European level but they have a primary influence over the antecedents that do predict political and civic participation. The influence they exert does not change depending on the type of media citizens choose.

Seeking information about Europe through new media outlets positively predicts a greater sense of European geo-identity. Getting informed through more traditional mechanisms also explains a positive association toward this type of identity circle. However they may well yield the same results based on different characteristics. For instance, the influence of new media use on the support for a European geo-identity may be due to the potential capabilities of the new media to stress intangible concepts about Europe, and to provide deeper and broader views about Europe as well as facilitate interconnection with other users. Even though the measure of new media use does not capture blogs use, most news outlets over the Internet allow some posting function by which users can discuss the topics in the news and often bring up topics of their own. This process coupled with the regular means of being informed online may well be aiding the creation of a more tangible space of public opinion and discussion which in turn would explain why it facilitates and enhances a European geo-identity.

Further studies need to address the way the association is created, providing more empirical evidence on how and under what conditions it is produced. This is particularly true due to the explosion of the blogosphere and social network sites as part of citizens' means to acquire information (Gil de Zúñiga and Rojas 2009) which also provides a new political setting and offers alternative ways of participating politically that differ from the ordinary offline ones (Gil de Zúñiga et al. 2010, Gil de Zúñiga and Valenzuela 2011). Thus, it remains untested as to whether the total inclusion of blogs and social media in the model will alter or shape differently the relationship between digital media use and geo-identity. And if so, a question for future research is to explore the implications for political and

civic participation. Similarly, conventional media use that seeks information about Europe predicts such alignment with a European, supranational circle of identity by adding other forms of explicit interest for European issues. Traditional news media may have a characteristic reporting style in presenting the information and issues that focus on European institutions and policies that may be also facilitating the aforementioned alignment (see Koopmans and Erbe 2004 for an exemplary survey of 20 German newspapers).

It makes sense then that geo-identity would explain the support for the European institutions or policies (proposed ones, such as the failed constitution and implemented ones, such as the Euro) and also would do much in capturing the intangible and more abstract idea of Europe as a whole, which is what finally predicts political participation at the European level. The model behaves similarly when civic participation rather than political engagement is meant to be predicted. It is worth noting the negative predictive relationship among the policy driven European orientations and both the political participation at the Spanish level and the most local level of civic participation. The less people support a European constitution the more likely they are to vote in the Spanish elections, perhaps in the light of trying to influence the national governments, which is more relevant to them. Another explanation might be the perception that voting in the European elections will not change that the policy of going through a constitution that already passed the European parliament, whereas at the national level it may seem easier to align with political parties that oppose pro-European policies such as the constitution.

In relation to how support for the Euro negatively predicts local civic participation, the association becomes more visible by reversing the relationship. That is, people who do not support the Euro will be more likely to civically participate at the local level. The ways in which the Euro has affected Europeans has been greatly discussed (for instance, see Hartmann et al. 2003). The Euro has created large opportunities for financial markets and has helped to establish a pan-European market on prices rather than a more country-specific one. However, the perception that the Euro has not helped the ordinary people as much as it might have helped the total economy of Europe as a whole exists. In other words, simply because the Euro may be macro-economically propelling industries does not imply that regular citizens will observe such an advantage at the individual level, and thereby they believe it negatively affects smaller communities, compelling them to get involved and participate locally.

The structural equation model introduced in this investigation helps to clarify the process of political and civic participation using the concept of geo-identity in the European context. However, the equation is not perfect. It is theoretically unsatisfactory as other communication variables, both in terms of media use and interpersonal discussion may be utilized to improve it, creating a more complete one. The substantive ways in which the model may be improved are of course questions for future research. Any time it is re-specified or modified, one will be implicitly changing its meaning in some fundamental way. Although in some instances the

alteration may result in rather trivial or inconsequential outcomes for the theoretical meaning of the model, in other cases, these changes are accompanied by substantive variations and alterations of the model's meaning from a theoretical standpoint. It is for this reason that the initial proposed model persisted in presenting the geo-identity variable as explanatory antecedent of media use and not vice versa.

Finally, results of this study expound that the final model corresponds to the appropriate theoretical explanation as the model fit greatly improved by exchanging the predicting directionality. In the beginning the assumption was that a person would be inclined to pursue certain types of information in a determined way, depending on his/her identity orientations, rather than the opposite. However, I may be underestimating the influence the media exerts on citizens particularly when comparing in subtractive indexes as is the case of this research. It remains a query for future research to replicate the establishment of this causal relationship with more empirical evidence. The difference in how much the model fit would improve very strongly suggests the directionality proposed in this research.

Ultimately, there is a need to take into account that the more a model experiences modifications, the more one will be relying on empirical data more than on theory to help specify the model. Structural equation modeling is a very powerful statistical tool to analyze and interpret theoretical grounded models but it may mislay much of its power when relying on that much on the empirical data (Kaplan 2000). The more empirically-based modifications one incorporates in the final testing model, the less likely it will be that the model will become successfully replicated in other sets of data provided by new samples. Conversely, there are other mediations that are worth noting. For instance, another important characteristic of the model lies on the mediation effect of geo-identity and media use in explaining political and civic involvement.

In this chapter I have discussed the theoretical reasons of placing media consumption as an antecedent of geo-identity and not vice-versa. Yet, there is also a need to further devote attention to the salience of the theorized mediation of geo-identity and media use over participation. It is worth noting that the extent to which both variables exert an influence over citizens' participation is produced indirectly. Taking these variables separately from the model and as unique measurements, they yield positive and statistically significant correlations with both political and civic participatory behaviors (at least as zero order correlations). Nonetheless, when they are introduced in the structural equation model proposed in this research, the direct paths from these variables toward voting in Spain, voting in European elections and toward civic participation at the local and community levels dissipate; they do not reach statistical significance. The effect they have on these exogenous variables resides in the mediated mechanism and thereby gets manifested through their influence on other European orientations that ultimately explain participation.

Patterns of media use help to develop certain geo-identities that predict accordingly distinct types of European support. These different European orientations have a direct impact over political and civic participation. Direct relationships from the former variables to the latter completely disappear. The fact

that there was an statistical relationship among these variables, at least when treated independently, but ultimately gets dissipated once the full model is formulated must, at minimum, encourage researchers to pursue more global explanations when it concerns citizens' participation rather than focus on simplistic solutions.

The model presented here may well serve as a reference to partially explain a number of political behaviors. However, there might be other models that also clarify these processes in political communication research. As much as the model may serve to somehow elucidate some of the variables that can be considered to have an influence on civic and political participation within the European context, other variables should be included in this very model exposing other paths that similarly are capable of predicting citizens' civic and political engagement and that this research might have neglected to include (i.e., the role of interpersonal discussion in the model). It would be rather difficult to obtain a fully explanatory model representing a global, unique and concise answer as to why and how European or Spanish citizens take part in the democratic process. This model has to some extent supplied an answer as for how geo-identity and the informational use of both digital and traditional media influence this process.

Lastly, there still exists the need to better elucidate the causal explanation of the directionality in the relationship between geo-identity and media use. Although the model establishes that certain types of media use lead to the attachment of a particular geo-identity, this directionality of course remains as a legitimate question for further research. Perhaps the forthcoming data collection will help to verify the directionality on this relationship. Other possibilities cannot be discarded either: 1) that media use obtain prevalence over geo-identity or 2) some sort of virtuous circle may be the explanation by which both variables end up explaining and predicting each other. That is, a determined geo-identity leads individuals to use media in a particular way but those same media uses simultaneously explain geo-identity preferences.

Perhaps the best way to solve these quandaries would be to introduce a non-recursive model based on panel data that facilitates further clarification on the equation paths. Likewise, there are other issues that future research may be able to explore. For instance, it seems appropriate to find out some other detailed ways in which the exposure to digital versus more traditional media may promote differences in citizens' attitudes or understandings of their geo-identity gravitation, and if so, what do the implications of having such different attitudes have to do with political and civic participation. For example, it would also be relevant to find out a better understanding of the mechanisms producing the gravitation toward a pan-European circle of identity over another and why they tend to yield different levels of support for the EU. Is it perhaps, that as more and more possibilities of tailoring one's information in the digital world (via real simple syndication, or simply hyperlinking to the news of interest), the more one will be able to filter the information to the extent that it differently influences one's geo-identity orientation? Future research needs to address all these points, and most importantly, will need to re-conceptualize the relationship between media use with

citizens' participation as the notion of geo-identity gets incorporated into the larger picture of political and civic involvement in Spain and in the EU.

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