Mobile Communication and the Public Sphere:
Linking Patterns of Use to Civic and Political Involvement

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Abstract

This study employed a uses and gratifications approach to investigate how certain patterns of mobile phone use are linked to civic and political involvement. Findings reveal that use of the technology for information exchange and recreation are positive predictors of participation in civic life, however associations are moderated by mobile communication competence. Most notably, individuals who report higher levels of comfort with mobile telephony and use it for information exchange tend to be more civically and politically engaged than those who report being less comfortable with the technology. These findings shed new light on the positive role of mobile communication in civil society, while highlighting competence as an emergent dimension of the so-called “second-level” digital divide, which has traditionally focused on computer skills.