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4 Media use and community involvement

A theoretical and meta-analytical review

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The idea that use of community media contributes to community involvement is becoming increasingly popular among social scientists. This development is explained as a response to a renewed interest in community-related concepts since 1985 (and not as a consequence of new research findings). This renewed interest has revitalised the idea that use of community media may promote community involvement. We criticise this idea for assuming a rigid relation between use of community media and community involvement. Instead, we argue that this relation is to be seen as a social construction. More specifically, we argue that if community oriented values become more important in society, the motives and values underlying use of community media and community involvement become more similar, and that this in turn results in a strengthening of the correlation between the two phenomena at macro-level. This hypothesis is tested using a Glassian meta-analysis of US and Dutch research findings. Results indicate that the association between community involvement and use of community media is strongly moderated by national differences. This finding is interpreted as a rebuttal of approaches that interpret the relationship between use of community media and community involvement as a rigid relationship between causes and effects; and as an encouragement for more qualitative and comparative research.

4.1 Introduction

Since the beginning of social science in the 19th century, community and community involvement have been among its major themes (Streeck & Schmitters, 1985). In the last 20 years, this scientific attention is unabated and even intensifying. To give some indications, the number of mentions of the word 'community' in titles of English language articles covered by the Social Science Citation Index went from 580 in 1988 to 1493 in 2008; 'Community involvement' went from 4 to 17; and 'community participation' from 3 to 15. A similar trend could be observed in the popularity of related concepts. The number of times that the 'public sphere' was mentioned in the above described dataset increased from 1 to 18, 'civil society' went from 3 to 46, and 'social capital'

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from 2 to 184. All these increases are well above the average 90 percent increase in articles covered by the SSCI: between 1988 and 2008.

Yet, why is 'community' still such a popular concept, more than a century after Tönnies (1887) prophesied its demise? We suspect that this has to do with the re-emergence of discussions about rights and duties, and the relationship between individual and society, which can be found in the work of Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton (1985), Etzioni (1993), Putnam (1995), Norris (2000), and Patterson (2003).

Since 1985, there has also been a revitalisation of attention for community in the field of communication research. In part this was most probably a direct result of a debate surrounding Putnam's idea that television has destroyed social capital in Western societies (Putnam, 1995). Subsequently, many studies have focused on the link between watching television on the one hand, and the amount of social capital on the other (e. g. Bianchi & Robinson, 1997; Brehm & Rahn, 1997; Hooghe, 1999; Moy, Scheufele & Holbert, 1999, Shah, 1998; Uslander, 1998; Van Gyes, Billiet & De Witte, 1999). This line of research did not provide clear evidence supporting Putnam's views.

A second consequence of the increased attention for community in social science has been the rise of research on the connection between the use of the Internet and community involvement. It was argued that the emergence of virtual communities might have a beneficial effect on community participation and civic engagement and that this could counteract the negative effects of television (Blanchard & Horan, 1998). Therefore, several studies were published regarding the association between the use of the Internet and civic engagement (DiMaggio, Hargittai, Neuman & Robinson, 2001; Kavanaugh & Patterson, 2001; Scheufele & Shah, 2000; Shah, Kwak & Holbert, 2001; Wellman, Haase, Witte & Hampton, 2001; Wilkins, 2000). A conclusion that can be drawn from this literature is that the use of Internet and civic engagement are linked, but that there is no clear support for the idea that the Internet stimulates civic engagement.

A third consequence of the increased attention for community and related phenomena has been the revitalisation of a research tradition studying the link between use of community media and community involvement. After a phase in which relatively little attention was paid to the interplay between these two phenomena, it is now a major theme in many studies in the fields of sociology and communication research. In the following, we will portray this development as a recent twist in the history of a field that has been in existence for at least 60 years.

4.1.1 Media use and community involvement

The research tradition studying the link between media use and community involvement has a history that can be divided into four periods. In the first period some basic observations were made and some preliminary explanations were formulated by Merton (1949) and Janowitz (1952 / 1967). Both scholars observed that persons who were predominantly oriented towards or integrated in a local community were also the most fervent users of community media such as community weeklies and local newspapers. So, both scholars observed an association between media use and community involvement. However, each scholar offered a different explanation for this association.

Merton explained the correlation between media use and community involvement as a manifestation of one single underlying concept, *orientation* that could be directed to-

ward the local community (a localistic orientation) or to the world as a whole (a cosmopolitan orientation). Both localistic and cosmopolitan people were seen as integrated in society, but they differed in how they defined it: Localistic persons saw it primarily as something local, whereas cosmopolitans defined their world as a global one.

In contrast, Janowitz explained the association between community involvement and the use of community media as a result of different levels of integration. To him, non-readers of community weeklies and non-participating individuals were marginal members of society, whereas readers and participants were well-integrated in society. He further offered an explanation for different levels of integration, in his theory about the 'community of limited liability'. According to this theory, social participation and communication behaviour are both determined by the degree an individual has a stake in his or her local community. In turn, having a stake in the local community is seen as a consequence of child rearing.

So, one might say that both Merton and Janowitz interpreted the associations between media use and community involvement as spurious correlations, caused by a 'third variable'. In Merton's view, this third variable was a subject's *orientation*. And according to Janowitz, this third variable was a subject's role as a family member.

The studies of Merton and Janowitz did soon have an influence on social science, but not on the subject of community involvement and media use. The 1950s and 1960s were periods in which little attention was paid to their ideas on this particular issue. This is not surprising, because the link between community involvement and media use was not the focal point of Merton and Janowitz. From time to time some scholars have paid attention to these ideas, for instance Edelstein and Larsen (1960) and Greer (1962). These scholars reinterpreted the work of Janowitz. They made assumptions about direct causal links between media use and community involvement. They hypothesised that media use might be helpful in creating community involvement. This predominant interpretation lasted until the 1970s.

In the 1970s, without much theoretical debate and without groundbreaking empirical evidence, the idea that media use produces community involvement became obsolete. The dominant opinion was that the influence was the reverse: the association between media use and community involvement was to be seen as an effect of community involvement on media use. We emphasise that this reversal was not evidence based, but a logical consequence of a paradigm change (Stamm, 1985). It appears that it was caused by a combination of ideological changes within the social scientific community, new ideas in mass communication research, and changing pragmatic demands. These developments will be discussed in the following.

The ideological changes meant that functionalism was no longer seen as an attractive theoretical perspective. It was criticised for its "built-in bias toward conformity [...] and a disproportionate concern with integration and consensus" (Cosser, 1977, p. 572). Whereas functionalism celebrated social integration, new lines of thought hailed the liberation of the individual from the collective as a positive development, indicative of modernisation (Wellman, 1999). In such an intellectual climate, it was not seen as appropriate to pay attention to the integrative powers of the community media. It was far more attractive to portray the individual as making his own choices, as a consumer of community media, not as someone who was socialised by the community media.

In communication research this new ideological focus became manifest in renewed academic interest for audience activity. Audience activity—the active selection and in-

terpretation of media messages by the audience—became an ‘article of faith’ for those studying mass communication (Blumler, 1979). For a small branch of research such as the research on community media and their audiences, it was attractive to follow this trend. Thus the use of community media became to be seen as a result of community involvement, not as a cause. This theoretical U-turn regarding causality was further enhanced by the fact that the main providers of local news in the United States, the newspaper publishers, became aware of the power of their audiences. They were confronted with declining levels of readership (cf. Schönbach, Lauf, McLeod & Scheufele, 1999). In response, they initiated and financed a research project aimed at a better understanding of their audiences (Bogart, 1991). Because media use (i.e. readership) was the phenomenon to be explained, researchers were inclined to assume that involvement in the local community had an impact on readership and not the reverse. Thus, a new interpretation of Janowitz (1952 / 1967) was proposed. Now his study was used for arguing that participation in community life was a cause of the use of community media.

So, in the 1970s and 1980, several parallel developments paved the way for the idea that media use was a consequence of community integration, not a cause. However, from the mid 1980s onwards, the climate that had nurtured this idea changed for a second time. A significant number of social scientists lost their faith in the Utopia that would result from maximum individual freedom and argued for a reappraisal of community values (cf. Bellah et al., 1985; Etzioni, 1993; Putnam, 1995). A ‘communitarian’ movement took shape. Within the field of mass communication research, some pleaded for a reappraisal of functionalism (Rothenbuhler, 1987). Thus new perspectives on the relationship between media use and community involvement were put forward.

In 1985 Stamm proposed a cyclical paradigm. He argued that media use and community involvement influence each other, depending on what life stage one was in, in relation to one's community: drifter, settler, settled or relocating . Given this cyclical paradigm, he urged for more longitudinal research to clarify this interaction, and stressed the need for theoretical investigations to sort out which types of community involvement are antecedents and which are consequences of of community media use. In retrospect, his study appears to have paved the way for a partial return to the 1960s idea of media use as contributing to community involvement. More and more, media use is treated as an antecedent of community involvement. Today, there are many studies in which media use is treated as predictor of community involvement (e.g., McLeod et al., 1996; Rothenbuhler, Mullen, DeLaurell & Ryu, 1996; Stamm, Emig & Hesse, 1997; McLeod, Scheufele & Moy, 1999; Mastin, 2000; Scheufele & Shah, 2000; Wilkins, 2000; Ball-Rokeach, Kim & Matei, 2001; Shah, Kwak & Holbert, 2001; Wellman, Haase, Witte & Hampton, 2001). On the other hand there are few recent studies in which media use is the criterion variable and community involvement its predictor (e.g., Demers, 1996; Davidson & Cotter, 1997).

In short then, there are many conflicting points of view on how to explain and to analyse the relationship between media use and community involvement. Mostly, the relationship between these two phenomena is treated as if it were a universal causal mechanism. But is this correct? Or should we question the universal and causal character of the link between these two phenomena?

4.2 Theory

In earlier studies (Westerik, 1999, 2001a, 2001b) we have criticised the way in which the relationship between use of community media and community involvement has been studied over the years. We then argued that research has focused too narrowly on direct causal relationships between these phenomena, and that variables that have an influence on both use of community media and community involvement¹ are often ignored.

In this study, we add a new element to our critique, contending that the relationship between community involvement and community media use is largely determined by socio-cultural factors. Our reasoning behind this idea consists of three steps or three theses.

Our first thesis is that *societies differ from one another with respect to the social significance of community involvement*. In our view, this is almost inevitable, because ‘significance’ is not something that occurs naturally. It is something that is created by individuals who all, to some extent, can make a difference. In democracies, they can for instance determine the balance between rights and duties of the citizen, and by doing so, they will also either encourage or discourage the social significance of civil engagement (cf. Etzioni, 1993).

Of course, giving ‘social significance’ is not something that happens in a social vacuum. People do it together with other people. Moreover, they do it together with others who have done so in the past, and they will be socialised in the way they feel and think by preceding generations (Berger & Luckmann, 1966 / 1991). As a consequence, the ‘significance’ of community involvement may not only differ from person to person, but also from country to country, and this is a historical process. For instance, in the US community involvement and participation² appear to have more legitimacy than in Europe. This is a long standing observation that goes back to De Tocqueville (1981a, 1981b). There is also recent evidence in support of this claim (Dekker, 1999; Greeley, 1997). Similar evidence is presented by Schofer and Fourcade-Gourinchas (2001) who further assert that America's high level of civil engagement should be understood as a result of institutionalised ideology that would legitimate non-state, community actions.

Our second thesis is that *the more important community involvement is in a society, the greater the overlap in the routines and motives underlying (1) community involvement and (2) use of community media*.

This thesis can be derived from social constructionist theory (Berger & Luckmann, 1966 / 1991) and related actional theory of media use (Bosman et al., 1989; Renckstorf, McQuail & Jankowski, 1996). According to these theories, it is knowledge (including the value attached to community involvement) that determines how problematic situations are being perceived. If community involvement is irrelevant to people, they won't bother about knowing the name of the local major, and they will not strive to increase their involvement by undertaking some action. In more general terms: increased relevance of community involvement will change the motivational basis underlying community media use into something that is aimed at increasing community involvement.

Moreover, as a result, all community institutions, including the community media will try to meet these changed demands by helping people to act as community members. In such a situation, media may become particularly useful for those who seek to become involved citizens, and thus a link may develop between heavy use of community media and intense community involvement.

If on the other hand community involvement were not that important, the use of community media would not be motivated by community related issues but by other motives. Community media would mirror other concerns, and use of community media would be correlated to other types of involvement. In a consumerist society, consumer information needs may develop into an important motive for use of community media, and community media may become channels for commercial information. In such a society reading a community newspaper will be related to visiting shops and using services. In a society dominated by strict adherence to religious norms, community media will provide guidance for religious practices. In such a society use of community media will probably be related to religious practices.

Yet, in a community oriented society, media use and more specifically use of community media is related to community related practices.

Of course, all societies are to some extent community oriented, religion-oriented, and consumer oriented. There are, however, indications that the US is more community-oriented than Europe is (De Tocqueville, 1981a, b; Dekker, 1999; Greeley, 1997; Schofer and Fourcade-Gourinchas, 2001). And this, in our reasoning, means that *the correlation between measures of use of community media and measures of community involvement should be higher in the US than in Europe*. This third thesis logically follows from the two earlier premises and therefore needs no further clarification. Later on in this study, we will present an empirical test of this third thesis.

4.2.1 Conceptualisation of community involvement

In this study, we will focus on community involvement as social interaction with fellow members of resident community or region; participation in local or regional politics; or engagement in activities that are likely to accompany such interaction or participation, such as occupational activities, visits to local facilities such as shops, restaurants, cinemas, informal social contacts with inhabitants of the same community, and participation in formal voluntary associations.

It should be noted that the concept of community involvement used here is narrower than the concept of *community ties* used by Stamm (1985). Stamm's concept encompasses not only behavioural, but cognitive and affective attachments to the residence community as well. Our concept only refers to *behavioural* involvement. This does not mean that we deny that community involvement has other aspects as well. For instance, involvement with a community may have cognitive aspects (e.g., knowing the name of the local major) and affective aspects as well (e.g., being proud of being a member of a particular community).

Yet, in this study, we will only conceptualise and analyse behavioural aspects of community involvement. The reason for this narrower definition is pragmatic. To study the relationship between community media use and community involvement, one needs to distinguish explicitly between the two concepts. It is relatively easy to differentiate between community media use and community involvement as overt behaviours. But we doubt if it is possible to discriminate between cognitive and affective processes related to community media use and cognitive and affective processes indicative of community involvement.

A second difference between our definition of community involvement and Stamm's conceptualisation of community ties is that 'ties to place' are not part of our concept of

community involvement. Our idea is that these variables (usually homeownership, residence length and the intention to move) are to be seen as antecedents of community involvement, not as its indicators. This reasoning is in line with Janowitz (1952 / 1967) and McLeod et al. (1996) who both treat 'ties to place' as an antecedent condition, not as an integral part of community participation. It is further in line with studies in the field of housing studies, in which 'ties to place' are not seen as something reflecting community involvement of individuals, but as responses to familial and economic demands of households (Clark, 1986; Priemus, 1986).

A third difference between our ideas and those of Stamm is that we do not differentiate between 'ties to community as process' and 'ties to community as structure'. The main reason for this is, that we think that in everyday life structural and process-related aspects of participation aspects are intertwined. People who visit a local church (a process tie) are often members of a local church (a structural tie); those registered as voters (a structural tie) are most likely to cast their votes (a process tie). Those who have local friends (a structural tie) tend to socialise within their own community (a process tie).

This fact, that structural and process-related dimensions of actions are closely related, is an inherent characteristic of human behaviour. Human actions are often repetitions of earlier actions, and such repetitions bring about habituation, objectivation and institutionalisation (Berger & Luckmann, 1966 / 1991). As a result, individual actions become associated with shared meanings and institutions and thus become embedded in a social structure, thereby making the distinction between structure and process somewhat superfluous.

A second reason for not discriminating between structural and process-related aspects of community participation is that researchers often take structural aspects of participation as indicators for the process of community participation. To give an example, Putnam's (1995) ideas about the negative effects of television on social capital clearly build on the idea that participation is a *process* (it takes place outdoors and demands time). Yet Putnam uses membership trends, not actual trends in participation, to substantiate his claims. Apparently, making a difference between structural and process-related aspects of community participation is not seen as essential by some researchers.

4.2.2 Community involvement and use of community media

Our main reason for narrowing the concept of community involvement to its behavioural aspects is, as said, that if this distinction were blurred, we could not meaningfully study the relationship between involvement and community media use. In other words, it is a strategic choice, made for a special purpose.

Scientists with other purposes in mind may not see the need for such a distinction. For example, some political scientists use scales for political participation that include items indicating that one regularly reads about politics, or watches politics on television (Brady, 1999). In the field studying community media use and community involvement, similar practices are found. In the frequently used 'Community Index' (Fortini-Campbell & Stamm, 1981) one item indicates the degree that a person is "following what goes on in the local government and local public affairs" (Stamm, Emig & Hesse, 1997, p. 101). This item has been reformulated by Rothenbuhler (1991, p. 68) into: "How often do you keep up with local news..."

Though nothing is wrong with this measurement of community involvement, it is questionable to analyse the correlation between such a measurement of community involvement and measures of use of community media. Those correlations are biased upwards, since the measurement of community involvement is contaminated with indicators of the concept it tries to explain; the two measures tend to be positively correlated, not for empirical reasons, but on logical grounds. It cannot be interpreted as evidence supporting the idea that community involvement and community media use are closely related. Yet, this is what happens occasionally (e.g., McLeod et al., 1996; Rothenbuhler et al., 1996; Stamm, Emig & Hesse, 1997).

4.2.3 Dissimilar effects of local newspapers, radio and TV?

The idea that community media use and community involvement are related was first limited to the domain of newspaper use and community involvement (Stamm, 1985). The last 25 years have witnessed, however, the rise of studies on community involvement and use of television and (to a lesser extent) radio. However, one may doubt whether a theory developed for understanding local newspaper use is suitable for understanding the use of local television and radio. On one hand, one might argue that local newspaper use is different from the use of local television and radio, and that consequently the association between newspaper use and community involvement is not similar to those between radio use and community involvement and between television use and community involvement. Radio often functions as background noise (Huysmans, 2001). Why then should local noises be correlated with community involvement? Watching television has been blamed for reducing civil engagement (Putnam, 1995). Thus it may even correlate *negatively* with community involvement. On the other hand, of course, one might argue that people use local newspapers, local radio and local television for their content, that this content has to do with the local community, and that therefore the association between local television use or local radio news and community involvement should resemble the association between local newspaper use and community involvement. On theoretical grounds, this issue cannot be resolved. Therefore we have to put the idea that the associations of local newspaper use, radio use and television use with community involvement are similar to an empirical test.

4.2.4 Hypotheses

Based on our idea that only in community oriented societies as the US a link between community involvement and community media use can develop, we formulate our first hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1: In research from countries outside the US with a less community oriented culture, community involvement and use of community media are less positively correlated than in the US.

Doubts concerning the applicability of community involvement theory on electronic media such as television and radio may bring us to the following:

Hypothesis 2: Community involvement correlates more positively with newspaper use than with local radio and local television use.

Finally, our idea that the community index is contaminated with elements of media use and therefore correlates stronger with use of community media than other measures of community involvement, bring us to a final hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Correlations between measures of community involvement and measures of community media use are less positive than correlations of the community index and measures of community media use.

4.3 Methods

4.3.1 Data

Data were collected from studies published between 1985 and 2003. Several successive search strategies were employed to identify relevant studies. First, a systematic search on key terms took place in electronic databases (PsychInfo, Sociological Abstracts and Social Science Citation Index). These key terms were constructed as the combination of a media use term (TV, television, radio, newspaper, or internet) *and* a community involvement term. Community involvement terms were constructed using a combination of words like community, civil or civil and words like involvement, engagement, participation, ties, tying, attachment, and integration. Additionally, a search for articles referring to Stamm (1985) was launched. After that, the relevance of the thus identified studies was assessed by reading (part of) their contents and then a new iterative search was launched aimed at articles published later on that referred to already identified relevant studies. The reverse search strategy—identifying studies from references in later studies—was also employed.

From the sampled studies, associations between variables indicative of (1) use of community media and (2) community involvement were entered into our analysis. Correlations based on non-behavioural measures of community involvement and media use were excluded, as well as correlations between community involvement and a measure of media use that could not be classified as either television or radio or newspaper use. This means that correlations of community involvement with other media (e.g., cable text, internet use, interpersonal communication), and with combined measures of media use (e.g., a scale measuring both radio and television and newspaper use) were excluded.

Only data on use of community media were included. Use of community media was operationally defined as (a) all use of newspapers that is not clearly directed at a national or international audience (such as *USA Today*, the *Wall Street Journal*) or (b) exposure to TV and radio for an audience that is clearly locally or regionally defined. Notice that our criterion for accepting television use or radio use as ‘local’ is stricter than that for newspaper use. This has to do with the fact that newspapers tend to focus on local news, while radio and television tend to offer primary non-local entertainment and (inter-)national news (see Bogart & Orenstein, 1965; Katz, Gurevitch & Haas, 1973; Palmgreen & Clarke, 1991).

Data from the following 12 US studies were used: Bramlett-Solomon and Merrill (1991; $N = 314$, $k = 2$);³ Buddenbaum (1994; $N = 937$, $k = 4$); Demers (1996; $N = 281$; $k = 2$); Finnegan and Viswanath (1988; $N = 208$; $k = 3$); Jeffres, Dobos, and Sweeney (1987; $N = 160$; $k = 1$); McLeod et al. (1996; $N = 394$; $k = 24$); Neuwirth, Salmon and Neff (1988; $N = 198$; $k = 12$); Rothenbuhler, Mullen, DeLaurell and Ryu (1996; $N = 378$; $k = 4$); Scheufele and Shah, (2000; $N = 3462$; $k = 2$); Stamm, Emig and Hesse (1997; $N = 431$; $k = 3$); Stamm and Weis (1986; $N = 491$; $k = 1$) and Viswanath, Finnegan, Rooney and Potter (1990; $N = 377$; $k = 8$). For an international comparison, we also included results from two national representative surveys on media use and community involvement in the Netherlands: Hollander, Vergeer and Verschuren (1993; $N = 956$, $k = 20$) and Westerik (2001a; $N = 782$; $k = 18$). In some cases we had to compute correlations ourselves on the basis of other statistics (e.g., t -tests, χ^2 -tests) that were reported in the original studies (see Schwarzer, 1989, for the formulas used).

4.3.2 Analysis

Hypotheses were tested using ‘Glassian’ meta-analysis, which allows to re-analyse research findings (in our case: correlation coefficients) as the units of analysis and that correlations based on different variables are averaged (Bangert-Drowns & Rudner, 1991). More specifically, we regressed the 104 scores on the variable *coefficient of correlation* ($M = .107$, $SD = .012$) on three nominal predictor variables: *surveyed population* (1 = US, 63.5%; 2 = The Netherlands, 36.5%); *measure of involvement* (1 = no community index employed, 89.4%; 2 = community index employed, 10.6%); *measurement of media use* (1 = local newspaper reading, 56.7%; 2 = local radio listening, 18.3%; 3 = local television viewing, 25%).

Regression coefficients were computed by means of a method developed by Sweeney and Ulveling (1972). This method allows for estimation of parameters for all original categories of nominal predictors,⁴ so there is no reference category. Significance of effects of *variables* was tested by means of an F -test on directly explained variance. Significance of effects of *variable categories* was tested by means of the usual t -tests.

4.4 Results

Table 4.1 shows the results of our Glassian meta-analysis. Columns 1-2 contain variable and category labels, columns 3-6 contain information at the category level, and columns 7-11 information at the variable level.

According to Table 4.1, a considerable amount of the variance of the dependent variable is explained: 28.9 percent in total. If we look at the percentages of directly explained variance, we see that most variance is accounted for by ‘surveyed population’ and ‘measure of involvement’. ‘Medium’ appears to have no effect whatsoever on correlations between use of community media and community involvement. This means that correlations of community involvement and newspaper use are similar to correlations between community involvement and other types of use of community media. Therefore hypothesis 2, which states that newspapers use correlates stronger with community involvement than other types of use of community media, should be rejected.

Table 4.1 Prediction of correlations between media use and community involvement

Variable	Category	<i>B</i>	<i>s.e.</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	directly explained variance	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i> ₁	<i>df</i> ₂	<i>p</i>
Surveyed population	Netherlands	-.07	.016	-4.29	.000	13.3%	18.44	1	99	.000
	US	.04	.009	4.29	.000					
Measure of involvement	No index	-.01	.004	-2.20	.030	3.5%	4.86	1	99	.030
	Index	.07	.033	2.20	.030					
Medium	Newspaper	.01	.010	1.07	.289	.9%	.63	2	99	.535
	Radio	-.02	.024	-.90	.369					
	Television	-.01	.019	-.42	.673					
Constant		.11	.011	9.94	.000					

Note. Total explained variance: 28.9% ($F = 10.05$; $df_1 = 4$; $df_2 = 99$; $p < .0001$).

In contrast, the remaining hypotheses receive strong support. Other things being equal, the average correlation found in Dutch studies is .07 below the grand mean (which is .11). In US studies, the average correlation found is .04 above the grand mean. To put it differently, we found that according to American research findings, use of community media and community involvement tend to go hand in hand while Dutch research suggests that use of community media and community involvement have almost nothing to do with each other. This is in line with hypothesis 1, in which it is contended that in US research community involvement and use of community media are more positively correlated than in research from outside the US.

The data further support the idea that the community index is more positively correlated with use of community media than with other measures of community involvement. If the community index is used, the correlations are .07 above average. If it is not used, the correlations are .01 below average. This supports hypothesis 3, which is based on the idea that the Index is contaminated with elements of use of community media and that this contamination artificially heightens its correlation with measures of use of community media.

4.5 Conclusion

4.5.1 Summary

We have argued that theoretical or pragmatic, not evidence or argument based reasons have restricted research into community media use and community involvement to questions pertaining causal links between these two phenomena. We further argued that since Stamm (1985) it has become customary to assume that community media use influences community involvement and not the reverse. We have criticised past research for paying no attention to the cultural roots that link community involvement and use of community media, and for the practice of using the Community Index—which we believe is an invalid measure of community involvement. The meta-analysis provides strong support for most of our ideas, above all for the idea that the association between community involvement and use of community media is not the same in the Netherlands as in the US.

Our theoretical framework predicted that the more important community involvement is in a society, the higher the correlation between use of community media and community involvement in that society. For the analysed contexts, this framework appears to work. It thus seems promising to investigate the association between community involvement and community media use in other contexts as well. More comparative research is needed to determine whether our ideas hold for other societies as well.

4.5.2 Discussion

From a theoretical point of view, it is of considerable importance that the association between community involvement and the use of community media appears to vary between countries. After all, this is our main point of departure from popular theories such as Stamm's (1985) 'cyclic paradigm' linking newspaper use and community ties. It is at this point that we disagree with Putnam's (1995) explanation of television as a cause of declining social capital, we voice doubt about Norris' (2000) ideas about news use as resource for getting involved in political life; and here, we deviate from Patterson's (2003) ideas about media use as a cause of political disengagement in the US.

All these other, well-known theories suggest that community media use may directly influence community involvement or the reverse and that this influence is due to universal mechanisms. Informed by social constructionist theory (Berger & Luckmann, 1966 / 1991) and the actional theory of media use (Renckstorf et al., 1996), we assumed however that such influences are due to acts of interpretation which may be present in some cultures while being absent in other ones. Hence, we hypothesised that correlations—as indicators of the assumed influence patterns—may differ from country to country, or from culture to culture—and this appeared to be the case.

In fact, that is the lesson to be learned from this study: that culture cannot be ignored, and that theories about the media also need to explain why the consequences of community media use in one culture may be different from the consequences of such use in another culture. Theories about universal biological and psychological factors underlying human behaviour tend to ignore this important task, and therefore we need theories about the social construction of reality and actional theories of media use to guide future research.

Notes

- 1 Notably education and life course related variables.
- 2 This term is used here to refer to the behavioural aspects of community involvement.
- 3 K here refers to the number of correlation coefficients in the analysed study.
- 4 The authors thank Ben Pelzer for drawing their attention to this type of regression analysis.

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