

**Laughing All The Way:
The Relationship Between Television Entertainment Talk Show Viewing
and Political Engagement among Young Adults**

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Top Three Faculty Paper presented to the Communication Theory and Methodology Division at
the annual meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication
August, 2004, Toronto, Canada

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Abstract

Findings of this study demonstrate that entertainment talk shows matter for young people's political engagement. Use of television entertainment talk shows for political information, particularly late night talk shows, was found to relate to all three categories of the criterion variables—political efficacy, political trust, and vote likelihood—either directly or via interacting with a third variable. Findings suggest that use of late night talk shows as a resource for political understanding may foster political inefficacy and political mistrust among young adults. Use of late night talk shows also interacted with newspaper use such that the positive role of newspaper reading in facilitating electoral participation was smaller among heavy viewers of late night talk shows. Interestingly, the negative relationship between late night talk show viewing and vote likelihood was most evident among young adults who regarded celebrities and entertainment elites trustworthy and convincing. The findings of this study call for a further examination of the role that non-traditional sources of political information, such as late night talk shows, play among young segments of the population.

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Scholars have long recognized the significance of young adulthood for the fostering of democratic citizenry (Dennis, 1973; Fendrich & Lonvoy, 1988; Renshon, 1977). Recent efforts in political socialization, in particular, have renewed research interest in this area (McLeod, 2000). Some have identified the media as a vital agent in political socialization with various positive contributions (Chaffee, Ward, & Tipton, 1970; Conway, Wyckoff, Feldbaum, & Ahern, 1981; Eveland, McLeod, & Horowitz, 1998). Others, however, have required a greater accountability from the media, as the readership and viewership of public affairs have been shrinking, particularly, among young adults (Buckingham, 1997 & 1999; also see Peiser, 2000). Many important questions about the role of the media in this critical period, though, are yet to be answered (McLeod, 2000).

Some have suggested that young adults are more responsive to newer forms of the media, such as cable TV, informal news programs, and TV news magazines (Katz, 1993). Notably, a recent survey by the Pew Center shows that young Americans are using television entertainment programs, such as comedy shows and late night talk shows, for their political information gathering (Pew, 2004). The role of these newer political news sources in facilitating young people's political engagement, however, is not clear. While there have been debates on the effects of entertainment media and talk shows on political engagement among the general population (Baum; 2003; Moy & Pfau, 2000; Prior, 2003), there has been little research conducted among young adults, the most active consumers of such programming.

This study extends this debate by analyzing the role that late night and daytime talk shows play in young adults' political engagement. For this goal, we carried out a secondary analysis of a national data set that was collected among young adults ages 18-24.

Political Implications of Entertainment Media

In recent years, an increasing number of scholars of political communication have argued that non-traditional media forms play a significant role in American politics (Baum, 2002; Davis, 1997; Gamson, 1999; Holbert, Kwak, & Shah, 2003; Mutz, 2001; Shah, 1998). Mutz (2001) called for broadening the definition of what is considered political communication and maintained that research should overcome the traditional distinctions between news and entertainment content in its search for political effects of the media. Patterson (2000), meanwhile, proposed a concept that he called "soft news," which refers to sensational, person-centered, and entertainment oriented stories that are found in not only entertainment programs, but also traditional news programs. Indeed, studies on various aspects of entertainment media, including primetime television dramas (Holbert et al., 2003), radios talk shows (Owen, 1997), and television entertainment talk shows (Pfau, Cho, & Chong, 2001), have uncovered various political effects.

Youth and Entertainment Talk Shows on Television

While past research on the political effects of entertainment media has exclusively analyzed the general adult population, a recent survey conducted by the Pew Center (2004) suggests that the role of entertainment media may be particularly significant among young adults. According to the survey, Americans are continuing to move towards less traditional sources for their political information. Notably, young adults under the age of 30 were found to be more likely to use non-traditional sources than the national network news for their campaign

information (also reported in Davis & Owen, 1998; Young, 2004), a trend that has been increasing during the last few elections. Comedy shows, such as *Saturday Night Live*, and late night talk shows, such as *The Tonight Show*, are important news sources for this audience, of whom 34% say that they regularly learn from comedy and late night shows, and 61% say that they regularly or sometimes learn about the 2004 campaign from these sources. Only 23% of 18-29 year olds regularly learn something from the evening network news and only 23% say they regularly learn something from the daily newspaper.

The political significance of entertainment media among young adults is expected because of not only their heavy use of this type of media, but also the low levels of political interest among this population segment. Research has shown that the influence of exposure to entertainment-focused media outlets—or soft news as the author called them—is particularly influential among those who do not follow political issues (Baum, 2002). Following the views expressed by Sniderman (1993), Popkin (1994), and Lupia and McCubbins (1998), Baum (2002) assumes that people will pay attention to news only when the expected benefits outweigh the expected costs of doing so. Soft news content, which presents news as entertainment, is quite attractive to those who seek an alternative to traditional news sources and desire to reduce costs of processing information (Baum, 2002). Thus Baum theorizes that people could learn and form opinions about issues, which is often a by-product of using soft news. The impact would most likely occur for those with lower levels of interest and education, who otherwise would not be exposed to political issues.

One of the defining political characteristics of young adults is indeed lack of political interest. Research has shown that about half of young adults do not pay attention to news and that 42% have little or no interest in politics (Patterson, 2000). They are also less likely than older Americans to be involved in politics in various aspects (see Delli Carpini, 2000, for a brief review on this topic). Notably, the gap in interest in following public affairs between youths and older generations has widened in recent decades (Graber, 2001), implying that the importance of entertainment media among young people may have increased over time.

There is little research, however, which has systematically examined the political influence of entertainment content on young adults. The need for pursuing this topic takes further significance because the period of late adolescence and young adulthood is particularly important for political socialization (Niemi & Hepburn, 1995), with the media functioning as an important agent for the process (Hepburn, 1998; McLeod, 2000). In this study, we investigate this issue focusing on a particular type of entertainment content, entertainment talk shows on television, and by analyzing various political effects of these shows among young adults.

Effects of Entertainment Talk Shows on Television

The literature on political effects of entertainment talk shows provides a somewhat complex picture. Although there have been a limited number of studies conducted on this issue, researchers have investigated a rather wide range of political outcomes, including knowledge (Hollander, 1995; Baum, 2003; Prior, 2003), candidate perception (Pfau, Moy, Radler, & Bridgeman, 1998; Young, 2004), electoral preference (Pfau & Eveland, 1996; Pfau et al., 2001), various political attitudes (Moy & Pfau, 2000; Weaver & Drew, 2001), political participation (Hollander, 1994; McLeod et al., 1996), and policy orientations (Baum, 2003). The impact of television talk shows in general and television entertainment talk shows in particular has been relatively small, and findings have been inconsistent in many areas, which makes it difficult to arrive at a firm conclusion concerning the role of entertainment talk shows.

Regarding the impact of entertainment talk shows on political engagement, some studies have reported a negative impact on interest (Pfau, Cho, & Chong, 2001) or likelihood of voting

(Hollander, 1994), but others have reported either null findings on campaign involvement or a positive impact on campaign interest (McLeod et al., 1996; Weaver & Drew, 2001). The issue of whether people learn from entertainment content still waits for a verdict, with some studies showing a positive role of the content (Baum, 2003; Chaffee, Zhao, & Leshner, 1994) and others reporting either negative or null effects (Pfau et al., 2001; McLeod et al., 1996; Prior, 2003). On various political attitudes, such as efficacy, cynicism, and confidence in institutions, the findings have been also mixed (Hollander, 1994; Moy, Pfau, & Kahlor, 1999; Moy & Pfau, 2000), although the patterns of effects on institutional confidence appear to be institution-specific (see Moy & Pfau, 2000). A greater consensus of findings has been reported for the effects on candidate perception and evaluation. Several studies—if not all (Young, 2004)—have generally found that some candidates were able to generate positive reception from talk show viewers, which in turn led to support for the candidates (McLeod et al., 1996; Pfau et al., 2001; Pfau & Eveland, 1996).

There could be some reasons for the inconsistency in findings. First of all, the context in which each study was conducted was different, and this creates a possibility for history effects. Also, studies have not adopted the same operationalization of the concept. In fact, studies focused only on late night talk shows (Young, 2004), used a general category of television talk shows (Chaffee et al., 1994; Hollander, 1994), or combined daytime and late night talk shows (Moy et al., 1999). Otherwise, as Young (2004) noted, the size of the direct effects of talk shows might be too small to find in the data, which could also contribute to the inconsistency of findings. The last point is particularly relevant to the current study, because the talk show effects, if any, may be more likely to be captured in the analysis among young people, as opposed to the general population, due to their usage and political disposition.

Content analyses of late night talk shows, however, have produced quite consistent results—that is, the tone of the content on politicians and political matters in these shows is decidedly negative. Prominent political figures, such as the president and front-running presidential candidates, are the most frequent targets of late night television jokes, and most of the jokes are not on issues but directed at personal foibles of these politicians (Niven, Lichter, & Amundson, 2003). According to a content analysis done by Moy and Pfau (2000), late night talk shows in 1995 were found to be largely negative in their coverage of the president. Analyzing the same data set, Pfau and colleagues (1998) reported that the presidency and congress were covered more negatively by television entertainment talk shows than by traditional media outlets. Young (2004), who analyzed late night talk shows in the 2000 election, also reported that most late night jokes focused on the personal failings of the candidates, such as Gore being stiff and dull and Bush being unintelligent.

Research Questions

To summarize, the review of the literature on television talk shows suggests that these shows could have a significant impact on individuals' political attitudes and participation. The existence of the impact or the extent of it, however, seems to depend on various factors. As stated earlier, young adults have certain characteristics that make entertainment talk shows likely to be a significant political force, and the effects of the shows are likely to be captured in this audience. In order to examine the political implications of television entertainment talk shows, we employed three categories of criterion variables that reflect attitudinal and behavioral aspects: political efficacy, trust in politicians, and likelihood of voting, which have been examined in the past (Hollander, 1994; McLeod et al., 1996; Moy et al., 1999; Pfau et al., 2001).

To guide our research, we developed several research questions. The main inquiry of the current study is reflected in the first research question, which is about the relationship between

entertainment talk show viewing and its possible political effects among young people. Although young people's heavy use of the shows (Pew, 2004), which are mostly negative in tone (e.g., Pfau et al., 1998), suggests that these shows may foster political disengagement, such as political mistrust and lack of electoral involvement, prior effects studies conducted among the general population have not produced consistent results on this matter. Thus, we developed the following research question:

RQ1. What is the relationship of television talk show use to various categories of political engagement, such as political efficacy, political trust, and likelihood of voting?

Next, a research question was developed to further clarify the relationship between traditional media use and the use of television entertainment talk shows. Some scholars have suggested that television talk shows mainly supplement traditional news outlets (Davis & Owen, 1998), and studies have indeed reported a positive correlation between traditional media use and the use of talk shows (Hollander, 1994; Young, 2004). These findings speak to the importance of considering the potential interplay between these two types of media outlets. Individuals tend to use both outlets for their understanding of politics, and one medium could affect the role another medium plays in political socialization. One of the key questions is, then, to what extent the newer form of political information, i.e., entertainment talk shows, affects the existing relationship between traditional media use and political engagement. The research question can be formally stated as follows:

RQ2. To what extent does use of television talk shows influence the role traditional media play in young people's political engagement?

One interesting phenomenon that exists among young Americans is that they tend to admire entertainment figures more than older populations (Lyons, 2002). For example, according to a poll conducted by CNN-Gallup in 2002, Americans 18 to 30 years old chose singer Jennifer Lopez as the most admired woman, while former first lady Mrs. Clinton was the most admired woman overall. These phenomena could be theoretically important, because young people's attitudes toward celebrities and entertainment elites, who frequently appear on television talk shows, could affect how they respond to the content of the shows. In fact, past studies have documented so-called celebrity effects (Basil, 1996; Boon & Lomore, 2001), which have been most productive in the research on the effects of celebrity endorsement in advertising (Kamins, Brand, Hoeke, & Moe, 1989; Heath, McCarthy, & Mothersbaugh, 1994). According to one study (Boon & Lomore, 2001), young adults who identified one or more celebrity figures as idols in their lives reported having taken some concrete steps—such as altering physical appearance, forming certain values, and pursuing particular activities—in order to increase the match between their idol's identity and their own (Boon & Lomore, 2001). Studies on source credibility have also shown that communicators perceived as trustworthy tend to exercise greater influence (Yoon, Kim, & Kim, 1998; see Pornpitakpan, 2004, for a review on source credibility). Thus, it may be expected that the contribution of entertainment talk shows to young people's political engagement should be greater among those who consider the messengers in those shows—who we call “entertainment elites”—trustworthy and convincing. Thus, we developed the following research question:

RQ3. How does young people's trust in entertainment elites influence the role television talk shows play in their political engagement?

Finally, given the inconsistency in conceptualizing television talk shows, it may be important to separately analyze daytime and late night talk shows. According to Mittell (2003), who conducted an online survey consisting of open-ended questions on people's reactions to talk shows, there were some differences in content between these two types of shows. While most respondents described daytime talk shows, such as *Oprah* and *Montel Williams*, as "educational" and focusing on "important issues" and "public interest," they perceived late night talk shows, such as *The Late Show with David Letterman* and *The Tonight Show*, as focusing on "entertainment" and "Hollywood," instead of particular issues and people's problems. Although the findings of this content analysis do not directly speak to the issues relevant to political engagement, they raise a possibility of different roles by these shows. Thus, a research question was developed as follows:

RQ4. Are there any differences between daytime and late night talk shows in their relationships with young people's political engagement?

Method

Data

The findings of this study are based on a secondary analysis of a national telephone survey commissioned by the Youth Vote Coalition¹ among youth ages 18 – 24 in June of 2002. The sample consists of 1,600 respondents, which includes over samples of 300 African-Americans and 300 Latinos. Telephone numbers were selected by random digit dialing, and professionals conducted the interviews. For all analyses reported in this study the sampling weight that was provided in the data set was used.

Key demographic characteristics of the sample resemble those of the U.S. population aged 18-24, which were reported in the 2000 U.S. Census, with respect to gender (48.9% and 49% female in the census and the current data, respectively), age (median: 21), education (median: high school diploma), and race (69.1% White and 14.0% Black in the census, as compared to 67.8% White and 12.1% Black in the sample). However, while the proportion of respondents with some college education (40.4%) and college diploma (8.0%) is comparable to those of the U.S. population aged 18-24 (38.4% and 7.8%, respectively), the sample has a smaller proportion of respondents without high school diploma (10.0% vs. 25.3%). Also, the proportion of Hispanic is smaller in the sample than the population (13.1% vs. 17.5%).

Criterion Variables

This study employed three criterion variables that reflect young people's political disposition and engagement: political efficacy, trust in politicians, and likelihood of voting. For political efficacy, two items that measure individuals' perceived impact on the political process were used. Respondents were asked to report on a four-point scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," how much they agreed with the following statements: "my vote matters" and "my vote makes a difference." Responses to the two questions were combined to form an index (inter-item correlation = .81; $M = 6.05$, $SD = 1.96$)

Trust in politicians was indirectly measured by tapping how credible and persuasive respondents considered politicians in a particular electoral context. Respondents were separately asked how convincing the President and the Governor of their own state would be if they were to appear in ads encouraging young adults to vote. Responses to each question were recorded on a four-point scale, ranging from "not at all convincing" to "very convincing," and summed as an index (inter-item correlation = .74; $M = 5.27$, $SD = 1.96$).

The degree to which respondents intended to turn out to vote in the 2002 election was measured by their likelihood of voting. Respondents were asked to report how likely they were to vote in the November election; a five-point scale ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 1.28$), with options including “definitely not,” “probably not,” “50-50,” “probably,” and “almost certain,” was used.

Media Use

Respondents were asked, on a seven-point scale, ranging from “never” to “daily,” how often they got information about public affairs and campaigns from various sources. Included in the study are newspapers ($M = 5.17$, $SD = 1.77$), television news ($M = 5.66$, $SD = 1.57$), late night talk shows ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 2.05$), and daytime talk shows ($M = 2.76$, $SD = 1.90$). Responses to late night talk shows and daytime talk shows were combined to create a composite index of television entertainment talk shows (inter-item correlation = .43; $M = 6.59$, $SD = 3.34$).

Trust in Entertainment Elites

In order to measure the degree to which young respondents trust entertainment elites, respondents were provided with a list of entertainment figures and asked to report how convincing each would be in the ad scenario described above (see the description for *trust in politicians*). The six entertainment elites provided were sports figures, musicians, MTV, late night TV hosts, actors and celebrities, and daytime talk show hosts. For each a four-point scale was used, and responses were summed as an index (Cronbach $\alpha = .86$; $M = 14.05$; $SD = 4.79$).

Control Variables

Key demographic variables, such as age ($M = 20.88$, $SD = 2.04$), gender, and education were used in all analyses as control variables. Also, two political attitudinal variables, political interest and civic duty, were included. These variables may influence political information gathering from the media as well as various political outcomes, which could produce spurious correlation between media measures and criterion variables. Political interest was measured by a single item; respondents were asked on a four-point scale, ranging from “not closely at all” to “very closely,” how closely they followed what politicians were doing or saying on the issue that they had identified as the number one national problem for a prior question ($M = 2.51$; $SD = .96$). Civic duty, which refers to the degree to which one considered voting a citizen’s civic obligation, was measured by a single statement, “voting is my responsibility.” Respondents were asked on a four-point scale how strongly they agreed with the statement ($M = 3.05$, $SD = 1.03$).

Interaction Terms

This study examined two sets of interaction terms: those between traditional news media use and entertainment talk show use variables and those between trust in entertainment elites and entertainment talk show use variables. For these analyses, multiplicative interaction terms were created. To reduce potential problems with multicollinearity between interaction terms and their components, all the component variables were standardized prior to the formation of the interaction terms (Jaccard, Turrisi, & Wan 1990).

Analytic Strategies

In order to understand the role television entertainment talk shows play in young people’s political engagement, this study conducted analyses in two separate stages. Each stage carried out an identical investigation; the only difference is that the first stage examined the influence of television talk shows using the composite index, while the second stage analyzed the influence of

daytime talk shows and late night talk shows separately. Within each stage, this study employed a series of regression analyses that investigated the independent influence of the use of entertainment talk shows and the interactive relationships of entertainment talk shows with traditional media outlets and trust in entertainment elites. Significant interactive effects will be graphically presented for ease of interpretation of the results.

Results

Table 1 summarizes findings related to RQ1, which were obtained from three regression analyses with political efficacy, political trust, and likelihood of voting as criterion variables, respectively. As expected, both political attitudinal variables, political interest and civic duty, were found to be significant predictors for all the criterion variables. On the contrary, the influence of demographic variables did not appear as strong as the attitudinal variables, which is probably due to the demographically homogeneous nature of the sample. The findings show that female respondents tended to consider politicians trustworthy and persuasive and that those with higher educational attainment were more likely to intend to vote. The control block accounted for a significant portion of the variance in the criterion variables, ranging from 14.1% for political trust, $F(5, 937) = 30.80, p < .01$, to 34.0% for political efficacy, $F(5, 923) = 95.10, p < .01$, and 39.7% for vote likelihood, $F(5, 930) = 122.43, p < .01$.

After the strong control, two traditional media use variables were found to be significant in most analyses. For the young respondents, television emerged as the most consistent media variable in fostering political efficacy, political trust, and electoral participation. Newspaper use was also found to be significant, at least marginally, for all criterion variables.

Two of the three regression analyses in Table 1 uncovered the significant role of entertainment talk shows on television, which is independent of the effects of the control and traditional news media variables. That is, those who utilized televised entertainment talk shows as information sources were less likely to feel efficacious with respect to personal influence on political processes. Political trust, however, was positively related to television entertainment talk show use. This finding indicates that those who frequently obtained political information from entertainment talk shows tended to consider politicians credible and convincing as electoral mobilizers. Likelihood of voting was not significantly related to the talk show variable.

Table 2 explores the interplay between traditional news media and televised talk shows by examining interactive relationships between these two categories of media use variables (RQ2). Of six interaction terms examined, one, the interaction of newspaper reading and entertainment talk show viewing, was found to be significant. The insignificant interaction terms indicate that using traditional media outlets for political information gathering retained a positive relationship with political outcome variables, regardless of the frequency of talk show viewing.

The negative coefficient of the interaction of entertainment talk show viewing and newspaper use ($\beta = -.06, t = -2.07$) demonstrates that the positive influence of newspaper reading on fostering young people's intention to vote was significantly smaller among those who were frequently getting political information from entertainment talk shows on television. The findings are plotted in Figure 1. As shown in the top panel of Figure 1, for both heavy and light viewers of talk shows, the likelihood of voting increased as young respondents were more actively reading newspapers. However, the growth was greater for less frequent talk show viewers, which demonstrates that talk show viewing lessened the potential mobilizing role of newspapers.

Table 3 shows findings concerning RQ3, which asked whether the influence of talk show viewing varied depending on the degree of trust young respondents had toward entertainment elites.² Of all interaction terms examined, one between talk show viewing and the trust variable

was found to be significant for vote likelihood. The negative interaction ($\beta = -.08, t = -3.06$) is plotted in the bottom panel of Figure 1. As shown in the figure, among those who had a lower degree of trust in entertainment elites, viewing entertainment talk shows had somewhat positive influence on young people's intention to vote. For those who considered entertainment figures credible and convincing, however, the role that entertainment talk show viewing played in electoral mobilization was opposite and stronger; those young people became less likely to turn out to vote as they were getting political information from entertainment talk shows more frequently.

Tables 4, 5, and 6 report findings based on a series of investigation that replicated the earlier analyses. As stated in RQ4, these additional analyses were carried out in order to examine whether there were differences between the two types of televised talk shows in their political outcomes. Table 4 shows direct relationships of these shows with the three criterion variables. As observed in Table 1, two criterion variables, political efficacy and trust, were significantly related to at least one entertainment talk show variable. The relationships, however, differed from the ones reported earlier on several important aspects. First, the negative relationship between political efficacy and the composite index of entertainment talk show viewing was replicated only for late night talk show viewing, which indicates that the earlier negative relationship is mainly attributed to this particular type of entertainment talk show. Second, the positive relationship between political trust and the composite index of entertainment talk show viewing was repeated only for daytime talk show viewing. Relying on late night talk shows for political information, however, did not have a positive relationship; rather, it was negatively related to the criterion variable. Thus, the findings in Table 4 indicate that the stronger, positive relationship ($\beta = .16, t = 4.93$) of daytime talk show use with political trust suppressed the weaker, negative ($\beta = -.08, t = -2.37$) relationship of late night talk show viewing with the criterion variable, when the composite index of television entertainment talk use was examined (see Table 1).

Table 5 summarizes findings concerning the interactive relationships between traditional media and different types of entertainment talk shows on television. As found in Table 2, likelihood of voting is the only variable that had a significant relationship with an interaction term. The negative interaction, however, was observed exclusively for the interaction of late night talk show viewing and newspaper use. As plotted in the top panel of Figure 2, the positive role of newspapers in fostering intention to vote was weaker among those who were frequently getting political information from late night talk shows. Daytime talk shows, however, did not play such role, as evidenced by the insignificant interaction coefficient.

Table 6 examined whether trust in entertainment elites modified the role of late night and daytime talk shows differentially.³ The findings in the table repeat the patterns of the findings observed in Tables 4 and 5. As demonstrated in Table 3, the trust measure functioned as a moderator in explaining likelihood of voting, but the significant interactive relationship was found again only for late night talk show viewing. As indicated in the bottom panel of Figure 2, greater reliance on late night talk shows tended to weaken young people's intention to turn out only when they had trusting attitudes toward entertainment leaders, a relationship that was not found for daytime talk shows.

Discussion

Findings of this study demonstrate that entertainment talk shows matter for young people's political engagement. Use of television entertainment talk shows was found to relate to all three categories of the criterion variables either directly or via interacting with a third variable. Findings also suggest that a direct role of television talk shows may be more manifested

in psychological and affective domains, in that viewing entertainment talk shows on television was directly related to young people's attitudinal reactions, such as self-efficacy and trust; behavioral impact of the talk shows, however, was subtler.

Furthermore, findings clearly suggested that televised entertainment talk shows are not a singular phenomenon. In fact, use of daytime talk shows did not exhibit any negative relationship with the criterion variables, and all negative relationships that were found for the composite index of television talk show use were attributable to late night talk shows. The contribution of daytime talk shows in the context of the current findings was, rather, to help viewers consider political leaders trustworthy and convincing in an electoral context. These findings suggest that there may be unique political roles played by different outlets of non-political television programming. Future research needs to explore this issue further by content-analyzing political discourse in these programs, which may influence viewers' political attitudes as well as their participation.

Findings in this study are consistent with what content studies of late night talk shows have found (Niven et al., 2003; Young, 2004). These studies have reported that late night jokes are characterized by cynical and negative tones in describing political leaders and events. These programs were often found unharmed among the general population (Young, 2004), but the current findings suggest that young adults may be vulnerable with respect to the formation of core political attitudes, such as self-efficacy and trust. Furthermore, exposure to late night jokes on politics could interfere with mobilizing function of other news media, as the negative interaction between late night talk show viewing and newspaper use demonstrated. What is not clear in this study, though, is long-term implications of these negative relationships. It is yet to be known whether the negative impact is something that young adults could overcome, as they grow further into adulthood.

The significant role that late night talk shows played in the current study suggests a strong possibility that there could be other types of media effects among young viewers. Given their low levels of political interest and sophistication, it is quite possible that their political cognition could be shaped by their exposure to late night talk shows. Future research needs to test this possibility by investigating such areas as political learning, agenda-setting, and priming effects of late night talk shows among young adults.

One of the interesting findings in this study is the significance of entertainment elites in young people's electoral participation. As findings showed, the demobilizing potential of late night talk shows that depict politics in cynical and negative tone seems to be materialized only among young viewers who rely on the shows as a resource for political information *and* evaluate entertainment elites—the sources of such characterization of politics—trustworthy and convincing. Celebrities and entertainers have not only been advocates for causes and charities, but they have also attracted media attention on their political stances and even run for public office. While some have identified a list of factors that contribute to the political success—broadly defined—of celebrities, such as strong media and fundraising skills, being photogenic and recognizable, and being perceived as political outsiders (West, 2003), the general public are yet to admit their political persuasiveness (Gillespie, 2003). Findings of this study strongly speak to the need for a careful understanding on the process by which entertainment elites may exert political influence. For instance, research needs to attempt to identify precisely feature(s) that may make entertainment elites politically persuasive, with the potential features including expertise, trustworthiness, and/or attractiveness (Chaiken 1979; Pornpitakpan, 2004). The current results suggest that they may have an impact in some areas, sometimes indirectly, and particularly among young people.

In closing, we would like to acknowledge two important caveats about the analyses of

this study. First, because this study is based on a secondary analysis of the existing data set, the operationalizations of some of our measures are not consistent with those in the literature. In particular, our trust measure is limited with respect to content validity, because it is narrowly operationalized to refer to respondents' responses to a particular context. Although there is some evidence of construct validity, given the theoretically consistent relationships of political trust with other political variables, future research is certainly needed to resolve this concern. Second, the relationships that this study reported were based on cross-sectionally collected data, which does not prove the existence of causal relationships between variables. Future studies on the basis of longitudinal data would need to address this issue.

Notes

1. A full report on the survey results and detailed methodology are available at the Youth Vote Coalition website: www.youthvote.org. The data set is available on the web site of the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE): <http://www.civicyouth.org/research/products/data.htm>
2. We re-ran all analyses using a new trust index, which was created by adding responses concerning talk show hosts, daytime and late night (inter-item correlation = .54, $M = 4.19$; $SD = 1.68$). The results are consistent with those in Table 3. In the alternative analyses, the interaction coefficient of TV talk show use and trust in talk show hosts was $-.09$ ($t = -3.39$; $p < .01$).
3. We re-ran all analyses using two variables of trust in talk show hosts, daytime and late night. The results are consistent with those in Table 6. In the alternative analyses, the interaction coefficient of late night talk show use and trust in late night talk show hosts, the only significant interaction term, was $-.07$ ($t = -2.89$; $p < .01$).

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Table 1
The Relationship Between Television Entertainment Talk Show Use
and Political Engagement

	Political Efficacy		Political Trust		Vote Likelihood	
	β	<i>t</i> Value	β	<i>t</i> Value	β	<i>t</i> Value
Control Block						
Age	-.02	-.59	-.01	-.33	.03	1.05
Gender (high: female)	.03	.93	.09**	2.90	.02	.89
Education	.05	1.53	-.03	-.77	.16**	5.46
Political Interest	.16**	5.44	.13**	3.71	.19**	6.59
Civic Duty	.44**	15.22	.23**	6.98	.37**	13.55
R^2 (%)	34.0		14.1		39.7	
<i>F</i>	95.10**		30.80**		122.43**	
Media Use						
Newspaper Use	.07*	2.02	.07#	1.73	.15**	4.94
Television Use	.13**	4.06	.13**	3.56	.07*	2.39
TV Entertainment Talk Show Use	-.07**	-2.65	.07*	2.25	-.03	-1.12
Final R^2 (%)						
<i>F</i>	36.3		17.4		42.6	
	65.59**		24.61**		85.97**	

Notes.

Entries are standardized final regression coefficients. ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, # $p < .10$

Table 2
Interaction of Television Entertainment Talk Show Use and Traditional Media Use

	Political Efficacy		Political Trust		Vote Likelihood	
	β	<i>t</i> Value	β	<i>t</i> Value	β	<i>t</i> Value
Control Block (R^2)	34.0%		14.1%		39.7%	
<i>F</i>	95.10**		30.80**		122.43**	
Newspaper Use	.08*	2.23	.06#	1.69	.14**	4.50
Television Use	.15**	4.41	.13**	3.51	.06#	1.90
TV Entertainment Talk Show Use	-.08**	-2.95	.07*	2.16	-.02	-.80
TV Entertainment Talk Show Use *Newspaper Use	.01	.23	-.02	-.51	-.06*	-2.07
TV Entertainment Talk Show Use *Television Use	.05	1.48	.02	.64	.00	.01
Final R^2 (%)	36.6		17.5		42.9	
<i>F</i>	52.87**		19.70**		69.57**	

Notes.

1. Entries are standardized final regression coefficients.
 2. Control block includes age, gender, education, political interest, and civic duty.
- ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, # $p < .10$

Table 3
Interaction of Television Entertainment Talk Show Use and Trust in Entertainment Elites

	Political Efficacy		Political Trust		Vote Likelihood	
	β	<i>t</i> Value	β	<i>t</i> Value	β	<i>t</i> Value
Prior Blocks (R^2)	36.3%		17.7%		43.4%	
<i>F</i>	.71.76**		27.38**		97.06**	
Trust in Entertainment Elites	.11**	4.03	.18**	5.85	.09**	3.41
TV Entertainment Talk Show Use	-.08**	-2.88	.02	.53	-.04	-1.40
TV Talk Show Use *Trust in Entertainment Elites	-.05#	-1.78	.05	1.54	-.08**	-3.06
Final R^2 (%)	38.1		21.4		44.8	
<i>F</i>	53.96**		24.18**		71.53**	

Notes.

1. Entries are standardized final regression coefficients.
 2. Prior blocks include age, gender, education, political interest, civic duty, newspaper use, and television use.
- ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, # $p < .10$

Table 4
The Relationship between Late Night and Daytime Talk Show Use
and Political Engagement

	Political Efficacy		Political Trust		Vote Likelihood	
	β	<i>t</i> Value	β	<i>t</i> Value	β	<i>t</i> Value
Control Block (R²)	34.0%		14.1%		39.7%	
<i>F</i>	95.10**		30.80**		122.43**	
Newspaper Use	.07*	2.01	.07#	1.75	.15**	4.93
Television Use	.13**	4.14	.14**	3.92	.07*	2.37
Late Night Talk Show Use	-.07*	-2.45	-.08*	-2.37	-.02	-.52
Daytime Talk Show Use	-.01	-.40	.16**	4.93	-.02	-.70
Final R² (%)	36.4		19.1		42.6	
<i>F</i>	58.47**		24.45**		76.34**	

Notes.

1. Entries are standardized final regression coefficients.
 2. Control block includes age, gender, education, political interest, and civic duty.
- ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, # $p < .10$

Table 5
Interaction of Late Night/Daytime Talk Show Use and Traditional Media Use

	Political Efficacy		Political Trust		Vote Likelihood	
	β	<i>t</i> Value	β	<i>t</i> Value	β	<i>t</i> Value
Control Block (R^2)	34.0%		14.1%		39.7%	
<i>F</i>	95.10**		30.80**		122.43**	
Newspaper Use	.07*	2.18	.06	1.60	.14**	4.33
Television Use	.15**	4.48	.14**	3.73	.07*	2.11
Late Night	-.08**	-2.58	-.08*	-2.39	-.02	-.53
Daytime	-.02	-.59	.17**	4.98	-.01	-.41
Late Night *Newspaper Use	.00	.01	.02	.48	-.10**	-3.06
Late Night *Television Use	.04	1.15	.01	.31	.06	1.63
Daytime *Newspaper Use	.01	.17	-.05	-1.29	.03	.95
Daytime *Television Use	.01	.36	.01	.18	-.05	-1.63
Final R^2 (%)	36.6		19.3		42.5	
<i>F</i>	40.69**		17.06**		54.16**	

Notes.

1. Entries are standardized final regression coefficients.
 2. Control block includes age, gender, education, political interest, and civic duty.
- ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, # $p < .10$

Table 6
Interaction of Late Night/Daytime Talk Show Use and Trust in Entertainment Elites

	Political Efficacy		Political Trust		Vote Likelihood	
	β	<i>t</i> Value	β	<i>t</i> Value	β	<i>t</i> Value
Prior Blocks (R^2)	36.3%		17.7%		43.4%	
<i>F</i>	71.76**		23.38**		97.06**	
Trust in Entertainment Elites	.11 **	3.83	.17 **	5.56	.09 **	3.34
Late Night	-.07 *	-2.39	-.09 *	-2.54	-.02	-.81
Daytime	-.02	-.65	.12 **	3.33	-.02	-.81
Late Night*Trust in Entertainment Elites	-.02	-.61	.04	1.09	-.06 *	-2.22
Daytime*Trust in Entertainment Elites	-.05	-1.53	.01	.17	-.03	-1.16
Final R^2 (%)	38.2		22.5		44.8	
<i>F</i>	93.51**		21.47**		59.52**	

Notes.

1. Entries are standardized final regression coefficients.
 2. Prior blocks include age, gender, education, political interest, civic duty, newspaper use, and television use.
- ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, # $p < .10$

Figure 1. The Interactive Relationships of TV Entertainment Talk Show Use with Newspaper Use and Trust in Entertainment Elites in Accounting for Likelihood of Voting

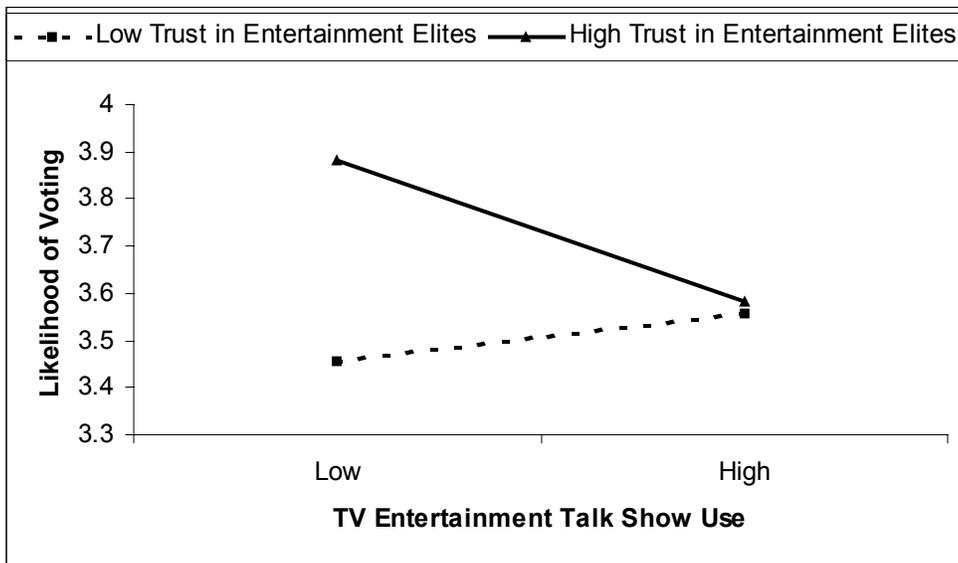
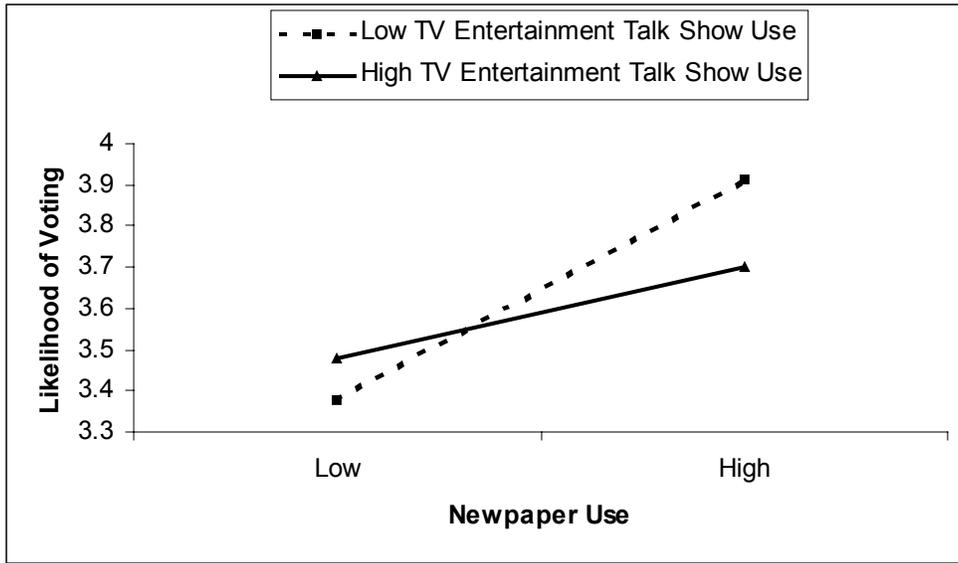
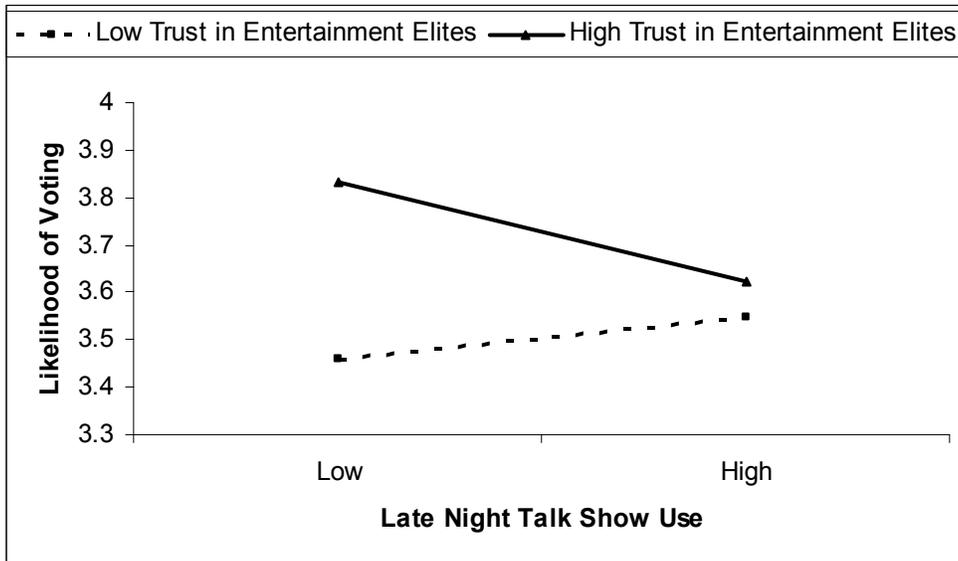
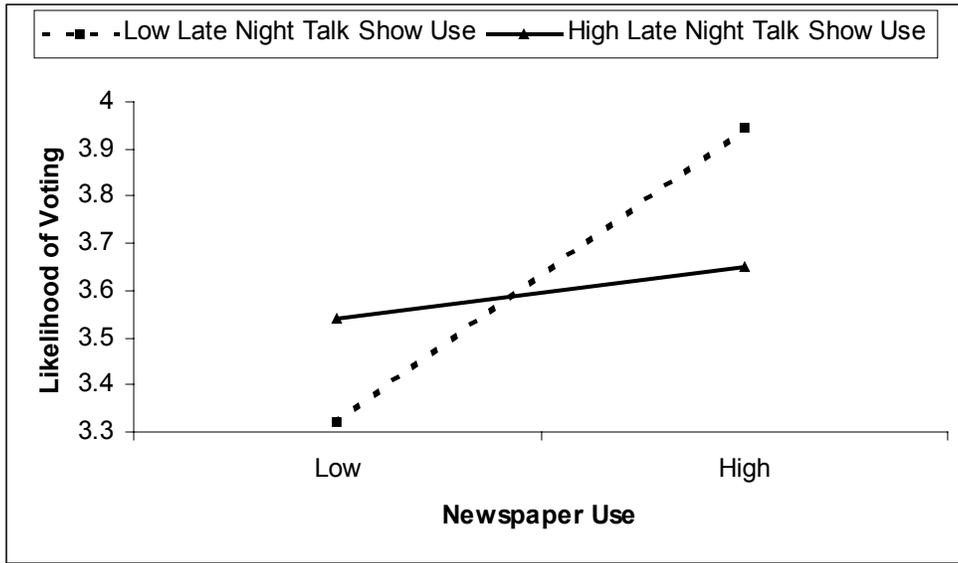


Figure 2. The Interactive Relationships of TV Late Night Talk Show Use with Newspaper Use and Trust in Entertainment Elites in Accounting for Likelihood of Voting



Appendix
Question Wording

Efficacy

Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statements.

a. My vote matters; b. My vote makes a difference

Coded: [1] Strongly disagree; [2] Not so strongly disagree; [3] Not so strongly agree; [4] Strongly agree

Trust in Politicians

Now, I am going to list some people and organizations who may be shown in ads convincing young adults to vote. For each one, please tell me how convincing each would be to convince you to go vote—very convincing, somewhat convincing, not too convincing, or not at all convincing.

a. The President; b. The Governor of your state

Coded: [1] Not at all convincing; [2] Not too convincing; [3] Somewhat convincing; [4] Very convincing

Likelihood of Voting

How likely are you to vote in this November's election for U.S. Congress, other statewide and local offices – are you almost certain to vote, will you probably vote, are the chances about 50-50, will you probably not vote, or will you definitely not vote?

Coded: [1] Definitely not; [2] Probably not; [3] 50-50; [4] Probably; [5] Almost certain

Trust in Entertainment Elites

Now, I am going to list some people and organizations who may be shown in ads convincing young adults to vote. For each one, please tell me how convincing each would be to convince you to go vote—very convincing, somewhat convincing, not too convincing, or not at all convincing.

a. Sports figures; b. Musicians; c. MTV; d. Late-Night TV hosts; e. Actors and Celebrities; f. Daytime talk show hosts

Coded: [1] Not at all convincing; [2] Not too convincing; [3] Somewhat convincing; [4] Very convincing

Civic Duty

Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statements.

a. Voting is my responsibility

Coded: [1] Strongly disagree; [2] Not so strongly disagree; [3] Not so strongly agree; [4] Strongly agree

Political Interest

Thinking about the next few years, what is the number one problem facing the country that you would like to see addressed? IF LIST AN ISSUE ASK: How closely do you follow what politicians are doing or saying on that issue – very closely, somewhat closely, not too closely, or not closely at all?

Coded: [1] not closely at all; [2] not too closely; [3] somewhat closely; [4] very closely

Media Use

Tell me how often you get information about public affairs, politics, candidates and campaigns from the following sources –daily, three to four times a week, once a week, a few times each month, every few months, once a year or never.

a. Newspapers; b. Television news; c. Late night talk shows; d. Daytime talk shows

Coded: [1] Never; [2] Once a year; [3] Every few months; [4] A few times each month; [5] Once a week; [6] 3-4 times a week; [7] Daily

Demographic Variables

Gender: [1] Female; [0] Male

Age: What is your age?

Coded: [18], [19], [20], [21], [22], [23], [24]

Education: What is the last year of schooling that you have completed?

Coded: [1] 1 - 11th grade; [2] High school graduate; [3] Non-college post H.S.; [4] Some college; [5] Associate's degree (2 year college); [6] College graduate; [7] Post-graduate school