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## Media Addiction and Political Participation in Serbia

### Abstract

Appearance of the Internet and its spread to 38.8% of world population from 1995 to 2013 indicate that new media bring significant changes to societies around the world. Features of new media such as interactivity and possibility to use it from anywhere anytime indicate the Internet may be highly addictive. Data point to increases in overall media use over the last 60 years. On the other hand, decreases in political participation are registered together with decline in socializing and active membership in professional organizations for the same period. Research is conducted through nationally representative survey in Serbia during 2013. All hypotheses of this study have been confirmed including main one, saying that increases in media addiction cause decreases in political participation. Those who have less confidence in future are bigger media addicts, those who fear about present and future are bigger media addicts, those who are not interested in politics are bigger media addicts, those who have less political knowledge are bigger media addicts and finally that low participants in elections are bigger media addicts. This study is limited to Serbia, while it would be useful to measure media addiction in all countries. New methodology introduced by this study should be improved. Results of further studies should be presented with 3D graphs.

**Key words:** political participation, media addiction, new media, democracy, the Internet

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## Introduction

There may be two crucial characteristics of the Internet possibly explaining its spread to 38.8% of world population (Internet World Stats 2013). First, this is an interactive media. Contrary to television, radio and print, the Internet enables its users to use it as a platform for communication, for example by commenting news, communicating on social networks and writing e-mails.

Second crucial characteristic of the Internet may be its accessibility. Through wireless technology and various forms of hardware like mobile phones, tablets, net-books, etc., the Internet can be accessed from anywhere anytime. In addition, an attention is pointed towards possible dangers that the Internet may bring to societies around the world in terms of its addictive potential.

### *Increase in media use*

Ownership of TV sets increased since 1975 until 2010 in the United States (Figure 1). In this period, homes with three TV sets increased from 11 to 55 percents (Nielsen 2009).

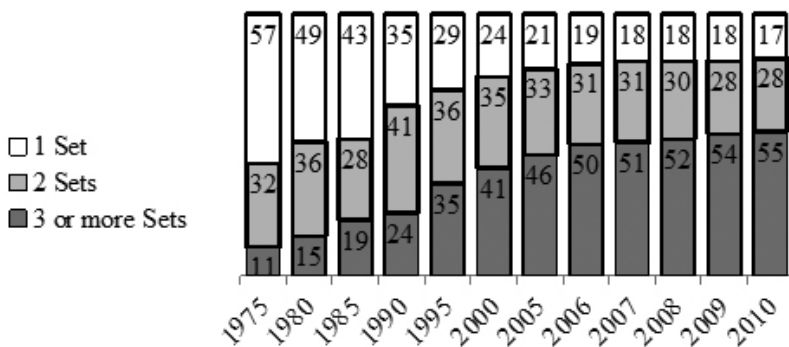


Figure 1 Television set ownership, number of sets per households (Nielsen, 2009)

Average time spent per day with major media by US adults has been increasing from 635 to 693 minutes since 2008 until 2011 (Figure 2). Increases were measured in domains of TV, the Internet and mobile use, while slight decreases were measured in the domains of radio, newspapers, magazines and other media use. These data clearly indicate increases in overall media use (eMarketer 2011).

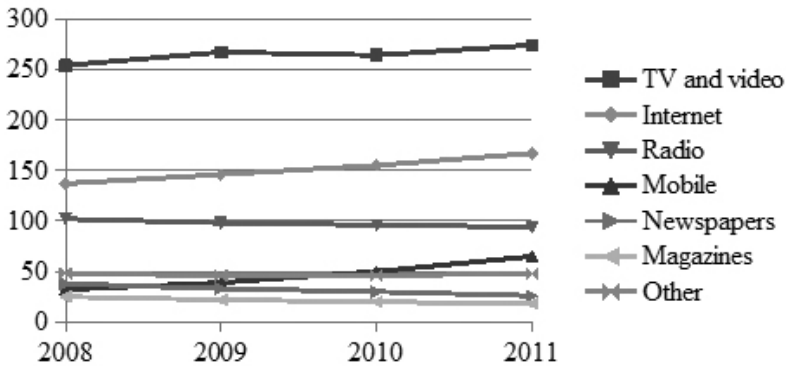


Figure 2 Average time in minutes spend per day with major media by US adults, 2008 – 2011 (eMarketer, 2011)

Number of media devices has been increasing too. For example, 381000 iPods were sold in 2002, while in 2010 this number jumped to 52.3 million globally. Logically, user generated content has been increasing as well. There were 3 million blogs in 2004, while in 2010 there were 130 million of them (Elliot 2010).

### *Decrease in participation*

Other data indicate decrease in direct communication as well as decrease in participative activities. There is decrease in sport activities, while watching matches on TV is more frequent than before (Putnam 2000). There is decrease in kids socializing when working on computers as opposed to coloring books (Le 2001). Also, there is a decrease in national park visits which coincides with the rise in electronic entertainment media in the United States (Pergams and Zaradic 2006). It is evident that there is decrease in person to person socializing with kids as they get older and is being replaced by social networks, cell phone usage and video chatting (NPD 2011).

### *Literature review*

Above data indicate increase in media use and decrease in participation, among else possibly in political participation. There are many examples that addiction endangers daily lives, which is main reason why it is considered disorder. Internet addiction is correlated with offline anti-social behaviors and chemical drug use experience (Fisoun et al., 2012).

Participation in social processes may be part of personal interests of every individual in society. Reason for this is that one may not take care about his security, decide on laws of conduct and cure himself in case of illness and so on. In modern society these common functions are taken care by representatives of people or otherwise called social agents or elected politicians. Participation on the other hand is needed to elect these social agents. This participation can also be offered to society as service by individuals in their effort to become social agents.

Various studies have been examining political participation. Some of the findings are that better educated citizens are more likely to be engaged by the political process (Lake & Huckfeldt<sup>11</sup>), effect of nonformal education generally appears to be stronger as it increases the likelihood that one will vote (Kuenzi 2006), engagement in different organizations may have impact to political participation (Campbell 2004) and solidarity may be one characteristic of functional citizenship that bears strong connection to political participation (Chong & Rogers 2005). To sum it up, there are various studies on how to increase political participation, but the ones that relate to media addiction lack.

### *Research hypothesis*

Establishing relation of media addiction and political participation is goal of this study because of higher infiltration of media into people lives and appearance of new media, use of the Internet on the go, and new technology. This study examines possible dangers of new technology – media addiction and decline of political participation. If people use extensively media, they might not have time for voting or participating in activities of common interest. Political participation may be basic pillar of democracy and lack of interest toward “common interest” participative activities may be dangerous for societies.

Grounded in above written theoretical frameworks, this exploratory study seeks to expand previous research by addressing the main research hypothesis that increase in media addiction causes decrease in political participation. Further research hypotheses are that the bigger media addicts are people who have less confidence in future, who fear about present and future, who are not interested in politics, who have lower political knowledge, and who have lower participation in elections. In this research, these hypotheses are addressed by adequate research questions.

## Materials and Methods

Research questions are examined through nationally representative survey conducted in Serbia during the first half of 2013. Research of media addiction was conducted by Faculty for Culture and Media. The research was done on multistage random sample of 2208 participants. This sample is representative for Serbian population older than 15 years of age. Research participants have been interviewed from January to May of 2013. Interviewers had an assignment to interview wider public as a part of their Media Analytics course. The response rate of the interviews was 70%. An average interview lasted 30min. The sample included urban areas (Beograd, Novi Sad, Nis, etc.) and rural areas. Coordinators of the course received 2505 inputs from students.

The sample is formed in three stages: first, samples are randomly chosen without replacement, from the lists of voting stations; Voting station plays the role of sample point. It is the most accurate statistical list of adults, which covers approximately one neighborhood. Voting population corresponds with the adult one (18+); There are about 10,000 voting stations in Serbia. This is a territorial unit with 709 voters on an average (standard deviation = 609). This fact shows that voting station perfectly corresponds with statistical criteria for sample point.

Statistical database of voting stations is used as a source for selecting sample points. Selection is conducted randomly, with probability of selecting that is proportional to the share of a given sample point in the total number of adult citizens. Ten respondents in each sample point are selected.

The sample was weighted for variables age and education, because in early research, it was found that age and education were the most connected with media customs and media behavior of population. The IBM SPSS Statistics 20 package was used (Nie et al., 2011).

### *Filtering research participants*

For the first time, the model for excessive media use (addiction) progression is applied. In this model, the media addiction is measured through duration of use and seven “subjective” indicators. The duration of media use is calculated for each of four media (the Internet, television, radio, and print) to filter the research participants who do not

practice excessive and potentially addictive use. Only those research participants, 1942 (88%) of 2208, who use any of four noted media in the top 40% of duration, are put in the group of the potential media addict indicating a prolonged media use. This potential media addict sample has a margin of error of  $\pm 2.22$  percentage points.

*Indicators applied to media.*

The term Internet addiction was first mentioned the first time by Goldberg (Goldberg 2006) After that, Diagnostic Questionnaire for Internet Addiction was made consisting of eight questions (Young 1996). After some critiques, she expanded the original questionnaire to a 20-item Internet Addiction Test (Young, 1998). Later, another prominent measure appeared. It was a multidimensional measure of Internet addiction using social comfort, loneliness/depression, diminished impulse control and distraction as factors (Davis et al., 2002).

Having an assignment to measure addiction to all media there was a need for new media addiction questionnaire to be created. It was checked for consistency with Young's IAT. When making the research indicators, the duration of media use is considered as an objective indicator and the addiction related questions are considered subjective indicators. The paper uses 21 questions for seven subjective media addiction indicators: (a) feeling that media are not over-consumed (over consumption), (b) feeling that media use cannot be resisted (attempts to cut media use), (c) feeling that the media cannot be abandoned (attempts to abandon media use), (d) feeling that media can be substitution for problems (substitution), (e) feeling bored without media (withdrawal), (f) feeling that one cannot be in the place without media access (nonexistence), and (g) feeling that media should be continually used despite negative news (continued use). Each indicator is investigated by using three questions for each media including Internet, TV, radio and print, answered by ten-degree scale. These seven subjective indicators in total correspond with seven factors from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders—Fourth Edition (American Psychiatric Association 1995).

The research participants are first filtered to obtain the prolonged media users (potential media addict). Then, the potential media addicts are divided into five groups, each with different level (0, 1, 2, 3, and 4) of media addiction. Each level of media addiction corresponds to different numbers of subjective signs of media addiction that potential media addicts have (Table 1).

**Table 1** Numbers of PMA with different levels of excessive media use

Media addiction Level	Nr. of subjective signs of PMA	Nr. of PMA	% of PMA	Margin of error for 95% confidence
0	0	441	22.7	±4.67%
1	1	611	31.5	±3.96%
2	2	464	23.9	±4.55%
3	3	258	13.3	±6.10%
4	4-6	168	8.6	±7.56%

### *Survey about political participation*

Question about confidence in future was “How confident are you in future?” with possible answers: “I have no confidence at all”, “I have some confidence”, “I have lots of confidence” and “I have maximal confidence”.

Question about fear in present or future was “How much do you fear about present or future?” with possible answers: “I have no fears at all”, “I have some fears”, “I have lots of fears” and “I have maximal fears”.

The survey question was “How often do you speak about politics now?”. The possible answers were “Everyday”, “One time a week”, “Rarely”, or “Never”.

To access political knowledge of research participants, the participants were asked the following questions: “Who is president of Serbia?” “Who is prime minister of Serbia?” “What is the biggest political party in Serbian Parliament?” “What political parties are members of government?”

With possible answers “Yes” or “No”, questions for research participants examined if they took part in latest elections and whether they are members of political parties, associations or organizations.

Multivariate regression model has been performed. Level of media addiction is taken as dependant variable, while fear about presence and future, interest in politics, political knowledge and election participation are taken as independent variables. Multicollinearity has been checked. VIF coefficient is less than 5, which means there is no dependence between variables.

## Results

This study was initiated because increasing importance of new media in societies around the world- Internet with e-mailing, messaging, social networking and browsing frequently on the go. This research would find out how digital media are affecting Serbian society, through prism of addiction to all media and in relation to political participation as basic pillar of democracy.

There are various elements of political participation examined by research within this study. First, two research results are presented, those relating to confidence and fear about present and future. Second, research results relating more to political participation are presented including political knowledge, political interest and participation in elections.

### *Confidence about future and fear about present and future*

The relations between confidence and fear on one side and media addiction on another side are investigated. Research participants that answered that had no confidence at all in their future scored higher degree of media addiction, while people who answered that they had some confidence scored lower media addiction level (Figure 3). On the other hand those who answered to have lots of confidence in their future scored even lower in terms of media addiction. Finally, those who answered that they had maximal confidence showed lowest levels of media addiction. These results clearly indicate that as media addiction increases, confidence in future decreases.

From Figure 4, it can be seen that people that fear about their present and future more are bigger media addicts. These results indicate that fear may be paralyzing factor that has to do something with media addiction. Those research participants that answered to have no fears at all scored lowest levels of media addiction of 2,5. Finally, Those who have maximal fears scored highest levels of media addiction of 4,8.



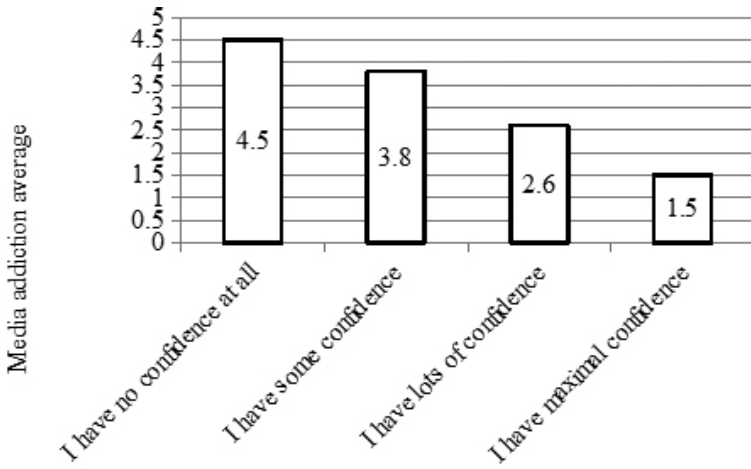


Figure 3 Comparison between averages of media addiction of research participants and their answers on question about confidence in future (95% confidence interval)

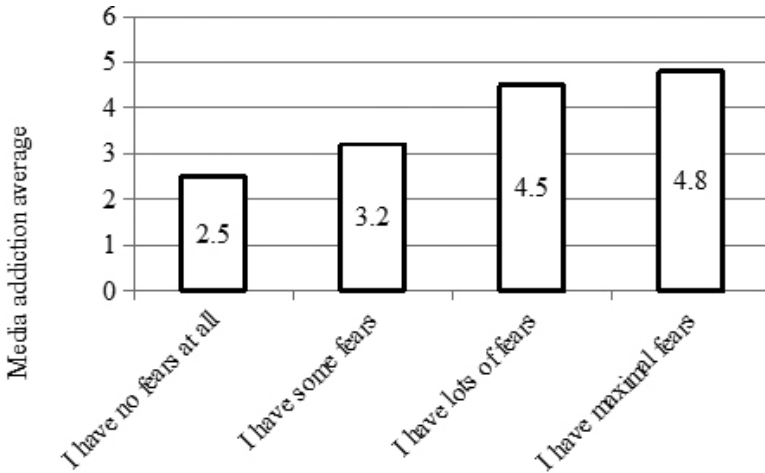


Figure 4 Comparison between averages of media addiction of research participants and their answers on question about fear about present or future (95% confidence interval)

These results about relation between media addiction and fear about present and future on one side and confidence in future on one side indicate that fear and lack of confidence may be paralyzing factors in terms of political participation.

Media content may provoke decrease in confidence and increase in fears with their users, because of nature of media contents. Fear provoking news in today's media may be plentiful in homicide, suicide, deaths while neglecting what may be called positive side of social reality, as most of research participants answered in survey of this study. On the other hand, numerous advertisements and commercials in today's media may pressure people to seek ideal superficial goals.

People who have lack of confidence and increased fears may not be able to deal with common interest and therefore participate in political processes.

*Interest in politics*

The political participation is examined in terms of interest towards politics. This relates to talks about political matters with other people. If person speaks about politics it means interest in politics exists. Talking about politics with people derives political opinions as basis for actions.

Speaking about politics every day, rarely and one time a week does not make significant difference when media addiction is in question (Figure 5). Although level of addiction is similar, this percentage may include those who are addicted to politics as well as non-addicts. The people may take care of their own personal and business priorities and then after that may look at common interest. On the other side, person that never speaks about politics may more possible be addict than that who speak about politics sometimes. Level of average addiction is higher than 3.5 for persons that never speak about politics.

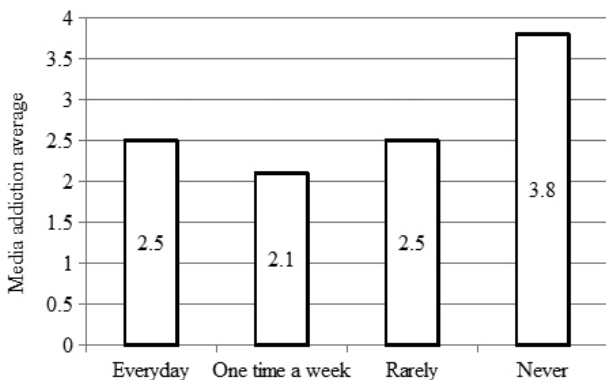


Figure 5 Comparison between media addiction averages of research participants and their answers on question about how often they speak about politics (95% confidence interval)

To conclude, research result suggests that less interest in politics means more media addiction. This is logical, as people who use media extensively lack time for political talks. Except time, media addicts may also lack interest in politics.

*Political knowledge*

Another aspect of political participation is political knowledge. This question relates to knowing factual information about politics. The more people know about politics the more they are interested in political issues.

Similarly as with interest in politics this research inquiry showed reverse relation between media addiction and political knowledge. The more people know about politics, the less addicted to media they are (Figure 6). This may be logical, as addicted persons lack time to think and learn about politics. Knowing that area of common interest including various political decisions affects everyday lives of citizens in societies, it is clear how much engagement in this field is important for individuals, society and functioning democracy.

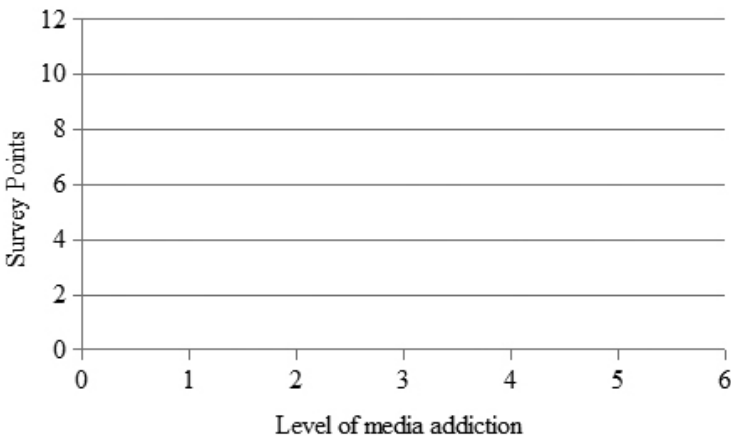


Figure 6 Survey points for research participants with different media addiction levels for their answers on question about their political knowledge- for parameters of shown OLS regression see Table 2

**Table 2** Parameters of the model of the OLS regression that shows the variable (y) as a function of different levels (x) of media addiction

Fig.	Variable y	a'	b	R <sup>2</sup>
6	Survey points (political knowledge)	-0.394	6.194	0.854
7	Survey points (political participation)	-0.567	5.781	0.8717

*Election participation*

Results of research inquiry show that as political participation increases by voting, media addiction decreases (Figure 7). The participating in elections is less present in case of media addiction, because simply there may not be interest and time to participate. Caring for common interest would be more present if person in question has stable income and stable family. If one is happy with his or her personal and professional life, there are necessary conditions for taking care of common interest. If fact, common interest may be largely important because as it affects both personal and professional life, but most people may not see it that way. In some cases when people have desire to change repressive ruling structures they may perceive this as priority. Not only addicts neglect common interest, because many non-addicts may want to take care and fix their personal and professional life first before dealing with common Interest, but this research results suggest media addicts are noticeable in neglecting political participation as opposed to non-addicts.

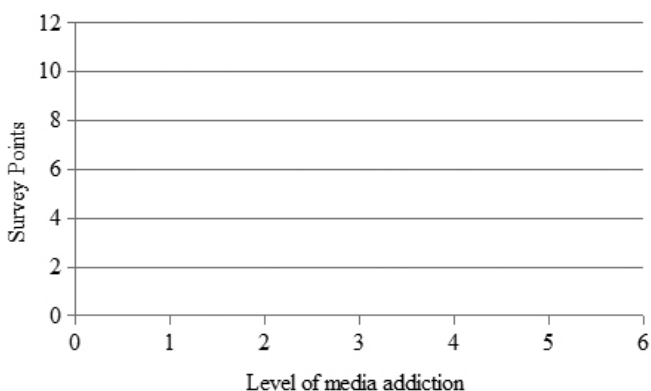


Figure 7 Survey points for research participants with different media addiction levels for their answers on question about their voting -- for parameters of shown OLS regression see Table 2

## Discussion

Three aspects of political participation have been examined in relation to media addiction: interest, knowledge and voting. All three aspects of political participation have shown same relation towards media addiction. First, as interest in politics decreases, media addiction increases. Second, as political knowledge decreases, media addiction increases. Third, as election participation decreases, media addiction increases. As all aspects of political participation show the same in relation to media addiction, it is possible to presume that media addiction is in inverse relation to political participation. Explanation includes lack of time with media addicts, so that they cannot dedicate themselves to common interest to some extent. Media addicts may also see common interest as not important or they may feel they cannot deal with it because they want to solve issues from personal and professional life first. Relating other research results it is noted that media addicts feel less confidence in present, future and themselves in terms of impacting political changes.

Research results confirmed all hypotheses including the main one. Indications that increases in media addiction cause decreases in political participation were confirmed. This issue may be important for any society, not just Serbian, where the research inquiry took place, because political participation is basic pillar of democracy. If people are not capable or willing to take part in political processes, then minorities in power may establish full control over societies. With ever-increasing presence of mobile phones and other electronic devices in lives of people in modern communities, threat of media addiction is high. That is why further examination in field of social sciences may be of importance to modern societies.

As for result display, 2D graphs have been chosen. In the future, the methodology to measure media addiction should be improved, while research results should be examined and presented through 3D graphs. Limitation of this study is measurement of addiction that is done in one country while it would be useful to do such measurement in all countries. That way research results could be compared between countries and answers could be found to question about society features that affect higher or lower media addiction levels. Also, after throughout measurement and analysis, governmental policies, strategies and laws may be established in order to decrease media addiction.

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