

ICA Pre-conference

The Political Communication of Young Citizens Through Social Media

London School of Economics, University of London

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Conference Organisers: Brian D. Loader (University of York, UK), Ariadne Vromen (University of Sydney, Australia) and Michael Xenos (University of Wisconsin, USA)

This one-day preconference explores the influence of social media communications technologies upon the participatory culture of young citizens. The adoption of social media, such as *YouTube*, *Facebook*, and *Twitter*, by many young citizens in a variety of high profile political protests and campaigns around the world provides both a relatively new focus and a series of challenges for communication scholars. For some academics the interactive, collaborative and user-generated content capacities of social media offer the prospect of facilitating new modes of political communication which are commensurate with contemporary youth cultures centred around self-actualisation, identity and individualism. Here it is possible to discern a cautious optimism for what are perceived as the inherent democratic features of social media that could enhance the participative and deliberative skills of young people (Jenkins 2006, Benkler 2006, Leadbetter 2008). Others, however, have exhibited greater anxiety about the influence of social media upon the political norms and actions of young citizens. In this context social media is sometimes identified as a source of instability (as in the urban unrest in the UK in August 2011) and also as a further challenge to conventional participatory political culture through fragmentation and personalisation (Papacharissi, 2010, Pariser, 2011).

The future engagement of young citizens from a wide range of socio-economic, ethnic and cultural backgrounds in democratic politics remains a crucial concern for political communications scholars, policy-makers, civics teachers and youth workers around the world. At a time when the negative relationship between socio-economic inequality and levels of political participation is compounded by high youth unemployment or precarious employment in many countries, it is not surprising that new social media communications may be seen as a means to re-engage young citizens. This preconference, comprising a number of leading international communications scholars in this field, is intended to examine such themes as the possible effects of social media use upon patterns of political socialization; the potential of social media to ameliorate young people's political inequality; the role of social media communications for enhancing the civic education curriculum; and evidence for social media manifesting new forms of political engagement and participation by young citizens. These issues will be considered from a number of theoretical and methodological approaches but all attempt to move beyond simplistic notions of young people as an undifferentiated category of 'the internet generation'. Instead, socio-cultural differentiation informs discussion of the adoption of social media and its influence for political engagement.

Programme:

08:30-09:00 Registration

09:00-09:10 Introduction to the Conference and outline of Themes
Brian Loader (University of York, UK)

9:10-11:00 Session One: Political Culture, Socialization and Social Media
Adoption

The Civic Network: Young Citizens, Political Engagement & Social Media

Ariadne Vromen (University of Sydney)

Mike Xenos (University of Wisconsin at Michigan)

Brian Loader (University of York, UK)

This paper analyses the complex interactions between social media, contemporary political youth culture and civic engagement. Based on an original comparative survey undertaken in three democratic polities – Australia, United Kingdom, and United States- it outlines to what extent young people use social media for civic purposes. We suggest that the capacity of social media to reduce political disenchantment and foster wider civic participation is differentially experienced among young people in our three cases. Thus the proven negative relationship between socioeconomic inequality and civic engagement is changing, but still an important undercurrent to our analysis. While most young people engage in new forms of social collaboration, openness, sharing and interaction through social media platforms, whether new forms of civic learning and engagement that stimulate active citizenship are also facilitated is still an open debate.

Does Participatory Culture Create Civic Youth?

Mats Ekström (Gothenburg University)

Tobias Olsson (Lund University)

Johan Östman (Örebro University)

The concept of *participatory culture* has quickly managed to gain a strong foothold in contemporary debates about social media and user engagement. The concept's primary advocate, Henry Jenkins, uses it to describe a cultural situation in which established relations between media producers and users have been disrupted to the point at which "...we might now see them as participants who interact with each other..." (Jenkins 2006:3). Hence, studies of for instance *Facebook*, blogging and *YouTube* have looked into what participatory practices these environments offer and are capable of fostering. Overall, these studies have often looked for, and found, engaged online users and inspiring participatory practices – especially among young people.

But what is the impact of engagement, and participation, within participatory cultures of social media on *civic* engagement and participation among young people? On this connection, the existing literature is rather unclear. In order to start compensating for this gap in knowledge, this paper draws on the multidimensional notion of civic

culture and examines how social media use relates to four of its key aspects: knowledge, values, trust, and practices.

Employing longitudinal survey data from a sample of Swedish 13-18-year-olds ($N = 1520$), young people's involvement in two forms of social media use is examined: social networking and creative production.

Results demonstrate that involvement in online social networking is more common among girls than boys. Involvement in creative production is substantially less frequent than social networking, and attracts more boys than girls, particularly boys with non-EU background. Furthermore, social networking was found to be largely unrelated engagement in a civic culture. By contrast, creative production is positively related to civic *practices* such as everyday-life conversations about political issues, and negatively related to political *knowledge*.

Overall, the results suggest that use of social media – creative production in particular – both encourages and hinders youths' engagement in a civic culture. The findings are discussed in terms of their implications for theories of participatory culture.

Political Influence within Parent-Child Dyads: Partisanship, Candidate Preference, and Political Participation

Dhavan V. Shah, Leticia Bode, Stephanie Edgerly, Emily Vraga, Chris Wells & JungHwan Yang

Early research on political socialization was dominated by the metaphor of transmission, focusing exclusively on the influence of parents on their children. Yet recent empirical evidence suggests that socialization processes are more reciprocal than originally believed (McLeod & Shah, 2009) and that young people shape their own socialization through their interactions with school curricula, peers and media, and may even influence parents (Lee, Shah, & McLeod, 2012).

To explore these possibilities, we use panel data from the 2008 US election cycle to assess the extent to which parents and children influenced one another in terms of (a) partisanship, (b) candidate preference, and (c) modes of engagement. Utilizing three waves of a national panel survey of parent-child dyads (May 2008, November 2008, & June 2009), in which we sampled households containing adolescents from 12-17 years of age, we are able to gain unique insights into the dynamics of political attitude and opinion influence between parents and kids.

Using these data, we propose and test eight patterns of stability and change within parent-child dyads that apply across a variety of political outcomes:

- (1) *Harmony* represents parent-child dyads that agree at early and late stages of the election cycle.
- (2) *Independent Child*, with the child who initially agrees with the parent but then moves away from that position during the election cycle.
- (3) *Independent Parent*, with the parent who moves away from initial agreement with the child.

- (4) *Co-adoption* is a process by which both parent and child change their views over the course of the election cycle while maintaining agreement.
- (5) *Discord* represents parent-child dyads that disagree at early and late stages of the election cycle.
- (6) *Indoctrination* indicates a child who is initially independent from the parental view, but then comes into agreement over the election cycle.
- (7) *Trickle-up* reflects the potential for children to encourage parents to adopt their views.
- (8) *Co-divergence* is a process by which both parents and children change their views, but maintain their disagreement

The distribution of parent-child dyads into these categories is meaningful on its own, as are the antecedents of these dyadic relationships.

Young Citizens and the Fine Art of Disengaging Online

Kjerstin Thorson (University of Southern California)

This presentation reports on a series of studies exploring how and why many young citizens avoid exposure to news and political content on social media. Second, it discusses how the social pressures of networked audiences shape perceptions of what is “acceptable” political discourse and how that range of acceptability is tied to individual political socialization experiences as well as the usage practices associated with distinct social media platforms.

11:00-11:15 Break

11:15-13:15 Session Two: Agency, Mobilization and the Voice of the Young Citizen

Organization in the Crowd: Twitter as Integrative Mechanism in the Networked Organization of the Occupy Protests

W. Lance Bennett & Alexandra Segerberg

Peer production theories of networked organization cover an astounding array of social forms from file sharing and flash mobs to sustained public actions with important face-to-face components. We propose to examine whether and how such varying networks may qualify as organizations by offering a framework along which they can be measured and compared. The aim is to understand the degree to which these differently organized digital media networks can perform various tasks and display structures and processes commonly associated with organizations. We propose three general criteria of organizational capacity that link recent peer production theory with more conventional hierarchy, face to face, and market exchange approaches to networked organization. Organizations seem to do at least three kinds of things in repeated or routinized fashion: a) resource mobilization –

gathering the material and symbolic stuff that (is thought to) better enable the organization to operate b) responsiveness or adaptation to short term external conditions – recognizing near term threats and opportunities and adjusting responses in concerted fashion, and c) coordinated long term internal action – long range adjustments and shifts in action patterns due to power shifts or aimed at organizational survival or improvement. We assess the presence and strength of these organizational properties in Twitter networks from the US Occupy protests, in which Twitter clearly served as the dynamic overarching organizational mechanism in the Occupy network of networks. We work with a data set of some 60 million tweets gathered by the Social Media lab (SoMe Lab) at University of Washington. This analysis offers a finer grained understanding of the organizational capacities of what Bennett and Segerberg (2013) term crowd-enabled connective action networks.

Islam on the Visual Battleground

Liesbet van Zoonen (Professor of Communication and Media Studies, Loughborough University Professor of Popular Culture, Erasmus University Rotterdam)

Film and video have become key instruments in mobilizing political and religious support for and against Islam. While to date, anti-Islam videos like Fitna and Innocence of Muslims draw most public attention and violent protest, YouTube and Vimeo show a much wider diversity of visual narratives around Islam. In this contribution we focus on this diversity, examining in detail content and style of these videos, and addressing the motivations and experiences of mostly young makers of these videos. The paper is based on qualitative visual and quantitative cybermetrics methods, and contributes to theories about young citizenship, cosmopolitanism and dialogue.

YouTube's Fantasies of Political Agency

Nico Carpentier (Free University of Brussels)

Social media behold the promise of increased (political) agency, citizenship, participation and democracy. Instead of looking for manoeuvring space in the utopian-dystopian debate, this paper aims to study how YouTube postings and comments contain traces of the importance and significance attributed to agency. The analysis will show how the concept of political agency is defined through the participatory processes on/in YouTube, how these conceptualisations capture the desires for agency and how is dealt with the frustrations that are always to be found when these desires are translated into actual practice.

“The Outraged Young”: Young Europeans, Civic Engagement and the Social Media in a Time of Crisis’

James Sloam (Royal Holloway University of London)

In almost all established democracies engagement in traditional political institutions has declined in recent decades, leading to what some have seen as a crisis in citizenship. This trend is most striking amongst young people, who have become increasingly alienated from mainstream electoral politics in Europe. At the same time, young Europeans have become increasingly marginalised by and from public policy since the onset of the global financial crisis: from worsening levels of child poverty,

to spiralling youth unemployment, to cuts in youth services and education budgets, to increased university tuition fees. Nevertheless, there is overwhelming evidence to show that young people are not apathetic about ‘politics’ – they have their own views and engage in democracy in a wide variety of ways relevant to their everyday lives. In this context, the rise and proliferation of protest politics amongst young Europeans is hardly surprising. Indeed, youth activism has become a major feature of the European political landscape: from the Occupy movement against the excesses of global capitalism, to mass demonstrations of the ‘outraged young’ (the ‘indignados’) against political corruption and youth unemployment, to growth in support for ‘pirate parties’ in defence of individual freedom. This paper will examine the role that the social media has played in the development of these protest movements across the continent.

13:15-14:00 Lunch

14:00-16:00 Session Three: Civics and Citizenship Education

Citizenship education is now internationally accepted and included in national curricula in many parts of the world. Although it remains a broad field there has recently been a growing acceptance of its essential elements and aims regarding the need to promote understanding and the potential for involvement in contemporary society. However, debates about its nature and form remain. The place of social media in connection with citizenship education is debated in relation to its current usage by teachers and learners; whether there is a necessary fundamental link between what is supposedly a more democratic means of communication and education which aims at promoting democratic understanding and involvement; and what, if such a link exists, pedagogical developments would be expected to emerge in the future?

It's Communication Stupid

Stephen Coleman (University of Leeds)

Before young people can become citizens, netizens, engaged or disengaged, they must develop sufficient confidence to speak up in public about matters that concern and affect them. The Youth Amplified project was set up to explore ways of helping young people to speak and listen. A range of resources for this purpose have been developed – see www.youthamplified.com These resources have been taken up by a number of schools and youth services. The aim of this talk will be to explore the civic practice of speaking, connect it to broader questions about civic education and online behaviour, and argue that, in over-focusing upon new online opportunities for social interaction, we are in danger of missing some basic problems of communicative inequality.

Key Issues in Researching Citizenship Education

David Kerr (Director of Educational Programmes, Citizenship Foundation)

The presentation will report on research into citizenship education that shows young people's citizenship practices have changed over time in relation to their attitudes, attachments and efficacy. The picture is mixed. On the one hand, there has been a

marked and steady increase in young people's civic and political participation and indications that these young people will continue to participate as adult citizens. In contrast, there has been a hardening of attitudes toward equality and society, a weakening of attachment to communities and fluctuating levels of engagement, efficacy and trust in the political arena. There will be discussion of those factors that shape young people's citizenship outcomes and reflections on the ways in which the delivery of citizenship education could change so as to further enhance its impact. The potential of social media will be explored in the context of that discussion.

Learning to be Citizens in and with the Social Web

Suzanne Mellor (Senior Research Fellow, Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER))

The presentation will report on a pilot case-study and survey research project entitled *Networking Young Citizens: Learning to be citizens in and with the social web*, undertaken in 3 secondary schools, in Victoria in 2011. The work was underpinned by support from Monash University, Clayton, Australia. The research included interviewing staff involved either in delivering civics and citizenship curriculum, or having pastoral responsibilities at the schools. Students who had been in contact with these staff were also interviewed, in class groups.

The focus of the discussions, with both populations, was on the schools' policies regarding social media access, the integration of social media and Web2 in pedagogy and learning, particularly in relation to civics and citizenship education. Discussion also elicited the opinions of the respondents on the ways in which the social media policies were implemented by the schools, and how effectively social media was used by the students in their learning, in their social networking with peers and in communications between staff and student and parent communities.

Links between social media and Web2 to learning in general or in civics and citizenship learning, varied between the schools. Student recognition of how social media might be associated with acting as a citizen also varied, in a roughly-correlational manner. Student confidence in their capacity to act as citizens was greatest where school culture actively promoted student participation in school and non-school activities, where explicit links between social media use and the school community had been experienced, and/or where explicit civics and citizenship education was provided.

These findings have significance for the National Curriculum in Civics and Citizenship, currently being developed by ACARA in Australia. (see: http://www.acara.edu.au/curriculum/civics_and_citizenship_1.html)

Social Media and Citizenship Education: What do Teachers and Students do, Why and What do They Want for the Future?

Ian Davies & Edda Sant Obiols (University of York, UK)

The general purpose of the study and many of the questions asked during the project were based around the work in Australia described above by Suzanne Mellor. The members of the England team gratefully acknowledge the collaborative approach of

colleagues in Australia. It was hoped that the investigation would provide an opportunity to discuss issues of similarity and difference between these projects in the actual and perceived potential use of social media for citizenship education. There are three aspects to the research which identifies students' and teacher's perceptions of: a) the rules as stated and as actually employed in schools on the general use of social media; b) the nature of and the extent to which social media is already in use specifically in citizenship education contexts and, if so, whether that has value; and, c) what, if anything, would staff and students prefer to do in the future to enhance the use of social media in citizenship education.

Thinking Beyond the Usual

Chris Waller (Professional Officer, Association for Citizenship Teaching)

The roots of citizenship education lie in academic courses on Politics for future leaders and civics for others. Recent debates about the nature of citizenship education have involved considerations of engagement and diversity in a multi-faith pluralistic democracy. An emphasis on active citizenship can be achieved by using ICT applications. This presentation will use insights from work with teachers and students undertaken in liaison with BECTA (originally known as the government's 'British Educational Communications and Technology Agency' and now operating as 'Bringing Educational Creativity to All') about how we can use ICT to explore citizenship education and evolve active participation and change action. This presentation will explore such thinking and place the technologies of ICT at the centre of learning and enable students to ask compelling questions about their use and impact.