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The Civic and Political Significance of Online Participatory Cultures among Youth Transitioning to Adulthood

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Abstract

Most existing scholarship that measures the impact of the Internet on civic or political engagement focuses on political uses of new media. Drawing on two large panel studies, we found that youth engagement in nonpolitical online participatory cultures may serve as a gateway to participation in civic and political life, including volunteering, community problem solving, protest activities, and political voice. These relationships remain statistically significant for both data sets, even when controlling for prior levels of civic and political participation and a full range of demographic variables. While politically driven online participation is clearly worthy of attention, our findings indicate that it should not be seen as the only relevant bridge from online activity to civic and political engagement.

Keywords: participatory culture, youth, new media, digital media, civic and political engagement.

The Civic and Political Significance of Online Participatory Cultures among Youth Transitioning to Adulthood

Much scholarship has examined how accessing news and other civic and politically oriented online activities can influence offline behaviors such as voting and engagement with community issues (Bimber, 2003; Mossberger, Tolbert, & McNeal, 2008; Shah, et al., 2005; Xenos & Moy, 2007). Much less is known about the influence of nonpolitical online engagement on civic and political practices. Several qualitative studies indicate that the online participatory cultures that form around shared interests in hobbies, games, and aspects of popular culture may support civic and political life by developing an individual's civic skills, sense of agency, social networks, and appreciation of desirable norms for social interaction (Ito et al., 2009; Jenkins, et al., 2007). Furthermore, the online discussion that takes place in relation to these activities may also expose individuals to divergent political views (Wojcieszak & Mutz, 2009).

Our study is the first broad-based quantitative panel study of the influences of nonpolitical online participatory cultures on youth civic and political participation. We use two data sets: a two-wave, purposive panel study of youth transitioning from high school to early adulthood and a nationally representative panel study of 18–35-year-olds.

Why Focus on Youth?

Youth and young adults are heavy users and early adopters of new media (Krueger, 2002). They frequently embrace the kind of participatory culture that can be facilitated by new media and are the most likely to use the Internet for entertainment and socializing. Forty-three percent of those aged 18–32 read blogs, 20% create blogs, and 67% use social networking sites (Jones and Fox, 2009). Moreover, when it comes to using new media in relation to civic and political issues, there appears to be a generational divide. While 37% of those aged 18–24 obtained campaign information from social networking sites in 2008 (more than did so from newspapers), only 4% aged 30–39 did so (Kohut, 2008). Interestingly, while inequality persists when it comes to some forms of online access and participation, in some important respects, the digital divide among youth may be less pronounced than other important forms of inequality. For example, political use of blogs and social networking sites by those aged 18–24 appears to be much less strongly linked to socioeconomic

status (SES) than offline political activities are (Smith, Schlozman, Verba and Brady, 2009). Finally, focusing on youth also makes sense because adolescence and early adulthood are times of lasting and significant civic and political identity development (Erikson, 1968; Jennings & Niemi, 1981; Smith, 1999).

Hypotheses Regarding Three Forms of Online Participatory Culture

Online participatory cultures are contexts in which participants create and share with others, experienced participants help less experienced ones acquire knowledge and solve problems, and participants develop a sense of connection with one another and come to understand functional community norms (Jenkins et al., 2007). Individuals blog, start or join groups, participate in networks, share links, and interact regularly through new media. We posit that these practices can foster civic and political activity in a manner consistent with Verba, Schlozman, and Brady's (1995) civic volunteerism model by promoting the motivation and capacity to act and by increasing the likelihood of being recruited into action.

We examine three domains of online participatory culture: politically driven, interest driven, and friendship driven. These cultures can provide young people with opportunities to discuss and gain information about political topics, thus motivating interest. They can create capacity for action by promoting civically relevant digital skills and norms for group interaction. Joining social networks may also facilitate recruitment into civic and political life.

Politically driven online participation

Politically driven participation ranges from reading the news online to more participatory practices such as entering into online dialogs or blogging about a political issue. It is an increasingly prominent form of political engagement (Smith, et al., 2009). It can also be viewed as an independent variable that may influence offline civic and political behavior. Studies indicate that politically driven participation can foster offline participation by increasing individuals' political interest and thus their motivation to be involved, by developing civically relevant digital skills, and by placing participants in contexts where recruitment is more likely (Mossberger et al., 2008; Shah et al., 2005; Shah, McLeod, & Lee, 2009). Thus, there is some prior empirical justification for our first hypothesis:

H1: Politically driven online participation will foster increased civic and political participation.

Interest-driven online participation

While much scholarship has examined politically driven participation, little has focused on the civic and political significance of *interest-driven participation*. These online activities enable youth to pursue interests in hobbies, popular culture, new technology, games, and sports (Ito et al., 2009; Jenkins, et al., 2007). Rather than passively consuming content, participants produce online materials, generate ideas, provide feedback, and participate in online communities. Because these activities are driven by specialized interests, participants tend to interact with those beyond their immediate friendship networks (Gee and Hayes, 2010; Ito et al., 2009).

In conceptualizing the value of such opportunities, it is worth considering research on youth extracurricular activities. These offline, nonpolitical, interest-driven activities provide opportunities to develop civic skills and productive norms of behavior within organizations, agencies, and social networks. Panel studies indicate that extracurricular activities foster social capital and, later, civic and political engagement (McFarland & Thomas, 2006; Smith, 1999).

Interest-driven participation may well develop civically relevant skills, norms, and networks in a similar way. In interest-driven contexts, young people journal about topics of local concern, organize gaming clans, and remix and share music online. Free software makes it easier than ever for youth to practice video production, share their creations with others, and receive feedback from other community members; this interaction may well strengthen civically relevant digital and communication skills and thus bolster an individual's capacity for action. These participatory cultures may also promote youths' understandings of norms of community membership and recognition of the potential of collective undertakings (Jenkins et al., 2007). Moreover, Wojcieszak and Mutz (2009) found that 53% of adults encounter political topics when engaged in online chat rooms and message boards related to nonpolitical leisure activities, including hobby and fan sites. While that study was of adults, we suspect that interest-driven participation among youth will also lead to unintended exposure to political topics and, as a result, may motivate engagement. Moreover, the border between nonpolitical interests and politics may be smaller than many suppose. Jenkins et al. (2011)

found that youth engage in discussions of politics while engaged in “nonpolitical” interest-driven activities and are often motivated to become politically active online in order to support nonpolitical interests.

H2: Interest-driven participation will foster civic and political engagement.

Friendship-driven online participation

F*riendship-driven participation* is the most common form of online participation. It centers on day-to-day interactions with the peers youth see at school and in their neighborhood. Such online activity often takes place through social media such as Facebook (Ito et al., 2009; Livingstone & Brake, 2009). It is unclear whether friendship-driven participation promotes civic or political engagement. Wyatt, Katz, and Kim (2000) found that personal conversations in public and private spaces often contain civic and political content. Likewise, Wojcieszak and Mutz (2009) found that online socializing and flirting in chat rooms and message boards do so as well. Such exposure could activate engagement. Puig-i-Abril and Rojas (2007) found a clear positive relationship between online social interaction and expressive political participation. However, civic and political topics are not the focus of most socializing among youth, and friendship-driven activities generally involve individuals who also interact with each other offline.

H3: Friendship-driven online participation will have a smaller impact on civic and political engagement than interest-driven online participation.

Method

Study 1: California Civic Survey (CCS)

In the springs of 2005, 2006, and 2007, we surveyed 5,505 junior- and senior-level high school students. This cross-sectional survey was not initially designed as a panel study. Students came from 21 high schools in 21 different school districts in California. The schools were selected to ensure a diverse range of demographic and academic characteristics. The sample includes schools that enroll mostly white students (19.0%), schools that enroll mostly students of color (42.9%), and schools that are racially mixed (38.1%). The percentages of students receiving a free or reduced-price lunch ranged from 0% to 92%. To minimize selection bias, we surveyed entire classes of juniors and seniors.

To retain the possibility of a follow-up survey, in our initial survey we asked about students' willingness to be contacted in the future. To this, 23.8% consented (*n* = 1,305). Our follow-up survey was conducted after the 2008 election (December 2008–March 2009) and was administered to a total of 435 respondents. This represents a panel retention rate of 33.3% against the baseline sample and 7.9% against the initial pool of survey respondents.

We compared the initial survey responses of those who took the follow-up survey (*n* = 435) with the responses of those who did not (*n* = 5,070). Those who took the follow-up survey were more likely to be female (61% vs. 50%), have a higher grade point average (GPA; mean = 3.35 vs. 3.15), and be more politically interested (mean = 3.8 vs. 3.4) than those who did not. Significantly, those who took the follow-up survey were not different in terms of their new media practices, when compared with those who did not take the follow-up survey. While, with the proper controls, we see no reason to believe that the differences between our T1 and T2 samples would bias the observed relationships between online participation and political engagement, as a safeguard we are fortunate to have been able to conduct a similar analysis (study 2) on a nationally representative data set (described below).

Measurement

Three groups of variables were created from these panel data: (a) measures of new media participation, (b) indicators of civic and political engagement (outcome variables), and (c) control variables (see Table 1).

New media participation

Indicators of politically driven, interest-driven, and friendship-driven online participation are listed in Table 2. Since interest-driven, politically driven, and friendship-driven participation had not been measured simultaneously in any prior surveys, we used factor analytic techniques to test whether these three forms of online participation represent distinct factors. Following conventional eigenvalue-based criteria in exploratory factor analysis, we extracted factors whose eigenvalues are greater than 1. Using principle component factor estimation, we found that three factors had eigenvalues greater than 1 and that the fourth and all subsequent factors accounted for a relatively small amount of variance. Thus, we extracted three factors using a principal-axis factoring estimation and we rotated this solution using a Promax (oblique)

rotation procedure for clearer interpretation. Table 2 shows the factor-pattern matrix from this rotated solution. Factor loadings were sorted by size to facilitate differentiation between variables. The factor loadings indicate three distinct factors. These three factors together explained 64.4% of the item variance.

Outcome variables

We examined civic, political, and expressive forms of participation to capture the multiple ways in which youth engage with public issues. Attending to a broad range of outcomes is especially important in light of evidence that young people—and perhaps young people of color, in particular—are drawn to community-based forms of participation more than to participation in traditional civic and political life (Bennett, 2008; Dalton, 2008; Sanchez-Jankowski, 2002). Our indicators were modified versions of those used in prior research (e.g., Zukin, et al., 2006).

Civic participation was measured by asking how often respondents had (a) volunteered in their community, (b) raised money for a charitable cause, and (c) informally worked with someone or some group to solve a problem in their community. All three items were administered at T2 ($\alpha = 0.73$); we administered the first two items at T1 (interitem $r = 0.47$).

Political action and expression assessed how often respondents participated in (a) activities aimed at changing a policy or law at a local or national level; (b) a peaceful protest, march, or demonstration; and (c) a poetry slam, youth forum, musical performance, or other event where young people express their political views ($\alpha = 0.66$ for T1; $\alpha = 0.69$ for T2).

Campaign participation was measured at T2 by asking how frequently respondents (a) tried to persuade anyone to vote for or against a political party or candidate; (b) wore political buttons, used bumper stickers, or placed signs in front of their house during a political campaign; and (c) contributed money to a candidate, political party, or organization that supported a candidate ($\alpha = 0.61$).

Voting was assessed by asking whether respondents voted in the 2008 presidential election. At T1, when most of our respondents were not eligible to vote, we used intention to vote as a surrogate measure. In a separate study (Author, 2010), we found that an individual's intention to vote, as expressed when the individual is a high school junior or senior, is a strong predictor of voting when that individual turns 18.

Control variables

We employed controls to isolate effects stemming from factors that have previously been found to relate to our outcome variables. These included sex, ethnic identity, and race (see Burns, Schlozman, & Verba, 2001), as well as parental political activity and political discussion between parents and youth (Niemi & Sobieszek, 1977). The parental involvement measure reflected the levels of civic and political talk occurring at home and the level of parents' involvement in the community (interitem $r = 0.45$).

In addition, we controlled for respondents' GPAs and whether they were attending four-year colleges, since educational attainment is strongly related to voting, group membership, and civic and political involvement. To account for factors stemming from political orientation, we assessed *political ideology,* ranging from "very liberal" (1) to "very conservative" (5). We also created one measure of *political interest* and one indicating the *strength of political ideology.* The latter was examined by folding over the political ideology measure and taking the absolute value, so our measure ranged from "middle of the road" (0) to "very liberal or very conservative" (2); for related research, see Mutz & Martin, 2001).

Finally, we included in the CCS a measure of video game play, since other studies have found that playing video games may be related to civic outcomes and is correlated with other forms of new media participation (Kahne, Middaugh, & Evans, 2008).

Analytic strategy

To take a full advantage of our panel data, we used lagged-dependent variable regression analysis that included prior values of the outcome variable as independent controls. The lagged-dependent variable model predicts the level of a given outcome at T2 while controlling for its value at T1. It provides unbiased estimates of the effects of digital media participation on civic and political engagement by adjusting any initial differences in the outcome variables that might exist between individuals who were already active in high school and those who were not (Finkel, 1995; Halaby, 2004). We did not have a T1 value for campaign participation, so we could not perform a lagged-dependent variable regression for this outcome.

Results

Influences of three types of new media participation

As shown in Table 3, politically driven participation was associated with increased levels of political action and expression ($\beta = 0.38$) and increased campaign participation ($\beta = 0.42$). It was not related to increased civic participation or voting rates. Interest-driven participation was related to increased levels of civic participation ($\beta = 0.19$), political action and expression ($\beta = 0.13$), and campaign participation. ($\beta = 0.12$). It did not predict voting. Finally, our two measures of friendship-driven participation appeared less consequential than interest-driven and politically driven participation. The use of blogs and social media to communicate with family and friends was unrelated to all civic and political outcomes. Friendship-driven use of e-mail and messaging was also unrelated to our measures of civic participation, political action and expression, and campaign participation. Interestingly, friendship-driven use of e-mail and messaging was the only online practice that was related to voting ($\beta = 0.12$).

The relationship between interest-driven participation and politically driven participation

We also examined whether interest-driven activities, along with friendship-driven activities, predict politically driven online activity. As shown in Table 4, model 1 included only our control variables. Model 2 (second column) included interest-driven online participation as an additional predictor. Finally, model 3 (third column) added the lagged value of politically driven participation as an additional control. Parental involvement, strength of ideology, college student status, and political interest were found to be strong and consistent predictors of increased politically driven online participation. Particularly strong, however, was interest-driven participation ($\beta = 0.50$; see model 2). The inclusion of interest-based participation in model 2 accounted for an additional 19.1% (= 48.2% – 29.1%) of explained variance in politically driven participation. The strength of this relationship was only modestly reduced ($\beta = 0.42$; see model 3) after the inclusion of politically driven participation measured at T1.

Study 2: Mobilization, Change, and Political and Civic Engagement Project

The second study was conducted as part of the Mobilization, Change, and Political and Civic Engagement (MCPCE) Project at the University of Chicago. This nationally representative sample was collected in three waves by Knowledge Networks, using an online computer methodology. We analyzed the first wave (n = 3,181), which was collected just prior to the 2008 election, and the third wave (n = 1,938), which was

collected 1 year later. Because we are primarily interested in new media participation among young adults, we limited our analysis to those panel respondents ages 18–35 (n = 586). That the MCPCE Project is a nationally representative survey— including an oversampling of people between the ages of 18 and 35 and an oversampling of African American, Latino, and Asian respondents— makes it a particularly valuable complement to our first CCS study.[1] This sample provides a valuable means to assess the generalizability and consistency of our findings from the California sample.

Measurement

We employed survey items in an analysis of the MCPCE data that aligned with those used when we analyzed the California data.

New media participation. We used the same measures in the MCPCE study to assess interest-driven participation as those used in the CCS study (mean [SD] = 0.91 [0.86], Cronbach's α = 0.70). We assessed politically driven participation with three yes/no items asking whether the respondents had (a) written or forwarded an e-mail, signed an e-mail petition, or posted a comment to a blog about a political issue, candidate, elected official, or political party; (b) written a blog about a political issue, candidate, elected official, or political party; or (c) e-mailed the editor of a newspaper, a television station, a magazine, or a Web site manager about a political issue, candidate, political party, or elected official. We counted the number of "yes" responses to these three questions to construct a summary measurement of politically driven participation (mean [SD] = 0.28 [0.61], Kuder-Richardson formula 20 [KR-20] = 0.55). Both interest-driven participation and politically driven participation were assessed in the third wave of the MCPCE. Because of space constraints, we were not able to assess friendship-driven participation in the MCPCE. Exploratory factors analysis indicated that the items in online participation formed two distinct factors that, together, explained 54.1% of the variance.

Outcome variables. Of the four outcome variables we employed in the CCS study, two were available in the MCPCE study: civic participation and campaign participation. *Civic participation* was measured by two

[1] Because of this oversampling, we weighted the sample in the subsequent analysis to adjust gender, race, education, and family income.

items asking whether respondents had volunteered and if they had worked with community members on a community issue or problem (mean [SD] = 0.42 [0.66], interitem $r = 0.38$ for the first wave; mean [SD] = 0.43 [0.67], $r = 0.44$ for the third wave). *Campaign participation* was assessed with three items: (a) contributing money to a candidate, political party, or cause; (b) volunteering for a party, cause, or elected official; and (c) going to political meetings, rallies, speeches, or dinners in support of a particular candidate, political party, or elected official (mean [SD] = 0.25 [0.65], KR-20 = 0.69 for the first wave; mean [SD] = 0.17 [0.57], KR-20 = 0.74 for the third wave).

*Control variables***.** Similar to the CCS study, we controlled for sex, ethnic identity, race, education (i.e., highest degree received), political ideology, and strength of partisanship. Because of space constraints, we did not include the descriptive statistics for these control variables. Interested readers can contact the authors for details on the measures.

Results

Similar to the CCS data analysis, we used lagged-dependent variable regression models to examine the effects of new media participation on civic and political engagement. As summarized in Table 5, the lagged outcome variables that were measured in the first wave are strong and consistent predictors of the corresponding outcome variables in the third wave. More importantly, interest-driven participation was a robust predictor of increased civic participation ($\beta = 0.16$), but it did not have a statistically significant relationship with campaign participation. By contrast, politically driven participation was associated with a boost in campaign participation ($\beta = 0.49$) but not in civic participation.

Discussion

Some pundits still make broad claims about the impact of the Internet on society. Most scholars who study the relationship between the Internet and democracy, however, focus on identifying consequential distinctions between varied forms of online activity. This study contributes to that dialog. First, it identifies survey measures that distinguish between three forms of online participatory culture: friendship-driven, interest-driven, and politically driven participation. It then considers how these forms of participation relate

to varied forms of civic and political activity. Overall, our results strongly suggest that the nature of online participation matters.

The importance of politically driven participation

Politically driven online participation appears to be an important bridge to civic and political participation, and an important form of participation in its own right. At the same time, these findings signal a need for caution. Politically driven participation may help to promote campaign participation and varied forms of political action and expression, but it is not associated with all civic or political outcomes. Politically driven participation does not appear to influence either civic engagement or voting. In addition, it seems quite plausible that politically driven online participation is a product of campaign work, to at least as great a degree as that it activates engagement with civic and political life. Thus, while politically driven online participation is clearly worthy of attention, these findings indicate that it should not be seen as the only relevant bridge from online activity to civic and political engagement.

The importance of friendship-driven participation

When it comes to findings regarding friendship-driven participation, it is the lack of relationships that seems most intriguing. Due to the newness and prevalence of social networking among youth and young adults, and due to the importance of social networks in civic and political life, some have posited that friendship-driven social networking might support civic and political engagement. We found no relationships between friendship-driven use of blogs or social networking sites and any civic or political practice. Friendship-driven use of e-mail and messaging was related to voting. However, it was not related to civic activity, political action or expression, campaign activity, or politically driven online activity. We do not see evidence that friendship-driven activity holds much promise as a support for civic and political life.

A difficulty associated with assessing such relationships should also be noted, however. Participation in online social networks and e-mail is now ubiquitous. Thus, our inability to find relationships may have resulted from a lack of variation. In addition, our measure of this concept was confined to two items, and the impact of friendship-driven participation was assessed in only one of the two studies. This limits our

confidence in these findings. Studies that better tap variations in the friendship-driven practices of youth will aid in the examination of this issue.

The importance of interest-driven participation

Our most significant findings concern interest-driven online participation. Our analysis suggests that involvement in online, nonpolitical, interest-driven activities serves as a gateway to important aspects of civic and, at times, political life, including volunteering, engagement in community problem solving, protest activities, and political voice. At times, this bridge is due to individuals acting civically or politically in support of their particular "nonpolitical" interest (For example, when online fan networks mobilize in support of a favorite TV show or character). Indeed, the distinction between interest-driven and politically driven actions, while analytically valuable, may not always be as clean as one might like. Interest-driven activities often motivate or involve civic or political activity tied to that interest. In other cases, the link may be less direct. Drawing on the civic volunteerism model, we propose that through online nonpolitical participatory activities, individuals develop capacities for action and learn about issues they find compelling. Their participation in these networked communities may also facilitate their recruitment into civic and political life. Studies that further conceptualize and test these or alternative propositions are needed.

Indeed, the significance of nonpolitical, interest-driven online activity leads us to argue that those studying new media's influence on civic and political participation among youth and young adults must broaden their focus and also attend to nonpolitical, interest-driven online participation. Also important is distinguishing between this and friendship-driven participation. Studies of the Internet and political participation that focus solely on politically driven forms of online participation can teach us a great deal. They also appear likely to miss much that matters.

Limitations

One limitation of this work is its reliance on self-reports; it would be ideal to collect data on actual online activity. In addition, while controls for prior levels of civic and political activity are helpful, being able to better control for prior levels of online activity would further strengthen our ability to make causal claims. That several of the outcome measures had factor loadings below 0.7 is also worth noting. The items used

were common indicators (see, for example, Zukin, et al. 2006), but because of space constraints, some measures were comprised of relatively few items, and this may have contributed to the low factor loadings. These loadings may also reflect the fact that the scales were additive measures of broad categories of activity. Engaging in one activity did not imply having been involved in any of the other activities. Still, in future studies, it would clearly be valuable to include more items in these scales.

A potential concern regarding our use of a lagged-dependent variable is also important to note. Conceptually, our use of a lagged-dependent variable reflects the belief that the beneficial effects of new media participation (such as the development of civically relevant digital capacities) are not immediate but are instead realized over time. The first-wave surveys of the CCS were conducted over a 3-year period, from 2005 to 2007, and the second-wave surveys were conducted immediately after the 2008 election, so there were different time lags between the first and the second waves in the CCS panel. To see whether the length of the lag mattered, we added a variable indicating the time interval between the two waves to the regression models we used to predict civic and political outcomes. The variable tied to the time of the lag was insignificant, and including it did not affect the significance of other independent variables. Thus, while our model indicates that a lagged effect does occur, we do not have evidence that a lag of a particular length is more or less advantageous.

Despite these limitations, that our analysis yielded consistent results across both panel data sets, even with a wide range of relevant controls, gives us greater confidence in the strength of the relationships between three forms of online participation and offline youth activism, as does the fact that the MCPCE Project is both nationally representative and contains a sizable oversample of African American, Latino, and Asian youth.

Future work: Assessing the quality and equality of participatory practices

While this study examined ways in which online activity relates to the quantity of civic and political life, it is important to also examine ways that digital media might influence the quality and equality of activity. For example, given that online participation may influence the extent to which youth participate civically and politically, examining the demographic distributions of these online participatory practices is clearly

important. An interesting finding in this regard is that Hispanics and African Americans in the California sample appear to be more likely than Whites to take part in politically driven online activities (see Table 4). We are cautious when interpreting these data, however, since the sample of various groups in the California sample is not necessarily representative and the number of African Americans in the sample is relatively small. In a separate fact sheet (Authors, 2010) that used data from the MCPCE, we analyzed interest-driven participation of youth and found that, overall, African American youth had the highest rates of interest-driven participation. Future work should examine the demographic distribution of such practices in greater detail and also consider whether online participation may play differing roles for differing demographic groups, when it comes to civic and political life.

In addition, from a normative standpoint, it is important to consider how forms of online participation relate to the quality as well as the quantity of civic and political life. For instance, the Internet provides unprecedented access to both information and misinformation. We have more to learn about the quality of news and information youth encounter online and whether varied sources provide appropriate depth or context (See Patterson, 2000; Prior, 2003).

In addition, while the Internet makes it easier than ever for individuals to hear diverse perspectives (Rheingold, 2000), it can also facilitate exposure, primarily to those who share one's ideological perspective (Sunstein, 2007). The importance of such issues is heightened by perceptions of increased partisanship online and off, by research indicating that individuals tend to form like-minded groups (Mutz, 2006), and by data indicating greater geographic clustering of like-minded citizens (Bishop, 2009). Our survey addressed some of these concerns by asking whether, when online, youth were exposed to views on societal issues that aligned with their own as well as whether they were exposed to views on societal issues that were different than the views they held. We found (Authors) that many youth reported not being exposed to any perspectives on societal issues. However, among those who reported exposure to others' views, the vast majority reported exposure both to views that aligned with their own and to those that did not. In addition, the volume of politically driven and interest-driven participation was positively associated with exposure to

diverse perspectives. In contrast, online friendship-driven participation had no effect on exposure to either kind of perspective.

While this tells us something about the views to which one is exposed, it does not tell us about the quality of cross-cutting interaction. Assessing the quality of such interaction should be a priority of future work. Similarly, while we expect that these experiences support both bridging and bonding social capital (see Putnam, 2000; Norris, 2002), this topic is also worthy of attention.

In undertaking this work, it is important to consider the ways that online participatory practices may reflect and potentially influence changes in the conceptions of the civic and political lives of youths and young adults. Recently scholars have argued that youths and young adults appear to grant significance to political expression and enact it in ways that differ from earlier generations, placing less emphasis, for example, on influencing the actions of elected officials and the state and more emphasis on lifestyle politics, influencing business practices through boycotts and "buycotts," and expressive acts tied to popular culture (Bennett, 2008; Dalton, 2008; Zukin et al., 2006). Many scholars have found that youth often doubt the efficacy and attractiveness of formal political life and are oriented toward nongovernmental, informal, and small-scale responses to societal issues (Delgado & Staples, 2007; Ginwright, 2009). This shift in politics does not require new media. However, the affordances of new media seem likely to make changes, such as an emphasis on expressive politics, easier to enact, and they may also orient youth toward valuing this form and focus of civic and political life. The desirability of such changes, if they are occurring, seems likely to be mixed. On the one hand, they may well provide mechanisms for engagement, leadership, audience, and mobilization that traditional institutions rarely grant to youth. On the other, voicing a different perspective, Henry Milner (2010) has argued, "generations that turn their backs on politics in favor of individual expression will continue to find their priorities at the top of society's wish list – and at the bottom of the 'to do' list" (p. 5). It is important that future work examine whether and when these new forms of expression and action augment or undermine youth civic and political influence.

Finally, this study may help us to understand the contexts in which the development of democratic habits, commitments, and skills currently occurs. There is a long tradition in the United States of viewing

democratic development as largely a product of life within geographically proximate local communities (de Tocqueville, 2000). New media, however, may be modifying the significance of geography in this regard. For example, Schragger (2001) suggested that high levels of mobility, shifting geographic boundaries, and competing factions within communities require new criteria for defining local communities, with an emphasis on defining community by shared interests rather than geographic proximity. Similarly, Delli Carpini (2000) concluded that the Internet is creating communities that are more interest based than geographically based (see Middaugh & Kahne, 2009 for a review discussing the significance of online localism for youth). Our findings appear to be consistent with that logic.

Participation in interest-driven and politically driven online activities appears to provide generative contexts for civic and political development, roles traditionally played by geographically proximate communities. While those interacting in interest-driven and politically driven spaces may also encounter one another offline, it is notable that online activities appear to prompt both on- and offline civic and political engagement. Fine-grained studies are needed to teach us about the relationship of online participatory communities to geographically proximate offline communities. More broadly, such studies are needed to deepen our understandings of the ways in which these online participatory communities can create locations and mechanisms that shape the developing civic and political behaviors of youth and young adults.

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Table 1.
Descriptive statistics of key variables (California Civic Survey panel)

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max	*N*
Outcome variables					
Civic participation, T2	2.45	.80	1.00	4.00	435
Civic participation, T1	2.62	.55	1.00	3.00	326
Political action and expression, T2	1.55	.68	1.00	4.00	434
Political action and expression, T1	1.59	.61	1.00	3.00	326
Campaign participation, T2	2.02	.71	1.00	4.00	435
Voting in 2008, T2	.68	.47	.00	1.00	430
Voting intention, T1	4.38	1.01	1.00	5.00	428
New media participation					
Friendship-driven participation					
Use of e-mail/messenger/messaging	5.70	.81	1.00	6.00	435
Use of social media to socialize	4.87	1.52	1.00	6.00	435
Interest-driven online participation	1.52	1.20	.00	5.00	435
Politically driven online participation	3.08	1.41	1.00	6.00	436
Control variables					
Female sex	.62	.49	.00	1.00	435
GPA in high school	3.85	.67	2.00	5.00	428
Parental involvement	3.19	1.12	1.00	5.00	434
Conservatism	2.81	1.08	1.00	5.00	422
Strength of political ideology	.85	.70	.00	2.00	422
College student	.86	.35	.00	1.00	435
Ethnicity					
African American	.03	.18	.00	1.00	435
Asian	.27	.44	.00	1.00	435
Hispanic	.27	.44	.00	1.00	435
Political interest	3.91	1.04	1.00	5.00	435
Frequency of video gaming	3.29	1.83	1.00	6.00	435

Note. GPA, grade point average; T1, initial baseline survey; T2, follow-up survey.

Table 2.

Correlations between the digital media use items and the common factors (California Civic Survey panel)

Items	Factors		
	Interest-driven participation	Politically driven participation	Friendship-driven participation
Interest-driven online activities			
Used the Internet to organize an online group, discussion, or Web site	**.83**	.03	-.02
Used the Internet to organize social or recreational events (games, concerts, dances, competitions, etc.)	**.70**	-.12	.17
Given someone you don't know feedback for something they wrote or put online	**.69**	.09	-.10
Gone online to participate in a special-interest community, such as a fan site or a site where you talk with others about a hobby, sport, or special interest	**.58**	.01	-.04
I have been a leader in an online community	**.51**	.07	-.02
Politically driven online activities			
Used blogs or social networking sites to share or discuss perspectives on social and political issues	-.02	**.94**	-.03
Used e-mail to communicate with others who are working on a political or social issue	.01	**.80**	-.01
Used the Internet to get information about political or social issues	.03	**.54**	.11
Relationship-driven online activities			
Used e-mail, text messaging, or instant messenger to communicate with friends or family	-.04	-.09	**.62**
Used blogs, diary, or social networking sites (like MySpace) to socialize with people (friends, family, or people you've met online)	.06	.07	**.55**
Principal component eigenvalue (before rotation)	4.18	1.22	1.05
Cronbach's alpha	.80	.81	.41

Table 3

Results of regression models predicting civic and political outcomes with lagged controls (California Civic Survey panel)

	Civic participation[a]	Political action and expression[a]	Campaign participation[a]	Voting in 2008[b]
Control variables				
Female sex	.00	.02	.06	.12[#]
GPA in high school	.06	-.02	.00	.10
Parental involvement	.13*	.03	.03	.08
Conservatism	-.01	-.03	-.05	-.08
Strength of political ideology	-.01	.03	.11*	.04
College student	.08	.02	-.02	.17**
Race:				
African American	-.06	-.04	-.12**	-.04
Hispanic	-.05	.05	-.03	.06
Asian	-.08	.04	-.08	-.05
Political interest	-.03	.03	.14**	.24***
Frequency of video gaming	-.08	-.11*	-.09*	.00
Lagged values of outcomes				
Civic participation, T1	.28***	—	—	—
Political action and expression, T1	—	.22***	—	—
Voting intention, T1	—	—	—	.28***
New media participation				
Friendship-driven participation:				
Use of e-mail/messaging	.08	.00	.00	.12*
Use of social media to socialize	.08	.00	.01	-.06
Interest-driven participation	.19**	.13*	.12*	-.02
Politically driven participation	.10	.38***	.42***	.03
Total R^2 (%)	31.6	36.4	37.8	21.2[c]
N of cases	321	321	423	417

Note. GPA, grade point average; T1, initial baseline survey.
[a] Standardized ordinary least squares regression coefficients.
[b] Standardized logistic regression estimates.
[c]McFadden's pseudo R^2
#p≤.10
*$p \leq .05$.
**$p \leq .01$.
***$p \leq .001$.

Table 4

Results of regression models predicting politically driven online participation (California Civic Survey panel)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Control variables			
Female sex	.05	.13**	.16**
GPA in high school	.09	.08	.00
Parental involvement	.17***	.09*	.07
Conservatism	-.06	-.07	-.06
Strength of political ideology	.11**	.07*	.11*
College student	.12**	.08*	.04
African American	.07	.09*	.09
Race:			
Hispanic	.12*	.08*	.11
Asian	.07	.01	.07
Political interest	.31***	.25***	.18***
Frequency of video gaming	.15**	.05	.09
New media participation			
Friendship-driven participation:			
Use of emails/messaging	-.04	-.02	.00
Use of social media to socialize	.24***	.10**	.05
Interest-driven participation	—	.50***	.42***
Lagged values of the outcome			
Politically driven participation, T1	—	—	.33***
Total R^2 (%)	29.1	48.2	53.5
N of cases	423	423	237

Note. Data are standardized ordinary least squares regression coefficients, unless otherwise indicated. GPA, grade point average; T1, initial baseline survey.

$*p \leq .05$.

$**p \leq .01$.

$***p \leq .001$.

Table 5

*Results of ordered logistic regression models predicting civic and campaign participation (*Mobilization, Change, and Political and Civic Engagement panel*)*

	Civic participation[a]	Campaign participation[a]
Control variables		
Age	.05	-.14**
Female sex	.06	-.13**
Education	.08	.03
Household income	.03	-.05
Race:		
African American	.04	.12**
Hispanic	.05	.12**
Asian	-.00	-.01
Conservatism	.21***	-.13**
Strength of partisanship	-.02	-.02
Internet access at home	-.06	-.06
Lagged values of outcomes		
Civic participation, T1	.50***	—
Campaign participation, T1	—	.24**
New media participation		
Interest-driven participation	.16**	.09
Politically driven participation	.05	.49***
R^2	38.2	52.6
N of cases	530	531

Note. Data are standardized ordinary least squares regression coefficients, unless otherwise indicated. Outcome variables were measured in 2009. T1, initial baseline survey conducted in 2008.

[b]*$p \leq .05$.

**$p \leq .01$.

***$p \leq .001$.