# What matters?
# Exploring Youth Political Participation in
# Western Democracies

by

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# Abstract

Researchers examining youth political participation largely fall within one of two camps: the first argues that youth participation is in decline, the second that this youngest demographic of voters still participates, but in new and unconventional ways. I aim to advance the academic debate on youth political participation by identifying and categorizing prevalent forms of youth political participation, both online and offline. By doing so, I also aim to contribute insights about the potential to influence youth political participation by identifying and examining relationships between the prevalence of participatory acts and the presence of particular features of participation. I address the extent to which, and how, youths are politically engaged both online and offline in western democracies. In order to do so I investigate dimensions of participation – including whether acts are interactive and the amount of resources they require – to discover whether they relate to the likelihood that youths will participate in political activity. I then examine existing survey reports to determine the prevalence of various forms of youth political participation in three Western democracies: the United States (U.S.), Australia and Canada. In doing so, I illustrate that youths are politically active but have moved away from traditional political activities, and instead seek out alternative avenues for participation, especially online.

**Keywords**:    Young adults; online participation; online media; interactivity; social engagement & offline participation

*For my father, who has provided me a lifetime of intellectual inspiration.*

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# 1.    Chapter I: Introduction

Youth participation in politics is central to democracy. Without it, upcoming generations wander into the political process without the knowledge, skills and drive to challenge political elites. They lack the capacity or interest to monitor the actions of government, and contribute little into the policies and legislation that impact their lives. Darin Barney writes, "[nothing] could be more politically volatile, more fatal to the stability of an established regime, than a refusal by its youth to participate" (Barney, 2010, p. 145). As such, the question of whether and to what extent youths are engaged in participatory politics is vitally important.

Researchers are divided regarding youth political participation. Some believe the sky is falling, and that youths are drastically disengaging from the political process. Others argue that youth engagement is merely in a state a flux. I explore this divide, and ultimately conclude that both camps are accurate in identifying facets of youth participation. Traditional youth participation is not prevalent in Western democracies. Youths have, however, found new means for political engagement – particularly online – and that is changing the face of participation across the globe.

## 1.1.  Understanding Youth Participation and the Potential Role for Online Media

Within the two dominant research narratives, some scholars - whom I will term *disengagement theorists* – write that youths are disengaging from politics. They argue that youths in Western democracies have become inactive to an unprecedented degree (Dalton, 2011; Wattenberg, 2002; Damon, 2001; Putnam, 2000). Disengagement theorists cite decreasing voter turnout and the rising average age of party memberships as evidence of youth disengagement (Fields, 2011; Dalton, 2011; Barney, 2010; Putnam, 2000). Other scholars – whom I will refer to as *alternative engagement theorists* – advocate that youths are politically engaged (Kiersa *et al.*, 2011; Kann *et al.* 2011; Micheletti & Stolle, 2011; Zukin *et al.*, 2002). In expanding the scope of examination to

include acts such as online activism, volunteerism, consumer politics and protesting, these researchers claim that youths are connecting with the political process in new ways. Alternative engagement theorists argue that youths are not necessarily less interested than previous generations. Instead, their view is that traditional engagement – voting and pledging party allegiance – no longer addresses the concerns associated with youth culture. It has been displaced by new forms of democratic expression heavily influenced by present-day issues and special-interest organizations (Loader, 2007; Phelps, 2004). As such, although youths are disengaging from traditional avenues of political activity, they may not be disengaging overall (Dalton, 2011, p. 4).

Aspects of both approaches are correct. Alternative participation may be increasing as traditional political activity diminishes. Democratic societies require both forms of participation; not only do youths need to voice their opinions through alternative avenues, arguably they must vote in order to be politically relevant. It may be that the continuum of youth participation has been extended to include new acts that are more amenable to today's youth and their values. If youths continue to disengage from traditional politics, however, these values may be unrecognized by politicians and missing from policies and legislation.

Disengagement and alternative engagement theorists disagree when examining the potential role of online media for political reengagement. Loader (2007) argues that disengagement theorists often adhere to the philosophy that online media do not hold a significant capacity for reengagement. Although these theorists acknowledge some potential for new technologies to impact youth participation – such as viewing online media as a vehicle to disseminate information on which youths can base political actions – they believe this potential to be overstated in the existing literature (Xenos & Bennett, 2007; Dahlgren, 2007). By contrast, alternative engagement theorists place more weight on the role online media have played in facilitating forms of new political activity (Loader, 2007; Livingstone, Couldry, & Markham, 2007; Gerodimos & Ward, 2007). This divide is mirrored in much of the literature on the role of the Internet.

A number of scholars have investigated the potential for online media to affect civic engagement, political knowledge and political participation (Bimber, 2001; Castells, 1997; Cohen *et al.*, 2012; Davis, 1999; Donk *et al.*, 2004; Negroponte, 1995; Norris,

2001, 2002; Rash, 1997; Toffler & Toffler, 1995; Zukin *et al.*, 2002). Within this research, a spectrum of views emerges. Research that surfaced on the impact of digital technologies in the 1990s viewed the Internet as an infrastructure with the potential to facilitate direct democracy and citizen empowerment (Negroponte, 1995; Rash, 1997; Toffler & Toffler, 1995). For the first time, citizens would hold the capacity to access information and their elected officials without many of the barriers to access that previously disempowered them.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, however, research began to caution against viewing online media as a vehicle that might facilitate participation. In a summary of existing literature Gibson, Lusoli & Ward (2005) iterated that only a minority of the population in most western countries had access to the Internet and that most of those who did were of high socioeconomic status. As a result, a number of researchers began to call into question Internet's political capacity (p. 563). Further, empirical studies were not providing the support for previously optimistic theoretical claims. For example, some theorists began to advocate that online media were inherently dangerous to democracy because of their capacity to reduce collective action and social cohesion (Wu & Weaver, 1996; Davis, 1999), erode social capital (Galston, 2003) and consume free time that might otherwise be spent on political actions (Kraut *et al.*, 1998; Putnam, 2000). Other researchers have also attributed a decline in participatory politics to the emergence of online media (Boulianne, 2009; Hodgkinson, 2008; Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2010; Rice, 2002).

By contrast, other scholars have argued that online media contribute positively to participation (Hendricks & Kaid, 2002; Kaye, 2002; Wellman *et al.*, 2001; Williamson, 2009). Looking more specifically at forms of alternative political participation, a growing number of researchers advocate that online media may be at the forefront of an emerging wave of participation (Bennett, Wells, & Freelon, 2011; Couldry, & Markham, 2007; Gerodimos & Ward, 2007; Jenkins H., 2006; Livingstone, 2007; Loader, 2007; Martin, 2012; Palfrey & Gasser, 2008). Starting from the presupposition that traditional political participation – voting and pledging party allegiance – no longer appeals to citizens to the extent they did previously (Dalton, 2004; Pharr & Putnam, 2000), scholars within this camp have argued that online media provide new opportunities for people to

form networks and take action to address the issues most important to them (Benkler, 2006; Coleman, 2007; Dalton, 2011; Kann *et al.*, 2011).

## 1.2. Research Aim and Questions

Scholars are unclear on whether and how youths are disengaging, and the relationship between online media and existing youth political participation. I aim to contribute to the literature on this topic in two ways. First, I will advance the academic debate on youth political participation by identifying and categorizing prevalent forms of this participation, both online and offline. By doing so, I also aim to contribute insights about the potential to influence youth political participation by identifying and examining relationships between the prevalence of participatory acts and the presence of particular features of participation.

To address these aims, I will examine the following main research question: to what extent, and how, are youths politically engaged both online and offline in western democracies? In order to address this question I will conduct predominantly descriptive research. I will break down this question into the following sub-questions:

1. What are the relevant dimensions on which youths base their decisions to participate, and how can the acts that youths engage in be classified according to these dimensions?

2. How prevalent are various forms of youth political participation and to what extent do youths engage in participatory acts online and offline?

3. How does online participation relate to offline participation?

In order to answer the first sub-question I will produce a theoretical typology of youth political participation based on descriptive research and the relevant literature. This typology will set the framework for the empirical analysis that will address the second sub-question. As outlined in Chapter III, I will populate this typology with data from survey reports from the U.S., Canada and Australia. This will allow me to identify the prevalent forms of youth political participation. I will then address my third sub-question: the relationship between online and offline participation. I emphasize that I do

not wish to infer conclusions of causality. Instead I hope to explore popular youth participatory acts in order to reveal features of prevalent acts that can be exploited to increase more traditional forms of youth political participation. Together, these questions will establish the how, and to what extent, youths participate politically.

## 1.3. Defining Political Participation

There is a lack of consensus in the literature around the concept of political participation. A number of key scholars within the field hold different views of the concept (Milbrath & Goel, 1977; Verba & Nie, 1972; Kaase & Marsh, 1979; Parry, Moyser, & Day, 1992; Norris, 2002). The lack of agreement may also account for variations in regard to whether or not scholars believe participation is decreasing, especially in regard to youth participation. If one adopts a restricted view of political participation that looks only to acts that attempt to impact traditional politics – such as electoral outcomes – it would appear that participatory acts are decreasing. By contrast, those who look at a wider spectrum of acts would find a greater degree of participation. As such, it is important to define clearly the parameters of political participation.

This concept has also been confused with civic engagement, which has arguably become a catchall for numerous forms of citizen activity (Berger, 2009, p. 335). I examine political participation, excluding facets of civic engagement such as personal conversations about politics, in order to narrow my field of research. For the purpose of this paper political participation will be defined as voluntary acts performed by citizens that are intended to influence political actors and outcomes – including but not limited to electoral, policy or legislative outcomes.

Since I wish to explore youth political participation, I must also identify the parameters of what is meant by 'youth.' This term is fluid, but I am primarily concerned with voters under thirty years of age. Existing data sets, however, require me to consider a broader age range, including 15-25 year olds (as the youngest sample), and 18 to 35 year olds (as the oldest sample).

## 1.4. Why a Typology?

A typology will allow me to explore forms and dimensions of youth political participation. It will allow for the categorization of various dimensions of participatory acts in order to address my first sub-question. I will use a typology to conceptualize youth political participation across the online/offline divide. In expanding facets of existing typologies to include online participatory acts, I aim to identify features of participation that relate to the likelihood that youths will engage, and also the way in which they choose to do so.

Existing typologies have been used to demonstrate that forms of participation are related: "citizens involved in one mode or dimension of political behaviour tend to be involved in other forms of political behaviour within the same dimension[1], but not necessarily involved in political activities in other dimensions" (Ekman & Amna, 2012, p. 287). Arguably, these typologies have not identified what features, or dimensions, of participatory acts are most related to youth political participation. Many existing typologies do not include online participation (understandable if they were created before the advent of the Internet) or are no longer relevant for exploring both traditional and alternative forms of participation. For example, Milbrath (1965) explored a number of helpful dimensions for categorizing acts. Simultaneously, he restricted the scope of his examination to one singular form of political participation, campaign activities. When researchers are too restrictive they miss important elements of youth political participation, especially in relation to the growing forums of online action.

Another well-known typology is that of Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995). These scholars examined voting, campaign work, political contributions, contacting public officials and protest and community activities. They also studied the requirements for performing an act (including time, money and skills), capacity for conveying information and variation in volume. While the theoretical dimensions of participation warrant merit, these features of participation no longer reflect important elements of online participation, such as the effort required (or lack thereof) for forms of political

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[1] Participatory acts within the same dimension are those that share a quality that is being explored in a typology.

participation. Further, the typology does not encompass participatory acts that are most prevalent among youths, such as online political promotion.

Teorell *et al.* (2007) provided a more recent typology of political participation. They examined a number of participatory acts including electoral participation, consumer participation (including donating money, boycotting and consumer politics), political party activity, protest activity and contact activity. Similar to that of Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995) this typology may miss some important forms of political participation. If one is interested in determining whether declining youth participation is prevalent, ignoring popular forms of youth activity, such as those that occur online, may lead to an inaccurate depiction of overall engagement.

There are, of course, problems associated with political typologies. It could be argued that attempting to systematically categorize various forms of political participation is unrealistic or impractical – can scholars fit a round peg into a square hole? There may also be problems associated with attempts to categorize political activities in relation to the absence or presence of various dimensions, as there might be a degree to which a dimension is present. There is also something to be said about disagreements between scholars. While particular scholars may consider certain activities to be categorized in one particular way, such as being interactive or time intensive, other scholars may disagree. It is my hope that a typology will allow me to build an overall picture of youth political participation, and may lay the groundwork for future research to categorize activities further.

The typology I produce will provide context for the empirical investigation that will follow. In Chapter II I will establish a theoretical framework that categorizes forms of youth participation based on relevant dimensions of actions, and provide a justification for this categorization. After providing an overview of my empirical methodology in Chapter III, I will examine existing survey reports to analyze what types of participatory acts are most prevalent in Chapter IV. This will allow me to address my initial two sub-questions. With this information, I will then explore how online participation relates to offline participation in relation to the results of these questions.

# 2. Chapter II: Creating a Framework of Youths' Acts of Political Participation

## 2.1. Online Youth Participation

A number of indicators have signaled that increasing numbers of youths are disengaging from traditional politics. Traditional political activities such as voting, political party membership, contacting political representatives, and working or volunteering for political parties are decreasing (Putnam, 2000; Easterline & Crimmins, 1991; Dalton, 2007). Scholars have investigated a number of potential factors in this shift in participation including: the role of traditional media (Bagdikian, 2004; Baker, 2002; Dahlgren, 2007; McChesney, 2007; Milner, 2001; Mindich, 2005); globalization (Vowles, 2008); the changing nature and experience of youths (Blais *et al.,* 2004; Dalton & Wattenberg, 2000; Miller & Shanks, 1996; Wass, 2007); and changes in political party and government communication (Carty & Eagles, 2006) (Green, Gerber, & Nickerson, 2003; Pattie, Whitely, Johnston, & Seyd, 1994).

Although this body of research provides insight into the state of youth political participation, I believe too many researchers overstate this disengagement. As stated above, youths participate in new and unconventional ways (Kiersa *et al.*, 2011; Kann *et al.* 2011; Micheletti & Stolle, 2011; Zukin *et al.*, 2002). As such, by investigating this decline in participation, many scholars may be misunderstanding, or even underestimating, the importance of youths' alternative participatory acts. Instead of exploring why traditional youth participation may be in decline, I wish to understand the ways that youths do participate politically, unveiling the types of participatory acts they perform and the features of these acts that make them popular among youths.

## 2.2. Defining the Typology

I use a typology in order to conceptualize youth political participation across the online/offline divide. In doing so, I aim both to identify features of participation that relate

to the likelihood that youths will engage, and also the way in which they choose to do so. I describe political participation as voluntary acts performed by citizens that are intended to influence actual political outcomes by targeting relevant political or societal elites or institutions. I believe that these acts can be categorized into different types of political participation, and that once categorized, specific types of participation may be identified as being more prevalent than others. Ultimately, I aim to shed light on why youths may prefer certain types of acts to others.

A number of theories exist that predict who will become political active and how. Because political participation is complex with a number of fundamental dimensions, political scientists have explored a variety of features of political participation to explain why certain people perform participatory acts. Within the field, Verba, Schlozman and Brady's model of Civic Voluntarism (1995) provides an example of a typology that combines features from a number of previously existing theories. Many scholars have explored individual characteristics, such as a person's gender, income or education as they relate to the likelihood that a person will engage in a participatory act. Verba *et al.* refer to these as, 'initial characteristics' (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995, p. 417). Others have looked at dimensions of participatory acts that predict whether or not a person will become politically active. Milbrath (1965) outlined such features as: whether an act is overt or covert, autonomous or compliant, approaching or avoiding, expressive or instrumental, verbal or non-verbal, social or nonsocial, episodic or continuous; or, constitutes inputs or outtakes to the political system (pp. 9-13).[2] He believed these dimensions categorized acts, and that they impacted the likelihood that individuals and groups would engage in them.

Similarly, I will examine dimensions of participatory acts in order to determine whether a relationship exists between these dimensions and the prevalence of particular acts. I will adopt features identified by Milbrath (and later assumed by other scholars) that apply to both online and offline participation. When considering this divide, however, a number of Milbrath's features are no longer relevant, applicable or measurable. Some

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[2] Often these distinguishing features do not need to be mutually exclusive. For example, an act need not be overt *or* covert. Instead, a number of these features can be characterized as existing on a spectrum and thus be more or less overt.

of these features are more obviously inappropriate in the current political climate For example, Milbrath's distinction regarding whether an act is approaching or avoiding (p. 10)[3] is difficult to measure, and as such I have disregarded it.

Milbrath distinguishes between overt and covert acts. In doing so he differentiates between acts that are conducted in public view and those conducted in private (p. 10). When considering the spectrum of participatory acts that occur presently this distinction is no longer clear. For example, take the act of posting content to a Facebook 'friend's' wall that encourages them to vote for a particular political party. In certain cases, this act is overt in that it occurs in public view[4]; however, it is also by nature an initiation of conversation between two Facebook users.

Autonomous acts are those that people choose to participate in without provocation; conversely, compliant acts are those that occur in response to solicitation (p. 10). The distinction between these forms of acts is unclear both online and offline. This is also illustrated by returning to the example of encouraging a Facebook 'friend' to vote: if a person chooses to vote, is she doing so autonomously or in response to the increasing number of requests to do so?

Milbrath advocates that acts can be either expressive or instrumental. He defines expressive acts as those that focus on engagement in behavior, such as conversation on political topics. By contrast, instrumental actions are oriented toward changing events (p. 12). I venture, however, that expressive and instrumental participatory acts are not mutually exclusive. Although many forms of online participation may be thought of as being expressive – such as 'liking' a page on Facebook, or disseminating information on Twitter – it is important not to overlook the capacity that these acts hold to influence the political sphere – to be instrumental. In addition, research has indicated that expressive and instrumental acts may be linked: when people engage in discussions on public affairs they are more likely to engage in participatory acts (Shah *et al.*, 2005).

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[3] Milbrath advocates that acts of political participation are either performed because a person has a positive valence (an affinity for the act) or a negative valence (a disdain for the act); he terms these as either approaching or avoiding.

[4] This fluctuates depending on the privacy setting of individual users' Facebook accounts.

Finally, participatory acts either contribute to the political system (inputs) or take withdrawals from the system (outtakes) (p. 11). For example, voting and campaigning would be considered inputs, whereas the use of public services would be considered outtakes. Based on my definition of political participation, I will examine exclusively acts in which individuals attempt to impact political outcomes, what Milbrath refers to as inputs.

I will adopt aspects of the three remaining features of Milbrath's model - social and nonsocial, verbal and nonverbal and episodic and continuous. I use the social and nonsocial feature as a form of distinction in and of itself, however, I refer to this as interactive and non-interactive. Among other features, I use the episodic and continuous, and verbal and nonverbal distinctions as dimensions of the amount of resources required to perform an act. These features are described below. I do not wish to infer that these dimensions of participation are mutually exclusive; an act is not either interactive or non-interactive, it does not require resources or not require them. Instead, these dimensions provide a spectrum of categorization.

## 2.3. Interactive and Non-interactive Acts

Milbrath advocates that most political acts require some minimal kind of social interaction, but that the amount of interaction required is useful in distinguishing various forms of political participation (p. 13). A similar notion was used by Verba, Nie and Kim (1978). They referred to it as the cooperative dimension of political participation and drew a distinction between activities that require individuals to act collectively and those that do not (p. 312).

When examining interactive and non-interactive acts, I define interactive acts as those that allow individuals to engage with others – either digitally or physically, reflecting the different elements of the online/offline divide. Non-interactive participatory acts are those that are conducted individually. This represents a change in previous conceptions of what was previously referenced as the social and nonsocial divide. Where previously interactive acts were those that occurred in the physical company of others, people are now capable of engaging in interactive participatory acts without

being in direct physical contact with others. For example, engaging in online political forums and social media discussions would be considered interactive acts; however, they occur from the comfort of one's home and without physical companions.

I do not wish to imply that all online participatory acts are interactive. People can email political actors, write editorials, or perform other acts that would be considered non-interactive. I argue instead that this divide concurrently exists online and offline and may shed light on the types of acts youths perform.

Scholars have investigated a number of reasons for why social interactions – either through discussion, online interactivity, group settings, or a number of other venues – impact political participation. For example, a number of researchers have indicated that political discussions relate positively to engagement, both online and offline (Huckfeldt, 1995; Shah *et al.*, 2005; Wyatt, Katz, & Kim, 2000). This is because social interactions not only facilitate "exchanges of information but also interpretive frameworks that help to process information" (Valenzuela, Kim, & Gil de Zuniga, 2012, p. 165). Research on interactivity online has produced a spectrum of results, however, a number of scholars have identified positive relationships between interactive features of online media and the prevalence of political participation (Bachen *et al.*, 2008; Chen, Griffith, & Shen, 2005; Chung & Zhao, 2004). Studies also exist, however, that indicate interactive elements of online media do not impact political participation (Bucy, 2004; Fortin & Dholakia, 2005). Further, literature indicates individuals have 'social preferences' in regard to their political participation (Feddesen & Sandroni, 2006; Fowler & Kam, 2006; Dawes, Loewen, & Fowler, 2011). According to this literature, individuals act not only for their own self-interest, but also for the self-interest of groups with which they are associated. Individuals consider the benefits of their actions to both themselves and their groups, and weigh these benefits against the costs of participatory acts. These groups can be peer-based or issue-based.

The interactions and networks that stem from social participation are important. Arguably people are social beings, youths being no exception; they are "embedded in friendship, interest, and identity-based networks" (Cohen *et al.*, 2012, p. 16). These networks allow individuals to share information and skills, mobilize others around them with similar concerns and issues and reduce barriers and costs to participation. Social

networks often become temporary political resources for youths who are prompted by issues and candidates that motivate them (ibid). Although this is likely to be the case for many people, I believe this to be particularly important for youths; younger adults will be more likely to engage in political activities when they can do so with peers.

For these reasons, I argue both online and offline social interactions provide information, inspiration and capacity for youths to engage in participatory acts. As a result, I believe this will increase the proportion of youths who engage in interactive participatory acts overall. I hypothesize that,

> ***H1: Youths will be more likely to perform participatory acts that are interactive than acts that are non-interactive.***

## 2.4. Resources Required

I also seek to examine the degree of resources required and whether this relates to the prevalence of certain political acts. This dimension of youth political participation stems from conceptions provided by Verba, Nie and Kim (1972) and later Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995). These scholars examined how 'difficult' an act is to perform in regard to time, money and civic skills. Combined, these characteristics provide an account of how many resources are required by the individual in order to complete participatory acts (p. 312). It is predicted that the amount of resources required for particular acts will negatively correlate to whether or not certain groups of individuals will perform these acts.

Following Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995) I predict that participatory acts that require more time will be less prevalent. For example, these scholars defined voting, campaign work, contacting, and protesting as time intensive (p. 48).[5] I believe these acts will be less common than acts that require less time including episodic acts such as 'liking' or 'following' a politician on Facebook or Twitter (respectively). This may be

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[5] According to Milbrath, voting is an episodic act. Episodic acts are those that take place at specific times. In contrast, continuous acts can occur over extended periods of time. I would argue, however, that the amount of time citizens must invest in order to: find a polling station, become politically informed, and physically go to vote provide justification for voting to be considered a time intensive act.

especially the case with youths. If it is the case that youths are less likely to participate than adults, it may follow that acts that require less resources and effort are more likely to occur.

Money is also thought to provide a barrier to action. Disposable income is necessary for campaign contributions and certain acts of consumer politics, such as buying certain products for political or ethical reasons. For example, certain products, such as non-genetically modified or organic foods, are more expensive than other items. This may be more important for youths than adults, who in many cases have less expendable income than older demographics, especially youths who may not be established in careers.[6]

Verba, Schlozman and Brady also reference civic skills necessary for political participation. Civic skills are defined as "the communications and organizational abilities that allow citizens to use time and money effectively in political life" (Verba, Schlozman & Brady, 1995, p. 304). I integrate Milbrath's distinction between verbal and nonverbal acts within this notion of civic skills. Verbal acts require knowledge and use of verbal skills (p. 13).

If an act requires two out the three aforementioned resources, I consider it to be resource intensive. I recognize that in doing so, I have considered time, money and civic skills to be equal, and that there may be theoretical and empirical implications and issues associated with this decision. For example, one could argue that money is essential for particular acts, such as contributing to a political campaign. A person may have both time and civic skills, however, without the financial capacity to do so they will be barred from contributing money to a political campaign.[7] I have devised this method for the sake of clarity and uniformity. I hypothesize acts that require more resources will be less prevalent. Following other scholars I argue that:

> **H2: Youths will be more likely to perform participatory acts that require fewer resources than resource-intensive acts.**

[6] There are obvious exceptions to this rule; some youths have considerable amounts of expendable income, and some adults do not. This serves as a generalization.

[7] Of the acts addressed in Chapter IV considered to be 'low resource,' the outstanding required resource would not bar participation.

## 2.5. Online Political Participation

As the number of online media has proliferated, access to the Internet has become less expensive and increasingly accessible (Hirzalla & Van Zoonen, 2010, p. 484). In addition, the Internet offers modes of low-cost forms of participation and is heavily used by youths (Bakker & De Vreese, 2011, p. 453). Because increasing numbers of youths are knowledgeable in regard to how to use various online media, knowledge based barriers (or the mental effort required) for access are further diminished. Compared with adults, youths are more avid Internet users (ibid.), use the Internet to build and maintain communication networks, and commit significant amounts of time to online activities (Livingstone, Couldry, & Markham, 2007, p. 21). As such, it may be the case that, for youths, online political participation requires fewer resources than forms of offline participation. I believe this to be especially true in regard to social media and other online platforms, for which many youths are well-versed (especially in relation to older demographics). These forms online media are also interactive. As such, I extend hypothesize:

> *H3: Youths will be more likely to perform participatory acts online than offline.*

TABLE 1 provides a theoretical account of youth political participation. This table summarizes the information found in the previous pages.

**TABLE 1: A Theoretical Typology of Youth Political Participation**

|  | High Resource | Low Resource |
|---|---|---|
| **Non-interactive** | Least prevalent | Moderately Prevalent |
| **Interactive** | Moderately Prevalent | Most prevalent |

The purpose of this typology is threefold. First, I aim to identify relevant dimensions of political participation. Second, I wish to identify the prevalent forms of youth political participation as they relate to these dimensions. Finally, I hope to identify whether these dimensions (the degree to which the act is interactive and the amount of resources required) transcend the online/offline divide. If this is the case, it might indicate that interactive online political participation is related to interactive offline participation. Similarly, if acts requiring fewer resources are consistently more common than acts that require more resources, this dimension may provide insight into both online and offline participation generally.

## 2.6. Existing Research: How Does Online Participation Relate to Offline Participation?

A number of scholars have investigated the relationship between online and offline participation. One of the first analyses of the impact of online media and offline participation was that of Bimber (1998). Using American National Election Studies (ANES) data and other survey material, he demonstrated that a correlation did not exist between online media use and traditional political participation. Since then, however, the Internet has grown in popularity, and an increasing number of researchers have addressed how the Internet might impact youth political activity.

According to Hirzalla and Van Zoonen (Hirzalla & Van Zoonen, 2010), researchers have examined online media and youth political participation in five ways. First, academics have performed theoretical studies in which they are mostly optimistic

about the Internet's potential to increase political participation (p. 482). Included in many theoretical discussions on the topic are issues such as: social contact, political opinion mobilization, socialization and education, self-presentation and enhanced contact between citizens and politicians (ibid.). Second, qualitative content analyses were conducted, which largely investigated whether or not online media can provide a public sphere that facilitates engagement, education or negotiation. Third, scholars have analyzed website production processes and explored how the features of various websites hinder or help political participation (Livingstone S. , 2007; Olsson, 2008; Bachen *et al.*, 2008). Fourth, they have performed interview-based analyses of how youths use and understand online media, which often demonstrate that although youths are active online, they are not capitalizing on online media's political potential (Dahlgren & Olsson, 2007).

Finally, a range of quantitative survey-based analyses exists. Much of this research can be classified into five categories. The first four categories are as follows. First, scholars have explored the relative entertainment preferences (REP) (Prior, 2005; Bakker & De Vreese, 2011). This research measures whether youths use online media more for entertainment purposes or political activities. Unsurprisingly, much of this research indicates that youths use the Internet predominantly for entertainment purposes. Second, scholars have investigated the role of online news media as it relates to traditional participation (Tolbert & MacNeal, 2003; Quintelier & Vissers, 2008). This research has indicated that those who consume online news media are also likely to be politically active offline through acts such as frequent voting. Third, as explained above as part of my rational for exploring the interactive element of participatory acts, political scientists have examined whether online networks are related to offline participation (Hardy & Scheufele, 2005; Bakker & De Vreese, 2011; Pasek, More, & Romer, 2009). Fourth, sholars have also analyzed the adverse effects of online media use and political participation. By researching the time displacement hypothesis, researchers have argued that time spent on the Internet reduces available time for engaging in political activities (Putnam, 2000; Nie & Erbring, 2002).

Most of this research attempts to build a profile of people who are politically active. I will build on this quantitative research by identifying features of youth participatory acts that relate to the prevalence of an act. As such, I explore the fifth body

of existing quantitative research on the relationship between online and offline participation: the normalization thesis.

This thesis states that youths who are politically active online are also active offline (Chadwick, 2006; Hirzalla & Van Zoonen, 2010). Scholars investigating the normalization thesis often advocate that the online and offline spheres are not distinct. I believe this may be true, but what links online and offline participation is not necessarily how politically active a person is generally. Instead, certain features of political participation that transcend the online/offline divide may relate to whether or not youths engage in forms of political participation. Existing research suggests this is accurate. For example, Hirzalla and Van Zoonen (2010) found that normalization applies to some forms of political participation and not others. Their research indicates that traditional politics and activism online may be correlated with traditional offline activities; however, consumer politics and knowledge sharing did not appear to transcend the digital divide. I believe that interactive acts online will relate to those offline, and similarly low-resource acts online will relate to their offline counterparts.

Throughout the following pages I will examine how, and to what extent these two dimensions of political participation relate to the prevalence of various forms of participation. I hypothesize that interactive participation will be more prevalent than non-interactive, and also that acts requiring fewer resources will be more prevalent than high-resource acts. I will also discuss whether interactive forms of online political participation relate to interactive forms of offline participation; and whether forms of political participation that require more resources online are related to participatory acts offline that require similar levels of resources. The next chapter will describe the methodology used for this investigation, followed by an empirical analysis in Chapter IV.

# 3.   Chapter III: Methodology

I will identify how and to what extent youths are politically active online and offline. Above I examined existing research that explored the ways in which people, and youths more specifically, are politically engaged. From this research I built a theoretical typology that references relevant dimensions of political participation and provides an explanation for why youths may perform certain types of acts. This allowed me to address the following sub-question:

> 1.   What are the relevant dimensions on which youths base their decisions to participate, and how can the acts that youths engage in be classified according to these dimensions?

I will place participatory acts into this theoretical typology. From here, I will use survey reports (described below) to investigate what participatory acts are most prevalent among youths. The reports ask respondents whether or not they performed a range of participatory acts.[8] I will explore the percentages of youths who engage in these acts. In some cases, the reports asked questions regarding similar participatory acts (such as contributing to a political party). Where possible I will reference information from multiple reports. This process will allow me also to address my second sub-question,

> 2.   How prevalent are various forms of youth political participation and to what extent do youths engage in participatory acts online and offline?

Exploring these initial questions will provide insight regarding prevalent forms of online and offline participation. Further, through reviewing survey reports I will examine how online and offline participation relate. Combined, these processes will allow me to answer my final sub-question,

> 3.   How does online participation relate to offline participation?

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[8] These surveys look at a number of acts, but do not address all forms of political participation.

This exploration will provide information regarding whether online acts are equally, more or less prevalent than offline acts. Further, this exploration should shed light on whether aspects of youth political participation, such as interactive features and the amount of resources required, transcend the online/offline divide.

## 3.1. Existing Survey Research

I will use information from four recent studies:

1.  Smith, A. (2013). *Civic Engagement in the Digital Age*. Pew Research Center, Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project. Washington: Pew Research Center.
2.  Cohen, C., Kahne, J., Bowyer, B., Middaugh, E., & Rogowski, J. (2012). *Participatory politics: New media and youth political action*. MacArthur Network on Youth Participation Politics. Oakland: Mills College School of Education.
3.  Martin, A. (2012). Political Participation among the Young in Australia: Testing Dalton's Good Citizen Thesis. *Australian Journal of Political Science* , 47 (2), 211-226.
4.  Anderson, K., Hilderman, J., & Loat, A. (2013). *Lightweights? Political Participation Beyond the Ballot Box*. Samara Democracy Reports. Toronto: Samara.

These studies examine the prevalence of various forms of traditional, alternative, online and offline political participation in three countries: the U.S., Australia and Canada. Although differences between these countries exist, I have selected data reports from a number of Western democracies. It is my aim that in doing so, I will garner more reliable results, and those which might be generalized for other Western democracies. I will cross-reference these surveys reports wherever possible.

I anticipate some discrepancies as a result of the age variance among the respondents in the studies, varying political contexts among countries, and methodologies. For example, it has been established that political participation increases with age (Blais & Loewen, 2009). As such, it can be anticipated that surveys that examine younger respondents – such as that of Cohen, *et al.* (2012) whose respondents were aged between 15 and 25 years – will have lower levels of participation than reports that examined responses from older respondents.

Where significant discrepancies in the data reports arise, I will note and provide potential reasons for differences.

It should be noted that these studies do not examine all forms of political participation. For example, they do not provide information regarding the prevalence of illegal protest. As a result, there exist limitations to this investigation. That being said, it is my intent that combined, these surveys will provide a general account of current forms of youth political participation.

## 3.2. Civic Engagement in the Digital Age

Smith's report is based on findings of a survey conducted on Americans' use of the Internet. The results stemmed from telephone interviews conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International between July 16 and August 17, 2012. Overall, 2,253 adults (18 and over) were surveyed, 363 of whom were between 18 and 29 years of age. The survey group used random digit dial (RDD) samples of both landlines and cellular phones; these samples were provided by Survey Sampling International. The calls were staggered over both various times of day, and different days of the week. A two-stage weighting procedure was used to weight this sample: the first stage corrected for different probabilities of selections associated with the number of adults in each household and respondent's telephone usage patterns; the second stage balanced sample demographics to population parameters, matching national population parameters for sex, age, education, race, region, population density and telephone usage. Overall, the response rates for the sample were 12 per cent (landline) and 11 per cent (cellular).

Results were categorized in regard to offline participatory acts, outreach to government officials and speaking in public forums (both online and offline), and political activities that occur within social networking sites. I combine elements of Smith's report with figures from its corresponding data set in order to establish the degree to which youths perform particular participatory acts. I use data cross-tabbed by the author in order to identify responses from those aged between 18 and 29 years of age.

It is also important to note that this study was conducted during a presidential election campaign. Further, this campaign featured significant outreach to youths. As such, it may be the case that, overall, youths were more politically engaged this year than they would be at other times (Smith, 2013, p. 5).

For the purpose of this paper, this report will be referenced as US2012.

## 3.3. Participatory Politics: New Media and Youth Political Action

The 2011 Youth Participatory Politics survey explored how youths use the Internet and social media, and their political participation. Knowledge Networks (KN) conducted this study under the direction of Cathy Cohen from the University of Chicago and Joseph Kahne from Mills College. It was administered through both online and telephone modes between February 9, 2011 and July 14, 2011. For this survey, KN sampled close to 3,000 youths between 15 and 25. The sample was drawn from two sources: KN's probability-based Internet panel (with a 95 per cent completion rate) and two address-based samples (with 47 per cent and 42 per cent completion rates). The study oversampled African Americans, Asian Americans and Hispanics, as part of the investigation sought to infer meaningful comparisons across racial and ethnic groups. Because of this, the survey was not representative of young people in the US; however, KN corrected for this through calculated weighting adjustments. Data from the Current Population Survey were used as a benchmark for constructing post-stratification weights for gender, age, race, ethnicity, education, household income, region, urban settings and citizenship status.

This report breaks down political participation into four categories: what researchers term participatory political activities[9], voting and voting intention, offline institutional political activities, and online institutional political activities. Although these

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[9] Cohen and Kahne use this term to describe acts of political participation that are interactive and peer-based. They contrast these acts with those that are guided by political elites and formal institutions. Further, these acts are typically facilitated through online platforms (Cohen *et al.*, 2012, p. 3).

categories of participation do not mirror those I have previously established, I will use information from the survey to provide insight regarding the prevalence of individual participatory acts.

For the purpose of this paper, this report will be referenced as US2011.

## 3.4. ISSP Citizenship Survey

Martin (2012) examined results from the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) Citizenship Survey that was released in 2006. Data was collected internationally; however, Martin used only Australian data. Australian data used in Martin's report was collected between September 7, 2005 and December 29, 2005 and drew from 1,988 eligible responses. Sampling procedures for this survey differed by country; however, partly simple/partly multi-stage stratified random samples of respondents aged 18 and older were used to garner responses from Australian respondents.

Although this survey was expansive, Martin identified responses of Australian youths between 18 and 29 years old. He further limited his examination to questions that addressed acts of traditional and alternative participation (although he phrased these as electoral and non-electoral participation). In regard to traditional participation, Martin examined contacting a politician, joining a political party, and views toward voting and political parties. In terms of alternative participation, he examined signing a petition, boycotting consumer products, taking part in a demonstration, and joining a political forum or discussion group online. Because this survey data stems from 2005, there are a number of participatory acts that are not represented in this survey, such as those that occur on social media sites.

For the purpose of this paper, this report will be referenced as AU2005.

## 3.5. Lightweights? Political Participation Beyond the Ballot Box

This report used data from the Samara Citizens' Survey. This was designed by Samara staff, with the guidance of academics from universities across Canada. Samara commissioned Feedback Research, which sampled 2,287 Canadians online from their existing panel providers. Feedback Research selected a random sample from within one of these panels, and weighted the panel to ensure it was geographically representative across the country. I examine responses, cross-tabulated by Samara, from Canadians between 18 and 34 years of age, the youngest category available in this report.[10]

This report investigates both online and offline participatory acts within five categories: online discussion (which I will later classify as online political promotion), offline discussion (including activities such as contacting public officials), activism (what other scholars have termed unconventional participation), civic engagement (including community activism) and formal engagement (or what I have referred to as traditional participation). Overall, they surveyed 20 individual participatory acts.

For the purpose of this paper, this report will be referenced as CA2013.

## 3.6. The Prevalence of Participatory Acts

In order to proceed I must first describe what is meant by prevalent. While examining the prevalence of participatory acts, it is important to keep in mind that youth political participation is typically low. Life-cycle theory dictates that as people age they become increasingly involved in society and conscious of social issues. As such they develop stronger political preferences and their propensity to participate increases (Blais & Loewen, 2009, p. 12). This theory has been supported by a number of studies including that of Blais and Loewen (2009), who examined aspects of political

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[10] This survey was performed by a research firm, and although guided by academics it may not hold the same degree of quality as other surveys referenced here. Concurrently, however, the results provide a relatively current overview of youth political participation in Canada, which is otherwise unavailable.

participation using Canadian census data[11]. As such, youths are typically the least political politically active age demographic. As such, I explore acts of youth political participation among and within the aforementioned studies in order to identify, comparatively, the acts that are *most* prevalent.

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[11] I was not able to isolate youth responses from this data set, as a result it has not been used in this research.

# 4.   Chapter IV: Results and Discussion

Scholars have investigated a variety of features of political participation in an attempt to explain why certain people perform participatory acts, as well as a number of ways to conceptualize participatory acts themselves. Early writers often held a more one-dimensional conceptualization of participation. For example, Milbrath (1965) argued that there is only one form of political participation – campaign activities – and that people participate in this singular form to a greater or lesser extent. He examined the costs associated with participation, and argued that these explain why and to what extent individuals choose to participate. In the 1970s scholars expanded their conception of political participation to include separate forms of political participation, such as voting, campaign activities, unconventional and protest politics to name a few (Barnes *et al.*, 1979; Verba & Nie, 1972; Verba, Nie, & Kim, 1978). Since then, an increasing number of acts have been examined, such as community activity (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995), civic activism (Norris, 2002) and consumer politics (Teorell, 2007). Currently, political scientists appear to have come to little consensus regarding how to conceptualize political participation and the numerous forms of participatory acts.

I adopt these later scholars' multifaceted conceptualization of political participation, and examine a number of distinct participatory acts. Each form of political participation encompasses different individual acts; however, I have attempted to group similar acts together under one heading. In order to develop a list of participatory acts, I agglomerated acts that are referenced in existing literature. I then excluded acts that did not fit within my definition of political participation: voluntary acts performed by citizens intended to influence political outcomes. As a result, I will look at the following forms of political participation: voting, contacting a politician or government office, signing a petition, promoting materials related to political or social issues, consumer politics, contributing to a political party, volunteering or working with a political party, being an active member of a not-for-profit or politically affiliated group, attending a political event and participating in protest activity (including illegal protest activity). For the most part these acts are those for which I have been able to agglomerate data. I concede that other acts may have been omitted.

Based on the dimensions of political participation described in Chapter II, I categorize these acts within my typology, found in TABLE 2 below. The justification for many of these classifications may appear intuitive. Where this is not the case, I will provide an explanation. I have also noted whether or not each act occurs online, offline or both. In most circumstances, this does not impact whether or not the act is interactive or the degree to which resources are required, with the exceptions of promoting material related to political or social issues and being a member of a not-for profit or politically affiliated group. I explain below why these forms of participatory acts are distinct.

## 4.1. Non-interactive High Resource Acts

I provided three hypotheses: first, interactive acts will be more prevalent than non-interactive acts; second, acts requiring fewer resources will be more prevalent; and third, online acts will be more prevalent than offline. Participatory acts within the non-interactive high resource category should not be comparatively prevalent: they both require resources and do not facilitate engagement in groups.

These acts include: contributing to a political party (online and offline) and contacting a politician or government office (online and offline). When considering political contributions, I look at traditional contributions and exclude attendance at fundraising events, which would be categorized under 'attending a political event,' discussed in section 4.4 below. These contributions may not necessarily require significant time (either through one time or habitual contributions because many established political parties ensure that political donations are easily facilitated). Concurrently, however, they require civic skills (for example, many individuals asked to provide political contributions are previously politically affiliated with a party) and more importantly money. Expendable income is necessary for political contributions, and because youths may not, en masse, have access to such money, the financial barriers for political contributions are high.

Following Verba, Schlozman & Brady (1995) I argue that contacting a politician or government office requires time and civic skills. Time is needed to research contact information and produce content (for example, by way of letters or emails). Civic skills

allow individuals to identify the correct level of government and government officials to address issues. I argue that this act is non-interactive because, although the act of reaching out to a government official is a form of communication, arguably, this communication is often one-directional; it is unlikely that this act will foster discussion with other individuals.

## 4.2. Non-interactive Low Resource Acts

Non-interactive low resource acts include: voting and consumer politics. Voting does not require significant resources. It is an episodic act that occurs sporadically. Although individuals may be asked to vote in a number of elections (ranging from municipal to federal) they are rarely asked to do so more than a few times a year. Also, voting does not require financial resources. Although one would hope that those who chose to vote utilize civic skills to do so, this may not always be the case; there are a number of uninformed voters. This is considered non-interactive because it is performed individually. I acknowledge that certain people vote in groups, and that a number of youth voting initiatives attempt to encourage this behaviour, but I do not believe these exceptions justify the categorization of voting as a interactive act because, by nature, voting is an anonymous, individual expression of political intention.

For the purpose of this paper, consumer politics refers to both boycotting and buying certain products for political reasons. Within this form of political activity I exclude the organization of large-scale product boycotts and promotion. The reason for this is two-fold. First, I consider this organizational act to be better reflected within active membership of a not-for-profit or politically affiliated group. Second, the surveys from which I have procured my results ask questions regarding whether individuals had purchased or boycotted specific items for political or ethical reasons, and not whether they had a role in organizing a boycott. Consumer politics is treated as non-interactive because it does not require the company of others and often does not lead to engagement in group settings.

## 4.3.  Interactive High Resource Acts

Interactive high resource acts include: volunteering or working with a political party (offline) and being an active member of a not-for-profit or politically affiliated group (offline). Both of these forms of participation require significant amounts of time, especially as they are often continuous activities requiring an ongoing commitment. They also require civic skills and occur in group settings, easily facilitating engagement and dialogue with others.

I note here that one might object to the notion that being a member of a political or social group is a resource intensive act. There exists the case where an individual becomes a member of an offline group through signing up by some means, and does not complete any follow-up activities. In this category, however, I reference *active* membership in an offline group, which requires contribution to the group through either volunteering time or contributing non-monetary materials (such as letters to editors or other written content).

## 4.4.  Interactive Low Resource Acts

I projected that acts within this category should be the acts that are most prevalent among youths. Acts within this category include: attending a political event (offline), taking part in protest activity (offline), signing a petition (online and offline) and promoting material related to political or social issues (online and offline).

Attending a political event and taking part in protest activity do not require substantial resources. With the exception of attending political fundraisers (which often require substantial monetary donations) these activities do not require money. Further, as the event is episodic it does not require a substantial time commitment. In regard to civic skills, if attendees are not organizers they may not be faced with skill-based barriers to participation. Although some civic skills-based barriers may exist, such as the capacity to acquire knowledge about when and where these events occur, I consider these outweighed because other barriers to action are not present. These activities are by nature interactive, and allow participants to engage with one another.

Substantial resources are not required to sign a petition. This act rarely requires money, is episodic and often quick, and does not demand civic skills - especially as petitions are often issue driven and not necessarily related to traditional campaigning activities or political processes. I consider this act to be interactive. Offline, youths are often engaged, talked with and encouraged to sign petitions. Online, many youths learn of petitions and find access to them through social networks.

The final act within this category is promoting material related to political or social issues. This act can occur online and offline, however, the bulk of these acts are performed online, and many through social media. These media are, by nature, social and interactive. They allow individuals to engage in online discussion, find others with similar interests and provide youths access to large interactive audiences, which were previously more difficult to access. For the most part, these acts do not require significant resources. Many youths are well-versed in the skills required to use social media, and have easy access to the Internet. Further, although youths spend a considerable amount of time on the Internet, the time required to perform promotional acts is, for the most part, not substantial.

*TABLE 2: Typology of Youth Political Participation*

|  | **High Resource** | **Low Resource** |
|---|---|---|
| **Non-interactive** | Contributing to a political party (online and offline)<br><br>Contacting a politician or government office (online and offline) | Voting (offline)<br><br>Consumer politics (offline) |
| **Interactive** | Volunteering or working with a political party (offline)<br><br>Being an active member of a not-for profit or politically affiliated group (offline) | Promoting material related to political or social issues (online and offline)<br><br>Attending a political event (offline)<br><br>Taking part in protest activity (offline)<br><br>Signing a petition (online and offline) |

## 4.5. The Prevalence of Participatory Acts

The following tables, TABLES 3-6, use information from the four aforementioned surveys in order to determine the prevalence of youths' participatory acts. When imputing values for levels of participation, I have used the wording of specific survey questions where possible. These tables are an extension of TABLE 2 to which I have added specific acts that fall under each form of participation referenced above. Where possible, I have referenced values from multiple studies. When this has been possible, I list surveys responses with younger respondents first. Each category has been broken down into its own table for ease of reference.

I begin by discussing non-interactive high resource acts including, found in TABLE 3: contributing to a political party and contacting a politician or government office. Contributing to a political party was not common in either Canada or the U.S. (Martin (2012) did not provide Australian information regarding this act). Overall, only between six and eight per cent of youths reported performing this act. By contrast, however, between 15 and 26 per cent of youths had contacted a politician or government office. Within Canada and the U.S. these numbers were higher (25 and 26 per cent respectively). Australian respondents were less likely to have performed this act. Martin (2012) procured information from a survey from 2005. It may be the case that as the avenues for potential communication with politicians and elected officials increase (such as through social media) more youths have attempted to contact politicians. At that time, many popular means of communication (such as Facebook and Twitter) were not readily available at this time. This may account for the variation in result from these respondents.

**TABLE 3: Non-interactive High Resource Acts of Youth Participation**

| Participatory act | Participatory act as outlined by surveys | Age Range | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Contributing to a political party (online and offline)** | Raised or donated money (US2011) – of those who contributed, approximately half did so online; half did so offline | 15-25 | 6% |
| | Contributing money to a political candidate or party (US2012) – of those who contributed, approximately half did so online; half did so offline. | 18-29 | 7% |
| | Donated money to a political party or candidate (CA2013) | 18-35 | 8% |
| **Contacting a politician or government office (online and offline)** | Contacted a national, state or local government official in person, by phone call or by letter about an issue that is important to you, OR contacted a national, state or local government official online by email, text message (US2012) – of those who contacted officials, approximately half did so online and half did so offline | 18-29 | 26% |
| | Contacted, or attempted to contact, a politician (AU2005) | 18-29 | 15% |
| | Contacted an elected official (CA2013) | 18-35 | 25% |

In TABLE 4, I provide information for two forms of non-interactive low resource acts: voting and consumer politics. Voting is compulsory in Australia, and as such I have not provided information regarding its prevalence. Further, the information regarding voting is not from the aforementioned surveys (which did not contain information regarding federal or presidential elections). As voting is an important participatory act I have included the information below. According to CIRCLE (2012) and Mayrand (2012) voting is comparatively one of the more prevalent acts of youth participation (although still below voting turnout averages in both countries); between 39 and 49 per cent of youths vote. It is also important to note that the recent U.S. presidential election (and the 2008 election) featured significant campaign outreach to young adults (Smith, 2013, p. 5), which may have increased turnout within this demographic.

Consumer politics were also comparatively prevalent. Both AU2005 and CA2013 reported high levels of participation within this act, 40 and 47 per cent respectively. I note that survey data from US2011 reported that only 11 per cent of youths engaged in boycotting. I believe there may be cause to view this result as an outlier. This survey asked respondents if they had been 'involved in a buycott.' This question is generic and open to various interpretations. I believe the 11 per cent rate may be due to respondents' misinterpretation, potentially perceiving this question to relate to an organized boycott, rather than simply making a personal decision to buy or not buy a product. As referenced in TABLE 4 below, two of the other studies both asked whether individuals had either boycotted or bought products for environment, ethical or political purposes. This language is more expansive and may have better reflected the spectrum of activities involved in consumer politics. Also, respondents from the US2011 study were between 15 and 25 years of age. Political 'buycotting' may be less popular among these respondents because they have fewer financial resources and a limited range of purchases compared with older individuals. As such, I believe between 40 and 47 per cent of youths perform acts of political consumerism.

***TABLE 4: Non-interactive Low Resource Acts of Youth Participation***

| Participatory act | Participatory act as outlined by surveys | Age Range | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Voting (offline)** | Voted in the 2012 U.S. presidential election (CIRCLE, 2012)[12] | 18-29 | 49% |
| | Voted in the 2011 Canadian federal election (Mayrand, 2012) | 18-24 | 39% |
| | Voted in the 2011 Canadian federal election (Mayrand, 2012) | 25-34 | 45% |
| **Consumer politics** | Engaged in 'buycotting" (US2011) | 15-25 | 11% |
| | Boycotted or deliberately bought, certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons (AU2005) | 18-29 | 40% |
| | Boycotted or bought products for environmental reasons AND/OR ethical or political reasons (CA2013) | 18-35 | 47% |

TABLE 5 provides information regarding two interactive high resource acts: working or volunteering with a political party and being an active member of a not-for-profit or politically affiliated group. Both these acts are not comparatively prevalent. Between five and eight per cent of youths volunteer or work directly with political parties. Similarly, only between three and 11 per cent of youths are active members of not-for-profit or politically affiliated groups.

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[12] This statistic as well as the one depicting voting in Canada in the row below are not from the aforementioned surveys, however, provide information regarding the prevalence of youth voting in the U.S. and Canada.

**TABLE 5: Interactive High Resource Acts of Youth Participation**

| Participatory act | Participatory act as outlined by surveys | Age Range | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Volunteering or working with a political party (offline) | Worked on a campaign (US2011) | 15-25 | 5% |
| | Worked or volunteered for a political party or candidate (US2012) | 18-29 | 7% |
| | Volunteered in an election campaign (CA2013) | 18-35 | 8% |
| Being an active member of a not-for profit or politically affiliated group (offline) | Belonged to a political party (US2011) | 15-25 | 3% |
| | Belonged to a political party (CA2013) | 18-35 | 9% |
| | Been an active member of any group that tries to influence public policy or government, not including a political party (US2012) | 18-29 | 11% |
| | Been active in or joined a group that has worked to address social or political issues (US2011) | 15-25 | 10% |

TABLE 6 provides information on interactive low resource acts. Within this category there are four forms of participation: petition signing, attending a political event, taking part in protest activity and promoting material related to political or social issues. Signing a petition was comparatively prevalent; between 32 and 49 per cent of respondents had signed a petition either online or offline.

Between nine and 19 per cent of youths have attended a political event. This form of political participation encompasses political party related events including rallies, speeches, dinners and other related meetings. Protest activity has a wider spectrum of participation. Results from the U.S. and Australia indicate that between six and nine per cent of youths had partaken in some form of protest or demonstration. Within Canada 21 per cent of youths had done so.

Online political promotion is one of the most prevalent forms of political participation. Overall, between 17 and 42 per cent of youths have engaged in participatory acts of political promotion. I note here that all but two of these acts are performed by more than 30 per cent of respondents. The two lowest acts may be

accounted for by looking at their survey sample and the act itself. The act of forwarding or posting someone else's political commentary or news related to a political campaign, candidate or issue comes from the US2011 survey, for which the respondents were younger than the remaining surveys (15 to 25). Typically people become increasingly engaged as they age. This can be seen in TABLES 3-6. As such, the lower age group may account for the lower percentage of youths who performed this act. Further, posting pictures or video online related to political or social issues, performed by 19 per cent of respondents, is more difficult than relaying information, and may pose more barriers to action than other promotional acts. The remaining acts are performed by between 30 and 42 per cent of respondents.

*TABLE 6: Interactive Low Resource Acts of Youth Participation*

| Participatory act | Participatory act as outlined by surveys | Age Range | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Signing a petition** | Signed a petition (US2011) | 15-25 | 32% |
| | Signed a petition (US2012) | 18-29 | 44% |
| | Signed a petition (AU2005) | 18-29 | 47% |
| | Signed a petition (CA2013) | 18-35 | 49% |
| **Attending a political event** | Attended a meeting, rally, speech, or dinner (US2011) | 15-25 | 9% |
| | Attended a political rally or speech (US2012) | 18-29 | 11% |
| | Attended a political meeting on local, town or school affairs (US2012) | 18-29 | 19% |
| | Attended a political meeting (CA2013) | 18-35 | 18% |
| **Taking part in protest activity** | Taken part in a protest, demonstration, or sit in (US2011) | 15-25 | 6% |
| | Attended an organized protest (US2012) | 18-29 | 9% |
| | Took part in a demonstration (AU2005) | 18-29 | 6% |
| | Taken part in a protest or demonstration (CA2013) | 18-35 | 21% |

*TABLE 6, Continued: Interactive Low Resource Acts of Youth Participation*

| **Promoting material related to political or social issues**[13] | Forwarded or posted someone else's political commentary or news related to a political campaign, candidate or issue (US2011) | 15-25 | 17% |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Post your own thoughts or comments on political or social issues (US2012) | 18-29 | 42% |
| | Encourage other people to take action on a political or social issues that are important to you online (US2012) | 18-29 | 36% |
| | Encourage others online to vote (US2012) | 18-29 | 34% |
| | Post links to political stories or articles for others to read (US2012) | 18-29 | 33 |
| | Participated in an online discussion group about a political or societal issue (CA2013) | 18-35 | 40% |
| | Circulated, (re)posted or embedded political information or content (CA2013) | 18-35 | 30% |
| | Posted pictures or video online related to a political or social issue (US2012) | 18-29 | 19% |

## 4.6. Categorizing Youths' Prevalent Acts

There is merit in attempting to garner inferences from both the most and least prevalent acts. Comparatively, the following forms of political participation are least prevalent among youths: contributing to a political party, volunteering or working with a political party and being an active member of a not-for profit or politically affiliated group. The most prevalent acts are: voting, consumer politics, promoting materials related to political or social issues (online and offline) and petition signing. The remaining acts are moderately prevalent: contacting a politician or government office, attending a political event and taking part in protest activity.

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[13] This list is a snapshot of the available data found within these four surveys. I have selected promotional acts that are related to the wide-scale promotion of political and social issues, and not more individual acts such as 'liking' or 'following' politicians via social media sites.

The least prevalent acts - contributing to a political party, volunteering or working with a political party and being an active member of a not-for profit or politically affiliated group - are resource intensive. Further, they are largely performed offline (with the exception of online political contributions and contacting a government official via email). One could argue that these acts are mostly forms of more traditional political activity. As such, scholars who do not expand the scope of their research to include various forms of online, alternative participatory acts will likely be led to believe that youth political participation is not prevalent.

The most prevalent acts - voting, consumer politics, promoting materials related to political or social issues (online and offline) and petition signing – are both interactive and non-interactive. As such, my hypothesis regarding the interactive dimension of participation being related to the prevalence of youths' participatory acts may not be accurate. I believe these results indicate that the interactive dimension of youth political participation is not relevant. At the same time, however, these acts are not resource intensive. As such my second hypothesis may be correct in identifying a dimension of political participation which relates to the prevalence of youths' participatory acts. With the exception of voting, these acts are forms of alternative political participation. Again, this emphasizes the importance of exploring and understanding these acts of online alternative participation in order to document an accurate account of youths' political participation.

As such, generally it appears as though the prevalence of youth political participation may be related to the amount of resources required but not the degree to which participatory acts are interactive or non-interactive. My third hypothesis, regarding online participatory acts being more prevalent than offline, was not supported by this research. Although the least prevalent acts - contributing to a political party, volunteering or working with a political party and being an active member of a not-for profit or politically affiliated group – were predominantly performed offline, the prevalent acts were performed both online and offline. The most prevalent acts were forms of alternative participation and, for the most part, did not relate to traditional electoral politics.

*TABLE 7: Typology of Youth Political Participation with Numeric Values*

|  | **High Resource** | **Low Resource** |
|---|---|---|
| **Non-interactive** | Contributing to a political party (online and offline) (6-8%)<br><br>Contacting a politician or government office (online and offline) (15-26%) | Voting (offline) (39-45%)<br><br>Consumer politics (offline) (40-47%) |
| **Interactive** | Volunteering or working with a political party (offline) (5-8%)<br><br>Being an active member of a not-for profit or politically affiliated group (offline) (3-11%) | Promoting material related to political or social issues (online and offline) (17-42%)<br><br>Attending a political event (9-19%)<br><br>Taking part in protest activity (offline) (6-21%)<br><br>Signing a petition (online and offline) (32-49%) |

## 4.7. Does Online Participation Relate to Offline Participation?

Whether an act occurs online or offline does not appear to have a bearing on the prevalence of the act. As such, the information garnered thus far does not indicate how, and to what extent online political participation relates to offline political participation. For that reason, I draw from other areas of the surveys and their accompanying reports in order to address this research question.

As part of his study, Smith (2013) – referred to in the above tables as US2012 - broached this issue with two questions: he asked whether or not respondents had decided to *learn more* about a political or social issue because of something they had read on a social networking site; and whether respondents had decided to *take action* involving a political or social issue because of something they read on a social networking site. As indicated in TABLE 8, survey data from this question reveals that nearly half (48 per cent) of youths were likely to learn more about a topic they had been introduced to via social media. In regard to taking action, however, only approximately

one in five (19 per cent) youths were likely to engage in participatory acts based on something they read on a social media site.

*TABLE 8: Participation Stemming from Online Media*

| Participatory Act | % |
| --- | --- |
| Decided to learn more about a political or social issue | 48% |
| Decided to take action involving a political or social issue | 19% |

Both Smith (2013) and Cohen *et al.* (2012) – referred to in the tables above as US2011 - spoke to the relationship between online and offline acts.[14] TABLE 9 reflects some of their results. Among other results, Smith's (2013) report indicates that 63 per cent of people who use social media for political purposes also engaged in participatory acts offline (p. 36). More specifically, 53 per cent of political social media users voiced their opinions about political and social media through offline channels (such as via sending a letter to a government official or signing offline petitions); 53 per cent of these social media users regularly talk about public affairs with others offline, and 20 per cent of these individuals donated money to a political cause or candidate (ibid). Interestingly, he also indicated that those who were politically engaged online were more likely to perform offline activities than those who were not. Overall, only 48 per cent of respondents in his survey engaged in some form of participatory act offline (compared with the aforementioned 63 per cent) (p. 36-7). He explained that, "compared with people who use social networking sites but do not get involved in political discussions within these spaces – or to those who do not use social networking sites at all – these politically active social network users stand out as being highly active in nearly all facets of their civic lives." (p. 37). Overall, people who are engaged in promotional political acts are more likely to talk about politics with others offline, speak out about issues, and get involved in political activities or groups (ibid). Cohen *et al.* (2012) reiterated these results. Their research indicated that youths who engaged in online participation were

[14] This information is garnered from cross tabulations produced by Smith (2013) to explore whether, and to what extent, people were concurrently engaged in politics both online and offline. These results, however, include responses from all sampled demographic groups, and are not restricted to youths.

more likely to engage offline. For example, youths who engaged in at least one participatory act online were almost twice as likely to report voting than those who did not (p. 13).

*TABLE 9: Relationships Between Online and Offline Participation*

| Online/Offline Relationship | Participatory act as outlined by surveys | Age Range | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Concurrent online and offline participation** | Use of social media for political purposes and offline participation (US2012) | 18-29 | 63 |
| | Use of social media for political purposes and voicing of opinions about political and social issues through offline channels (US2012) | 18-29 | 53% |
| | Use of social media for political purposes and regular political discourse with peers (US2012) | 18-29 | 53% |
| | Use of social media for political purposes and political contribution (US2012) | 18-29 | 20% |

It is important to note, however, that there are outliers. Smith's (2013) report indicated that 17 per cent of respondents were active online and not offline. Of this group, 57 per cent were youths (representing 10 per cent of respondents overall). Cohen *et al.* (2012) also found that there were youths who participated exclusively in online politics, albeit to a much lesser extent; only four per cent of youths engaged exclusively online (p. 13). As such, there are youths who are politically active online who do not perform participatory acts offline.

Cohen *et al.,* (2012) examined the displacement theory, attempting to explore whether or not online forms of political participation displace more traditional offline participation. They concluded that online participation is best viewed as an addition to youths' engagement and not a substitute.

Although most individuals who are active online are also active offline, I would like to emphasize I am not inferring that online political participation causes offline participation. It may even be the case that offline political participation increases the chance of online acts. Regardless, however, it does appear that there is a relationship

between online and offline forms of political participation. As such, more research is needed in order to identify what this relationship is, if it is causal, and whether additional dimensions of political participation impact the prevalence of participatory acts among youths.

# 5.    Chapter V: Conclusion

I had two aims for this research: I aimed to advance the academic debate on youth political participation by identifying and categorizing prevalent forms participation, both online and offline; and I sought to contribute insights regarding the features of youth participatory acts that relate to the prevalence of these acts. In order to do so I explored the extent and means by which youths are politically participating both online and offline in three Western democracies: the U.S., Australia and Canada. I researched three sub-questions in order to do so, in which I analysed the relevant dimensions on which youths base their decisions to participate, the prevalence of various forms of both online and offline political participation, and how online activity relates to offline activity.

## 5.1.    Relevant Dimensions of Youth Political Participation

Youths perform a variety of participatory acts. From traditional political participation – such as party membership and volunteering with political parties – to alternative acts supported by unprecedented technologies – such as online political promotion – youths are engaged in politics in a number of ways. I examined these acts in conjunction with their level of social interaction and the amount of resources they require and formulated three hypotheses:

> *H1: Youths will be more likely to perform participatory acts that are interactive than acts that are non-interactive.*
>
> *H2: Youths will be more likely to perform participatory acts that require fewer resources than resource-intensive acts.*
>
> *H3: Youths will be more likely to perform participatory acts online than offline.*

Although participatory acts can be categorized by these means, participation did not appear to relate equally to both. Prevalent forms of participation were not consistently interactive acts. Whether or not an acts was prevalent, however, did appear

to correlate to the degree to which resources were required for participation. As such, H1 was rejected and H2 could not be rejected.

These results may have been impacted by my methodological choices. For example, in this research I chose to address whether or not an act was interactive or required resources. If I had chosen to place these dimensions on a spectrum, such as exploring the various degrees to which acts were interactive and required resources, this may have led to different results. For example, had I considered three levels of interactivity: noninteractive, moderately interactive (typically involving small groups, such as two or three people) and highly interactive (acts that typically involve groups of four or more) a different picture begins to emerge. TABLE 10 indicates that interactivity may *negatively* correlate to youth political participation; for the most part, highly interactive political acts are among the least common. There are, however, outliers to this claim including online promotion – which is largely popular among youths – and, contributing to a political party – which is among the least popular participatory acts. Arguably, these outliers are significant, and thus this categorization would also have led me to reject H1.

***TABLE 10: Degrees of Interactivity and Political Participation***

| Participatory Act | Percentage | Degree of Interactivity |
|---|---|---|
| Volunteering or working with a political party (offline) | 5-8% | Highly interactive |
| Being an active member of a not-for-profit or politically affiliated group (offline) | 3-11% | Highly interactive |
| Attending a political event (offline) | 9-19% | Highly interactive |
| Taking part in protest activity (offline) | 6-21% | Highly interactive |
| **Promoting material related to political or social issues (online and offline)** | **17-42%** | **Highly interactive (outlier)** |
| Contacting a politician or government office (online and offline) | 15-26% | Moderately interactive |
| Signing a petition (online and offline) | 32-49% | Moderately interactive |
| **Contributing to a political party (online and offline)** | **6-8%** | **Noninteractive (outlier)** |
| Voting (offline) | 39-45% | Noninteractive |
| Consumer politics (offline) | 40-47% | Noninteractive |

Similarly, I could have examined three degrees of required resources: low (that which required no resources), medium (that which required one resource) and high (that which required two or three). TABLE 11 depicts results that may have stemmed from this different categorization. This change reinforces the findings above that the resources required relate to the prevalence of participatory act. TABLE 11 generally indicates that the more resources required decrease the likelihood that youths will perform an act.

***TABLE 11: Degrees of Resources Required and Political Participation***

| High Resource | Medium Resource | Low Resource |
|---|---|---|
| Contributing to a political party (online and offline) (6-8%)<br><br>Contacting a politician or government office (online and offline) (15-26%)<br><br>Volunteering or working with a political party (offline) (5-8%)<br><br>Being an active member of a not-for profit or politically affiliated group (offline) (3-11%) | Voting (offline) (39-45%)<br><br>Attending a political event (9-19%)<br><br>Taking part in protest activity (offline) (6-21%) | Consumer politics (offline) (40-47%)<br><br>Promoting material related to political or social issues (online and offline) (17-42%)<br><br>Signing a petition (online and offline) (32-49%) |

Overall, these changes may not have helped better answer my research question. I sought to identify to what extent, and how, youths are politically engaged both online and offline in Western democracies. My choice to create a typology was intended to provide a means of categorizing acts which related to the prevalence of these acts. As such, it may not be the methodology which needs to be altered, but the features themselves which I chose to address. Although resources required appear to relate to the prevalence of participation, other dimensions of participation may be more relevant for understanding youth political participation than the interactive dimension I examined. Perhaps, for example, there is something to be said about the degree to which an act allows youths to publicly voice their opinion. For example, social media, for the most part, allow individuals to convey interests, values and actions to their online networks. This capacity to outwardly project actions and gather feedback, support or approval may be related to the likelihood that youths might engage in participatory politics. It may be the case that this is more relevant for youths than adults because they may be less self-assured or have yet to establish a strong sense of self, which can outweigh an individuals' desire for external approval or support. As such, there is room for future research to explore a number of alternative features of political participation as they may relate to the prevalence of participatory acts.

In regard to H3, this research cannot state whether youths are more likely to perform participatory acts online than offline; this research can neither reject nor confirm this hypothesis. For the most part, political participation appears to transcend the

online/offline divide. The majority of politically involved youths are engaged both online and offline. Of course there are exceptions to this rule. Both Smith (2013) and Cohen *et al.* (2012) referenced a small group of youths who were political engaged exclusively online; however, for the most part this was not the case. It appears that the location of the act (whether physical or digital) may not be as relevant as the type of activity involved. When there exist acts that can be performed both online and offline – such as petition signing – approximately equal numbers of youths perform these acts online as offline.

## 5.2. Understanding Non-Prevalent and Prevalent Acts of Youth Participation, and the Online/Offline Divide

Non-prevalent acts of political participation included contributing to a political party, volunteering or working with a political party and being an active member of a not-for-profit or politically affiliated group. For the most part, these acts did not include direct (or even indirect) contact with political parties.[15] This may indicate the necessary work political parties in Western democracies must perform in order to communicate with and reengage youths.

As will be expanded upon in the following section, prevalent acts – with the exception of voting – are forms of alternative political participation. If scholars seek to accurately understand youth political participation, these findings indicate that alternative forms of political participation must not be overlooked. If researchers look only to forms of traditional electoral participation, such as party membership, political contributions, volunteering or working with political parties and voting – where youths participate to a lesser degree than older demographics – they will likely be led to believe that youths are ultimately disengaged. When expanding the scope of research to include alternative forms of participation another picture arises.

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[15] In regard to being an active member of a not-for-profit or politically affiliated group, this form of political activity included membership with both political parties and issues-based groups. Interestingly, membership in type of issues-based group was also more popular than membership with political parties.

Online political promotion is one of the more prevalent forms of participation. Although included in this analysis are only acts of online political promotion focused on impacting political outcomes, there are a number of other acts which were prevalent among youths which have not been included, such as 'liking' and 'following' politicians online – which was conducted by 44 per cent of youths (Smith, 2013) – and reposting materials to social media sites regarding political issues – conducted by 36 per cent of youths (Smith, 2013). As such, there is reason to believe that the amount of political activity that occurs within online media is substantial.

There are features of online political participation which are unprecedented and significant. Political participation through social media readily allows youths to identify peers with similar interests and to engage. Online groups connect people despite previously isolating geographical barriers. Also, online media allow youths to express themselves easily. Another important element is the widespread capacity online media hold for information dissemination. Where previously youths, and other individuals, were not easily able to reach large audiences (because this communication occurred formerly through telephone, traditional media, and personal interactions) social and other forms of online media allow people to access large bodies of information. Further, many of these media themselves are designed to allow for easy 'sharing' of information. Sites such as Facebook and Twitter allow users to click 'share' on a wide variety of posts, videos and other links. This provides an unprecedented capacity for information dissemination. As will be described in the following section, these online media have also been used to foster significant online and offline protests. The skills youths develop to engage in online political promotion facilitate and stem engagement in other avenues.

## 5.3. Are youths disengaged?

Are traditional engagement theorists or alternative engagement theorists correct? It appears as though they are both accurate in identifying facets of youth political participation. More traditional forms of political participation were not prevalent among youths. Scholars who limit their definition of political participation to only more conventional forms of participation will see considerable inactivity. Alternative engagement theorists, who have taken to examining new forms of political participation –

such as online promotional politics and consumer politics – however, arrive at different conclusions. These forms of activity are prevalent among youths, and as such may provide merit for alternative engagement theorists' claims that youths are not disengaging overall, just engaging in new forms of participatory acts.

If it is the case that youths are not disengaging, but are finding alternative avenues for political activity, this does not negate the fact that youth voter turnout and other forms of traditional political participation are not prevalent, and may be in decline. For example, Canada's turnout of new young voters has been in steady decline since the 1970s (Blais & Loewen, 2009, p. 12). This problem, however, is not unique to Canada. Studies have indicated that decreasing youth participation is also prevalent in the United States (Dalton, 2007; Lyons & Alexander, 2000; Miller & Shanks, 1996; Wattenberg, 2007), and Britain (Clarke *et al.* 2004), among other nations.

This is problematic as electoral participation impacts policy priorities and election outcomes. For example, if youths had voted at the same level as their parents in the 2000 and 2004 U.S. presidential elections, George W. Bush would not likely have been elected (Dalton, 2011, p. 9). In cases where youth participation would not necessarily impact election outcomes, it does impact policy and platform development (Fields, 2011, p. 37). If youths do not participate in traditional politics, this may stem a downward cycle in which politicians devote greater attention to the demands of older voters who are likely to vote, and neglect youths who do not (Dalton, 2011, p. 9; Mesch & Coleman, 2007, p. 35).

Further, electoral engagement among youths provides a foundation for continued action. Cutts *et al.* (2009) demonstrated that voting is habit forming (p. 260). As a result, youths who do not develop voting tendencies at a younger age may be less likely to do so when they are older. If youths cannot be enticed to participate in the political process, it may be the case that electoral participation will continue to decline increasingly, and even exponentially, as time moves forward.

By contrast, if youths do begin to participate at a young age they are likely to follow a path of political engagement. A number of longitudinal studies have indicated that politically active youths are more likely to be engaged in their adult years (Campbell,

2008; Hart *et al.*, 2007; McFarland & Thomas, 2006; Damon, 2001). Prevalent forms of youth political participation likely indicate an overall interest in politics and public affairs. These studies indicate that this is something youths will take with them through most of their lifetime. As a result, I believe prevalent forms of youth political participation are important.

Concurrently, it may be the case that various forms of prevalent political participation, such as online promotion, provide youths the tools and knowledge to engage in and influence the more traditional realms of politics in which most decisions are made. A number of tremendous political movements have been started, and in some cases have lived entirely, online and impacted traditional politics, such as the #TellVicEverything campaign in Canada, the Stop Online Piracy Act campaign in the U.S., and of course the international Occupy Movement to name a few.

In 2012, the Public Safety Minister Vic Toews proposed online surveillance legislation, Bill C-30. Among other powers, the bill would have given police access to Internet subscribers' private information without a warrant. In response, thousands of Twitter users across Canada staged an online protest. Punctuating their tweets with the hashtag #TellVicEverything, citizens poured personal and minute details of their lives online in an attempt to demonstrate that if the government wanted access to information that is exactly what they would get. Robert Jensen initiated the movement, a regular citizen and online Steven Harper critique. The movement was sensational and widespread, but also successful. Within twenty-four hours, the hashtag was the top trending topic in Canada on Twitter (Payton, 2012). More importantly, however, the legislation did not progress.

In the U.S. in late 2011 and early 2012, the Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA) was proposed, an Act designed to hinder Internet copyright infringement and intellectual property theft. It was supported in both the House and the Senate, and backed by lobbyists. In protest, youths organized a synchronized Internet blackout (in which Wikipedia participated[16]) with accompanying blog posts, videos and social media promotion (Martin, 2012). In response to this online promotion and protest, Congress

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[16] Wikipedia was concurrently protesting the PROTECT IP Act.

blocked the legislation. Interestingly, the Pew Research Center found that young people under the age of thirty followed news about SOPA more closely than the presidential election (Kohut & Remez, 2012), again indicating a shift away from traditional political participation and perhaps values.

In 2011, Canadian-based magazine *Adbusters* called for a peaceful protest and 'occupation' of Wall Street (Gamson & Sirfry, 2013, p. 159). In response hundreds of individuals, mostly youths, protested in the streets surrounding the financial district in New York City, eventually setting up a camp in Zucotti Park. The movement originated predominantly online and initially received little attention in traditional media (ibid), however grew to encompass numerous social and news media platforms, drew significant funds from supporters and spread internationally. Also important to note is that it signaled the capacity for youths to organize independently of elites and their institutions using online and social media platforms (Cohen *et al.*, 2012, p. v).

It appears that participation is changing. Many of the prevalent forms of political participation exist within media that were not available a decade ago. As indicated by the three examples provided, however, these alternative means of participation have established ways to impact the realm of traditional politics. At the same time, more research is needed to explore whether features of political participation can be identified that relate to the likelihood a youth will perform an act. If these features can be identified, they may shed light on ways in which political parties can attempt to reengage youths to increase participation in their traditional politics. For example, if it is the case that youths engage in participatory acts that allow them to express themselves, political parties can attempt to foster a means of political funding, membership and activity that allow youths to publicly express their views and contribution. If it is possible to isolate features of political participation that relate to the likelihood youths will engage it may ultimately highlight how parties, institutions and groups can transfer alternative participation to traditional activities.

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