

Using Social Media for Youth Political Engagement

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For many young adults today, social media has become an essential part of their daily life. According to Perrin (2015), the use of social media among young adults has encountered considerable growth from 2006 to 2015. Studies have shown that youth's social media involvement has a positive effect on their engagement in political activities (Bowyer & Kahne, 2016; Ekström & Östman, 2015; Polonski, 2017). By using social media sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat etc., youth have access to more information sources, can develop political engagement skills, and gain attention from a wider audience.

Access to information

With the growth of youth activities, social media has become a large informal repository of political information. Youth are provided with

political knowledge in either an active or passive way. Some teens search for information based on their political interest. The others are exposed to political information through posts shared by family, friends, celebrities and associations they follow. According to Dr. Polonski (2017), during election period, many young adults visit social

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media sites, particularly, for accessing information and to express their views. For example, “after Theresa May's election announcement, there was a deluge of

Instagram posts about what this election might mean for British society” (Polonski, 2017, para. 2).

Reaching a wider audience

Social media is an effective platform for youth to make their political voice widely heard. Social media allows youth to easily connect with each other, generate discussions and give comments without physical

barriers. Many youth activists around the world use social media hashtags to draw attention to political causes and call for actions. After the school shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High



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School in Parkland, Florida, in February 2018, a group of students started a campaign by posting #NeverAgain on Facebook to advocate against gun violence. In three days after the shooting, the group gained over 35,000 followers on Facebook.

Developing political skills

Through social media activities, including searching for information, posting, commenting, using hashtags, and other creative activities, youth are developing skills that they can later

apply to political causes, (Bowyer & Kahne, 2016, para. 3). Youth may learn political skills by observing what politicians do on social media. Posting and commenting are great practices for

communication skills.

Social media also helps youth activists build their network. Besides, Ekström and Östman (2015) find that “by being active in searching for information and in participating in online discussions, the chance is high that adolescents are also

offered relatively undemanding forms of political activity (such as signing a petition)” (p. 812).

“Young people are angry about the world, and a lot of us use social media to articulate that,” said Amika George (Pires, 2018), the famous 18-year-old campaigner against period petition. Social media not only facilitates the accumulation of youth’s knowledge and skills of politics, but also is an effective way for youth to share their views and reach a larger audience.

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