The role of social media for youth political engagement

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A Fundamental Shift

Media Use (Austria)

Source: Media Analyse 2017/18
Social Media Hopes

On the one hand...

• Social media can build relationships, enable social interaction, connect people, enhance expression

• Positive relationship between frequency of social media use and protest participation among youth (Valenzuela et al., 2014)

• Political social media use have consistently found to have a positive effect on participation (e.g. Ekström, Olsson, & Shehata, 2014; Skoric & Zhu, 2015)
Social Media Participation Paradox

Germany

Election Data: Der Bundeswahlleiter (2017)
Social Media Participation Paradox

Voter turnout in general elections in percent (total population)
Three Questions

What do adolescents do on social media?
What kind of political content are they exposed to?
Can social media engage...and distract?
What do adolescents do on social media?

Mobile Experience Sampling (MES) Study

• Design
  – Austrian school students sample (N = 83)
  – 967 MES measurements
  – Two text messages at randomized time during the day

• Timeline of data collection
  – Recruitment of schools in February/March, 2019
  – First long questionnaire at the beginning of March
  – 7 days of short questionnaires (starting the day after the first long questionnaire)
  – Final long questionnaire at the beginning of April
What do adolescents do on social media?

- Hardly any students turn to social media for political purposes
- Hardly any political content on social media
What do adolescents do on social media?

Mobile Experience Sampling Study

![Bar chart showing the number of MESMeasurements for different social media platforms, categorized as political (red) and nonpolitical (blue).](chart_image)
Three Questions

What kind of political content are they exposed to?
What kind of political content are they exposed to?

Politicians’ Facebook posts

- National politicians and political parties
  - Ministers & members of the Austrian parliament (who had Facebook-page)
  - National party organization and youth organization for each of 6 parties in Austria

- N = 79 profiles & N = 1601 Posts

- From January to July 2015; 4 artificial weeks
What kind of political content are they exposed to?

Young people mentioned or addressed in the post

![Bar chart showing young people mentioned or addressed in the post]

Young people not mentioned or addressed in the post

Young people addressed or mentioned in the post
What kind of political content are they exposed to?

Participatory Posts

![Bar chart showing the percentage of participatory posts.](chart.png)

- No participatory posts: 94.1%
- Participatory posts: 5.7%
What kind of political content are they exposed to?

Quality of arguments

- Reasoned arguments (experience or facts): 2.3%
- No reasoning (all other posts): 97.6%
Three Questions

Can social media engage...and distract?
The Slacktivists...
- seek entertainment information only
- engage in slacktivist activities in incidental exposure situations

The Distracted...
- are motivated to engage politically
- are also constantly distracted by entertainment posts

The Inactive...
- do not use SNS for either entertainment of politics
- use SNS only to a limited degree

The Focused...
- are motivated to engage politically
- are not distracted by entertainment information
Thank you!