

Study finds Web no equalizer for civic engagement

September 1 2009, By BARBARA ORTUTAY , AP Technology Writer

(AP) -- Unlike some people have hoped, the Internet hasn't led to big changes in the socio-economic makeup of Americans engaged in civic activities, a new study from the Pew Internet and American Life Project finds.

As in offline politics, people who participate in online civic life - by contacting government officials, making political or charitable donations or signing petitions, for example - tend to be richer and better educated.

According to the study released Tuesday, 35 percent of U.S. adults making at least \$100,000 participated in two or more online political activities in the previous 12 months, compared with just 8 percent of people making less than \$20,000. That's a gap of 27 percentage points - the same gap seen for offline political activities.

There are signs that [social media](#) sites like [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) are driving civic engagement among younger people. On social networks, income and education levels seem to be less correlated with whether someone engages in civic activism.

Of course, that could result from the fact that younger people who are heavily engaged with such social media sites have yet to reach their full earning and education potential, so they appear poorer and less educated - and falsely make it seem as if the sites are diversifying the makeup of people who are active in civic endeavors.

But researchers behind the study expressed hope that social media could serve as an equalizer.

Social-networking sites make it easier for [people](#) to get together and to express themselves, said Kay Lehman Schlozman, a political science professor at Boston College.

"This could evolve in a way that makes it easier to get involved," she said.

The survey of 2,251 adults, including 1,655 Internet users, was conducted Aug. 12-31, 2008, and has a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 2.4 percentage points.

Some of the percentages on participation may have been higher had the survey been taken after the fall campaigns and the January inauguration of President Barack Obama. However, a December survey taken by Pew, using different questions, suggests that the socio-economic gaps remained then.

©2009 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

Citation: Study finds Web no equalizer for civic engagement (2009, September 1) retrieved 10 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-09-web-equalizer-civic-engagement.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--