

Facebook most effective way to engage young people in politics, study shows

September 26 2014, by Kate Mayor

An increase in social media use leads to more political participation by young people, with Facebook the most effective channel, a study at the University of Sydney has shown.

The study surveyed 3,600 young people (16-29 years) across Australia, the UK and the US, 90 per cent of whom use Facebook (as opposed to Twitter use which was on average 50 per cent). And 65 per cent of the Australian participants in the survey also highlighted that Facebook is where they first hear about news and major events, rather than traditional news outlets such as print and television news programs.

"Our research suggests that we need to take Facebook much more seriously as a space where young people - purposefully or incidentally - engage with politics, with their networks of friends and family," said Associate Professor Ariadne Vromen from the Department of Government and International Relations, who is a lead researcher in the two-year project called The Civic Network.

"We have found overall that increasing use of social media leads to more political participation by young people; especially for those young people that have an issue-based approach to why political participation matters, rather than a traditional orientation that only focuses on formal, electoral politics."

Many participants believe that 'liking'; is an important way of showing support for political issues they and their friends care about, and are

more likely to do this action than commenting on or sharing the posts. One of the main reasons they are reluctant to comment is that they don't want to cause conflict between their family and friends on this platform, and some said they thought that political conversations were better done face-to-face.

Some of the young participants were optimistic about engagement with politics through social media platforms, with one Australian female stating "I do think it is good. Many people my age have switched off the traditional media, and it is rare to meet somebody who regularly watches the news or reads a newspaper. It is therefore important to spark their engagement in other ways. If they are actively reading, engaging, and being informed by conversations on social media sites, then it creates a more informed public."

Associate Professor Vromen said that this should be a two-way street, with politicians engaging through these platforms to connect with a younger audience too.

"Most of the [young people](#) we questioned said they think politicians should use [social media](#) more," said Associate Professor Vromen, "they think politicians should be asked questions publicly more often to show they are responsive to people's views."

Provided by University of Sydney

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