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The scoop from Washington

Youth politics: Social media use bridges race, ethnic divides: University of Chicago survey

By [Lynn Sweet](#) on June 26, 2012 11:07 AM | [No Comments](#)

The University of Chicago released a new study, "Participatory Politics: New Media and Youth Political Action," which concludes that when it comes to the 15--to-25 year old age group, there is little digital divide in using social media to participate in politics.

For the entire study, here is the PDF:

[Social_media_tunes_in_youth_to_politics.doc](#)

Click below for summary release.

below, from the University of Chicago.....

IN ADVANCE OF 2012 ELECTION, NATIONAL SURVEY FINDS YOUNG PEOPLE ARE USING NEW MEDIA FOR PEER-BASED PARTICIPATORY POLITICS, BYPASSING POLITICAL ELITES AND INSTITUTIONS

Contrary to Notion of a Digital Divide, Black Youth Engage in Participatory Politics Online at Rates Equal To or Slightly Higher Than White, Latino, and Asian-American Youth.

The MacArthur Research Network on Youth and Participatory Politics (YPP), under the direction of co-principal investigators University of Chicago political scientist Cathy Cohen, and Joseph Kahne, professor of education at Mills College, has unveiled the findings of the largest nationally representative study to date of new media and politics among young people.

The national survey questioned 3,000 young people, ages 15-25 on how they use the Internet, social media and engage in politics. Unlike any prior study on the topic, the YPP survey included large numbers of black, Latino, and Asian American respondents, allowing for unique statistical comparisons across race. The data present one of the most complete pictures to date of how young people are using new media in new ways to engage politically, providing relevant insights on both the long-term political picture in America and the upcoming 2012 election.

The study report, Participatory Politics: New Media and Youth Political Action shows that contrary to the traditional notion of a technological digital divide, substantial numbers of young people across racial and ethnic groups are engaging in "participatory politics" -- acts such as starting a political group online, circulating a blog about a political issue, or forwarding political videos to friends. Like traditional political acts, these acts address issues of public concern. The difference is that participatory acts are interactive, peer-based, and do not defer to elites or formal institutions. They are also tied to digital or new media platforms that facilitate and amplify young people's actions.

"As the 2012 election approaches, it is important to realize how young people, especially youth of color, are using new media to amplify their voices in the political realm," said Cohen, the David and Mary Winton Green Professor in Political Science. "Not only did we find that large numbers of youth take part in participatory politics, but, defying conventional expectations, black and Asian-American youth are the most avid users of new media for friendship and interest-driven activities. Moreover, black youth participate in online forms of participatory politics at rates equal to or slightly higher than white, Latino and Asian-American youth."

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"Anyone who cares about democracy needs to pay attention to this important dimension of politics for young people--participatory politics spread information, mobilize individuals to act, and provide many ways for youth to voice their perspectives," said Kahne. "But there are challenges. These politics also spread misinformation, and they may promote voice more than influence. When we asked young people if they thought they and their friends would benefit from learning more about how to tell if online information was trustworthy, 84% said, 'Yes!' In massive numbers, youth are saying they need help with digital media literacy."

The YPP national survey and analysis of the data was supported by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, whose \$100-million digital media and learning initiative aims to determine how digital media are changing the way young people learn, play, socialize, and participate in civic life. The research was conducted by Kahne and Cohen and a team of three researchers: Benjamin Bowyer and Ellen Middaugh at Mills College and Jon Rogowski at the University of Chicago. The study has an overall margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points. Among the key findings:

Access to and Use of Internet and Social Media

- Large proportions of young people across racial and ethnic groups have access to the Internet and use online social media regularly to stay connected to their family and friends and pursue interests and hobbies.

- A majority or near-majority of white (51%), black (57%), Latino (49%), and Asian American (52%) youth report sending messages, sharing status updates and links, or chatting online daily.

Participatory politics are an important dimension of politics

- 41% of young people engaged in at least one act of participatory politics during the prior 12 months, while 44% participated in other acts of politics.

- Specifically, 43% of white, 41% of black, 38% of Latino, and 36% of Asian American youth participated in at least one act of participatory politics during the prior 12 months.

- Participatory politics are an addition to an individual's engagement rather than an alternative to other political activities:

- U.S. citizens who were 18 or older and who engaged in at least one act of participatory politics were twice as likely to report voting in the November 2010 elections as those who did not engage in participatory politics.

- A large proportion--37% of all young people--engages in both participatory and institutional politics.

- Among young people who engage in participatory politics, 90% of them either vote or engage in other forms of politics.

Participatory politics are equitably distributed across different racial and ethnic groups

- Contrary to the notion of a technological digital divide, the YPP study finds that overwhelmingly, white (96%), black (94%), Latino (96%) and Asian American (98%) youth report having access to a computer that connects to the Internet.

- The difference in voting in 2008 between the group with the highest rate of turnout according to the U. S. Census Bureau--black youth (52%)--and the group with the lowest rate of turnout--Latino youth (27%)--is 25 percentage points.

- In contrast, the difference between the group with the highest rate of engaging in at least one act of participatory politics--whites (43%)--and the groups with the lowest rate of engaging in at least one act of participatory politics--Asian Americans (36%)--is only 7 percentage points.

Taking into account participatory politics, institutional politics, and voting, black youth are the most likely to have participated in at least one form of these activities:

- Engagement is highest among black youth, with only 25% reporting no engagement in any form of political behavior, compared with 33% of whites, 40% of Asian Americans, and 43% of Latinos.

Credibility of Online News and Information

- Youth now consume news through participatory channels. 45% of youth reported getting news at least once a week from family and friends via Twitter or Facebook feeds. This rivals the 49% who got news at least once in the past week from newspapers or magazines. Youth believe they would benefit from learning how to judge the credibility of what they find online.

- Survey respondents were asked, "Do you think people like you and your friends would benefit from learning more about how to tell if news and information you find online is trustworthy?"--84% said, "Yes."

"While we can probably assume that youth will learn to use their cell phones without formal instruction," Kahne said, "They may well benefit from supports and programs in

both school and out-of-school settings that strengthen their ability and desire to produce media that is informed, persuasive, and distributed effectively."

"A key question that emerges from these findings is: 'Are we prepared to provide the resources, supports and media literacy training necessary for youth of color to transfer their digital social capital into influence in the political realm?'," noted Cohen.

"Participatory politics offers a political realm where voices of young people are at the center and driving the agenda. Are we prepared to embrace their innovation, support their engagement, and give them greater control, voice, and potentially influence over the issues that matter most in their lives?"

Methodology

The Youth Participatory Politics survey was conducted by Knowledge Networks (KN) on behalf of Mills College. The survey was administered through online and telephone modes from February 9, 2011 to July 14, 2011. Both modes were administered in English- and Spanish-language versions. The median online respondent completed the survey in 35 minutes, and the median telephone interview lasted 44 minutes. The target population for the survey comprised young people between fifteen and twenty-five years of age living in the United States from four ethnic/racial groups: non-Hispanic whites, non-Hispanic blacks, non-Hispanic Asians, and Hispanics (of any race). In order to be able to make meaningful comparison across racial and ethnic groups, the study also included oversamples of African Americans, Asian Americans, and Hispanics.

Immediate rewards for good scores can boost student performance

Study on behavioral economics and educational incentives advances debate on how to motivate students

Test performance can improve dramatically if students are offered rewards just before they are given standardized tests and if they receive the incentive immediately afterward, new research at the University of Chicago shows.

Educators have long debated the value of financial and other rewards as incentives, but a series of experiments in Chicago-area schools showed that with the right kind of rewards, students achievement improved by as much as six months beyond what would be expected.

The rewards apparently provide students with an incentive to take tests more seriously. One implication is that policymakers may underestimate students' ability in otherwise low-performing schools, according to the research team that conducted the experiments.

Researchers used financial rewards to boost performance for older students and non-financial rewards, such as trophies, to improve performance among younger students.

The prospect of losing a reward created a stronger desire to perform than the possibility of receiving a reward after a test, the research showed. Students who were given money or a trophy to look at while they tested performed better.

"Most importantly, all motivating power of the incentives vanishes when rewards are handed out with a delay," said lead author Sally Sadoff, a 2010 PhD graduate in economics, who did the research as a Griffin Postdoctoral Scholar at UChicago from 2010-11.

Sadoff, now an assistant professor at the University of California, San Diego, was part a team that conducted a series of experiments involving 7,000 students in the Chicago Public Schools as well as in elementary and high school districts in south-suburban Chicago Heights.

The team studied the impact of incentives on students taking relatively short, standardized diagnostic tests given three times a year to determine their grasp of mathematics and English skills. Unlike other tests on incentives, the students were not told ahead of time of the rewards so they could not study but rather demonstrated the impact of the rewards themselves on performance.

The research was reported in the paper, "The Behaviorist Goes to School: Leveraging Behavioral Economics to Improve Educational Performance," published by the National Bureau of Economic Research.

Sadoff was joined in her work by John List, the Homer J. Livingston Professor in Economics and one of the nation's leading scholars of experimental economics; Steven Levitt, the William B. Ogden Distinguished Service Professor in Economics at UChicago; and Susanne Neckermann, a scholar at the Center for European Economic Research in Germany.

The team found that elementary school students, who were given nonfinancial rewards,

responded more to incentives than high schoolers. Those students were given trophies, as they have been found to be more responsive to non-monetary rewards than older students.

Among high school students, the amount of money involved in the incentive mattered. Students performed better if offered \$20 rather than \$10.

"At Bloom Township High School, when we offered students \$20 incentives, we found that their scores were 0.12 to .20 standard deviation points (five to sixth months in improved performance) above what we would otherwise have predicted given their previous test scores," Sadoff said.

List pointed out that the results of the experiments challenged a conventional theory that giving students tangible rewards "crowds out intrinsic motivation, rendering such approaches ineffective in the short run and potentially detrimental in the long run."

The students tested had low initial motivation to do well, and thus benefited from the rewards, List said. He added that follow-up tests showed no negative impact on removing the rewards in successive tests.

The research helps teachers and school leaders better understand the role of rewards in school performance. Most rewards are delayed and involve a very distant horizon, such as the prospect of making a better salary as an adult as the result of better school performance, the team pointed out.

"The effect of timing of payoffs provides insights into the crux of the education problem that we face with our urban youth," the authors write. "Effort is far removed from the payout of rewards, making it difficult for students to connect them in a useful way. The failure to recognize this connection potentially leads to dramatic under-investment," as students fail to apply themselves and policymakers don't realize the students' full potential.

The research was supported by a grant from the Children First Fund, the Kenneth and Anne Griffin Foundation, the Rauner Family Foundation and the Spencer Foundation.

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