**Civic Education and Social Media Use**

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Social media have redefined the parameters of established forms of political engagement and facilitated the development of new types of participation.  People use social media to gain information, communicate with other citizens, politicians, and journalists, create and distribute content, network, organize, and fundraise, among other applications.  The 2008 presidential campaign was an incubator for the cultivation of social media, and sparked the proliferation of applications that has continued into the 2010 midterm election cycle (Owen, in press).  The future promises further innovations employing social media that will expand the nature and scope of citizen engagement.

Social media are complex phenomena that require users to have access to digital technologies and to acquire the requisite skill set in order to engage.  People can choose to position themselves at the hub of social media activity or they can hover along the perimeters. The decision to use social media to engage in politics is governed by a number of factors.  People's propensity to participate politically is influenced by their knowledge of government and political processes, their sense of civic duty and political efficacy, and the invitations to engage they receive from parties, organizations, and other individuals.  During the 2008 presidential election, young people, in particular, had the incentive to participate in a campaign where they felt they could make a difference.  The candidate field did not involve an incumbent president or vice president, and included a compelling contender, Barak Obama, who embraced the use of new media in his bid for office.

The entire range of factors that influences the use of social media for politics has yet to be explored. This study is the first to examine the possibility that formal civics training provides a foundation for civic engagement that is conducive to the use of novel

methods of engaging the polity.  Thus, this paper addresses the basic question:  Does

civic education predispose individuals to use social media to engage in politics?

Specifically, is an individual's civic education experience related to the propensity to use

social media to take part in the 2008 presidential contest?

**Social Media and Politics**

Social media are primarily Internet and mobile-based communication tools that

foster a collaborative and networked information environment. While social media have

their roots in Internet based chat rooms, discussion forums, and blogs, the most

ubiquitous forms of social media are social networking websites (SNSs).  According to

one definition, SNSs are "web based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a

public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users

with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections

and those made by others in a system" (boyd & Ellison, 2007: 1). Through the media rich

interfaces and social networks provided in SNSs, individuals can reconnect with old

acquaintances, build new contacts, and meet total strangers who may be members of

shared groups, networks, or fan pages.  Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, and

LinkedIn dominate popular use of social media.  In June of 2010 Facebook, far and away

the most popular SNS, passed 500 million users worldwide (Facebook, 2010).

While originally limited to sharing basic personal information, SNSs have

evolved into complex mediums for real-time information sharing, interaction, and

organizing. Contemporary SNSs "consist of platforms hosting user-generated content that

is passed on through networks of friends and associates to spread and gather information,

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influence opinion, and create organizations" (Owen, 2009, p. 24).  Using public or private

profiles as communication hubs to share content, individuals can "do" the majority of

their everyday offline activities online in the SNS space.


*Social Media Use*

Social media use is now common among some groups of Americans (Project for

Excellence in Journalism, 2010).  While use of social media has grown rapidly for adults

over thirty over the past 5 years, there are substantially fewer adults using social media

(40%) than their teen (72%) and young adult (73%) counterparts.  Facebook is the most

popular social media tool among all age groups.  According to the Pew Internet and

American Life Projects, factors such as age, race, education, and income all have modest

correlations with the type, extent, and brand of social media use.

boyd & Elison (2007) note that social media scholarship emerged from a diverse

blend of academic disciplines.  Research has been conducted primarily in the social

sciences, computer sciences, and cultural studies; scholars have researched everything

from identity construction (Rettberg, 2009; boyd 2008; Lui 2008) to network formation,

composition, and function (Finin et al., 2208 Elmer et al., 2009; Donath, 2008). Given

that social media use is common among the young, a great deal of the academic research

on social media has concentrated on the behavior of younger users.

Studies consistently reveal that users are drawn to social media primarily because

of the social aspect of the technology.  Whether using social media for personal,

professional, or political reasons, interacting with others is the primary motivation for

social media use.  The inherent sociability of social media differentiates them from

traditional mass media.  In a study of older adolescents, Barker found that communicating with peer group members was the most important motivation of SNS use (Barker, 2009).  If users had a positive opinion of the collective, they were more likely to use SNSs to communicate within the group than if their opinion was negative.  In this study, girls were more likely to hold positive opinions than boys (Barker, 2009).  Finding similar patterns, two other studies highlight extraversion and openness to new experiences as personality qualities that determine the extent of SNS use (Correa et al., 2009; Ross et al., 2009).

While the heavy use of a traditional media like television has an inverse relationship to civic engagement among young people (Romer et. al., 2009), some have argued that, due to its sociability, social media use may extend participation in community and civic life (Delli Carpini, 2000; Raynes-Goldie, 2008).  Studies investigating this claim have been modestly successful.  A secondary analysis of the 2006 National Annenberg Survey of Youth found that SNS users were "more civically engaged *but* less trusting than non-users." This finding did not hold across all social media, as there were important differences in political knowledge and civic engagement levels between users of Facebook and MySpace.  Facebook users were more civically inclined than their MySpace counterparts (Pasek et al., 2008).

Differences in social media use media have led some researchers to a call for more site specific SNS analysis in order to get more accurate findings (Hargittai, 2008; Romer, 2009).  A random web survey of college students in Texas showed that intensity of Facebook use was strongly related to feelings of personal contentment, trust and participation in civic life (Valenzuela et. al, 2009).  An analysis of the website

TakingITGlobal.org found that offline civic activity was encouraged through the sites many online features (Raynes-Goldie, 2008). A positive relationship between certain Facebook activities and the creation of social capital has been uncovered, although the study concedes it is impossible to determine which came first (Elison et al., 2007).

*Social Media and the 2008 Election*

Political campaigns are often at the forefront of using and developing novel applications of communications technology. Consequently, political science and political communication research has contributed to the development of SNS scholarship in important ways. While academic scholarship has highlighted the interactive aspects of the Internet in political campaigns for more than a decade (Farnsworth & Owen, 2004), Howard Dean's 2004 primary campaign is widely regarded as the first effective Internet based campaign incorporating heavy use of social media in the form of blogging (Kerbel and Bloom, 2005; Kaid, 2009; Lawson-Borders and Kirk, 2005). The now ubiquitous SNSs did not emerge as influential sources of political information, mobilization, and activity until the 2006 midterm elections (Gueorguieva, 2008; Williams and Girish, 2007). During that election, Facebook became established as the most popular SNS for political candidates (Williams and Girish, 2007).

Research on Facebook use by candidate campaigns in the 2006 election suggests a modest positive correlation between candidates who maintained a profile and vote share (Williams and Gulati, 2007). MySpace also played a small, but important, role in the election in mobilization efforts related to volunteering and voter registration. MySpace

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users were more likely to engage with political content online than other groups of individuals (Gueroguiva, 2007).

The 2008 election marked a breakthrough year for the use of SNS in political campaigns.  SNSs played an especially innovative role in the protracted nominating process (Owen, 2009).   In addition to developing effective SNS electioneering strategies on Facebook and MySpace, the Obama '08 campaign created a highly effective fundraising and organizational tool by combining elements of SNSs into the web design of the campaign homepage—a move that undoubtedly contributed to the campaign's electoral and fundraising success. The integration of social media into traditional electioneering practices like fundraising and organizing by the Obama campaign led some to hail a new era of 21$^{st}$ century American politics (Carpenter, 2010).

While campaigns have used SNSs to establish online identities, broaden social networks, and conduct outreach and mobilization, the recent evolution of SNSs into prominent sources of news and information is a significant political development. During the 2008 presidential election, 74% of Americans went online for campaign news (Pew Research Center, 2009).  The implications of a major shift to online forms of news are still uncertain, although some preliminary research suggests that there is real civic engagement potential in news that is found online.  Experimental research demonstrates that online news consumption leads to a more "integrated or connected understanding of politics" (Dalrymple and Scheufele, 2007:106) because of the Web's emphasis on interactivity and hyperlinking to other sources.

While claims in one experimental study are not sufficient to draw broad conclusions about the quality of news interaction online, it is safe to say that the Internet

fosters a different information gathering environment from the traditional mass media model that dominated the 20th century. Through the web, and increasingly through SNSs, political news and information can come directly from candidates, advocacy organizations, family, friends, and acquaintances on a constant and increasingly portable basis. Foot and Schneider (2002) call this type of information production "co-production" a term that stresses the "jointly" produced nature of political information on the web. Co-production takes on an important meaning when conceptualizing information production, consumption, and exchange on SNSs. While each profile is, at its core, a digital identity maintained through impression management and the negotiation of offline/online identity tension, it also has the potential to be a powerful communication portal with an audience comprised of an individual's extended network of "friends," and contacts. Just as they co-produce the network itself by finding and connecting with each other through the SNS space, individuals also co-produce political content, sharing and commenting on the links, videos, or status updates past along by their peers. The integration of personalized social networks, hyperlinking, news and information sharing, and politicking have led to the creation of online public spheres on spaces like FB and YouTube (Robertson, Vatrapu, and Medina, 2009).

**Civic Education and Social Media**

Early research examining the effectiveness of civic education in conveying citizenship orientations yielded conflicting findings. Some scholars argued that civics instruction failed to politicize young people, while others found that the schools were the most prominent locus for political learning (Langton and Jennings, 1968, Hess and

Torney, 1967; Niemi and Junn, 1998; Torney-Purta, 2002).   Interest in civics instruction

among researchers has undergone a resurgence in the last two decades (Galston, 2001).

Studies have provided more promising results in regards to the potential for formal civics

instruction to translate into a more engaged young citizenry.

As opposed to other environments that contribute to political socialization, the

classroom remains, even when coupled with community outreach, a unique setting in

which young people can at once gain knowledge, autonomy in their ideas, and confidence

in their abilities to serve as civic actors (Morgan and Streb, 2001).  Classroom-based

activities can expand a young adult's civic capacity. Research has highlighted the

particular characteristics of effective civics curricula. Niemi and Junn (1998) identified

two factors that play a significant and positive role in conveying political knowledge--the

integration of current events into classroom discussions and the variety and breadth of

topics covered.  Similarly, Kahne and Middaugh's model for high quality civic education

is rooted in curricular supports that go beyond textbooks.  They found in their study that

making classroom civics more personal and engaging (e.g. meeting civic role models,

discussing local issues of relevance to the students) "promoted commitments to civic

participation among high school students" and an increase in these types of activities

could help to further offset the civic opportunity gap caused by differences in personal

backgrounds and home environments (2008: 36-37). Most scholars seem to agree that

current events, particularly when tailored to a student's interest, are a key component of a

civics course.  Current events can bolster civic knowledge and engagement, providing

"nonduplicative civic knowledge" as opposed to other classroom approaches (Galston,

2001). The 2005 California Survey of Civic Education reported that 61% of students in

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classes that continuously discussed current events said that they were interested in politics compared to 32% in classes that did not include current events discussions in their curricula (California Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools). Further, discussing current events that involve social injustices can compel students to take action in their community (Kahne and Middaugh 2003), although controversial issues should be carefully considered in terms of public policy rather than being quick responses to the day's headlines (Hess, 2009).

Additional modes of instruction that go beyond memorization of textbook material have been touted by scholars as exemplary models of classroom-based civic education. These include role-playing, mock elections, and mock trials (Niemi and Junn, 1998; Levine, 1996; Leming, 1996, Brody, 1994, Kahne and Middaugh, 2003). But several studies have shown that such simulations of civic activities are often limited to select programs such as Advanced Placement classes or omitted due to strict curriculum guidelines (Kahne and Middaugh, 2009; Torney-Purta, 2002). Scholars also have found that students who take part in programs that integrate problem solving, collaborative thinking, and cross-disciplinary approaches into their curricula develop a greater sense of their own agency as civic actors (Atherton, 2000; Tolo, 1998).

Social media may be employed as a teaching and learning tool. In formal learning situations, some have argued that social media can positively augment traditional classroom learning activities to create a more engaging and collaborative classroom environment (Rheingold, 2007; Bunus, 2010; Hemmi et al., 2009). Yet what may be useful for teachers may not be desired by students. In a study of U.K. college students, an experimental Facebook group helped students build and maintain social ties while

attending University, but was not something that many students expressed interest in engaging with in a formal academic setting (Madge et. al., 2009).

Service-learning and community-based learning programs also are linked to greater political participation and community engagement in adulthood (Farr 1997; Walker 2000; Hepburn, 2000; Youniss et. al 1997). Scholars note, however, that both the duration of the experience and a reflective academic component, such as keeping and sharing a journal, are key to students being able to reflect on their role as civic agents (Hepburn, 2000; Galston, 2001; Hamilton and Zeldin, 1987). Battistoni (2000) insists that for a service learning program to be effective in a civics curriculum, students need to examine the intricacies of the institutions and democratic power structures involved. Kahne and Middaugh criticize service learning and community-based learning programs that place too much emphasis on service and individual character, as they believe that such a focus on good deeds distracts students from learning "the economic and political obstacles to remedying social ills" (2003: 36)—a core component of democratic citizenry.

The preponderance of the more recent evidence suggests that civic education, especially when it involves an active learning environment, results in greater political knowledge, interest, and activation among students that can extend over the life course. Civic education also promotes the development of civic skills, such as the ability to negotiate pathways to participation. Few citizens today, especially among older cohorts, have gone through civic education programs that specifically incorporate the use of social media for accessing government and politics into the curriculum. However, it might well be the case that the heightened potential for citizenship activation that is conveyed

through civic education will carry over into the social media arena. We anticipate that people whose civics instruction involved active instructional approaches will be more inclined to use social media due to its emphasis on interactive engagement.

**Extracurricular Activities**

Debate over how to effectively teach American youth the principles of good citizenship has led scholars to explore the role of extracurricular activities in encouraging political engagement. Observers dating back to De Tocqueville have argued that a primary way people can become engaged in politics is through organizational membership (Tocqueville, 1840). By the 1920s, it was considered legitimate policy to commit scarce school resources to extracurricular activities (Ziblatt, 1965). These activities began to hold a more important position as the philosophy of the "democratic school" emerged (Judd, 1923). Since then, studies have shown that participation in extracurricular activities can be more effective than traditional classroom learning in encouraging political participation (Beck and Jennings, 1982; Eccles, 2003).

Certain characteristics of extracurricular activities make them effective political socializers. First, many of these activities embody service learning opportunities, which research shows are quite effective in encouraging political engagement (Owen, 2000; Olsen, 1982; Verba and Nie, 1972). Further, extracurricular activities are quite similar to adult voluntary organizations in their effect on politicization (Ziblatt, 1965). Both expose people to ideas and peer groups they might not normally have contact with, and provide a space for people to learn interpersonal and leadership skills (Langton, 1967). Researchers assert that organizational membership, in general, affects political attitudes,

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information about public issues, social networks, norms of participation, and civic skills (Olsen, 1982; Verba et al., 1995). These similarities suggest that in some ways the two serve similar functions in fostering political engagement (Glanville, 1999).

The majority of scholarly work concludes that participation in extracurricular activities in high school is positively related to political engagement later in life (Glanville, 1999; Youniss et al., 1997; Ladewig and Thomas, 1987). Engagement in extracurricular activities has been shown to be positively associated with "political efficacy, political-party appreciation, legitimacy of political institutions, and expectations of future political participation" (Lewis, 1962). Hanks and Eckland (1978) find that the best predictor of adult membership in community organizations at age 30 is membership at age 15. These findings make sense in light of social capital theory, which implies that active involvement in social networks encourages participation. The theory purports that the wider one's social network, the more likely they are to participate in politics; so as people join associations, they expand their social networks, and increase their likelihood of participating in politics (Putnam, 1995). The development of these types of skills is relevant for the present study, as the use of SNSs is heavily invested in social networking.

Different forms of extracurricular activity foster different aspects of civic skills. Some studies have differentiated between political and non-political extracurriculars (e.g. student government vs. the football team). Interestingly, most find that non-political activities are just as important as the overtly political in developing many of these skills (Olsen, 1982; Putnam, 1993). Gordon and Babchuk (1959) categorize extracurriculars as either instrumental or expressive. Instrumental associations have some tangible outcome as their goal, while with expressive associations, participation itself is the only outcome.

In this case, studies show that participation in instrumental associations is a stronger predictor of political mobilization (Verba and Nie, 1972).

A brief look at some of the criticisms of this body of research proves useful in understanding its limitations and contributions. The central problem with studies looking at the relationship between participation in extracurricular activities and political engagement is the presence of factors that would likely select people into both extracurriculars and engagement, thus lessening support for their unique correlation. Some of these traits include self-efficacy, sociability, political interest, political awareness, leadership traits, socio economic status, academic aptitude, and GPA (Glanville, 1999; Hanks and Eckland, 1978). For example, Eyler (1982) found that political interest positively predicts extracurricular participation in high school, and Verba et al. (2006) show that people who are "psychologically engaged" in politics may also be more likely to join associations. However, other studies have accounted for these factors and still find a positive association between extracurriculars and political engagement (Glanville, 1999; Otto, 1976; Verba, et al., 2006).

**Hypotheses**

Prior research examining the link between junior high and high school civic education and participation in extracurricular activities indicates a connection to political engagement later in life. We expect that these relationships will be apparent for newer forms of political participation involving SNSs. Thus, we test the following hypotheses specifying the relationship between civic education and social media use in the 2008 presidential contest:

$H_1$: Civic education is positively related to social media use in the 2008 presidential election.

$H_2$: The type of civics instruction that individuals received is related to social media use in the 2008 presidential election. Individuals whose civic education experience included current-events based and active learning approaches were more likely to have used social media during the campaign than those whose classroom environment did not incorporate these elements.

$H_3$: Participation in activities as part of civics training, such as mock hearings, debates, speech-making, contacting officials, and field trips, is positively related to social media use in the 2008 presidential election.

$H_4$: Participation in certain types of extracurricular activities is positively correlated with social media use in the 2008 presidential election. Specifically, participation in media-related and government/politics-related extracurricular activities is related to engagement with campaign social media.

**Data and Measures**

*Data*

This research uses data from the Civic Education and Political Engagement Study which was designed to examine the influence of civic education on the development of political orientations and citizenship skills. The online survey was conducted by Knowledge Networks (KN) between May 14 and 28, 2010, and employs a national probability sample (n=1,228) drawn from KN's nationwide online panel.[1] The survey oversamples people age 18-30. For this analysis, the data were weighted to reflect the general U.S. population. Respondents were questioned about their civic education

experience, attitudes toward civics instruction, political socialization, political knowledge, political attitudes and values, political participation, campaign activity and voting behavior, traditional media use, and new/social media use.[2]

*Dependent Variable—Social Media Use*

Social media use in the 2008 presidential election is the dependent variable in this analysis. The survey contained seven social media items measuring respondents' use of social networking sites, online campaign videos, blogs, websites, email, and twitter. The individual items are measured on a four point scale indicating whether the respondent used the medium frequently, sometimes, rarely, or never. An additive social media scale was computed ranging from 0 (no social media use) to 7. (A complete description of the variables and indicator construction appears in Appendix A.)

*Civic Education Variables*

A civic education index was constructed as a basic indicator of the amount of civics instruction people received. The survey asked respondents if they had taken a government, social studies, or civics class in junior high or high school.[3] Participants also indicated whether or not they had taken part in civic education program that went beyond the basic government, social studies, American history, or civics curriculum to incorporate active and innovative learning features, such as field trips, interviews with civic leaders, debates, mock trials, and simulated elections. Survey respondents affirmed participation in approximately 35 different civic education programs. These programs differ in specific goals and instructional methods. More than twice as many survey respondents (75 cases or 6% of the sample) participated in We the People: The Citizen

and the Constitution than in any other civics program.  We the People, a program developed by the Center for Civic Education, has as its culminating activity a simulated congressional hearing in which students demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of constitutional principles in front of a panel of judges.  Other programs include Kids Voting USA, Model Congress/Model United Nations, Street Law, Close Up, and Project Citizen.  Students who participate in some of these programs can be predisposed to high achievement and strong civic attitudes. Other may take these classes at younger grade levels where it is part of the curriculum.  Particularly in senior high school, students may self-select into the program or are encouraged to take part by teachers and parents. The civic education index consists of three categories: 1) people who had no civic education at all (24% of the sample); 2) those who took a basic civics, social studies, American history or government course with no associated culminating activity, such as a simulated hearing or debate (64% of the sample); and 3) individuals who took a civics course and participated in a civic education program (12% of the sample).[4]

The survey includes items that tapped more specifically into the type of civics instruction the respondent had received. These variables measure the extent to which the class experience included lecture, textbook-based learning, current events-based learning, classroom activities, and community-based activities.  Each item is measured using a five point indicator ranging from never to always.  A 13 point scale was constructed using the current events-based learning, classroom activities, and community-based learning items. A higher score on the civics classroom environment scale indicates a more interactive and engaging classroom setting.

Respondents were asked if they had ever taken part in a variety of activities in conjunction with their civics training. Among these activities are participating in debates, competitions to test civic knowledge, mock trials and hearings, writing a letter to government officials, and taking a field trip to a local, state, or federal government institution or historic site. The fourteen dichotomous items were combined to form a civic education activities scale that ranges from 0 to 14.

The survey asked respondents if they had participated in eighteen different extracurricular activities each represented by a dichotomous variable. The analysis revealed that few of these items were related to the dependent variable, social media use in the 2008 election. We included four extracurricular activity variables in the analysis based on our expectations that a relationship might exist and our empirical findings. A five point media extracurricular activities variable was created combining participation in student newspaper, literary journal, student radio/television station, and student yearbook (ranging from 0 to 4). We also included dichotomous variables representing whether or not a respondent had taken part in student government, was a member of debate team/mock trial, or worked on a political campaign.

*Control Variables*

Control variables taking into account respondents' party identification and the extent to which they followed the 2008 presidential election were incorporated into the analysis. Party identification consists of a five point index where strong Republican is scored 1 and strong Democrat is scored 5 with independents in the middle of the scale at 3. Because the Obama campaign made greater use of social media during the election than did the McCain campaign, we anticipate that Democrats will be more likely to use

social media than Republicans. How closely respondents followed the campaign is measured on a four point scale ranging from not closely at all to very closely. We expect that people who followed the election very closely will be more inclined to use social media to enhance their campaign experience than those who did not pay much attention.

Demographic controls for age, highest level of education, and family income were introduced into the analysis. We expect that age will be a strong predictor of social media use, as young people were at the forefront of innovation through these platforms during the election. Education and family income should be positively related to social media use. Dummy variables for race (white, black, and Hispanic) were created. Only the dummy variables for whites and Hispanics were used in the final analysis, as the dummy variable for black respondents was not significant. Controls for other demographic factors, such as gender and occupation, were analyzed, but had no effect on social media use in the election. A control for high speed internet access also was included in the analysis, given that social media use is predicated to some extent on individuals' ready access to appropriate technology.

**Analysis**

We developed an ordinary least squares regression (OLS) model to test the hypotheses presented in this study. The model predicted social media use based on the civic education indicators, and introduced controls for party identification, how closely the respondent followed the election, age, education, income, race, and high speed internet access. Four separate OLS regression analyses were run for each of the education variables—the civic education index, the civics classroom environment scale, the civic education activities scale, and the extracurricular activities variables.

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**Findings**

*Social Media Use in the 2008 Presidential Election*

Social media provided voters with new opportunities to participate in the 2008 presidential contest. This development was the subject of significant news coverage and public discussion during the campaign. However, the proportion of the public who used social media to engage with the campaign was relatively small. Data from the November 2008 Post-Election Tracking Survey conducted by the Pew Internet and American Life Project indicate that only 4% of the public used social networking sites to get information about the election, 3% started or joined an election-related group, and 2% became 'friends' with a candidate online. Five percent of the population posted their vote choice on a social networking site, and 7% discovered a friend's candidate preference online. These data reveal large age-related differences in campaign social media use. Twenty percent of 18 to 24 year olds got information from social networking sites compares to 1% of those over age 45 (Owen, 2009).

Findings from the Civic Education and Political Engagement Study are consistent with the Pew data. Thirty-one percent of respondents used some form of social media either frequently or sometimes during the campaign. As Table 1 reveals, less than 20% of the population overall engaged in any one of the seven social networking activities included in the study. The highest proportion (19%) visited a candidate's website. Campaign websites in 2008 were multimedia platforms that incorporated social media applications, including blogging, video sharing, and email. Website use was followed by using email to send and receive information about the campaign (15%), watching online campaign videos (13%), and using social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace

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(10%).  Young people are significantly more inclined to engage in all of the social media

activities more frequently than older people with the exception of sending and receiving

campaign email.  Nineteen percent of those 45 and older used email during the election

compared to 11% of 18-29 year olds and 15% of 30-44 year olds.  Conversely, 8% of 18-

29 year olds used Twitter during the campaign compared to 1% or less of those over age

45.  This finding is in keeping with studies demonstrating the young people prefer

quicker forms of information sharing, like text messaging and Twitter, to more

cumbersome applications, like email (Anderson and Rainie, 2010).

Table 1
Percentage of Respondents Who Used Social Media Frequently or Sometimes
During the 2008 Presidential Election by Age

|  | Total Sample | 18-29 | 30-44 | 45-59 | 60+ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Social Networking | 10% | 22% | 10% | 6% | 3% |
| Watched Online Video | 13% | 20% | 15% | 14% | 7% |
| Followed Blog | 7% | 13% | 6% | 7% | 2% |
| Posted to a Blog | 6% | 13% | 8% | 4% | 1% |
| Candidate's Website | 19% | 21% | 21% | 19% | 15% |
| Used Email | 15% | 11% | 15% | 19% | 19% |
| Used Twitter | 3% | 8% | 3% | <1% | 1% |

$X^2$=.00 for all relationships

*Social Media and Civic Education*

We tested the basic hypothesis that civic education is positively related to social

media use in the 2008 presidential election using the civic education index.  The analysis

supports our hypothesis.  As Table 2 demonstrates, individuals who have no civic

education were significantly less likely to use social media than those who had classroom civics training.  Respondents who had taken a civics course and participated in a civic education program (42%) were more than twice more likely to have used social media than those without civics training (19%).  Thirty four percent of those who had taken a civics course only used campaign social media.

Table 2
Percentage of Respondents Who Used Social Media Frequently or Sometimes
During the 2008 Presidential Election by Civic Education

|  | % Used Social Media |
| --- | --- |
| No Civic Education | 19% |
| Civics Course | 34% |
| Civics Course and Program | 42% |

$X^2=.00$

A positive relationship between civic education and social media use remains in the multivariate analysis when controls are introduced.  (See Table 3.)  The relationship is not especially strong (beta=.070), but it is statistically significant.  Following the campaign is the strongest predictor of social media use in this equation (beta=.253).  Party identification has a weak relationship to social media use, but it is statistically significant and in the expected direction favoring Democrats.  As anticipated, age is a strong indicator of social media use (beta=-.241).  Our analysis suggests that there is no relationship between education (highest degree received) and social media use in the 2008 presidential campaign.  While the level of civic education that an individual has experienced corresponds to higher social media use, the amount of education that a person has obtained is not pertinent.  Similarly, the correspondence between income level and social media use is nonexistent.  (Appendix B depicts an OLS regression analysis that excludes the civic education variables which indicates nonfindings for education and

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income.) The dummy variable for Hispanic respondents indicates a weak positive

relationship that is approaching statistical significance.  There is a statistically significant

negative correlation between whites and campaign social media use.

Table 3
OLS Regression Analysis of Social Media on Civic Education

|  | Beta | Sign. |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Civic Education Index | .070 | .01 |
| Party Identification | .059 | .05 |
| Follow Campaign | .253 | .00 |
| Age | -.241 | .00 |
| Education | .005 | .87 |
| Income | .026 | .44 |
| Hispanic | .057 | .10 |
| White | -.077 | .03 |
| HH Internet Access | .107 | .00 |
| Adj. $R^2$ = .144 Sign. = .00 n=1138 |  |  |

We posit that the approach used to teach civics can contribute to the development

of civic orientations.  We hypothesize that people whose civic education experience

included current-events based and active learning approaches were more likely to have

used social media during the campaign than those whose civics learning environment

lacked these elements.   The analysis was performed only for those respondents who had

taken a civics course.  Table 4 depicts the correlations (Pearson's R) between the items

which measured the extent to which the civics classes taken by the respondents included

text-book learning, lecture, current events-based learning, classroom activities, and

community-based learning and social media use.  The evidence shows support for the

hypothesis. There is no relationship between textbook-based learning and social media

use.  This finding is likely due to the fact that most classes rely on textbooks as an

element of instruction.  The coefficients indicate that the more active the approach to

learning, the higher the correlation with social media use. The correlation between a lecture-based approach to civic learning is .117, compared to .161 for current events-based learning, .174 for instructional methods that involve classroom activities, and .238 for community-based learning approaches. All of these correlations are statistically significant.

Table 4
Correlation between Civic Learning Approaches and Social Media Use
During the 2008 Presidential Election

|  | Pearson's R |
| --- | --- |
| Textbook-Based Learning | .030 |
| Lecture | .117* |
| Current Events-Based Learning | .161* |
| Classroom Activities | .174* |
| Community-Based Learning | .238* |

*p<.01

The OLS regression analysis indicates that civic learning approaches predict social media use after controls are introduced. As Table 5 demonstrates, respondents whose civic education involved approaches to learning that incorporated current events and active methods were more likely to use social media during the 2008 presidential campaign than those who were not exposed to these techniques. In fact, the coefficient for civic learning approaches (beta=.151) was the highest among the four types of civic education predictors. As was the case for the model incorporating the civic education index, following the campaign and age were the two strongest predictors of social media use. The only notable difference in the trends in this model is that the dummy variable for whites is nonsignificant.

Table 5
OLS Regression Analysis of Social Media on Civic Learning Approaches

| | Beta | Sign. |
|---|---|---|
| Civic Learning Approaches | .151 | .00 |
| Party Identification | .075 | .01 |
| Follow Campaign | .241 | .00 |
| Age | -.238 | .00 |
| Education | -.026 | .45 |
| Income | .036 | .32 |
| Hispanic | .074 | .05 |
| White | -.028 | .47 |
| HH Internet Access | .094 | .00 |
| Adj. $R^2$ = .161<br>Sign. = .00<br>n=984 | | |

Related to the hypothesis that more engaging approaches to civic learning will be associated with social media use, we hypothesize that participation in activities as part of civics training, such as mock hearings, debates, speech-making, contacting officials, and field trips, will result in higher campaign-related social media use. The correlation between the class activity scale and use of social media is .200 (significant at p<.01). This positive relationship is evident in the OLS regression analysis as depicted in Table 6. The coefficient is somewhat modest (beta=.104) and statistically significant. The trends for the control variables are consistent with the findings in the other OLS regression models in this analysis.

Table 6
OLS Regression Analysis of Social Media on Civics Course Activities

| | Beta | Sign. |
|---|---|---|
| Civics Course Activities | .104 | .00 |
| Party Identification | .056 | .09 |
| Follow Campaign | .247 | .00 |
| Age | -.240 | .00 |
| Education | .005 | .82 |
| Income | .016 | .70 |

| | Beta | Sign. |
|---|---|---|
| Hispanic | .058 | .06 |
| White | -.074 | .07 |
| HH Internet Access | .104 | .00 |
| Adj. R$^2$ = .149<br>Sign. = .00<br>n=1139 | | |

There is no apparent relationship between most types of extracurricular activities and social media use in the 2008 presidential election. The data set includes items tapping respondents' participation in 17 extracurricular activities, and respondents provided an additional 25 activities in response to an open-ended question. These activities ran the gamut from student government, academic clubs, social organization, and sports. Each item was examined to determine if there was a relationship between participation in that form of extracurricular activity and social media use. In most cases, the correlation was weak to nonexistent. We hypothesized that students who participated in media-related extracurricular activities would be inclined to use social media. This hypothesis was not supported. We also tested the proposition that taking part in student government would be related to social media use and found that no relationship exists. As Table 7 indicates, there are two extracurricular activities that are positively correlated with social media use—volunteering with a political campaign and participating in debate team or mock trial. The coefficients are rather weak, but they are statistically significant.

Table 7
OLS Regression Analysis of Social Media on Extracurricular Activities

| | Beta | Sign. |
|---|---|---|
| Media Extracurriculars | .022 | .46 |
| Student Government | -.005 | .85 |
| Political Campaign | .071 | .01 |
| Debate Team/Mock Trial | .098 | .00 |
| Party Identification | .049 | .09 |
| Follow Campaign | .252 | .00 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Age | -.253 | .00 |
| Education | .013 | .68 |
| Income | .020 | .55 |
| Hispanic | .059 | .09 |
| White | -.062 | .14 |
| HH Internet Access | .096 | .00 |
| Adj. $R^2$ = .157 Sign. = .00 n=1138 | | |

Overall, the analysis shows support for the proposition that an individual's civic education background is linked to their propensity to engage in elections using social media. The OLS regression analyses demonstrate that, while the coefficients are not large, the relationship between the civic education indicators and social media use remain statistically significant when controls for political factors, demographics, and access to technology are introduced. Taking a civics course in junior high or high school increased the probability that a person would employ social media to take part in the 2008 presidential election. Participation in a civic education program, like We the People, further predicted social media use. Civic education experiences that involved more active and innovative learning approaches were conducive to producing citizens who were more likely to use SNSs in the election.

The relationship between participation in extracurricular activities was less consistent. While the expected correspondence between media-related activities and participation in student government was not apparent, social media use was higher for individuals who took part in debate team/mock trial and volunteered for a political campaign while in high school. People who were involved in debate team/mock trial may be more inclined toward actively seeking information, deliberating, and expressing opinions—actions that are facilitated by social media. Students who take part in political

campaigns are may continue their interest and involvement in elections throughout the life course.

**Conclusion**

The use of social media by citizens expanded dramatically in 2008 and played an important role in electing President Obama. Younger cohorts in large numbers (22% of 18-29 year olds) used social networking sites to connect with others, but also to share information, interact and organize in the 2008 presidential election.  Research has typically focused on the types of platforms, outreach, and other features that engage online participants. New platforms, for instance, encourage users to go beyond obtaining information to participate in the generation of new content. However, researchers know less about what types of preparation to build the skills, confidence, interest, and desire to engage politically via SNSs. In this study, civic education predicted social media use in the 2008 presidential election, along with following the campaign, age, access to high speed internet, and weakly, party identification.

Our hypothesis, that people whose civics instruction involved active instructional approaches would use more social media, was confirmed.  This validates the unique role that classroom based instruction may provide emerging citizens with opportunities to master relevant political knowledge, to gain autonomy in their ideas, and to garner confidence. These in turn may are likely to translate into increased online political activity, such as we found in the 2008 election. As noted, by high school, youth who are already interested in public affairs may self-select into rigorous civic education programs, so in our next study, we will investigate youth embedded in classrooms employing a

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longitudinal design. This will permit us to explore questions such as whether the acquisition of skills, opportunities to practice those skills in the classroom, and norms promoting participation equally affect those who are already inclined to engage politically versus those who are not.

Reinforcing other research, we found that the particular characteristics of effective civics instruction affect online political participation. We confirmed Niemi and Junn's (1998) finding of the importance of integrating current events in to classroom discussion; those whose civic education incorporated discussions of current events were more likely to use social media during the 2008 presidential campaign. By discussing current events, respondents' interest in the election, knowledge about the campaign, and a sense that they were connected to the political process, in other words, their own sense of political efficacy may have increased. The least interactive methods, simple rote learning via textbooks, bore no relationship to the use of social media. However, each step toward greater interactivity in civics instruction predicted greater use of social media in the 2008 elections, with the effect sizes increasing from lecture-based to current-events based learning, to interactive classroom activities to community based learning experiences.

Interactive civic learning approaches, which expressly value engagement and provide students the opportunities to obtain and to practice civic skills, are also translating into the new and expanding realm of political social media. In this study, we found that those with civics training were two times more likely to use social media than those without. However data from the nationally representative sample used here show that only 64% received civics instruction, 12% participated in a quality program and 24% had no civic education opportunities.  If youth have unequal access to interactive civic

instruction that provides them with the knowledge, skills, confidence they need to participate politically in SNSs, they will once again be disadvantaged in the increasingly influential and expanding political activity taking place online.  Even as barriers to online communication decline, such as income, which in this instance did predict the use of social media, if there are gaps between citizens' skills and knowledge, the avenue of democracy of online forums may be difficult or daunting for many potential participants. Extracurricular activities were not found to narrow the gap. Unless extracurricular activities specifically focused political engagement, such as debate and volunteering for a campaign, they were not found to predict social networking activity in the 2008 election.

Researchers interested in the increasing political activity on SNSs may wish to explore the resources participants bring from formal and informal education that have honed their skills and fostered their commitment and willingness to participate publically online. Similarly, civic educators may wish to push their classroom instruction to include interactive methods, such as those mentioned here, that directly translate into effective participation on the new pathway of online political engagement. While few citizens have yet to experience civic education programs that specifically incorporate the use of social media for accessing government and politics into the curriculum, this is likely to become more common. This study suggests that there is great potential for civic educators to teach effectively in a manner that will carry over into political participation in the social media arena.

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## APPENDIX A
## Survey Item Wording and Variable Construction

**Social Media**

During the 2008 presidential election, how often did you do each of the following:
--Used a social networking site, like Facebook, to engage with others during the campaign
--Watched online campaign videos, such as those on YouTube
--Followed the campaign via a blog
--Posted something related to the campaign on a blog, website, or videosharing site
--Visited a candidate's website
--Used email to send information about the campaign to others
--Use Twitter to send or receive campaign information

      1 Never
      2 Rarely
      3 Sometimes
      4 Frequently

Social Media Scale (includes all indicators):
      Range   0 - 21
      Cronbach's Alpha=.880

**Civic Education Index**

Computed from the following variables:

Did you take a government, social studies, or civics class in junior high or high school?

Did you take part in any of the following civic education programs? (indicate yes/no for eleven programs including We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution, Project Citizen, Close Up, Kid's Voting USA, boys State or Girls State, Junior Statesmen of America, YMCA Youth and Government, Rotary Club-National Youth Leadership Forum, Model Congress/Model United Nations, Harvard CIVICS Program, Citizen Action Project)

Did you take part in any other civic education program? (23 additional programs were named by respondents)

Civic Education Index

| | Percent | n |
|---|---|---|
| No Civic Education | 24% | 290 |
| Civics Course Only | 64% | 787 |
| Civics Course and Program | 12% | 148 |

**Approaches to Civic Education**

How often did your class experience include:
--Textbook-Based Learning
--Lecture
--Current Events-Based Learning
--Classroom Activities
--Community-Based Activities

      1  Never
      2  Rarely
      3  Some of the Time
      4  Most of the Time
      5  Always

Civics Classroom Approaches Scale (includes Current-Events Based Learning, Classroom Activities, Community-Based Activities):
      Range 1-17
      Cronbach's Alpha=.751

**Civic Education Activities**

Did you ever take part in any of the following activities:
--A debate
--A competition to test your civic knowledge
--A mock trial
--A hearing
--Deliver a speech
--Discuss current events that you cared about
--Write a letter to a government official
--Circulate a petition
--Attend a community meeting
--Meet with government or community leaders
--Take a field trip to a local, state, or federal government institution or historical site
--Community service
--Create civics-related information material, newsletter, videos, or website
--Other

Civic Education Activities Scale (includes all variables):
     Range  0-14
     Cronbach's Alpha=.805


**Extracurricular Activities**

Did you ever participate in any of the following extracurricular activities:
--Student Government
--Debate Team/Mock Trial
--Worked on a Political Campaign
--Student Newspaper
--Literary Journal
--Student Radio/Television Station
--Student Yearbook


Media Extracurriculars Scale (includes student newspaper, literary journal, student radio/television station, student yearbook):
     Range 0-4
     Cronbach's Alpha=.533

**APPENDIX B**
**OLS Regression Analysis of Education**
**(Highest Degree Received)**

|  | Beta | Sign. |
|---|---|---|
| Party Identification | .058 | .05 |
| Follow Campaign | .268 | .00 |
| Age | -.251 | .00 |
| **Education** | **.021** | **.52** |
| Income | .021 | .52 |
| Hispanic | .059 | .09 |
| White | -.074 | .04 |
| HH Internet Access | .109 | .00 |
| Adj. $R^2$ = .134<br>Sign. = .00<br>n=1139 |  |  |

ENDNOTES

[1] Information about the Knowledge Networks panel can be found at:
http://www.knowledgenetworks.com/knpanel/index.html.

[2] The study was conducted by a research team at Georgetown University (principal investigator, Diana Owen), and funded by the Center for Civic Education.

[3] The fact that respondents relied on recall of their civic education experience is a potential limitation of this study. We sought to mitigate this pitfall by subjecting the instrument to rigorous pretesting of the items. The Georgetown University research team conducted an extensive survey and interview pretest on 288 subjects. A subsample of the survey respondents was interviewed to determine if they had difficulty answering any of the questions. The interview subjects ranged from young people to octogenarians, and included members of a senior citizens community in Florida. The subjects generally had little difficulty recalling their civics experience in some detail. A small number of items where recall was sketchy, such as whether their high school civics course had been required or was an elective, were eliminated from the study. The survey instrument was pretested further by Knowledge Networks on 50 subjects before the final version went into the field.

[4] Six respondents participated in a civics program, but did not take a civics course. These respondents were eliminated from the analysis because there were too few of them to analyze.