

# Free research paper on effects of social media on youth perceptions of political ...

[Media](#), [Social Media](#)



## Overview and Literature Review

Courting the youth vote is one of the primary objectives of political parties in any representative form of government. The youth vote ensures a party's or representative's future in government, but many representative forms of government struggle with encouraging youth participation in government, particularly when it comes to participation in the voting process. Research shows that people within representative forms of government, particularly within large-scale representative democracies, often face severe alienation from their government and from the voting process as a whole (Blount, 1998). Young people are particularly prone to alienation from the process of civic engagement, and one of the struggles for many multi-party governmental systems, both within and outside of Australia, struggle with the best way to encourage civic engagement in young people (Blount, 1998).

Research also suggests that the face of political and civic engagement will change in the near future (Gibson, Ward, and Lisoli, 2002). More and more of an individual's everyday life is spent online, participating in a variety of online activities; young people are less likely than ever to engage in and consume traditional forms of media (Gibson, Ward, and Lisoli, 2002). This indicates that the successful political party will, in the future, utilize the Internet and social media heavily to engage younger generations in the political process (Gibson, Ward, and Lisoli, 2002). However, the changing face of political involvement does not necessarily mean the death of civic engagement, as many pundits claim. According to McLeod (2000), research into Internet usage among young people in the western world suggests that

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“ considering adolescents as participants actively engaged in, and interacting with, family, peers, teachers, and the media. This contrasts with earlier top-down transmission models that saw adolescents as passive recipients of information from parents and teachers. Active citizenship is now seen as a largely indirect result of contextualized knowledge and cognitive skills learned from news media use, interpersonal communication, and active participation in school and community volunteer activities.” In short, McLeod’s (2000) research suggests that community participation has moved to cyberspace, but has not ceased, nor has the existence of cyberspace reduced the ability for today’s youth to participate in politics.

Australia’s system of compulsory voting is one of the oldest and most effective in the world (Mackerras and McAllister, 1999). The compulsory voting system in Australia has the dual effect of forcing young people to vote as well as increasing the number of invalid votes cast each election (Mackerras and McAllister, 1999). While the latter is a negative side effect of the voting process, the fact that the youth are required to vote in Australia sets the country apart from places like the United States, where voter apathy is high, particularly among young people (Jackman, 1999). According to Mackerras and McAllister (1999), “ Survey evidence from the 1996 federal election suggests compulsory voting reduced the Liberal-National coalition's first preference vote by some 5 per cent, compared to the coalition's expected vote under a voluntary system. If the system is ever removed, it is likely to be for this reason, rather than because of any difficulties in administering it, or because of any philosophical objection to compulsion among voters or politicians.” The system of voting in Australia disadvantages

right-wing parties, which are generally less favorable with the youth than left-wing parties, as well (Jackman, 1999).

Women, particularly young women, are much more likely to vote than their male peers (Kissane, 2008). In addition, they are more likely to demonstrate significant civic knowledge, and are less likely to cast votes that are null, void, or lazy (Kissane, 2008). Determining how to encourage youth to vote properly and with conviction is one of the fundamental concerns of the Australian political system. Some researchers suggest that the political system in Australia has been inevitably changed by the advent of social media (Bennett, 2008). Pasek, Moore, and Romer (2009) suggest that “ differences between social networking sites are as large as those between more global categories of use (e. g., informational vs. social networking) and are robust to attempts to account for differences between the users of the sites. In explaining these relationships and exploring the differences between social networking sites, [we] suggest that Web site use induces a site-specific culture that can either encourage or hinder social capital.” This indicates that care must be taken on the part of politicians to properly utilize the Internet and all of its social media outlets to mobilize the youth vote.

## **Problem Definition**

When determining the effect of the Internet-- more specifically, the effect of social media-- on the actions of Australia's youth vote, there are many angles for consideration. Notably, investigation should be done into how the young people in Australia use social media, and how they currently use social media to engage in the civic process, if they currently use it at all. In

addition, their levels of knowledge and understanding of their government and their potential representatives should be assessed, to determine whether social media can and should be used as an educational tool in addition to a way to reach out to young voters.

Research suggests that communities can be formed on the Internet and on social media sites that promote civic engagement (Bennett, 2008). How different parties and politicians should be utilizing different types of social media is a fundamental question that must be answered. Politicians and political action groups must also consider their ideological standpoints, and the different types of social media that are most effective for showcasing their particular ideological standpoints (Bennett, 2008). Bennett (2008) suggests that there are a plethora of different types of social media, and not all types of social media are conducive to creating platforms for civic engagement. Instead, types of social media must be considered individually, rather than globally (Bennett, 2008).

The purpose of this research is multifaceted and varied. Ideally, the research done will discover why young Australian citizens-- for these purposes, between the ages of 18 and 34 years old-- choose to vote, and what inspires them to cast a certain type of vote. It will also consider the effect of the compulsory voting system on an individual's vote, and whether or not the compulsory system has ever influenced the individual to cast a lazy or under-educated vote. In addition, the research will attempt to discover the level of civic involvement that young people feel with their government, and what level of civic responsibility is felt by the youth in Australia. Lastly, the research will consider the effects of the Internet and social media on young

people and their engagement in the Australian political process. It has long been accepted that demographics such as class, religion, ethnicity, and so on play a role in voter choices; this research will also tangentially consider the intersection of other demographics with age, and the ways in which these demographics affect voter behavior.

## **Research Design and Methodology**

The survey will be done on 500 respondents, with fifty percent of the respondents being male and fifty percent female. Respondents will be between the ages of 18 and 34, and will be chosen at random via Internet Service Provider (ISP) information. Surveys will be administered and respondents will choose answers on a numerical scale from 1-10. Questions will be grouped into two groups: social media usage and political beliefs. Each group will consist of five to ten questions, and an average will be taken from each group of questions. In addition, demographic information such as age, sex, ethnicity, race, gender and sexual orientation, tax bracket, and religious association will be collected. The researchers will then apply a correlational analysis to the information received to determine whether there is a statistically-significant correlation between any of the factors in question, particularly social media usage and political participation, as well as the types of social media that are most effective for political use. In addition to the statistical analysis done on the results, the final survey will include an optional section where respondents can articulate what would encourage them to participate more fully in the Australian political process. These answers will not be quantitatively analyzed but may provide more

information for further study. The research may also discover other, unanswered issues insofar as the Australian youth vote is concerned, and new avenues can be explored based on age groups, tax brackets, and even religion or ethnicity.

## Appendix A

Please respond to the questions truthfully and fully, with 1 being “strongly disagree” and 10 being “strongly agree.” Answers will be kept confidential.

### Personal Information

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

Approx. annual salary: \_\_\_\_\_

Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_

Race: \_\_\_\_\_

Religion: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Sexual orientation: \_\_\_\_\_

Marital Status: \_\_\_\_\_

Dependents: \_\_\_\_\_

### Social Media Use

- I perform most of my social media use on my cellular phone or other mobile device. \_\_\_\_\_

- My primary use for social media is personal connection.

\_\_\_\_\_

- I frequent political or news-based pages on my social media sites.

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- I engage in political discourse on social media platforms.

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- I enjoy reading about or seeing political commentary or discourse on social media platforms.

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- I use social media as a way to educate myself or others about the political or civic issues.

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#### Political Beliefs

- I consider myself liberal.

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- I consider myself conservative.

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- I feel apathetic towards the government.

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- I do not believe it is my civic responsibility to vote.

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- I vote because I want to change the way the government is run.

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- I am active in the Australian political process.

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- I have cast a " lazy" vote.

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- I consider myself well-educated on domestic politics.



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- I consider myself well-educated on international politics.

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Future engagement

In what way could the Australian political system and politicians engage you further, if possible, in the political system?

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