Article

Social Science Computer Review
2017, Vol. 35(4) 462-479

DOI: 10.1177/0894439316655738
journals.sagepub.com/home/ssc
SAGE

Exploring UK Millennials' Social Media Consumption Patterns and Participation in Elections, Activism, and "Slacktivism"

Rodolfo Leyva[1]

Abstract

This study explores how UK young adults' exposure to social networking sites (SNSs) and attention to specific SNS content relate to their political practices. Data were collected from a diverse group of undergraduates during the 2015 General Election and Labour leadership campaign via a web survey designed with novel instruments (e.g., simulated Facebook and Twitter newsfeeds). Results indicate that regular use of varying SNSs and attention to certain political content—for example, newsfeeds about student-fee activism—have a positive weak association with off-line formal and activist participation and a considerably stronger association with online "slacktivism." Moreover, exposure to SNSs was found similarly high across respondents. However, those with typical demographic and psychographic markers of participation (e.g., upper socioeconomic status, early political socialization) showed significantly greater levels of engagement with political content and off-line and online participation. Together, these findings suggest that frequent social media consumption is linked to a minimal and narrow mobilizing impact.

Keywords

social media, youth political participation, slacktivism

Many of the world's advanced democracies continue to experience concerning rates of civic and political disengagement among emerging and current young adults from the so-called millennial generation (Bessant, Farthing, & Watts, 2016; Smith & Thompson, 2015). There is nonetheless optimism that the Internet and social media, in particular, will ameliorate or even reverse this generational trend by catalyzing youth engagement in elections (Morris & Morris, 2013) and in alternative and more inclusive modes of democratic participation (Castells, 2007). Indeed, political campaigns, nongovernmental organizations, and activist groups across the world are increasingly turning to social media to inform and mobilize millennials into both formal and direct modes of democratic action (Van Laer, 2010; Vitak, et al., 2011).

[1] Middlesex University, London, UK

Corresponding Author:
Rodolfo Leyva, Middlesex University, The Burroughs, London, NW4 4BT, UK.
Email: r.leyva@mdx.ac.uk

Correspondingly, many studies do show that there is at least a positive association between social media consumption and youth political participation that stems from a complex intertwining of sociostructural, cognitive-attitudinal, and informational determinants. In particular, these include (1) geo-historical and sociodemographic specificities; (2) individual levels of political interest, childhood socialization, and sophistication; and (3) exposure and attention to digital political content (Brandtzaeg, 2015; Hargittai & Shaw, 2013; Kushin & Yammamoto, 2010; Zhang, Seltzer, & Bichard, 2013). However, how these determinants interact and influence one another, and the degree to which these dynamics then induce off-line and online participation, remains unclear, as the empirical literature has produced largely mixed findings (de Zúñiga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012; Dimitrova, Shehata, Strömbäck & Nord, 2014; Zhang, Johnson, Seltzer, & Bichard, 2010). This inconclusiveness in the literature might be partly explained by to the following reasons. Firstly, social media consist of an aggregate of social networking sites (SNSs) with varying content-generating, sorting, filtering, and distribution user functions, some of the oldest of which, and that are still in popular use today (e.g., Facebook, YouTube), have only been publicly accessible for around than 10 years. Additionally, newer and prominent SNSs such as Instagram and Pinterest have only existed for 5 years and have yet to be examined for their potential affects on youth participation. Therefore, and given that much of the published research has been carried out when SNSs were arguably not quite as functionally varied, socially widespread, and habitually used as they are now, there is a small possibility that most studies were simply conducted too early to be able to fully observe and assess social media's politicizing effects.

Secondly, there is a relative dearth of research on how and the extent to which young people actually attend to political information on social media. That is, in social media environments, users are presented with a high volume of segmented, diverse, bespoke, and continuously changing digital content. The prioritization, selection, and subsequent interaction with individual content is thus largely determined by the extent to which its respective textual-sensorial stimuli can, more so than others, simultaneously attract a user's attentional mechanisms and cue their cognitive–affective dispositions (Johnson, Zhang, & Bichard, 2011; Knobloch-Westerwick & Kleinman, 2012; Kobayashi & Ikeda, 2009). However, only a handful of studies have specifically investigated how these SNS content selection processes affect youth online and off-line participation, and these have relied on self-reported measures that gauge attentive frequency to broad political content categories. For example, such measures have entailed Likert-type items that prompt respondents to indicate how often they paid attention to SNSs that provide information about specific issues or policies they agreed or disagreed with (e.g., Zhang et al., 2013) or to information about a political campaign or politician on SNSs such as Facebook (e.g., Towner, 2013). Hence, while these early instruments have certainly produced insightful data, they are limited in terms of ecological validity and are susceptible to respondents' recall errors and social desirability biases. Moreover, they tend to offer minimal contextual and textual detail, which makes it difficult to ascertain or unpack the specific content functions through which social media may help to induce participation.

Therefore to partly address the issues described above, this UK study examines data collected in 2015 from a diverse group of undergraduates whom represent a sample of young adults who have had the most historical experience and exposure to social media to date. Additionally, this was done via a web survey designed with measures for the use of currently popular classic and newer SNSs (e.g., Pinterest, Whatsapp, Tumblr) as well as with novel instruments (e.g., simulated Facebook and Twitter newsfeeds), which enabled the capturing of respondents' real-time content selections and corresponding attentive-cognitive expenditures. The purpose of this study is thus to demonstrate how using more distinct and detailed

measures of SNS usage patterns and preferences, coupled with an analyses of both predictive trends and subgroup variances, can help to better illuminate the extent and range of contexts within which social media are influencing youth political behaviors. To this end, this article proceeds with a brief literature review to set the context and theoretical underpinnings for this study. This is followed by a hierarchical regression analyses on the predicted effects of frequent exposure to SNSs and attention to four specific types of political content on off-line and online participation and voter registration. How these factors differ between typically engaged and disengaged youth cohorts are then unpacked further via multivariate cluster analyses. The article concludes with a discussion on the implications of the findings and the limitations of this study.

Are Social Media Mobilizing Youth?

Most scholars agree that youth political and civic participation are crucial for the health and future of democracy and that social media can at least in theory play a major role in increasing and widening this participation (de Zúñiga, Molyneux, & Zheng, 2014; Dimitrova, Shehata, Strömbäck, & Nord, 2014). While perhaps at times bordering on technological determinism, this faith in the politicizing function of social media is not without sound theoretical grounding. Millennials after all came of age during the advent of Web 2.0 and are consequently the largest and most experienced users of SNSs. Unlike traditional media, SNSs enable the free or inexpensive dissemination of user selected and/or created content across global networks in real time. This affords users the opportunity to more easily bypass the content selection, distribution and censoring practices of governments, party officials, and the ever-expanding multinational corporate media conglomerates. Furthermore, SNSs provide users platforms to meaningfully discuss and debate political issues with both like-minded people and those of rival orientations as well as increasingly with elected officials and politicians running for office. These and other unique and heretofore historically unavailable user tools certainly endow social media with the potential to generate an impactful expansion of the public sphere and youth political engagement, which can result in the reinvigoration, transformation, and expansion of contemporary democratic processes and practices. However, as stated earlier, how or whether or not this potential is actually manifesting continues to be hotly debated in the empirical literature. In what follows, this literature is parsimoniously broken up into three broad empirical factions that are grouped strictly on the basis of their similar significant findings.

Evidence from the first and most optimistic body of research suggests that social media are inducing considerable significant increases in online and off-line youth participation—particularly among cohorts that are chronically disengaged and excluded—by effectively mediating political interest and moderating political marginalization (see e.g., de Zúñiga et al., 2014; Holt, Shehata, Strömbäck, & Ljungberg, 2013; Kahne, Lee, & Feezell, 2013; Xenos, Vromen, & Loader, 2014; Zhang et al., 2013). Broadly speaking, these mobilization effects are hypothesized to result from a combination of exposure, informational, developmental and interactionist processes, and mechanisms that are uniquely enabled by and inherent to social media. Drawing on a mix of the *uses and gratifications theory, incidental by-product model of learning*, and the *political engagement gateway hypothesis*, this research posits that social media's low-entry costs, social networking requirements, and chaotic or relatively uncontrollable distribution of user created and other media content (among other essential characteristics) set or extensively facilitate conditions whereby frequent use can probabilistically lead to a higher likelihood of intentional and unintentional exposure to, and eventual engagement with, a wide range of political information, opinions,

organizations, and recruitment opportunities. Additionally, this likelihood is particularly amplified during national political campaigns or major events whose coverage tends to saturate both traditional and online media (Morris & Morris, 2013). In tandem, all these conditions and reciprocal processes, directly and indirectly nurture the development of norms for group action, civic skills, and sociopolitical knowledge and identities in ways that can complement, fill in for, or even challenge the role of primary political socializers such as family and schools. Over time, this, in turn, leads to a higher interest in and propensity for both online and off-line political participation (Ekström & Östman, 2015; Enjolras, Steen-Johnsen, & Wollebæk, 2013; Lee, Shah, & McLeod, 2013; Towner, 2013).

In contrast to the above, evidence from the second body of research suggests that social media consumption has had little to no significant effect in increasing off-line participation but does seem to have a greater effect in increasing online participation (see e.g., Baumgartner & Morris, 2009; Carlisle & Patton, 2013; Ternès, Mittelstadt, & Towers, 2014; Vissers & Stolle, 2014; Vitak et al., 2011; de Zúñiga et al., 2012). For example, in their study of the influence of SNSs on participation in the 2008 U.S. election, Baumgartner and Morris (2009) found that SNS usage frequency had an appreciably strong positive association with digital practices such as posting a political message on a blog or forwarding a political link but had no significant association with off-line practices such as voting. At this juncture, it is important to note that these types of digital political practices are often cited as examples of online "slacktivism," that is, "low-risk, low-cost activities via social media whose purpose is to raise awareness, produce change, or grant satisfaction to the person engaged in the activity" (Lee & Hsieh, 2013, p. 1). Other common examples include clicking "like" on a political post, blogging about political issues, participating in a digital protest, e-mailing a politician, joining an SNS political cause group, and signing e-petitions (Christensen, 2012). Correspondingly, in the majority of studies, measures for online participation tend to exclude higher commitment practices like hacking and predominantly include what are arguably mostly "slacktivist" practices (e.g., Carlisle & Patton, 2013; Christensen, 2012; Ekström & Östman, 2015). Hence, when divorced from traditional formal and activist off-line participation, the significance of online participation, or slacktivism if you will, is contentious. That said, many of the scholars grouped in this second empirical faction take a cautiously positive view of this mode of participation, arguing that it provides otherwise disengaged youth with an outlet through which to develop and apply civic and participatory knowledge and skills (e.g., Vissers & Stolle, 2014; Vitak et al., 2011). It thus follows that over time, online participation, slacktivist or otherwise, may eventually lead to an increase in traditional modes of off-line participation.

Finally, findings from the third body of research suggest that social media consumption has had a minor or no significant effect in mobilizing new citizens to either off-line or online political participation (see e.g., Bakker & Vreese, 2011; Hargittai & Shaw, 2013; Theocharis & Quintelier, 2016; Zhang et al., 2010). That is, this research shows that high levels of prior political engagement, political interest, and sociopolitical capital are the strongest predictors of both online and off-line participation. Now while this is also found in many studies from across the literature (e.g., Dimotrova et al., 2014; Holt et al., 2013), the major difference here is that this third empirical faction has consistently found that SNS usage frequency generated either no effect, or a significant but very weak positive effect, on off-line and/or online participation. This to some extent suggests that rather than function as a politicizing gateway and leveler of participatory inequalities, social media may be for now simply supplementary tools whose political utility is being predominantly enacted by socioeconomically advantaged and/or strongly politically disposed individuals. As such, their findings indirectly lend support for the *reinforcement hypothesis* also known as *normalization thesis*. This hypothesis posits that social

media and other web technologies mostly serve to provide privileged and dominant social groups and politically interested individuals with yet another means of mass communication through which to be politically active (Strandberg, 2013; Van Laer, 2010). Correspondingly, this will continue to have the effect of marginalizing the less educated, those from lower socioeconomic strata, and other chronically marginalized groups (di Gennaro & Dutton, 2006). Therefore, the unequal demographic and psychographic makeup long observed in off-line participation will be effectively reproduced and observed in online participation, irrespective of relative equal access to the Internet (Brandtzaeg, 2015; Min, 2010; Schlozman, Verba, & Brady, 2010).

This present study explores how the findings and related theories from each of the three empirical factions discussed above apply to the UK context. Furthermore, this exploration will include a specific focus on how and the extent to which young people attend to social media political content. The UK provides an ideal setting for this research, as it is fourth in the world in social media use and Internet speed and residents on average spend more than half the time on social media than they do on the Internet in general (Kemp, 2015). Data were collected from April to August 2015, which coincided with the UK General Election and Labour leadership campaign. This provided a serendipitous research opportunity to explore the very recent political uses and influence of social media in communicative settings, where the dissemination of political information was national and especially heightened. As this research is exploratory, hypotheses were not formulated. Instead, the design and analyses were guided by the following research questions:

Research Question 1: Among UK undergraduates, what are the strengths of association between exposure to SNSs, attention to SNS political content, and off-line and online participation?

Research Question 2: How do social media usage frequency, attention to SNS political content, and participation vary between disengaged and engaged youth?

Research Question 3: Do the results from Research Questions 1 and 2 indicate that disengaged youth are being brought into online and/or off-line participation via social media?

Data and Method

Qualtrics software (version, March–August 2015) was used to develop and administer a web survey, which yielded an average completion rate of 13 min. The survey link and participant information sheet were distributed via e-mail to students from various universities across the UK. Undergraduate participants from all areas and 3 years of study were targeted and included in this analysis to partly control for level of education. The majority (63%) of participants were recruited from a London-based former polytechnic (post-1992) university via an e-mail which was sent through university's student e-mail list server to all students ($n = 17{,}480$). The e-mail stated that participation in the study was voluntary and that only undergraduates who could vote in the UK and from the ages of 18–29 were eligible to participate. In total, 241 responded yielding a response rate of .01%. Additionally, 21% dropped out and 171 were included in the analysis. To gain a more representative sample, the company Qualtrics was subcontracted to administer the web survey to an additional random sample of 100 undergraduates from universities across the UK. This brought the total number of eligible respondents included in the analysis to 271.

Although undergraduate samples certainly limit external validity, they are generally accepted as a highly suitable demographic for this type of exploratory research (Vissers & Stolle, 2014). Additionally, the sample analyzed was uniquely diverse and consisted of 50.9% females and 49.1% males from the ages of 18–29. This age range was chosen because it marks a critical period in political development and engagement (Neundorf, Smets, & García-Albacete, 2013; Sears & Funk, 1999) and has been shown to be a range in which inequalities in Internet access and competency are less pronounced (Kahne et al., 2013). Furthermore, the racial–ethnic spread of the sample was more diverse than the national average and entailed a makeup of 62% White, 13% Black, 15.7% Asian, and 6.3% mixed racial–ethnic background. Moreover, self-reported annual family income was used as a measure of socioeconomic status (SES). The results indicate that 21.4% of respondents broadly correspond to a low SES (£20,000 or less), 23.6% low middle SES (£20,000–£40,000), 24.7% upper middle SES (£40,000–£60,000), and 26.5% high SES (£60,000 or over), 3.7% did not respond.

Political Participation Variables

This study utilized three measures of political participation: online participation, off-line participation, and voter registration. Participants were shown 12 political practices and asked to select any that they had engaged in over the last 12 months (see Appendix Table A1 for percentage breakdowns). For online participation, this included (1) used social media to spread information about a political party, (2) clicked like on a political image or story on social media, (3) purchased a product online where some of the proceeds go to support a political or social cause, (4) signed an online petition about a political or social cause, (5) used social media to spread information about a political event or demonstration, and (6) used social media to spread awareness of a political or social cause or issue. Responses were coded as 1 for yes and 0 for no and subsequently summed ($M = 2.0$, $SD = 1.8$, $\alpha = .73$) to create an additive index/dependent variable for Online Participation ranging from 0 (no online participation) to 6 (high online participation).

Traditional formal and activist practices were used for off-line participation (1) campaigned for a politician or political party by passing out pamphlets or door to door canvassing; (2) helped to organize a political event; (3) attended a meeting hosted by an environmentalist, human rights, and/or other activist organization; (4) written a letter to Parliament; and (5) attended a political protest or demonstration. These were summed ($M = 0.49$, $SD = 0.93$, $\alpha = .63$) to create an additive index/dependent variable for Off-line Participation ranging from 0 (no off-line participation) to 5 (high off-line participation). It must be noted that political activity indexes are limited indicators of participation, as they measure the range of actions that respondents are engaged in rather than their frequency of engagement (Dylko, 2010). Thus, for example, a respondent who is very active in only one off-line activity could be considered a low-engagement respondent. Despite these limitations, the indexes used here generated acceptable internal consistency and therefore provide a suitable starting point to gauge consistent patterns in participation. Moreover, the practices included in each index were grouped according to their relatively symmetrical costs, risks, and commitment requirements in order to generate more precise effect estimates.

Lastly, respondents were also asked if they registered to vote in the 2015 General Election. This was originally conceived as an off-line practice but was not included in either of the above indexes because it can also be enacted online. Therefore, selections were coded as $1 = yes$ and $0 = no$ and used to create a dependent binary variable for *Registered To Vote In The 2015 UK General Election.*

Control Variables

Demographic variables including SES and gender were, respectively, coded as 1 = *male*, 2 = *female* and 1 = *low SES*, 2 = *low middle SES*, and so on. As the large majority (62%) of the respondents identified as White and as 87% of all respondents were between the ages of 18 and 25, race/ethnicity and age were not included in the analysis. Instead, new measures were developed to capture and control for traditional psychographic predictors of participation including political socialization, ideology, knowledge, and interest disposition.

Political socialization was measured by asking respondents what extent they agreed on a 5-point scale between 5 = *totally agree* and 1 = *totally disagree* with the following four statements: (1) growing up I had relatives or close friends that discussed politics and social issues with me; (2) growing up my parents discussed politics and social issues with me; (3) my family or close friends encourage me to participate in elections and/or political demonstrations; and (4) during my secondary education lessons on history, social issues, and economics my teachers allowed and encouraged us to debate and discuss topics. The scores were averaged ($M = 3.35$, $SD = 0.86$) to create a variable for *Childhood and Formal Political Socialisation,* ranging from 1 (*very low socialization*) to 5 (*very high socialization*). The scale generated acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha = .70$).

Political ideology was measured by asking respondents how much they agreed on a 5-point scale between 5 = *totally agree* and 1 = *totally disagree* with eight highly provocative statements, three of which were reverse coded. In part, these included the following: (1) the National Health Service (NHS) should be run by private companies in order to become more effective, (2) corporations have too much influence on government policies and decisions, (3) workers should be allowed to organize and demand better wages and working conditions from their employers, and (4) most people in the lower economic classes are poor because they didn't work hard enough. The measures were averaged ($M = 2.52$, $SD = 0.61$, $\alpha = .70$), to create a variable for *Left–Right Political Orientation* ranging from 1 (very left wing) to 5 (very right wing).

Political knowledge was measured through four multiple-choice questions on representative and participatory democratic systems and practices. Each question listed five possible answers. The four questions were as follows: (1) A political system in which all citizens can propose laws and vote on legislation and executive bills can best be described as? (43.6% correct); (2) a political system in which all citizens can participate in open elections and vote on representatives to run the government can best be described as? (62.9% correct); (3) the process in which citizens identify, prioritize, and decide on how public budgets are spent is best associated with which of the following political systems? (41.6% correct); and (4) the process in which legislative groups of elected officials identify, prioritize, and decide on how public budgets are spent is best associated with which of the following political systems? (44.9% correct). Correct responses were coded as 1 and 0 otherwise, and the scores were averaged ($M = 2.01$, $SD = 1.41$, $\alpha = .70$) to create a variable for *Knowledge of Democracy* ranging from 0 (no knowledge) to 4 (very high knowledge).

Furthermore, political attitudes generally begin to develop in early childhood and crystallize around late adolescence (Sears & Funk, 1999), and young people with far left of right orientations tend to pay more attention to political news and be more politically active and knowledgeable than their mainstream moderate counterparts (Federico & Hunt, 2013; Sidanius, 1984). Given this, the above-listed measures for political socialization, orientation, and knowledge in tandem also measure and control for political interest disposition (i.e., a natural and/or socially developed strong tendency to engage in and be highly interested in politics).

In the absence of more robust longitudinal data, these measures also arguably, albeit partially, gauge and control for prior levels of political engagement.

Social Media Consumption Variables

Social media use was measured through an 8-item list of functionally heterogeneous SNSs (see Appendix Table A1). These SNSs were selected because they were as of the time of this research popular with contemporary UK young adults (Kemp, 2015), and depending on the specific functions of and device on which each is accessed, can be used to create, distribute, and receive digital content of varying textual-sensorial forms (e.g., videos, images, short text messages). Respondents were asked to select any SNS that they use regularly throughout the week. Selected items were coded as 1 and 0 otherwise and summed to create a simple additive composite variable for *Number of Regularly Used SNSs* ranging from 0 to 8 SNSs ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 1.44$).

Lastly, 15 Facebook and 3 Twitter naturalistic newsfeeds were developed in order to gauge the more specific types of social media political content that young people might engage within real life. Social media political content is defined here as classifications of digital text that communicate a specific political topic along with an explicit or implicit political–ideological orientation, policy recommendations, and/or calls for political actions. Moreover, Facebook was selected as the newsfeed platform background because it is the most used SNS in the UK (Kemp, 2015) and Twitter because it was widely used by the UK electoral commission to spread voter registration information and reminders (Curtis, 2015). These simulated newsfeeds were spread across 6 survey items, three of which asked: if the following posts appeared on your Facebook newsfeed, which one would you most likely click on and read? The others asked (1) which of the following Facebook newsfeeds would you most likely share with your friends? (1) if the following posts appeared on your Facebook newsfeed, which one would you most likely click like on? and (1) which of the following would you most likely retweet? Each survey item contained three vertically segmented and modified images designed to mimic SNS newsfeeds as well as simulate an actual newsfeed platform presentation (see example in Figure 1 below). Two of these images displayed different types of political content specific to the UK, and one displayed random pop culture content. Pop-culture images of high-profile celebrities were incorporated to further simulate realistic social media environments, and to in conjunction with a ''none of the above'' option, better gauge and evaluate the types of content that users are most likely to selectively engage with if exposed to. Additionally, all of the images had their dates changed to display recent posting times in order to further simulate realistic settings, and to minimize the effects of visual saliency and response bias, were restructured to relatively equal sizes and placed in a counterbalanced order. Selected images were coded as 1 and 0 otherwise. Three images contained informational content on how to register to vote in the 2015 General Election. The measures were summed to create an additive composite variable for selective engagement with *2015 UK Voter Registry Information* ranging from 0 to 3 selections ($M = 0.62$, $SD = 0.86$). Three images contained news stories and information about activist actions being taken to overturn the recent tuition hikes in English and Welsh universities. The selections were summed to create an additive composite variable for selective engagement with content on *Student-Fee Activism News Articles and Demonstration Events* ranging from 0 to 3 selections ($M = 0.98$, $SD = 0.94$). This procedure was repeated for three images featuring content on *Environmental Activism News Articles and Demonstration Event Info* ($M = 0.39$, $SD = 0.71$) and for three images featuring *Corporate Malfeasance News Articles and Information* ($M = 0.93$, $SD = 0.92$).

Figure 1. Examples of Facebook newsfeed simulation.

Analysis Strategy

To examine Research Question 1, three hierarchical regression models (two ordinary least squares and one binary logistic) were constructed, respectively, predicting (1) off-line participation, (2) online participation, and (3) electoral registration for the 2015 UK General Election. Control variables were entered in the first block and the social media consumption variables in the second block. This regression procedure was utilized to counterbalance specification error, generate more accurate coefficient estimates (see e.g., Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010), and better isolate and measure the individual effects of the social media consumption variables (see e.g., Bakker & Vreese, 2011). The results are shown in Table 1 below.

Following this, cluster multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) and χ^2 tests were conducted to examine Research Question 2. First, MANOVA tests were conducted to test gender and SES

Table 1. Political Participation by Social Media Consumption Variables.

	Off-Line Participation	Online Participation	Registered to Vote in the 2015 UK General Election
First block			
Control variables			
Gender	–.05 (.13)	.01 (.02)	–.695* (.32)
Socioeconomic status	.01 (.05)	.07 (.07)	–.047 (.12)
Knowledge of democracy	.13* (.04)	.21*** (.06)	.214* (.10)
Childhood and formal political socialization	.28*** (.05)	.27*** (.09)	.226 (.14)
Left–right political orientation	.05 (.09)	–.13* (.15)	–.208 (.24)
R^2 (adjusted)	10***	18***	—
Pseudo R^2	—	—	.10***
Second block and final model			
Control variables			
Gender	.00 (.13)	.07 (.19)	–.75* (.35)
Socioeconomic status	.02 (.04)	.07 (.06)	–.03 (.12)
Knowledge of democracy	.11 (.04)	.17** (.05)	.17 (.10)
Childhood and formal political socialization	.21** (.05)	.17** (.08)	.18 (.15)
Left–right political orientation	.08 (.09)	–.10 (.13)	–.20 (.24)
Social media consumption variables			
Number of regularly used social networking sites	.15* (.03)	19*** (.05)	.00 (.10)
Corporate malfeasance news articles and information	.12* (.06)	.15** (.08)	–.00 (.16)
Environmental activism news articles and demonstration events	.11* (.07)	.08 (.11)	–.20 (.19)
Student-fee activism news articles and demonstration events	.17** (.06)	.15** (.09)	.11 (.16)
UK 2015 voter registration information	.08 (.06)	.24*** (.09)	.30 (.18)
R^2 change (adjusted)	.10***	.16***	—
Total R^2 (adjusted)	.20***	.34***	—
Total pseudo R^2	—	—	.13**
N	271	271	271

Note. Estimates for the first two columns are standardized coefficients. Unstandardized coefficients are used in the last column. All columns have standard errors in parenthesis.
*$p \leq .05$. **$p \leq .01$. ***$p \leq .001$.

differences in social media usage frequency, content selection, and participation, with males and higher SES groups serving as proxies for typically demographically engaged youth and vice versa. The results are shown in Table 2 in the subsequent section. Furthermore, additional MANOVA tests were conducted using grouping variables that were developed by dividing the scores from the *Childhood and Formal Political Socialization* and *Left–Right Political Orientation* composite variables into comparably sized blocks. For the former, this consisted of three cohorts, respectively, categorized as (1) low political socialization, (2) average political socialization, and (3) high political socialization; for the latter, this consisted of four cohorts: (1) far left, (2) left moderate, (3) right moderate, and (4) far right. As stated earlier, these two psychographic measures tap into the key congruent dimensions of political interest-disposition, high levels of which are strongly associated with a higher propensity for participation (Min, 2010). As such, for these tests, the cohorts with high political socialization and far left or right political orientation served as proxies for typically engaged youth and vice versa. The results are shown in Table 3.

Social Media Consumption and Political Participation

The results from the first model show that respondents with higher childhood and formal political socialization ($\beta = .21$, $p < .05$) and those who used more SNSs on a regular and weekly basis ($\beta = .15$, $p < .05$) were more likely to engage in more off-line practices. Additionally, this was also true for respondents who selected more SNS content featuring corporate maleficence news articles and information ($\beta = .12$, $p < .05$), environmental activism news articles and demonstration events ($\beta = .11$, $p < .05$), and student-fee activism news articles and demonstration events ($\beta = .17$, $p < .05$). While it cannot be ascertained for certain that respondents who attended to these content simulations do the same in their actual social media environments, these findings partially suggest that if exposed and attended to, these specific types of SNS political content, which had informational, mobilization, and advertisement functions, may potentially induce a significant positive effect in mobilizing formal and/or activist off-line practices. However, as the block of control variables and social media consumption variables each explained 10% of the total variance in the model ($R^2 = .20$, $F = 7.555$, $p < .05$), the overall results indicate that this potential effect is likely to be relatively marginal. Correspondingly, the results suggest that frequent use of multiple SNSs alone predicts a small increase in off-line participation.

For the second model, the β coefficients show that respondents with greater knowledge of democracy ($\beta = .17$, $p < .05$), childhood and formal political socialization ($\beta = .17$, $p < .05$), and numbers of SNSs used frequently ($\beta = .19$, $p < .05$) were more likely to engage in more online slacktivist practices. Moreover, so were respondents who attended to more SNS content on corporate maleficence ($\beta = .15$, $p < .05$), student-fee-related activism ($\beta = .15$, $p < .05$), and information about how to register to vote in the UK General Election ($\beta = .24$, $p < .05$). In this model, the social media consumption variables yielded stronger individual effects than the controls and improved model performance by a significant increase of 16% ($R^2 = .34$, $F = 14.194$, $p < .05$). Thus, frequent exposure to multiple SNSs and attention to SNS political content each predicts an appreciable increase in online participation.

Finally, the third model shows that males were more likely than females to register to vote in the 2015 UK General Election ($\beta = -.75$, $p < .05$). Moreover, although the block of social media variables added an increase of 3% to the total explained variance in the model (pseudo $R^2 = .13$, $p < .05$), no individual variables were statistically significant. This surprisingly included attention to SNS content featuring UK 2015 voter registration information. Hence, these results suggest that in this case, regular use of multiple SNSs and attention to SNS political content had no significant association with electoral registration.

Table 2. Differences in Political Content Selections, Social Networking Site (SNS) Use, and Participation for Gender and Socioeconomic Status (SES) Groups.

Groups	Corporate Malfeasance News Articles and Information Content	Environmental Activism News Articles and Demonstration Events Content	Student-Fee Activism News Articles and Demonstration Events Content	UK 2015 Voter Registration Information Content	Number of Regularly Used SNSs	Off-Line Participation	Online Participation	*N*
Male	1.21 (0.69)	0.56 (.80)	0.79 (.88)	0.83 (0.93)	3.7 (1.6)	0.65 (1.0)	1.9 (1.4)	132
Female	0.69 (0.78)	0.25 (.57)	1.15 (.96)	0.44 (0.77)	3.5 (1.2)	0.33 (0.69)	1.5 (1.4)	136
F value, sig.	21.49, $p = .000$	13.42, $p = .000$	10.21, $p = .002$	14.13, $p = .000$	1.66, $p = .198$	8.32, $p = .004$	6.50, $p = .011$	
Low SES	0.87 (0.82)	0.33 (.71)	1.2 (.94)	0.52 (0.80)	3.4 (1.5)	0.24 (0.47)	1.4 (1.3)	57
Lower middle SES	0.71 (0.82)	0.21 (.48)	1.0 (.99)	0.34 (0.64)	3.5 (1.1)	0.37 (0.76)	1.4 (1.5)	64
Upper middle SES	1.0 (0.95)	0.46 (.74)	0.95 (.90)	0.68 (0.87)	3.7 (1.4)	0.57 (1.0)	1.9 (1.4)	66
High SES	1.1 (1.0)	0.59 (.81)	0.76 (.91)	0.97 (1.0)	3.8 (1.6)	0.77 (1.1)	2.1 (1.6)	72
F value, sig.	3.26, $p = .022$	3.62, $p = .014$	3.48, $p = .016$	6.62, $p = .000$	0.897, $p = .443$	4.09, $p = .007$	3.96, $p = .009$	

Note. Standard deviations are in parenthesis. Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Bonferroni. Online participation means have been weighted to make them comparable to the off-line participation means.

Engaged Versus Disengaged Youth

What follows next is a multivariate cluster and χ^2 analyses of how social media consumption and participatory patterns specifically differ between typically engaged and disengaged youth cohorts. The results in Table 2 from the first MANOVA test showed a significant multivariate main effect for gender (Pillai's trace $V = .190$; $F = 8.73$, $p = .000$). Follow-up Bonferroni tests showed no significant differences in the number of regularly frequented SNSs, but on average males attended to more types of political content to a significantly greater extent than females except for student-fee-related activism content. Moreover, and paralleling the findings from the third model in Table 1, males also significantly engaged in more off-line and online practices than females. The second MANOVA test generated a significant multivariate main effect for SES (Pillai's trace $V = .218$; $F = 2.80$, $p = .000$). Follow-up Bonferroni tests showed no significant differences in the number of regularly frequented SNSs but reveal greater political content selection for the higher SES groups which was significant for selections of corporate malfeasance, environmental activism, and voter registration content. Interestingly, however, the lower SES groups did select student-fee-related content significantly more so than the higher SES groups. This is not entirely surprising as higher SES groups are less likely to be concerned about rises in student fees since they are less likely to be negatively impacted by them. This finding partly conforms with the expectations from web-browsing models that show that people's online selections will be triggered more so by informational utility than by political disposition, if the content is perceived as personally relevant (Knobloch-Westerwick, Carpentier, Blumhoff, & Nickel, 2005; Kobayashi & Ikeda, 2009). However, despite this, the highest SES groups had significantly greater rates of off-line and online participation as well as proportions of respondents who registered to vote in the 2015 UK General Election ($\chi^2 = 4.34$, $p = .031$).

In Table 3, the MANOVA test generated a significant multivariate main effect for political socialization (Pillai's trace $V = .182$; $F = 3.73$, $p = .000$). Follow-up Bonferroni tests showed no significant group differences in the number of regularly frequented SNSs. Moreover, respondents with higher childhood and formal political socialization on average selected more political content. This was significant for selections of corporate malfeasance and voter registration content. They also had higher rates of off-line and online participation and proportions of voter registration ($\chi^2 = 4.38$, $p = .036$). Lastly, the MANOVA test showed a significant multivariate main effect for political–ideological orientation (Pillai's trace $V = .173$; $F = 2.26$, $p = .001$). Follow-up Bonferroni tests showed no differences in the number of SNSs regularly frequented. Moreover, the results for political content selection were inconclusive, but on average far-right-oriented respondents selected more political content than their more moderate counterparts, which was significant for selections of student-fee activism content. As this content can be considered highly leftist in orientation, this finding is again noteworthy for its fit with existing web-browsing models. These posit that individuals with high political interest and online participation are more likely to select content with counter attitudinal information (Johnson et al., 2011; Knobloch-Westerwick & Kleinman, 2012). Lastly, respondents with far left or right orientations on average significantly engaged in more off-line and online political practices than their moderate counterparts. However, there were no significant differences between these groups in the proportions of respondents who registered to vote ($\chi^2 = 1.64$, $p = .199$).

With regard to Research Question 2, the results from this analysis show that the number of regularly used SNSs during the week. SNSs was effectively the same across all respondents ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 1.44$). However, despite this, overall levels of participation and attention to SNS political content were markedly and significantly higher among respondents with typical demographic and/or psychographic markers of participation. Turning now to Research Question 3, the regression models show that of the three examined modes of participation, social media consumption is most strongly linked to an increase in online participation. Furthermore, across all cluster comparisons, typically disengaged

Table 3. Differences in Political Content Selections, Social Networking Site (SNS) Use, and Participation for Political Socialization and Political Orientation Groups.

Groups	Corporate Malfeasance News Articles and Information Content	Environmental Activism News Articles and Demonstration Events Content	Student-Fee Activism News Articles and Demonstration Events Content	UK 2015 Voter Registration Information Content	Number of Regularly Used SNSs	Off-Line Participation	Online Participation	*n*
Low political socialization	0.70 (.79)	0.25 (.59)	1.0 (0.90)	0.30 (.65)	3.3 (1.1)	0.16 (.40)	1.0 (1.1)	78
Average political socialization	0.98 (.97)	0.43 (.71)	0.90 (0.92)	0.65 (.96)	3.6 (1.5)	0.43 (.84)	1.8 (1.4)	105
High political socialization	1.1 (.98)	50 (.77)	1.0 (1.0)	0.89 (.84)	3.8 (1.5)	0.87 (1.2)	2.1 (1.6)	86
F value, sig.	4.78, $p = .009$	2.62, $p = .074$	0.677, $p = .509$	9.94, $p = .000$	2.59, $p = .076$	13.1, $p = .000$	12.6, $p = .000$	
Far left	1.0 (.97)	0.39 (.77)	1.1 (1.0)	0.62 (.84)	3.3 (1.5)	0.60 (1.0)	2.2 (1.7)	69
Left moderate	0.94 (.96)	0.48 (.73)	1.1 (0.93)	0.67 (.91)	3.9 (1.2)	0.46 (.75)	1.8 (1.4)	76
Right moderate	0.89 (.97)	0.35 (.62)	0.68 (0.80)	0.54 (.87)	3.5 (1.3)	0.27 (.66)	1.3 (1.2)	74
Far right	0.94 (.81)	0.38 (.69)	0.88 (0.93)	0.72 (.85)	3.6 (1.6)	0.74 (1.2)	1.5 (1.3)	50
F values, significance	0.318, $p = .813$	0.505, $p = .679$	4.66, $p = .003$	0.490, $p = .690$	2.05, $p = .107$	3.02, $p = .030$	5.04, $p = .002$	

Note. Standard deviations are in parenthesis. Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Bonferroni. Online participation means have been weighted to make them comparable to the off-line participation means.

cohorts did engage in proportionately more online practices relative to their off-line practices than their counterparts. For example, the ratio of average enacted online to off-line practices was 4.5:1 for females, which is considerably greater than the ratio of 2.9:1 for males. These differences were even more pronounced for the low political socialization cohort who yielded a ratio of 6.2:1 compared to the ratio of 2.4:1 for the high political socialization cohort, and for the right-moderate cohort who yielded a ratio of 4.8:1 compared to the ratio of 2.0:1 for the far-right cohort. Therefore, when looked at in tandem, the findings from the regression models and the cluster analyses suggest that social media played an appreciable role in mobilizing typically disengaged respondents into at least online participation.

Discussion

Overall, the results above indicate that frequent exposure to SNSs and attention to SNS political content are positively but weakly associated with off-line formal and activist participation and more strongly associated with online slacktivism. Moreover, while prior political engagement was only partly controlled for, the findings indicate that online participation likely follows and complements prior off-line participation for the most typically engaged respondents and is the dominant and potentially only mode of participation for the most typically disengaged respondents. These findings, therefore, most closely corroborate those from the second empirical faction. In particular, they help support Vissers and Stolle's (2014) argument that social media are potentially mobilizing otherwise disaffected youth into online participation and simultaneously reinforcing the participation of those with high political interest and/or social advantages.

Furthermore, as stated earlier, attention to digital political information is hypothesized to be the initial necessary condition for activating social media's politicizing function. Moreover, this condition is probabilistically most likely to be satisfied via frequent exposure to social media. However, the respondents for this study represent youth who have to date had the most historical exposure to diverse SNSs and who regularly accessed several and functionally varying SNSs a week. Of these, the ones used by most respondents were YouTube (84%), Facebook (75%), Whatsapp (72%), and Instagram (60%), which strongly indicates that the large majority of respondents are regularly exposed to a high volume of digital content of varying textual-sensorial forms. Despite this, the findings indicate that those without sociostructural advantages, childhood and school-based political socialization and education, and/or a natural political disposition may simply ignore most of the political content that social media present to them or may not be exposed to much political content at all, as they or their SNSs can automatically filter out posts depending on their preferences. Therefore, the overall attentional and behavioral patterns captured by this study, also support Min's (2010) argument that the simple availability and access to web technologies, may not be enough to encourage the political use of said technologies, or that is not ones that go beyond the digital realm.

However, whether or not social media have realized their democratizing potential in the UK, or will do so given enough time, is of course still open for further research. Indeed, due to its cross-sectional design, this study is based on a limited snapshot of young people's social media consumption patterns and political practices and thus cannot offer firm conclusions on causal directions. Furthermore, while the sample used for the analysis featured a uniquely diverse demographic and psychographic profile, it was nonetheless small and composed entirely of undergraduates; the majority of which resided in London. Additionally, respondents were surveyed during two national political campaigns, which could have had an otherwise irregular amplifying effect on their political attitudes and participation. These factors could have positively biased the observed effect estimates. Further research utilizing representative and longitudinal panel samples is needed to test if the findings from this study are generalizable to the UK millennial populations. Furthermore, the simulated SNS newsfeeds were only partially simulated and restricted to Facebook and Twitter platform formats and a small sample of content items. Future research, utilizing more interactive

simulations under more controlled and experimental conditions, along with a wider range of SNS platform formats and types of political and nonpolitical content is required to flesh out the specific platform, device, and textual-sensorial mechanisms that mediate and/or moderate the effects of individual SNSs on political behaviors. These limitations notwithstanding, this study contributes to an emerging international literature demonstrating how utilizing more distinct and detailed measures of participation and digital consumption can help in gaining a better understanding of the complex relationship between social media use and youth democratic engagement.

Appendix

Table A1. Frequency of Political Practices and Social Networking Site (SNS) Use.

Off-line practices (engaged in during the last 12 months)	
Written a letter to your member of parliament	9.20%
Campaigned for a politician or political party by passing out pamphlets or door to door canvasing	6.30%
Attended a meeting hosted by an environmentalist, human rights, and/or other activist organization	18.10%
Helped to organize a political demonstration or event	5.90%
Attended a political protest or demonstration	10%
Online slacktivist practices (engaged in during the last 12 months)	
Purchased a product online where some of the proceeds go to support a political or social cause	38.70%
Signed an online petition about a political or social cause	48.70%
Clicked "like" on a political image or story on social media	47.20%
Used social media to spread information about a political party	21.80%
Used social media to spread information about a political event or demonstration	17.70%
Used social media to spread awareness of a political or social cause or issue	33.20%
SNSs used regularly and weekly	
Facebook	75.60%
Twitter	44.60%
Instagram	60.50%
YouTube	84.10%
Tumblr	12.50%
Flickr	3.70%
Pinterest	10.30%
Whatsapp	72.3%

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: The author received a small grant from the Middlesex University School of Law to fund this research.

References

Bakker, T. P., & de Vreese, C. H. (2011). Good news for the future? Young people, Internet use, and political participation. *Communication Research*, *38*, 451–470.

Baumgartner, J. C., & Morris, J. S. (2009). MyFaceTube politics: Social networking web sites and political engagement of young adults. *Social Science Computer Review*, *28*, 24–44.

Bessant, J., Farthing, R., & Watts, R. (2016). Co-designing a civics curriculum: Young people, democratic deficit and political renewal in the EU. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, *48*, 271–289.

Brandtzaeg, P. B. (2015). Facebook is no "Great equalizer." A big data approach to gender differences in civic engagement across countries. *Social Science Computer Review*, 1–23. doi:10.1177/0894439315605806

Carlisle, J. E., & Patton, R. C. (2013). Is social media changing how we understand political engagement? An analysis of Facebook and the 2008 presidential election. *Political Research Quarterly*, *66*, 883–895.

Castells, M. (2007). Communication, power and counter-power in the network society. *International Journal of Communication*, *1*, 238–266.

Christensen, H. S. (2012). Simply slacktivism? Internet participation in Finland. *eJournal of eDemocracy and Open Government*, *4*, 1–23.

Curtis, S. (2015). Twitter prompts UK users to register to vote in General Election. *The Telegraph*, 13 April. Retrieved from http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/twitter/11532113/Twitter-prompts-UK-users-to-register-to-vote-in-General-Election.html

de Zúñiga, H. G., Jung, N., & Valenzuela, S. (2012). Social media use for news and individuals' social capital, civic engagement and political participation. *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication*, *17*, 319–336.

de Zúñiga, H. G., Molyneux, L., & Zheng, P. (2014). Social media, political expression, and political participation: Panel analysis of lagged and concurrent relationships. *Journal of Communication*, *64*, 612–634.

Dimitrova, D. V., Shehata, A., Strömbäck, J., & Nord, L. W. (2014). The effects of digital media on political knowledge and participation in election campaigns: Evidence from panel data. *Communication Research*, *41*, 95–118.

Dylko, I. B. (2010). An examination of methodological and theoretical problems arising from the use of political participation indexes in political communication research. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, *22*, 523–534.

Ekström, M., & Östman, J. (2015). Information, interaction, and creative production: The effects of three forms of Internet use on youth democratic engagement. *Communication Research*, *42*, 796–818.

Enjolras, B., Steen-Johnsen, K., & Wollebæk, D. (2013). Social media and mobilization to offline demonstrations: Transcending participatory divides? *New Media & Society*, *15*, 890–908.

Federico, C. M., & Hunt, C. V. (2013). Political information, political involvement, and reliance on ideology in political evaluation. *Political Behavior*, *35*, 89–112.

di Gennaro, C., & Dutton, W. (2006). The Internet and the public: Online and offline political participation in the United Kingdom. *Parliamentary Affairs*, *59*, 299–313.

Hargittai, E., & Shaw, A. (2013). Digitally savvy citizenship: The role of internet skills and engagement in young adults' political participation around the 2008 presidential election. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, *57*, 115–134.

Holt, K., Shehata, A., Strömbäck, J., & Ljungberg, E. (2013). Age and the effects of news media attention and social media use on political interest and participation: Do social media function as leveller? *European Journal of Communication*, *28*, 19–34.

Johnson, T. J., Zhang, W., & Bichard, S. L. (2011). Voices of convergence or conflict? A path analysis investigation of selective exposure to political websites. *Social Science Computer Review*, *29*, 449–469.

Kahne, J., Lee, N. J., & Feezell, J. T. (2013). The civic and political significance of online participatory cultures among youth transitioning to adulthood. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, *10*, 1–20.

Kemp, S. (2015). *Digital, Social and Mobile in 2015*. Report from We Are Social. Retrieved from http://wearesocial.sg/blog/2015/01/digital-social-mobile-2015/

Knobloch-Westerwick, S., Carpentier, F. D., Blumhoff, A., & Nickel, N. (2005). Selective exposure effects for positive and negative news: Testing the robustness of the informational utility model. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *82*, 181–195.

Knobloch-Westerwick, S., & Kleinman, S. B. (2012). Preselection selective exposure confirmation bias versus informational utility. *Communication Research*, *39*, 170–193.

Kobayashi, T., & Ikeda, K. I. (2009). Selective exposure in political web browsing: Empirical verification of 'cyber-balkanization' in Japan and the USA. *Information, Communication & Society*, *12*, 929–953.

Kushin, M. J., & Yamamoto, M. (2010). Did social media really matter? College students' use of online media and political decision making in the 2008 election. *Mass Communication and Society*, *13*, 608–630.

Lee, Y. H., & Hsieh, G. (2013, April). Does slacktivism hurt activism? The effects of moral balancing and consistency in online activism. In CHI conference on human factors in computing systems CHI '13, Paris, 27 April–2 May 2013. ACM, New York, NY, USA ©2013.

Lee, N. J., Shah, D. V., & McLeod, J. M. (2013). Processes of political socialization a communication mediation approach to youth civic engagement. *Communication Research*, *40*, 669–697.

Min, S. J. (2010). From the digital divide to the democratic divide: Internet skills, political interest, and the second-level digital divide in political internet use. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, *7*, 22–35.

Morris, D. S., & Morris, J. S. (2013). Digital inequality and participation in the political process real or imagined? *Social Science Computer Review*, *31*, 589–600.

Neundorf, A., Smets, K., & García-Albacete, G. M. (2013). Homemade citizens: The development of political interest during adolescence and young adulthood. *Acta Politica*, *48*, 92–116.

Schlozman, K. L., Verba, S., & Brady, H. E. (2010). Weapon of the strong? Participatory inequality and the Internet. *Perspectives on Politics*, *8*, 487–509.

Sears, D. O., & Funk, C. L. (1999). Evidence of the long-term persistence of adults' political predispositions. *The Journal of Politics*, *61*, 1–28.

Sidanius, J. (1984). Political interest, political information search, and ideological homogeneity as a function of sociopolitical ideology: A tale of three theories. *Human Relations*, *37*, 811–828.

Smith, L. C., & Thompson, S. (2015). Tuning out or tuned out? A critical discourse analysis of youth political participation in Britain. *Journal of Promotional Communications*, *3*, 295–301.

Strandberg, K. (2013). A social media revolution or just a case of history repeating itself? The use of social media in the 2011 Finnish parliamentary elections. *New Media & Society*, *15*, 1329–1347.

Ternès, A., Mittelstadt, A., & Towers, I. (2014). Using Facebook for political action? Social networking sites and political participation of young adults. *Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review*, *5*, 1–16.

Theocharis, Y., & Quintelier, E. (2016). Stimulating citizenship or expanding entertainment? The effect of Facebook on adolescent participation. *New Media & Society*, *18*, 817–836.

Towner, T. L. (2013). All political participation is socially networked? New media and the 2012 Election. *Social Science Computer Review*, *31*, 527–541.

Van Laer, J. (2010). Activists online and offline: The internet as an information channel for protest demonstrations. *Mobilization: An International Quarterly*, *15*, 347–366.

Vissers, S., & Stolle, D. (2014). The Internet and new modes of political participation: Online versus offline participation. *Information, Communication & Society*, *17*, 937–955.

Vitak, J., Zube, P., Smock, A., Carr, C. T., Ellison, N., & Lampe, C. (2011). It's complicated: Facebook users' political participation in the 2008 election. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, *14*, 107–114.

Xenos, M., Vromen, A., & Loader, B. D. (2014). The great equalizer? Patterns of social media use and youth political engagement in three advanced democracies. *Information, Communication & Society*, *17*, 151–157.

Zhang, W., Johnson, T. J., Seltzer, T., & Bichard, S. L. (2010). The revolution will be networked: The influence of social networking sites on political attitudes and behavior. *Social Science Computer Review*, *28*, 75–92.

Zhang, W., Seltzer, T., & Bichard, S. L. (2013). Two sides of the coin assessing the influence of social network site use during the 2012 US presidential campaign. *Social Science Computer Review*, *31*, 542–551.

Author Biography

Rodolfo Leyva is a lecturer of Criminology and Sociology at Middlesex University, London, UK. He can be reached at r.leyva@mdx.ac.uk.