

# Exploring YouTube, Civic Engagement and Perceptions About the Role of the Internet in Civic Engagement Among College Students

Matthew J. Kushin  
Washington State University  
mkushin@wsu.edu

This study examines self-reports of college students' perceived civic engagement and use of YouTube.com for socio-political reasons. For communication scholars, civic engagement is concerned with the relationship between communication and community life (Shah, McLeod, & Yoon, 2001). In recent years, several studies (e.g., Shat et al., 2005; Shah, McLeod et al., 2001; Moy et al., 2005) have shown that certain internet activities are positively related to civic engagement. Drawing on this research, the present study investigated both consumption and creation of socio-political YouTube content:

RQ1: How is consumption of YouTube media for socio-political reasons associated with civic engagement?

RQ2: How is creation of YouTube media for socio-political reasons associated with civic engagement?

RQ3: How is consumption of YouTube media for socio-political reasons associated with perceptions about the role of the internet in civic engagement?

RQ4: How is creation of YouTube media for socio-political reasons associated with perceptions about the role of the internet in civic engagement?

## Method

Because this study concerns young adults' uses of YouTube.com, students from undergraduate classes at a large Northwestern state university were recruited to participate in an online survey. The use of a convenience sample in this study was a limitation. Further, the demographics of the sample are unrepresentative of the college student population. Because of these limitations the results of this study cannot be generalized to the population of interest: college students in the United States.

YouTube media measures assessed (1) use of YouTube.com for political and social issues and (2) creation of socio-political YouTube media. Civic engagement was measured via self-reports of various civic activities developed from previous research. Perceptions of the role of the internet in civic engagement were also measured. As this study was exploratory, many of the measures used had to be built. The validity of these measures have not been previously tested. Despite these limitations, this study offers an important exploratory look into socio-political YouTube use. Cross-tabs were used to assess RQ1 and RQ2. Correlation was used to assess RQ3 and RQ4.

## Discussion of Results

Overall, two different profiles of socio-political YouTube use emerged. Consumers of YouTube socio-political media reported that they were no more civically engaged than non-consumers. However, those who created socio-political YouTube media reported being significantly more civically engaged than non-creators.

Further, this study shows a difference between self-report of these two uses of YouTube for socio-political purposes and opinions about the role of the internet in civic engagement. Consumption was overall positively related to the perception that the internet is a legitimate location for civic engagement. Unlike consumption, creation was not significantly related to holding the perception that the internet is a legitimate location for civic engagement. Creators were more involved in their community than non-creators and their higher level of engagement in the community corresponded to not feeling as strongly about the importance of engaging the internet community.

When considered together, findings from this study indicate those who partake in the more passive consumption behavior may envisage themselves as civically engaged in part due to their online engagement in a Web 2.0 participatory network. However, their seeking out of socio-political content online does not spill over into action as they do not hold the perception that it is necessary that they go beyond their internet activities and take community action.

## References

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