Click Activism: Youth Civic Engagement Through Online Participatory Cultures

CYFERnet Webinar

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Background –
Youth & Participatory Politics Network
Participatory Politics - Definition

“Interactive, peer-based acts through which individuals and groups seek to exert both voice and influence on issues of public concern. Importantly, these acts are not guided by deference to elites or formal institutions”

Participatory politics acts can
- Mobilize networks
- Help shape agendas
- Enable participants to exert greater agency through circulation or production of content
Survey –
New Media and Youth Political Action

Survey of 3,000 respondents aged 15-25

Key findings:
✓ Youth are very involved in friendship-driven and interest-driven activities online (chat, share information)
✓ About one in six engage in active self-expression, e.g. organizing an online group, starting a website, producing and sharing original media
✓ 41% have engaged in at least one act of participatory politics
✓ Interest-driven activities encourage participatory politics through the development of “digital social capital”
Our sub-project – Media, Activism & Participatory Politics

Participatory Culture Civics (PCC) - How may participatory cultures encourage civic engagement?

Groups, organizations and networks which:
✓ Build on participatory culture
✓ Have a civic goal - broadly defined
✓ Are sustained
✓ Use new media and popular culture
✓ Speak with a youth voice
What is a participatory culture?
Example: YouTubers

Participatory culture is one characterized by
1. Relatively low barriers to expression and civic engagement
2. Strong support for creating and sharing
3. Some type of informal mentorship
4. Members believe their contributions matter
5. Members feel a social connection with one another

The outcome: A powerful model for informal learning
The civic learning model: Learning through practice

Many established civic organizations - apprenticeship model (similar to youth-adult partnership in 4H?)

PCC organizations – participatory model

✓ Young people are shaping their modes of engagement
✓ Learning happens not only vertically, from expert to novice, but horizontally, from peer to peer
✓ “Learning through mentorship” (scaffolded by the organization) as well as “learning through doing”

Example: The Harry Potter Alliance
Building on shared passions and a sense of community

Nerdfighters: “nerds who fight to decrease world suck”

✓ Shared sense of identity – “nerd pride”
✓ Shared content world – Vlogbrothers’ videos
✓ Shared interests – TV shows, YouTube channels
✓ Shared practices – Vlogging on YouTube
Use of new media

- Use of a range of tools and platforms
- Requires mastery and flexibility
- Knowing what each platform is best for
- Allowing discussion, participation and feedback
- Connect the national and the local
Creative Production

The challenges of centralized vs. participatory production
Range of participation

✓ Wide range of participation levels accepted
✓ “Legitimate peripheral participation” as baby steps toward potential wider involvement (vs. “slacktivism”)
✓ Lowering the threshold, make participation less daunting
✓ But wider trajectory needs to be scaffolded
Implications

PCC organizations don’t replace established models, but what can we learn from them?

✓ Powerfully resonating with young people
✓ Speak with a youth voice
✓ Willing to “share” control
✓ Innovative use of affordances of new media
✓ Building on “where young people are”
Questions to audience

• How is this similar / different from the models you are working with?
• How may this be translatable to your work?
• What are some of the challenges in adopting parts of this model when working in an established organization?
Thank you!

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