

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

**Communicating Civic Engagement:  
Contrasting Models of Citizenship  
in the Youth Web Sphere**

W. Lance Bennett, Chris Wells, &amp; Deen Freelon

Center for Communication & Civic Engagement, Department of Communication, University of Washington,  
Seattle, Washington 98195, USA

*Communication aimed at promoting civic engagement may become problematic when citizen roles undergo historic changes. In the current era, younger generations are embracing more expressive styles of actualizing citizenship defined around peer content sharing and social media, in contrast to earlier models of dutiful citizenship based on one-way communication managed by authorities. An analysis of 90 youth Web sites operated by diverse civic and political organizations in the United States reveals uneven conceptions of citizenship and related civic skills, suggesting that many established organization are out of step with changing civic styles.*

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Two narratives have dominated scholarly debate about the role of communication in youth political participation. One story flows from Putnam's (2000) argument that the rise of a passive television culture and declining group memberships has created a "generational displacement" from politics and public life that is unlikely to be ameliorated by new forms of online civic action. Another narrative depicts young people as "digital natives" at the forefront of participatory media that may promote new forms of engagement in public life (e.g., Jenkins, 2006; Palfrey & Gasser, 2008). Both narratives have been challenged: the first by the mobilization of young and first-time voters in Obama's 2008 campaign, the second by research questioning young people's technical proficiency (Bennett et al., 2008; Hargittai & Walejko, 2008). Yet both views of young citizens continue to gather support. The civic deficit story is buttressed with declining news consumption and political knowledge levels among younger demographics (Pew, 2007a,b; Wattenberg, 2006). At the same time, open source tools and social networking platforms create new opportunities for youth to form networks and take action to address many issues directly (Benkler, 2006;

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Corresponding author: W. Lance Bennett; e-mail: lbennett@u.washington.edu

Coleman, 2007, 2008). Rather than trying to resolve these competing narratives as though they are competing for a single reality of citizenship, we propose that both are partly right in the sense that each describes different parts of a changing citizenship picture: The former accounting for the fragmentation of an old civic order, and the latter bringing emerging civic styles into focus.

Various scholars have described historic changes in citizenship, along with ways in which related communication regimes affect civic engagement (e.g., Bennett, 1998; Schudson, 1998). The difficulty of interpreting inchoate civic forms may account for the current paradigm controversies over what counts as “civic” and “engagement,” particularly in the proliferation of online environments that appeal to youth. For example, an online discussion among leading scholars produced disagreement over whether participants in Harry Potter fan sites or World of Warcraft games were learning important civic skills (MacArthur Online Discussions, 2006). Before we can sort out the civic properties of popular online media, it may help to establish a baseline range of the conceptions of citizenship and civic engagement found in online environments more explicitly dedicated to civic engagement. These online civic environments include: political campaign and government sites, youth branches of interest organizations (e.g., National Rifle Association, Sierra Club), community youth organizations (e.g., Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCA), and civic engagement organizations that exist only in online form (e.g., YouthNoise, TakingITGlobal).

With a few notable exceptions (e.g., Coleman, 2007, 2008), earlier work examining youth engagement online has generally failed to account for different conceptions of citizenship that may be communicated by different kinds of organizations. The result is that many studies have noted communication deficits in these environments (e.g., the limited uses of Web 2.0 features), but few have offered theoretical explanations for the unevenness of online communication with young citizens. Following a review of these studies, we propose a theoretical framework to map the youth civic Web in terms of the contrasting definitions of citizenship being communicated through opportunities to learn different civic skills. This framework is then applied to a sample of 90 U.S. youth civic sites to assess differences in how citizenship is constructed by opportunities to learn different civic skills.

### **Images of online youth engagement**

The vast majority of American youth are online (Lenhart, Hitlin, & Madden, 2005, 2006). Although much of their involvement is entertainment-oriented, half the nation’s 18- to 29-year-olds also sought political information in early stages of the 2008 campaign (Smith & Rainie, 2008). These younger citizens were significantly more likely than their elders to watch political video clips online, use social networking sites such as Myspace and Facebook for political purposes, and express opinions in online forums (Hargittai & Hinnant, 2008; Smith & Rainie, 2008).

Although younger demographics clearly experience some forms of online engagement, the activities they engage in may not reflect earlier citizen communication

habits (Madden 2006). For example, there are clear differences in the way different generations engage with political information online. Although most young people encounter some news online, most of them (65%) come across it casually or accidentally in the midst of other pursuits. In contrast, a majority of Internet users over 30 years of age (55%) actively seek out their news (Patterson, 2007). Moreover, the portion of people going without any news (from any source) is largest and rising most rapidly among the 18 to 24 age group (Pew, 2007b). Do these trends render young citizens out of touch politically? The conventional answer may be yes. But other views of information sourcing and sharing suggest that there are other ways to be connected politically (Jenkins, 2006; Pew, 2007a).

These shifting foundations of communication create problems for interpreting existing research. For example, we know that young people who actively seek out information online generally report higher levels of offline civic engagement (Pasek, Kenski, Romer, & Jamieson, 2006; Shah, Cho, Eveland, & Kwak, 2005; Xenos & Moy, 2007). However, these findings may only be telling us that young people who display online citizenship orientations like their parents also behave offline like their parents. At the same time, such young people appear to be dwindling in number. What is missing here is a theoretical framework for observing and interpreting emerging forms of engagement that may not be captured by studies based on earlier conceptions of citizenship.

Research on the youth civic Web remains largely descriptive. An emerging consensus has it that the lack of many Web 2.0 features diminishes the appeal of most formal civic engagement sites (Coleman 2007, 2008; European Commission, 2007; Montgomery, Gottleib-Robles, & Larson, 2004). An analysis of 73 U.S. youth civic sites found generally low levels of interactive features and active pedagogical styles, that is, efforts to convey civic skills (Bachen, Raphael, Lynn, McKee, & Philippi, 2008). A largely descriptive study of youth engagement sites in seven European nations showed that technology lags were common, even in the more developed democracies (European Commission, 2007). Other studies in the United States have found that online youth sites tend to offer little hyperlinking to other sites, few opportunities for interactivity, and that candidate sites (before Dean and Obama) offered few communication appeals to young voters (Bennett & Xenos, 2004, 2005; Xenos & Bennett, 2007; Xenos & Foot, 2008).

Such findings may help explain some of the participation gap between social networking sites and civic sites. At the time of this writing, Facebook had 25 million users between the ages of 13 and 25 in the United States, making them the largest demographic bracket among the roughly 95 million American users (InsideFacebook.com, 2009). Even the most popular youth engagement sites pale by comparison: Idealist.org attracts 400,000 monthly visitors (compete.com), and YouthNoise (personal communication) and TakingITGlobal (Raynes-Goldie & Walker, 2008) have memberships in the range of 100,000–150,000. What is lacking is a theoretical explanation of why so many civic organizations develop online communication environments

that limit the uses of popular digital technologies. Looking within this population of youth sites, it also becomes important to identify and compare communication environments that may be grounded in fundamentally different conceptions of citizenship.

An interesting theoretical clue about why youth sites so often lack expressive technology affordances is offered by Coleman (2008), who analyzed the degrees of communication freedom offered to young users in a collection of sites in the United Kingdom. He found a division between activist (largely youth-built) sites, which gave young users *autonomy* in their actions, and institutional or governmental sites, which heavily *managed* the experiences of their users. In Coleman's reading, these differences did not reflect superficial design choices, but philosophical differences about whether young citizens are fully formed, or "citizens in training" in need of structured democratic education (Coleman, 2008). We expand on this distinction, and on the promising idea of civic pedagogies offered by Bachen and colleagues with a more formal classification of different civic learning environments based on a typology of the different conceptions of citizenship that characterize (and often limit) the communication design of many sites.

### **Rethinking citizenship and engagement in the online generation**

Without a more systematic model of how different conceptions of citizenship and engagement become coded into civic communication technologies, it will remain difficult to make rigorous comparisons and interpret differences across the spectrum of online communities. The model developed in this section returns to our opening concern that there are different practical paradigms of citizenship in play, not just in the scholarly literature, but in the changing repertoires of civic practices in play in most postindustrial democratic societies. These civic paradigms, although not mutually exclusive, are often poorly integrated in schools, organizations, and online environments, and they have not been operationalized in research.

The longest-running citizenship paradigm in the United States (with variants in many other democracies) may be termed a model of *dutiful citizenship* (DC) that dates from the progressive era of the last century (Schudson, 1998). The core characteristic of the DC style is that individuals participate in civic life through organized groups, from civic clubs to political parties, while becoming informed via the news, and generally engaging in public life out of a sense of personal duty. These defining characteristics of DC civic engagement are notably in decline among younger generations in the United States (Putnam, 2000) and elsewhere (Inglehart, 1997). As these civic styles begin to fade, other researches have identified new civic orientations emerging among the same younger demographic in many nations. These civic trends include the rise of more personally expressive cause-oriented politics based on lifestyle concerns such as consumer behaviors, and the emergence of direct action protest networks in a variety of local to global arenas (Bennett, 1998;

Inglehart, 1997; Norris, 2002, 2003; Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, & Jenkins, 2006). The social origins of these changes have been attributed to social fragmentation and the restructuring of society, economy, and personal life related to globalization (Bennett, 1998; Giddens, 1991).

The generational scope of these changes is truly impressive. Norris (2003) has charted parallel trends in 15 nations involving generational declines in what she terms citizen-oriented activism (primarily related to voting and elections) and rises in cause-oriented activism. However, we are not convinced that it makes sense to juxtapose the rise of personal causes with citizenship itself, as Norris does; cause activism strikes us as a perfectly valid, if different, citizen action style. Nor do we wish to contrast the idea of DC with “engaged citizenship” as Dalton (2009) does, as the practices of dutiful citizens seem to be “engaged” to us, even if expressed in different ways. We suggest a broader conceptual shift toward thinking about declines in the older model of DC, and the rise of another style that Bennett (2007, 2008) has termed *actualizing citizenship* (AC). This citizenship typology enables us to think about a generational shift away from taking cues as members of groups or out of regard for public authorities (opinion leaders, public officials, and journalists), and toward looser personal engagement with peer networks that pool (crowd source) information and organize civic action using social technologies that maximize individual expression. This scheme points to the growing importance of participatory media (Jenkins, 2006; Pew, 2007a) in the rise of a new civic paradigm as shown in Table 1.

The two citizenship models defined in Table 1 are ideal types based on characteristic skills required of citizens, such as how to recognize, filter, and use different kinds of political information; appropriate forms of public expression; modes of affiliations with others in groups or networks; and characteristic forms of participation. We can use this framework to examine the mix of different civic skills being communicated in different settings from schools to Web sites, and locate and compare various civic environments along the AC–DC continuum. Thus, we propose thinking about Web environments as sites for learning various models of citizenship, and we can use formal measures of civic learning to categorize and compare the conceptions of citizenship being communicated in different sectors of the youth civic Web sphere. A starting point for thinking about the civic skill sets that define different paradigms of citizenship is to look at the schools as places where the most formal citizenship training takes place.

### **Civic skills and styles of citizenship**

At first glance, the diversity of school environments seems to offer few civic learning goals to which all educators subscribe (Flanagan & Faison, 2001; Niemi & Junn, 1998). Indeed, an earlier review of the civic education literature revealed dozens of different desirable outcomes of civic learning (Bennett, Wells, & Rank, 2009). However, these many civic learning goals can be synthesized into a more compact set of learning categories that seem to define essential citizen skill sets. Our earlier analysis suggested that

**Table 1** Dutiful and Actualizing Styles of Civic Action and Communication

|             | Civic Style   | Communication Logic  |
|-------------|---|--|
| Dutiful     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oriented around citizen input to government or formal public organizations, institutions, and campaigns</li> <li>• Rooted in responsibility and duty</li> <li>• Channeled through membership in defined social groups</li> </ul>                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primarily one-way consumption of managed civic information (news and political ads)</li> <li>• When individual content production occurs, it is aimed at specific institutional targets (contacting elected officials, letters to newspapers)</li> </ul>                                    |
| Actualizing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open to many forms of creative civic input, ranging from government to consumer politics to global activism</li> <li>• Rooted in self actualization through social expression</li> <li>• Personal interests channeled through loosely tied networks</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lines between content consumption and production blurred</li> <li>• Individual content production and sharing over peer networks that tie personal identity to engagement (which can occur in traditional political contexts such as viral video sharing in political campaigns)</li> </ul> |

school civics curricula are still communicating models of DC (Bennett, 2008; Bennett, Wells, & Rank, 2009; see also Campbell, 2005, 2007; Langton & Jennings, 1968; McDivett *et al.*, 2003; McIntosh *et al.*, 2007; Metz & Youniss, 2005). However, the basic categories seemed general enough to allow adding other practices that are more consistent with AC engagement styles (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008; Kahne & Westheimer, 2006). The following overview explains how we produced this elaborated model of citizenship practices that can be used to observe various mixtures of AC and DC civic practices being communicated in settings from classrooms to online environments.

Two helpful resources for reducing the voluminous literature on civic learning goals and outcomes are the Civic Mission of Schools report, released by CIRCLE and the Carnegie Corporation in 2003 (Gibson & Levine, 2003), and the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools (CCMS), an ongoing effort to implement the report's recommendations (CCMS, 2008). The scholars and practitioners who worked on the report compiled and agreed upon a set of 40 "civic competencies" necessary for effective citizenship. Putting aside civic dispositions such as trust, and critical analysis skills, which cannot be easily assessed on civic Web sites, these competencies are sort into four key categories:

- 1 The *Knowledge* necessary to be an effective citizen.
- 2 The *Expression* skills needed to communicate effectively.

- 3 The skills needed for *Joining Publics* (groups or networks) that can emerge, coordinate, and organize around an issue or candidate.
- 4 The skills needed to *Take Action* to address a specific issue or policy.

Each of these skill categories contains various competencies thought important for the good citizen. As defined in most school curricula, it is clear that these skills skew heavily toward the DC citizenship model, which may be one reason that civic education often produces less than desirable results (Syvertsen, Flanagin, & Stout, 2007). Starting with the basic DC skills set, we can add AC skills to expand the repertoire of appropriate citizen engagement. *Knowledge* in most conventional (DC) thinking is variously defined to encompass: information about history, the Constitution, the founding fathers, wars, and other events (CIRCLE, 2006; Niemi & Chapman, 1998); understanding how government and democracy work (CIRCLE, 2006; Gibson, 2001); and identifying specific officeholders (McDevitt & Kioussis, 2004; Syvertsen *et al.*, 2007), candidates, and positions on specific issues (Pasek, Feldman, Romer, & Jamieson, 2008). *Expression* typically includes discursive, cooperation, negotiation, and persuasion skills (Feldman, Pasek, Romer, & Jamieson, 2007; Gibson, 2001; Levine, 2008; McDevitt & Kioussis, 2004; Syvertsen *et al.*, 2007); and communication tools (such as writing letters) that citizens may need to express themselves in public contexts (e.g., Student Voices, 2008). Knowing how to be *effective group members* includes organizing political events, running meetings, and finding consensus within groups (CCMS, 2008); leadership skills (Gibson, 2001; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004); experience with community groups (Andolina, Jenkins, Zukin, & Keeter, 2003); and understanding what groups do (CCMS, 2008; Torney-Purta, 2002). *Taking civic action* is a culminating point for engagement (e.g., Zukin *et al.*, 2006) that typically includes: voting (e.g., Pasek *et al.*, 2008) or developing positive intentions to vote (Hooghe, Kavadias, & Reeskens, 2006); understanding how to affiliate and support a political party or social movement (Torney-Purta, 2002); fundraising, campaigning, or intending to run to office (Torney-Purta, Lehman, Oswald, & Schulz 2001). Some attention is also paid to consumer actions (CCMS, 2008) and controversial activities such as protests or political graffiti (Torney-Purta *et al.*, 2001).

To create a more encompassing civic learning typology, we next added to each learning category a number of skills better suited to actualizing citizens (see Bennett, Wells, & Rank 2009 for a more detailed explanation of this). For example, we augmented the *knowledge* category beyond conventional notions of one-way authoritative transmission of information from sources such as the press, teachers, or other authorities, by adding the importance of opportunities for peer-to-peer knowledge sharing of the sort developed by Wikipedia. In this fashion, we expanded each category of civic skills to include more AC skills, resulting in the framework in Table 2. Each learning category can now be thought of as a continuum that runs from AC skills to DC skills, which may be observed in various combinations in different learning and engagement environments. The idea is not that any individual

**Table 2** Dutiful (DC) and Actualizing (AC) Forms of Four Categories of Civic Learning

|                   | Knowledge  |   | Expression  |   | Join Publics  |   | Take Action                                    |   |
|-------------------|--|---|---|---|---|---|--|---|
| <b>Definition</b> | Information that citizens should know                                  | Information created and shared by peers | Training in effective public communication skills   | Training for self-produced and distributed digital media (e.g., blogs, election videos, culture jams) | Learning how to connect to others through networks and groups | Membership in traditional, hierarchical organizations | Membership in peer-defined networks and groups | Actions that engage citizens with specific public issues or campaigns |
|                   | DC   | AC                                      | DC  | AC  | DC  | DC  | AC   | AC  |
| <b>Definition</b> | Information provided by authorities (e.g., teachers, officials, press) | Information created and shared by peers | Training for traditional forms of public address to institutions & authorities (e.g., letters to newspapers, petitions to public officials) | Training for self-produced and distributed digital media (e.g., blogs, election videos, culture jams) | Membership in traditional, hierarchical organizations         | Membership in peer-defined networks and groups        | Membership in peer-defined networks and groups | Activities generated and endorsed by peers                            |

*Note:* AC = actualizing citizenship; DC = dutiful citizenship.



citizen falls neatly into one type or another, but that the two civic styles may combine into a broader repertoire of choices. For many older citizens, the civic repertoire may be weighted with more DC skills, and younger citizens may draw upon more AC styles. This framework yields the operational measures described in the next section to assess the citizenship styles being communicated in different online civic youth environments.

### **Research design: Civic skills and the communication of citizenship in the youth civic Web**

As explained earlier, establishing a baseline for measuring how different styles of citizenship are communicated in online settings is simplified somewhat by starting with sites that are explicitly dedicated to civic engagement. However, this is by no means a homogeneous collection of Web environments. In order to see if our models of citizenship are distributed differently across different kinds of organizations, we cast a wide net (as described below) to include four general categories of sites that offer youth civic skills and engagement experiences: (a) *traditional interest groups* such as the Sierra Club that offer some forms of online engagement to youth, (b) brick-and-mortar *community youth organizations* such as the YMCA that have online presences, (c) *government agencies and political campaigns* that have some Web presence with youth messaging, ranging from the Peace Corps to BarackObama.com, and (d) *online-only youth civic communities* that have little or no offline presence, such as Do Something and Taking IT Global. All these sites include some variant of youth civic engagement in their mission statements, but most present few details about precisely what is meant by “civic,” “citizenship,” or “engagement.” The general research question here is: How are the varieties of citizenship and related indicators of civic skills learning communicated and distributed over different types of sites in the youth civic Web?

### **Hypotheses**

Drawing on the work of Bennett, Coleman, Jenkins, and others discussed above, and with particular reference to the work on organizations and social technology of Bimber, Flanagin, and Stohl (2005), we expect that more traditional organizations will signal primarily to dutiful citizens through relatively limited offerings of interactive affordances for sharing knowledge, expressing views, creating groups or networks, or proposing action. In contrast, “online-only” organizations may promote more AC-style civic engagement, largely because they have fewer historical organizational identity and mission constraints in defining relations to their publics, and thus more freedom to deploy technologies that enable emerging AC styles of citizenship and action. We also expect that some learning is occurring among these organizations, even though they may have imperfect knowledge of how citizenship is changing for different groups. It seems likely that more flexible organizations such as election campaigns that seek to attract younger citizens may communicate a mix of AC and

DC engagement opportunities, as contrasted, for example, with community youth organizations whose identity and funding often depend on continuing their historic missions of individual leadership and community service. These propositions can be formulated as general hypotheses:

**H1:** Youth engagement organizations that exist primarily or only in online forms will display a disproportionate share of the actualizing AC learning opportunities in the youth civic Web sphere.

**H2:** Conversely, organizations that exist primarily in conventional offline forms of membership-based, hierarchical organizations (such as traditional community youth organizations and interest groups with youth branches) should communicate opportunities to learn engagement skills via more dutiful DC forms of knowledge, expression, joining, and action.

**H3:** Relatively flexible organizations such as political campaigns may show signs of adapting to changing civic environments by offering more AC engagement opportunities than conventional interest or community organizations, but fewer than found in online-only civic environments.

More generally, and in line with the earlier research reviewed above, we anticipate relatively few cases of pure AC communication environments online due to the preponderance of communication about DC citizenship in society. Such communication emanates largely from older generations who write about citizenship, design civic education policy and standards, and fund and manage most online communities. Thus, we expect to find a mix of AC and DC civic skills even in most of the online-only sites in our sample.

## Methods

### The sample

We cast a wide net across the U.S. youth civic Web sphere (including international organizations with U.S. outreach), and then chose a selection of most-trafficked sites of different organization types. To assure identifying the broadest population of sites, and to establish continuity with other studies, we began with the sites found in earlier research. The list from Montgomery *et al.* (2004) resulted in 348 sites that passed an automated test of still being online (though many eventually proved to be inactive). From Bennett and Xenos (Bennett & Xenos, 2004, 2005; Xenos & Bennett, 2007) and Wells (2010) we drew an additional 70 sites. We then checked all the sites manually, eliminating 161 sites that were duplicates, or had not been active for a year or longer, or were no longer available. Next, to improve our sampling of major nonprofit organizations that do not often appear in studies of youth-only sites, we conducted Google searches using the names of the U.S.'s 100 biggest nonprofits (Clolery & Hrywna, 2006) paired with the search terms "youth," "student," "college," and "social networking." This yielded 22 additional sites. Finally, we conducted a search

to identify sites pertaining to contemporary issues, and political or religious ideologies not uncovered by the above methods. Those searches included 54 key terms<sup>1</sup> each combined with the youth-related search terms above. This yielded 88 further sites.

Our initial catalog of living Web sites totaled 367. This population was then screened by undergraduate assistants and checked by the authors for sites (or sections of sites) having a primary focus on youth civic engagement.<sup>2</sup> The 264 sites that met those criteria were then categorized by the authors according to their mission and the type of organization that created them. First, if a site was entirely online, without reference to offline activities, it was placed in an *Online-Only* category. Fifty-six sites fell in that category. A focus on a government organization, a candidate for office, or a political party, placed a site in a *Government/Candidate* category (28 sites). Organizations providing community or service involvement without explicit advocacy were placed in a *Community/Service* category (84 sites). Sites promoting advocacy for a cause or particular political interest group were placed in an *Interest/Activist* category (98 sites). For the most part, the clusters of sites were easy to sort out and fit well together. The one case where the members of a category displayed topical overlap involved Online-Only sites that displayed political, service, or activist agendas. However, our theoretical framework suggests that the distinction between conventional organizations and online-only organizations is critical for understanding underlying differences in conceptions of citizenship that affect the design of communication environments.

The four site clusters were then adjusted to make sure that we included organizations that (a) represented local levels of large multibranch national organizations, or (b) might have eluded the mechanical search terms, but that offered clear opportunities for youth engagement (e.g., election campaign organizations or interest groups such as Sierra Club that are not youth-specific, but that have youth outreach).<sup>3</sup>

Finally, we used <http://www.compete.com> to obtain rough estimates of comparative traffic levels on the sites, and constructed a preliminary list of the most-trafficked sites in each category.<sup>4</sup> Based on the size of the coding challenge, we cut off our sample at 90, with an oversample of 35 in the Online-Only category (in order to accommodate the great diversity of sites in this category), 15 in the Government/Candidate category (reflecting the smaller numbers and more limited youth focus in this category), and 20 each in the Community/Service and Interest/Activist categories.<sup>5</sup> The proportional differences in subsample sizes were controlled for in all data analysis and reporting.

## Coding

Coding was divided into two stages, each conducted by a different team of coders to avoid confounding the identification of whether a site page contained a civic learning opportunity (knowledge, expression, joining, and acting) with the civic style (actualizing or dutiful) that opportunity represented. The stages were a *page selection* process, in which one group of expert coders (including two of the authors) determined which pages contained general learning opportunities, and *dutiful/actualizing*

*coding*, in which a different set of (blind) coders determined whether *dutiful* and/or *actualizing* forms of each learning goal were present on the pages selected.

### **Page selection**

In the *page selection* process, three coders independently evaluated each site for the presence of any of the four learning goal categories. Navigating from the home page, the coders looked at each page linked from the main menu bars. The coders were thus limited to pages one link from the homepage, a choice that reduced the potential for randomness in searching differently designed Web sites, while capturing prominent features, and making the search through voluminous sites manageable. (Full code sheet available upon request.)

Coders were instructed to select up to three pages for each learning category found on a site, to ensure that different (AC, DC, or both) forms of a particular civic skill were captured. The percent agreement across three coders for the presence of a learning category was 84.4% for all four combined, broken down to 83.9% for Knowledge, 82.1% for Expression, 82.0% for Joining Publics, and 89.7% for Take Action. Agreement on particular pages containing those goals was also very high, with some fall off from the first to the third page, as might be expected.<sup>6</sup> The cases in which coders differed were resolved by consensus discussion to produce a common set of up to three pages per learning category. As Bachen et al. (2008) note, such pairwise percentage agreements are above the accepted level for this kind of analysis.

### **Dutiful and actualizing coding**

A different team of four coders was trained to code the selected pages to determine whether the learning opportunities they contained reflected more dutiful or actualizing civic styles. For *Knowledge* the page features that presented users with information from one-way, authoritative sources such as site sponsors, news stories, public officials, or other external sources were coded as DC Knowledge, and opportunities for peer knowledge sharing were coded as AC.<sup>7</sup> For *Expression* the pages offering communication training to produce content aimed at institutions or authorities, such as tips on how to write good letters or effectively telephone an elected official were coded DC; training in digital participatory media, such as how to create a podcast, design a video, or effectively communicate with a blog were coded AC. For *Joining Publics* the groups that were hierarchical, or created and defined by the site or an affiliated organization were coded DC; opportunities for users to define their own groups, or join groups or networks created by peers were coded AC. For *Take Action*, activities organized and managed by site sponsors or affiliated organizations and authorities were scored DC; peer generated actions suggested or reported upon by site users were scored AC.

### **Reliability**

After the four coders were trained, a random 16-site subsample was selected for a reliability test. The reliabilities (pairwise percent agreement for four coders) were

100% for DC Knowledge (every site offering information provided some sort of DC Knowledge); 78% for AC Knowledge; 92% for DC Expression; 81% for AC Expression; 84% for DC Joining Publics; 94% for AC Joining Publics; 98% for DC Take Action; and 91% for AC Take Action.<sup>8</sup> The overall reliability for all eight forms of learning was 91%. Once again, in line with the criteria proposed by Bachen et al. (2008), these exceed acceptable levels.

Figure 1 illustrates how the coding process was applied to one particular page. This page is from <http://dosomething.org>, a site from the Online-Only category, and was selected in the page selection process as presenting Take Action learning because the site chose to name it “Projects” and because it clearly presented actions for users to take. In dutiful/actualizing coding, the coder determined that an actualizing opportunity to Take Action was present, because users could see actions which peers had taken, and suggest their own actions. Similarly, the coder determined that no dutiful action forms were present, as no action opportunities originated from site



Figure 1 Coding process example. Example of AC Take Action code from the Online-Only organization DoSomething.org.

sponsors or external organizations or authorities. The page was coded as a Take Action learning opportunity, in an actualizing (AC) form.

**Results**

The sample of 90 sites produced a total of 255 civic learning opportunities, with 76% of those signaling the dutiful citizen style. As predicted, different types of organizations signal different models of citizenship, with the majority of actualizing learning opportunities (53%) occurring in the online-only site types, although those sites constituted only about one third of the total sample. Figure 2 illustrates these differences more clearly, showing that online-only youth sites have several notable qualities absent in sites produced by more conventional civic organizations: a greater balance of the four major categories of learning, a better mix of AC and DC learning opportunities, and by far the greatest opportunity to learn how to participate in peer-to-peer actualizing forms of knowledge sharing and public expression. Indeed, opportunities to learn any form of expression are scarce in conventional community, interest, and government organizations, which are aimed disproportionately at getting young people to engage with site-defined activities. In contrast, nearly 70% of the sites in the online-only group offer some expression training, and most of those provide either a mix of AC and DC expression skills or exclusively AC skills. It seems clear that conventional civic organizations overwhelmingly regard young people as subjects to be heavily guided, or as “citizens in training” who should be told what to do by authoritative figures (Coleman, 2008).

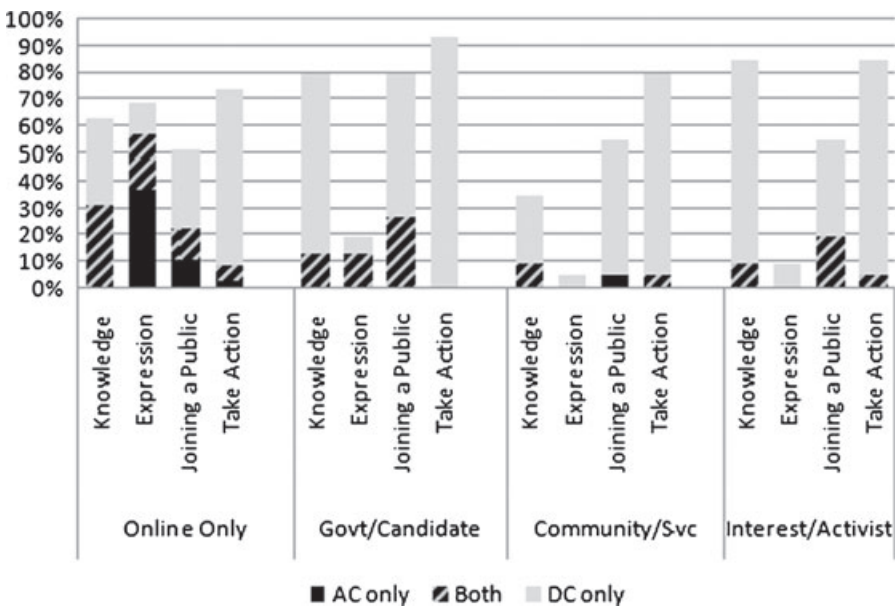
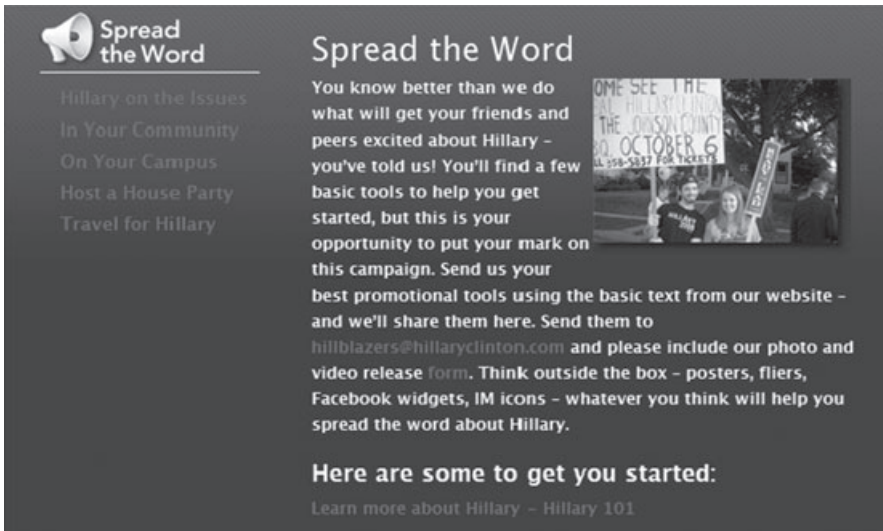


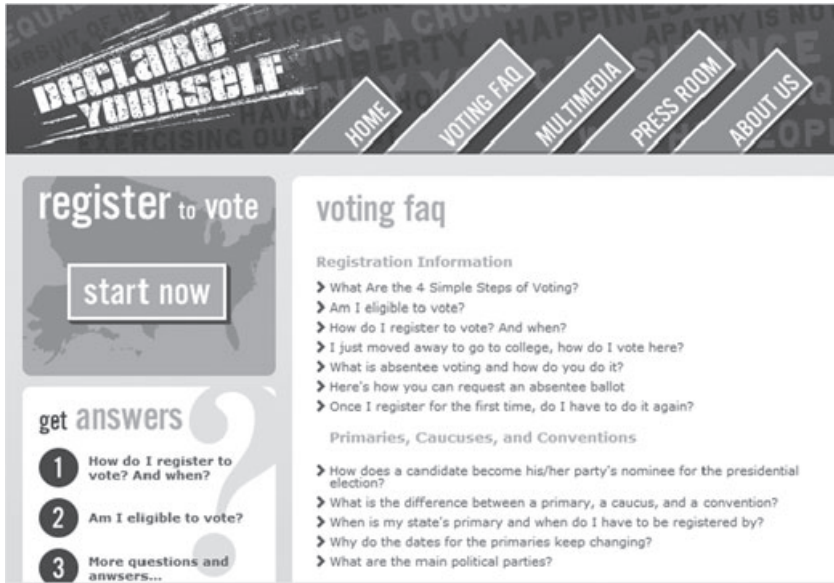
Figure 2 Distribution of learning opportunities.



**Figure 3** “Spread the Word” page from Hillblazers. Example of Both actualizing (AC) and dutiful citizenship (DC) engagement with Knowledge skills: opportunities to gather information about the candidate both provided by the site, and by users sharing their own knowledge of the candidate.

Also in keeping with our predictions, the government and campaign category offered slightly greater opportunities for actualizing civic skills learning, particularly when compared to community organizations, and, to some extent, compared to interest/activist groups. This was driven largely by Clinton and Obama campaign affordances for sharing knowledge, blogging, and forming personal support groups. Figure 3 displays a portion of a page on the Clinton youth site Hillblazers titled “Spread the Word.” This page was selected in the category of Knowledge learning in the page selection process, and then coded for both dutiful and actualizing opportunities. On the DC side, it offers a link to information about Clinton provided by the site (“Learning more about Hillary–Hillary 101”)—typical for campaigns wishing to manage knowledge acquisition about their candidate as human and inspiring, and signaling a dutiful campaign-supporter relationship. At the same time, the heart of the page encourages supporters to tell Clinton’s story in their own way (“You know better than we do what will get your friends and peers excited about Hillary. . . this is your opportunity to put your mark on this campaign”), a much more actualizing pattern. The signal sent is that learning might occur not only as a result of direct interaction with the information on the site, but also as a result of expression and sharing with peers.

A striking similarity across all four categories of organizations that we did not fully anticipate is the tendency to offer highly managed (DC) opportunities for taking action, even in online-only youth communities. When it comes to enabling young citizens to act, it seems that site operators are generally not inclined to empower young people to create and promote their own activities. Perhaps this reflects clear



**Figure 4** A core dutiful citizenship (DC) civic learning skill: registering to vote on [declareyourself.com](http://declareyourself.com).

action goals on the part of sponsoring organizations, but it may also reveal an implicit sense that young people are not capable of engineering their own effective action plans. The lack of advocacy training is a clear pattern across the sample. A typical site offering a core DC action skill is the voter registration page shown in Figure 4.

## Discussion

One obvious conclusion from the data is that, as predicted in H1, conventional community and interest/activist organizations overwhelmingly reproduce their offline DC models of citizenship and civic engagement in their online sites. In one sense, it is not surprising that organizations believe that their online presence should reproduce their existing organizational identity. However, as many observers have noted, conventional civic organizations face shrinking memberships precisely because younger generations are not inclined to enter into formal membership relations (Bimber *et al.*, 2005; Putnam, 2000). As predicted in H2, organizations that exist primarily as online communities have shed at least some conventional notions about proper (*i.e.*, DC) citizenship, enabling them to communicate different kinds of relationships to user communities by offering them a mix of AC and DC civic skill sets.

There are lessons here for both conventional organizations and for policymakers and funders looking for places to invest resources: The potential of online engagement to reach a broader population of younger citizens is barely being achieved because of rather rigid notions of who they are and how to communicate with them. Among



conventional hierarchical civic organizations, it seems that some election campaigns (consistent with the prediction in H3) have begun to realize that potential to adjust their models of citizen–organization interaction to enable more AC participation in knowledge and content sharing and social networking, but it remains to be seen whether the war room command and control model of campaigning will ultimately stop yielding ground to autonomous social networking for fear of losing control of messages and organization.

Another interesting implication of our findings about organizations defined by their conceptions of citizens is that while organizations that exist only or mostly online tend to offer the most balanced mix of knowledge and expression opportunities, they look much like other kinds of organizations when it comes to opportunities for joining publics and taking action. Moreover, joining and acting are so managed that they are often not even presented in terms of learning (just doing). Although some interest and activist groups do offer training kits on how to organize and act, such formal learning opportunities are rare. As a result, in order to include these key elements of civic engagement in our data, we had to lower the bar to adopt a “learning by doing” standard that included opportunities to join or act that were not accompanied by training in formal skills. This makes our findings generally consistent with the overall low levels of civic pedagogy reported by Bachen *et al.* (2008). At the same time, our finding that online-only sites differed systematically in their communication with AC citizens in two important learning categories (knowledge and expression) challenges the Bachen *et al.* (2008) finding that nonprofit sites offered richer and more interactive learning opportunities than either government or commercial sites. Our site typology shows that when sorted in specific terms of how organizations conceive of citizens, nonprofits are far from a uniform category. Conventional nonprofits (in the Community/Service and Interest/Activist site groups) offered the fewest actualizing (interactive learning) experiences.

This theory-driven framework offers a useful starting point for thinking about how to identify and understand different implicit organizational models of citizenship as they are communicated through civic learning and engagement features on Web sites. One clear implication is that site owners may not be aware of (or able to transcend) the gaps between the often narrow citizenship ideals coded in online civic environments and the broader range of participatory media and social networking opportunities that young people routinely encounter in other environments such as Facebook. More personally creative and expressive opportunities for civic engagement can be offered easily on the civic Web if organizations can adjust their apparent needs to manage relationships with their publics. Indeed, the next study in this research project shows that user activity levels on various site features such as blogs and forums are significantly higher on sites that offer more opportunities to learn AC learning civic skills. We hope that our framework for thinking about how citizenship is communicated to young people is useful both for scholars seeking to understand the wellsprings of civic learning and engagement online and for practitioners who seek to develop more effective environments for youth participation.

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## Notes

- 1 Key categories included political positions (e.g., “libertarian,” “socialist”), political issues (“gay rights,” “2nd amendment”), current issues of concern (“sustainability,” “Darfur,” “media literacy”), ethnicities (“African American,” “Latino”), and religions (“Christian,” “Muslim”).
- 2 Our process involved looking first on the homepage, then on an “About” page, for evidence that the site was for youth (e.g., references to “youth,” “students,” “kids,” and any age ranges under 30) and that it involved some form of public engagement (e.g. “getting involved,” “improving one’s community,” “speaking out,” “activism”).
- 3 First, to include the kinds of local, community sites that most youth would be likely to interact with, we replaced the sites of national-level organizations in the Community/Service category with the sites of local branches, selected based on searches using randomly generated zip codes. For the Girl Scouts we drew the site of a Madison, Wisconsin chapter; for the Boys and Girls Clubs we drew the site of Metropolitan Denver’s clubs; and for 4H we drew the site of 4H in North Carolina. Second, even though they are not focused primarily on youth, we added the 2008 political campaign sites of McCain, Obama, and Clinton to assess any differences in the way they communicated engagement to young voters. Finally, we added to the sample a number of major interest organizations that eluded our search for organizations that had an explicit focus on youth, but that offered youth sections on their Web sites. This included the ACLU, NRA, and Sierra Club.
- 4 The use of compete.com was simply a convenient way to roughly sort the sample. We do not claim that compete offers actual site traffic measures, but a rough indicator of comparative volumes that proved helpful in selecting sites without resorting to subjective criteria. For reference, for the 72 sites for which Compete data might be considered reasonably reliable, the sites averaged 21,547 monthly visits, with a high of almost 400,000 for idealist.org, and lows below 1,000 for several sites.
- 5 The Online-Only category includes idealist.org, youthnoise.com, battlecry.com, declareyourself.com, rockthevote.org, takingitglobal.org, itsgettinghotinhere.org, dosomething.org. The government/campaign category includes libertarianrock.com, bostonyouthzone.com, peacecorps.gov, collegerepublicans.org, hillaryclinton.org, johnmccain.com, go.barackobama.com. Community organizations include Web sites for local chapters of Key Club, YMCA, Girl Scouts, Jewish Service, and 4-H. Interest group/activist organization sites included NRA, ACLU, Sierra Club, Feminist Campus, Out Proud, and Students for a Free Tibet.
- 6 Following agreement that a learning goal was present on a site, agreement on the first page selected was as follows: Knowledge, 91.6%; Expression, 96.9%; Joining Publics, 97.8%; Take Action, 95.6%; with total first page agreement at 95%. Looking at the

second most selected page, though slightly lower, the agreement is acceptable: Knowledge, 79.6%; Expression, 75.0%; Joining Publics, 89.7%; Take Action, 73.9%. Coders only selected three pages for single learning goal on a site if all coders agreed, following deliberation, on all three pages.

- 7 Here is the coding instruction for Knowledge from the codebook. Positive scores on the (1) code were scored DC, and positive scores on the (2) code were scored AC:
 

Some sites want users to be able to find out more about issues or related matters when they are on the Web site. Some sites have pages that are specifically for this purpose. Looking at the pages selected from this site:

  1. Do any of the pages contain a listing of facts or background reports (on issues, problems, or how some political process works) produced by experts or by the operators of the site? For example, some sites might have sections such as “what they never told you,” or “inform yourself on important issues,” or “what you should know about X (e.g., global warming)”
  2. Do any of the pages encourage users to share what they know about community or public issues or related matters with other users? For example, some sites enable users to post their own reports and projects in order to share they have learned about a particular problem with other users.
- 8 One coder’s results in the reliability subsample were significantly different from others’ on AC Take Action (that coder did not record any Take Action codes). Leaving these systematic errors out made the DC Take Action agreement 97%, and the AC Take Action agreement 100%.

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## 公民参与的传播学：在青年网络空间建构公民模式

W. Lance Bennett, Chris Wells & Deen Freelon

华盛顿大学传播系传播与公民参与研究中心

### 【摘要：】

在公民的角色发生历史性的转变时，旨在促进公民参与的传播可能会产生问题。相比于早期的单向的，权威统治中顺从公民的早期模式，当今的年轻一代通过与周围同龄人的内容分享和社会媒体能够接受更外在的实现公民权利的方式。本文通过分析美国不同的公民和政治组织经营的 90 个青年网站的分析揭示了参差不齐的公民概念和相关的公民技能，结果表明许多组织与不断变化的公民风格步调并不一致。

Communiquer l'engagement civique : un contraste de modèles de citoyenneté dans la sphère web jeunesse

La communication qui vise la promotion de l'engagement civique peut devenir problématique lorsque les rôles des citoyens subissent des changements historiques. Actuellement, les générations plus jeunes adoptent les styles plus démonstratifs de la citoyenneté actualisante (AC), définie autour du partage de contenu avec les pairs et les médias sociaux, par contraste avec les modèles antérieurs de la citoyenneté respectueuse (CR), basée sur la communication unidirectionnelle gérée par les autorités. Une analyse de 90 sites web jeunesse gérés par diverses organisations civiques et politiques aux États-Unis révèle des conceptions variables de la citoyenneté et des compétences civiques qui y sont liées, ce qui suggère que plusieurs organisations établies sont en décalage par rapport aux styles civiques en changement.

Mots clés : implication civique, citoyenneté, implication en ligne, analyse web, web civique, implication des jeunes



W. Lance Bennett, Chris Wells & Deen Freelon

### **Bürgerbeteiligung kommunizieren: Konträre Modelle von Bürgerschaft in der Websphäre Jugendlicher**

**Bemühungen, die Beteiligung der Bürger mittels Kommunikation zu fördern, können dann problematisch werden, wenn sich die Rollen des Bürgers in historischen Umbrüchen befinden. Heutzutage nutzen die jüngeren Generationen deutlich expressivere Wege, sich als Bürger zu verwirklichen, insbesondere indem sie Inhalte mit Gleichaltrigen teilen und sich in sozialen Medien bewegen. Im Gegensatz dazu basieren frühere Modelle des gehorsamen Bürgers auf einer einseitigen Kommunikation unter Anleitung von Autoritäten. Eine Analyse von 90 Webseiten für Jugendliche, betrieben von verschiedenen bürgerlichen und politischen Organisationen in den USA, zeigt eine unausgewogene Konzeptualisierung von Bürgerschaft und den damit verbundenen Fähigkeiten des Bürgers. Dies deutet darauf hin, dass viele etablierte Organisationen den aktuellen Veränderungen bürgerliche Stile nicht angemessen begegnen.**

**Schlüsselbegriffe: bürgerliches Engagement, Online-Engagement, Webanalyse, bürgerliches Web, Jugendengagement**

## 시민참여소통:

### 젊은이들의 웹공론장에서의 시민모델들의 대비

W. Lance Bennett, Chris Wells & Deen Freelon  
Center for Communication & Civic Engagement  
Department of Communication  
University of Washington, Seattle USA

Center for Communication & Civic Engagement  
Attn: Lance Bennett  
Department of Communication, Room 125

### 요약

시민참여를 증진시키고자 하는 목적을 가진 커뮤니케이션은 시민들의 역할이 역사적 변화를 경험할때 문제가 될수 있다. 현 시대에, 젊은이들은 권위자들에 의해 관리되는 일방적 커뮤니케이션에 근거한 의무적 시민 (DC)모델과 비교해볼때, 동료들간의 콘텐츠를 공유하거나 사회적 미디어를 둘러싸고 정의되고 있는 행위적 시민(AC)의 표현적인 형태를 더욱 선호하고 있다. 미국에서 다양한 시민과 정치집단들에 의해 운영되고 있는 90 개의 젊은층대상의 웹사이트분석은 시민권과 이에 관련된 시민기술들의 불균형적 개념들을 보여주고 있는바, 이는 많은 기존의 집단들이 변화하는 시민형태에서 벗어나 있다는 것을 의미한다고 할 수 있다.