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CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND FACEBOOK USE AMONG
COLLEGE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The recent development of online communities has had a major impact on university students' interactions. Through the use of Internet tools such as Facebook.com, students are able to communicate, form groups, learn about others, and pursue interests. As the popularity of Facebook continues to grow, it becomes important to ask how students' civic engagement (in the form of involvement on college campuses) is related to their online lives. My project hypothesizes that students who are more involved on campus will reflect this in their Facebook interactions, utilizing Facebook as a critical tool to foster and encourage further civic activity. Survey data to address this hypothesis were collected during Fall 2009 from a convenience sample of 508 undergraduate students at a large northeastern university.

The results document a connection between campus activity and both year in school and gender, with advanced students and females more likely to attend campus events. Females are also more likely to volunteer, as well as to attend a community service event that they discovered through a Facebook invitation. Students holding leadership positions in student organizations tend to be more advanced in school year and more likely to send a Facebook invitation regarding a club event. Students who are involved in a greater number of student organizations are more likely to attend campus events, respond to Facebook event, and discover and attend club events and community service activities through means of Facebook invitation. Those students who are involved in civically oriented student organizations are significantly more likely to have voted in the presidential election. Lastly, students who have discovered community service events on Facebook are more likely both to be leaders in a service club and to have volunteered frequently while in college. These connections demonstrate a strong resemblance between student involvement online and offline, with students who are involved in their communities' offline using Facebook as a tool to proliferate this.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2 Background	5
Chapter 3 Data and Methods.....	16
Chapter 4 Results	22
Chapter 5 Conclusion.....	35

Chapter 1

Introduction

The rapid extension of online communication technologies into the everyday lives of college-aged youth has dramatically impacted every facet of the college experience. In American universities today, college students operate in a world in which they are constantly connected to others, regardless of their offline location. This growing reliance on interconnected online technologies raises several questions about the ways that these technologies may shape a young adult's relationship to his or her offline world. Many researchers and analysts have expressed concerns about the pervasive attraction of youth to technology, worrying that this tendency may lead to the withdrawal of youth from face-to-face communities. Others view the upsurge in use of online technology to be a positive change for youth culture, believing that it allows a greater range of connections and methods for communication. While both of these perspectives may have some merit, the behavioral trends are still relatively new and hence understudied. My thesis aims to fill this void, investigating the relationship between youths' online technology dependence and their offline community activity.

Commonly, youth today are viewed by the media and researchers as increasingly disengaged from activities in the political and community domains. As summarized in a recent article by Galston (2004), there has been a decrease in the quality of civic education found in schools. This has led to a lessened search for information about community news and politics through the Internet, and ultimately less exposure to events

of the day than previous generations of young adults experienced through media outlets such as newspapers and television programming. These findings have been a cause for concern, with analysts pointing to the potential risks of an uneducated and under-involved emerging population of adults. If these young adults have little interest in community leadership, what will happen to our communities in the future? Is it possible that the extreme intrusion of online technology into youths' everyday lives has created a distracted generation whose members are indifferent towards their offline society?

A contrasting school of thought believes that the civic engagement of American youth has merely shifted in the manner in which it is expressed. Society has undergone major changes as a result of the Internet revolution that took place while today's college students were just coming of age. These dramatic changes have completely transformed how young people communicate with each other, and correspondingly with their communities. For example, young Americans today can use the Internet to connect with anyone who has similar interests, use its online tools to organize events in their communities, and access news information through live feed websites. These forms of engagement, not available until quite recently, raise the possibility that the use of interconnected technologies has fostered an age group that is indeed engaged, but in ways that differ from their parents' generation (Sander & Putnam, 2010).

One of the fastest growing technological trends in youth culture is the use of Social Network Sites (SNS). These Internet tools have become incredibly popular in virtually all demographic segments, but particularly among college students. The most popular SNS by far for students is Facebook (www.facebook.com). Facebook is a booming and recent innovation, beginning only in 2005. Since then the site has expanded

to have over 400 million users, with the average user spending nearly an hour a day on Facebook (Facebook.com, 2010). Users under the age of 25 make up 70% of Facebook's clientele and, compared to older users, rely even more on it as a critical aspect of their lives (Corbett, 2009). Almost every element of the college experience is represented on Facebook.com: course support, interest groups, sports club, and social activities are all available.

Contemporary college students spend a great amount of time using Facebook as a versatile tool in their everyday social and academic lives. Is it possible that the time invested in Facebook is decreasing the amount of time that students spend in offline communities? Is Facebook acting as a disincentive for participating in other, more "real world" activities? Or, is Facebook actually serving to increase opportunities to be engaged in community activities, as students are able to connect with a greater number of people, groups, and causes?

To shed light on these questions, my research investigates the relationship between Facebook use and students' activities, in particular their engagement in their communities. I begin this investigation with a detailed review of the literature on college-aged youth's civic engagement, student use of Facebook, and the ways in which they might be associated. I then present my own research, which analyzes original data from a survey of Facebook use and civic engagement among students at a large Northeastern university. Through a series of hypotheses I will evaluate the competing theoretical perspectives of (a) youth disengagement as a result of online communities and (b) the transformation of youth engagement via Internet use. Lastly, I will discuss the broader

implications of my results, making projections about the future importance of Facebook for civic engagement and vice-versa.

Chapter 2

Background

Civic Engagement on College Campuses

Investigations of civic engagement differ markedly in how the phenomenon of interest is defined. However, there are clear activities that college students may pursue to become more involved with their campus communities. For the purposes of this study, civic engagement will refer primarily to student participation in a variety of extracurricular student clubs and organizations. I also consider students' political involvement and participation in community service. In order to fully understand the context of my research, it is necessary to examine previous findings on student participation in extracurricular organizations, volunteering and politics.

Successful collegiate performance traditionally encompasses both academic and extracurricular excellence, as it is assumed that students benefit greatly from elements of each. Participating in student organizations, along with schoolwork, gives college students opportunities to expand their interests, develop leadership and time management skills, and meet others. Research by Bradley and Graham (2000) has shown that traditional students (those in the age range of 17-24) exhibit a strong association between out-of-class involvement and intellectual growth, problem solving, career development and scientific reasoning. Given this sort of evidence, it is not surprising that many

colleges encourage students to maintain involvement in out-of-class activities, which can also be described as civic engagement. A study completed by Eklund-Leen and Young (1997) investigated overarching differences between students who were involved on campus and those who were not, based on community college samples. The study found that women were significantly more likely to be involved in campus activities than men. Further, students who were more intensely involved in campus activities identified a stronger positive attitude towards community engagement in general.

Such engagement beyond the boundaries of campus often takes the form of student participation in community service and political activity. Recent national data have shown an increase in college students' likelihood of volunteering but a decrease in their interest in politics and political participation. The Harvard Institute of Politics reports that while 57% of college students had participated in community service in the past year, only 25% had taken any action on political issues (Shaheen, 2006). Youth explained that participating in community service made them feel they were doing something good, whereas participating in politics felt complicated and even corrupt. These observations indicate that while community service is quite customary for college students, student participation in political activity may indicate an unusual level of interest in civic engagement.

The Rise of Social Networking

The use of Social Networking Sites (SNS) has increased rapidly in the past decade among college students. The creation of Facebook in 2005 was the beginning of a

new trend of using SNS for all social functions, and this trend has grown exponentially over the last five years. While my research focuses on Facebook usage among college students, it is critical to appreciate the enormous variety of SNS services available, many of which cater to specialized audiences. Previous investigations have sought to understand the appeal of Facebook versus other SNS, and who the users of these various online services typically are. Some attention has also been devoted to the uses of Facebook, the needs it meets for college students, and how such usage may reflect their offline lives.

A study by Hargittai (2007) documented differences among the college student users of various SNS, as well as between those who did and did not participate in any SNS. The study investigated the impact of gender, race, parental education and ethnicity on SNS participation among college students. Facebook was found to be the most popular SNS, with Myspace second in popularity. Whites were found to have a significant preference for Facebook, with students of color generally preferring SNS other than Facebook. Nevertheless, many non-white students still maintained a secondary account on Facebook. Students whose parents had attained a higher level of education, and were therefore from a higher socio-economic background, were found to have a preference for Facebook versus other SNS options. Lastly, women were found to have a higher participation rate in all SNS use than men.

These results demonstrate the partial segregation that exists among users of different SNS. Peer connections, rather than selection based on overall SNS popularity, can at least partially explain the differences in users' SNS preferences. Because students access the sites to connect to friends, it is logical that they spend time on the sites where

they can best reach those they know, leading segregated peer groups offline to also be somewhat segregated online. In the case of college students, demographic characteristics such as race, gender, and family background frequently contribute to peer grouping. Hargittai's (2007) study reaffirms the popularity of Facebook, demonstrating that even students with a preferred affiliation to another site also frequently maintain a Facebook account.

One key aspect of SNS is the opportunity for users to influence or shape the way they are presented to those they interact with. In the case of Facebook.com, users control their profile page where they are able to select interests, preferences, photos, events and groups to display. Users also determine the amount of security they would like to have on their profile, deciding who can and cannot see their information. The way students choose to portray themselves on Facebook signals the purpose that this SNS serves for them. Undergraduate students believe that it is generally their peers and offline friends who view their profile (Lampe, Ellison & Steinfield, 2006). An empirical study completed by Kolek and Saunders (2008) found that many students' profiles were relatively open, and thus easily viewed by faculty and staff at their universities. A substantial number of students were also comfortable displaying their contact information, living location, class schedule, and publicly viewable photographs. This indicates a relatively high level of trust and feeling of security. Additionally, because students believe that offline friends are viewing their profile, they may try to ensure that it generally corresponds to their offline life.

Why is Facebook such a widely relied-upon element of college student life? What are the benefits of subscribing to it? Recreationally, Facebook serves many functions

through gaming applications, chatting with friends, looking at photographs, and posting links. However, Facebook is not simply a site for games and entertainment: it is a communication tool that could potentially be used to meet millions of people around the world. A two-phase in-person and online study, completed by Subrahmanyam, Reich, Waechter and Espinoza (2008), examined how student's social networks offline were reflected in their online actions. The study found that the vast majority of students use online interaction tools (SNS and instant messaging) to maintain the contacts they have offline. Their relationships online closely resembled those of their offline interactions, with the main exception being students who used online tools to maintain connections with friends who had moved away.

The claim that students' online and offline social networks are quite similar receives substantial support. For example, Lampe, Ellison and Steinfield (2006) found that online networks mimic offline social networks. Their survey focused on what students typically are searching for on Facebook. They discovered that youth typically use the Internet to maintain offline connections, or in some cases to seek out others who may share a specific interest or hobby. These results support the theory that student's online lives are closely tied to their offline relationships and communities.

Are Civic Engagement and SNS Use Related?

The idea that students' online relationships resemble their offline relationships has implications for the association between civic engagement and Facebook use. If a student who is involved on campus is connected to other involved students, they may have a

social network that is reflected online, as their profiles and activities are likely to converge. However, there is no assurance that civic engagement translates into an online presence; perhaps this is a domain of young adult life that will not be represented in SNS usage. Further, it is important to ask what happens to students who are not engaged offline. Will their potential online civic engagement be impacted in the same way as those who are engaged offline? Or will SNS influence all college students in uniform fashion? Here I consider past research that bears on these questions.

One relevant study was conducted by Shah, Cho, Eveland and Kwak (2005), who investigated the connections among respondents' political and civic participation, preferences for news information, and tendency to participate in civic expression both online and offline. They found that participants who sought news information from online sources were likely to use Internet sites and tools for political and civic expression and communication. However, those who did not seek news information online were unlikely to use the Internet for expression and messaging. These findings suggest that individuals must first have an established interest and trust in the information available on the Internet before they use it as a tool for civic expression. However, it is important to note that Shah and associates collected their data in 1999 and 2000 from a sample that represented all age groups. Given that youth are generally more connected to the Internet, the results might have been stronger if they pertained to the college student population throughout the past decade.

A critical step in understanding the Internet's impact on civic engagement is to identify which members of society are most likely to be affected. While previous studies have shown that offline lives are typically represented in online activities, not all

demographic groups may be equally familiar with the tools available on the Internet. The Pew Internet & American Life Project completed a study in 2008 that considered how the Internet is impacting Americans' online and offline behaviors (Smith, Lehman, Schlozman, Verba & Brady, 2009). The research documented that higher-SES respondents are more likely to participate in civic engagement activities, a pattern that has been true throughout history. This pattern was observed for civic actions that were both offline and online. The civic activities most likely to be found online were those of a political nature, frequently intended to spread awareness of causes to new audiences. In fact, the study reported that of the adults who were involved in civic activity, over half of them frequently relied on the Internet as a tool for messaging and communicating with others about their particular political or civic cause.

College students today are unique in the sense that they have matured while relying on the Internet as a common resource. The ability to connect to millions of others worldwide has opened options for communication and exploration that have never existed before, exponentially expanding the potential scope of civic engagement. A chapter in the book Civic Life Online: Learning How Digital Media Can Engage Youth, written by Raynes-Goldie and Walker (2008), discusses a recent evaluation of the effectiveness of several websites designed to connect youth who are interested in similar political and social topics. The study was based on youth who were already using the websites, and found that these young users were overall very satisfied with them. The users met others who were passionate about similar causes and shared information, resources and ideas. Though these youth were not necessarily able to support their peer's

offline civic activity through participation, the option for communication nevertheless remains a valuable innovation.

In sum, the Internet has become a significant resource for civic engagement. The studies reviewed above show that the Internet has benefited those who seek information, an outlet for civic and political expression, and access to other people with similar interests. The opportunity to connect and reach out to others is especially beneficial to those who are already civically engaged offline. While none of the studies relate specifically to SNS usage, they do suggest that persons interested in civic engagement offline may incorporate these interests in their SNS use. Because SNS is such a significant part of college student life today, there is great potential for students' civic engagement to be connected with their online activities.

Hypotheses

The existing literature sheds light on the community activity and civic engagement of college students and on their widespread use of SNS as a social tool. However, there remains a need for up-to-date information regarding civic engagement, SNS use, and the connection between the two in college populations. With Facebook only in existence for five years, it is important to provide current evidence on the impact that SNS are having. My study offers an opportunity to assess student involvement as it is today, during a period of widespread dependence on Facebook. I am guided by the following series of descriptive hypotheses about levels and types of youth civic

engagement and the association between such engagement and Internet (specifically Facebook) use.

Civic Engagement:

1. *As students progress through college, they will belong to an increasing number of student organizations and will correspondingly be more likely to hold leadership positions and spend a greater number of hours per week on their student organizational commitments.* With each additional year in school, students should become more aware of the many engagement opportunities available in their campus community. They may also recognize the importance of engagement for building their resumes as they approach graduation. Further, the longer a student has been a member of an organization, the stronger their connection to it will be and the more relevant experiences they will have accumulated. This will increase the likelihood of a student taking on leadership positions and spending greater amounts of time in their organizations.
2. *As students progress through college, they will attend a greater number of campus events.* The logic here is similar to that for Hypothesis One: as students grow a greater connection to their campus community, they will be increasingly aware of and interested in opportunities to be involved in the community. This interest in the community will be expressed through attending campus events.
3. *Compared to men, women will exhibit more involvement in campus organizations, more frequent attendance at campus events, and a greater likelihood of volunteering.* Previously discussed research by Eklund-Leen and Young (1997) found that women were more likely to be involved in their campus communities. This interest in involvement is likely to be seen in student organization participation and attendance at events. Further, because students who are interested in civic engagement often express this through volunteering

rather than political activity, it is probable that women will also be more likely to volunteer than men.

4. *Students from a higher-SES background (i.e., whose parents are well educated) will have a greater amount of organizational involvement.* Smith, Lehman, Schlozman, Verba & Brady (2009) found that higher-status people are more likely to be civically involved in their communities. For college students this interest in being involved will translate into involvement in student organizations.
5. *Students who attend a greater number of campus events will be involved in a greater number of student organizations.* This hypothesis is based on the argument that some students are fundamentally more active than others. Their “active” trait is likely to manifest itself across a variety of domains, including event attendance as well as organizational involvement.
6. *Students who are involved in civically oriented student organizations will have been more likely to vote in the presidential election.* Involvement in civically oriented organizations implies an interest in public affairs beyond the boundaries of campus, which in turn should increase the probability of electoral participation.

Civic Engagement and Facebook Use:

7. *As students progress through college, they will be more likely to receive invitations to campus events and to attend events as a result of the invitation.* Similar to Hypotheses One and Two, students will progressively become more connected to their college campuses as they spend more time on them. These connections will yield both a greater number of event invitations and a stronger motivation to attend. This hypothesis suggests that students’ offline activity will be correspondingly represented in their Facebook activity and invitations.

8. *Women will be more likely to attend a greater number of community service events that were discovered through Facebook.* Just as women will be more likely to volunteer (Hypothesis Three), they will also be more likely to receive invitations to do so. Hargittai (2007) found that women are more likely to use SNS frequently. This knowledge, combined with the belief that women volunteer more, should produce a Facebook community for women that provides them invitations to volunteer.
9. *Students who receive and respond to Facebook events regarding community service on campus will be more likely to be involved in service related student organizations.* Much of the previously reviewed research supports the idea that students' online and offline social activities reinforce and complement each other. If a student is a member of a service related student organization, they should be similarly likely to have formed connections with others who will further expose them to community service activities through Facebook events.
10. *Students who are involved in a greater number of campus organizations will receive and respond to a greater number of student organization and community service event invitations.* Students who have a tendency to be involved in their offline communities will be connected to other involved students on Facebook. This will provide an opportunity to receive information about offline events through Facebook. Also, students who are interested in being involved in their communities, as expressed through student organization membership, will be likely to express their interest in civic engagement through volunteering.
11. *Students who have created Facebook events inviting others to campus activities will be more likely to have held leadership positions in student organizations.* Students who act as leaders in their offline student organizations will likely also act as leaders in their online interactions. This online leadership will take the form of organizing campus activity Facebook events, which in turn encourages other students to be involved.

Chapter 3

Data and Methods

Survey Design

The data for this research were collected through a survey at a large Northeastern university in Fall 2009 employing a convenience sample. The survey instrument, a questionnaire, was distributed to eight Sociology classes that ranged from upper level to introductory and that were chosen to reflect variation in the academic and demographic characteristics of the university student body. All undergraduate students over the age of 18 who were in class the day that the survey was administered were eligible to participate; absent students were not given another opportunity to take part. The instructor for each class had previously approved the survey, setting aside class time for students to participate if they wished.

All questionnaires were distributed within a two-week time frame. Respondents were only eligible to participate once, regardless of the number of selected Sociology classes they may have been in. Respondents were presented an implied consent form and were also read a script approved by the Institutional Review Board that identified any potential risks. The respondents' participation in the survey acted as their consent to participate. All respondents were given the option to enter a raffle for three fifty-dollar gift cards to local retail stores, a step taken in order to encourage participation. Respondents entered the raffle by recording their email address on a slip of paper

separate from the survey. The three selected respondents were drawn at random and mailed a gift card in January 2010.

The eight surveyed Sociology classes differed markedly in size, from a low enrollment of 24 to a high of 300. If all sections of all of these classes had been filled, with all students in attendance, there was a potential for 720 respondents. In fact, 508 students participated, leading to an overall response rate of 70.6%. This rate, while impressive, should be considered conservative given that maximum possible class enrollment (rather than actual enrollment) serves as the denominator. The large lecture classes included in the sample, which had particularly low attendance and survey participation, no doubt depressed the response rate.

Working Sample

In order to maintain a constant N for the research, I narrowed down the original data to include only those questionnaires that were entirely complete. If a respondent failed to complete any of the questions used in the analysis, the record was eliminated from the working sample. Deleting respondents who had incomplete data created a working sample N of 427. Table 1 compares the basic demographic characteristics of the working sample to the cases that were excluded based on incomplete questionnaires (N=79).

Table 1. Demographic Comparison of Working Sample to Incomplete Cases

	<i>Working Sample</i>	<i>Incomplete Cases</i>
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	45%	43%
Female	55%	57%
<i>Year in School</i>		
Freshman	15%	21.5%
Sophomore	37%	26.6%
Junior	22.7%	22.8%
Senior or above	25.3%	29.1%
<i>Race</i>		
White	79.2%	74.4%
Black	7.7%	11.5%
All other races	13.1%	14.1%
	427	79

In general, the working sample varies only slightly from the incomplete cases that were excluded from the analysis. The most apparent differences are in the distributions for year in school and race. The reported year in school demonstrates that freshman and seniors were more likely to turn in an incomplete questionnaire than sophomores and juniors. Additionally, black respondents were more likely to turn in an incomplete questionnaire while white students were less likely. However, the disparities found between the working sample and the incomplete cases are relatively small in magnitude.

Measures

The variables used in this research can be grouped into the three broad categories shown in Table 2: demographic descriptors, involvement, and Facebook use.

Table 2. Description of Variables Used

	Mean	SD
<i>Demographic descriptors (N=427)</i>		
Gender (0=Male, 1=Female)	.550	.498
Race (1= White, 2=Black, 3=Other races)	1.339	.698
Year in school (1= Freshman, 4=Senior or greater)	2.583	1.025
Hometown size (1= Rural/Small Town, 3= City/Metropolitan Area)	2.039	.909
Parental education (1= High school, 6= Graduate degree)	4.899	.986
<i>Involvement (N=427)</i>		
Leadership positions (0=None, 3=Three or more leadership roles)	.653	.826
Hours a week (0= None, 3=more than 11 hours a week)	1.885	1.003
Involvement in student organizations (0=None, 4=Four or more organizations)	2.026	1.211
Volunteer (0=No, 1= Yes)	.482	.500
Member of service based student organization (0=No, 1=Yes)	.278	.449
Number of memberships in civic-oriented student organizations (0=None, 2= Two or more)	.773	.710
Vote in presidential election* (0=No, 1=Yes)	.725	.447
Number of campus events attended (1=One type of event, 4=Four types of events.	2.546	1.072
<i>Facebook Use (N=411)</i>		
Own Facebook account** (0= No, 1=Yes)	.963	.190
Facebook invitations received per month (1= Less than four a month, 4= Over 10 a month)	2.462	1.096
Respond to Facebook invitations (1=Infrequently, 2=Sometimes, 3= Frequently)	1.844	.541
Attend party from Facebook invitation (1=Never, 4=Often)	3.043	1.067
Attend student club event from Facebook invitation (1= Never, 4= Often)	2.569	1.094
Attend community service from Facebook invitation (1=Never, 4= Often)	1.835	.979
Send Facebook invitation for student organization (0=No, 1=Yes)	.197	.398

*=*Vote in Presidential Election* has an N of 411 because 16 students were ineligible to vote at the time of the last election.

**=*Own Facebook Account* has an N of 427 because it includes the 16 students without Facebook accounts who were excluded from the remainder of the survey questions about Facebook use.

The *demographic descriptors* category includes gender, race, year in school, hometown size, and parental education. The *involvement* variables measure student activity on campus and include leadership positions held, hours a week spent on student organizations, number of organizational involvements, participation in volunteering, membership in a service based organization, membership in a civically oriented organization, voting in the presidential election, and number of campus events attended. All involvement and demographic descriptors variables have an N of 427, with the exception of voting in the presidential election, which excluded 16 respondents who were ineligible to vote.

Leadership positions, hours a week spent on student organizations, and involvement in student organizations were all created based on a series of seven questions that measured students' involvement in various types of student organizations. The survey instrument asked about involvement in Greek Life, THON (a large student run philanthropy that attracts many students), sports organizations, religious organizations, service/leadership organizations, special interest organizations and political organizations. Each respondent indicated his or her involvement, hours spent a week, and leadership positions if applicable for each category. The variables *leadership positions, hours a week spent on student organizations, and involvement in student organizations* are additive indexes based on these seven types of student organizations.

Membership in a civic oriented student organization is the sum of the number of memberships in three categories of clubs: service organizations, political organizations, and THON. The variable *number of campus events attended* represents the sum of different types of campus sponsored events a respondent has attended. The questionnaire

posed four types of events: campus speaker, cultural event, concert, and theatrical performance. Both *membership in a civic oriented student organization* and *number of campus events attended* were measured in dichotomous fashion, tapping any participation in any category of organization or event.

An initial item in the *Facebook use* portion of the questionnaire asked whether the student owned a Facebook account. This item reveals near-universal Facebook subscription. The other *Facebook use* variables have an N of 411, with the 16 students lacking a Facebook account excluded. These variables are generally centered around the Facebook event, which is a feature on Facebook that allows users to invite online friends to offline events, such as parties or campus activities. The measures include: Facebook event invitations received in one month, Facebook event invitations responded to in one month, attending a party or club event discovered through Facebook, and sending a Facebook event invitation for student organizations.

The sample in this research is nearly evenly split by gender and across years in school. Most respondents are white and have at least one parent with a college degree. The average respondent is involved in two different types of student organizations and spends less than five hours a week in them. A large majority of the respondents had voted in the 2008 presidential election. Virtually all students own a Facebook account, with most students receiving over four event invitations a month. While the majority of respondents discover parties on Facebook, a minority discover club or service events through event invitations.

Chapter 4

Results

The findings from this research are based largely on a series of crosstabulations designed to demonstrate relationships between individual characteristics and student involvement, as well as between student involvement and Facebook use. I first explore the factors associated with civic engagement, answering questions about which students are most engaged, how students typically demonstrate their engagement, and what role engagement plays in student lives. Second, I examine the relationship between student engagement and Facebook use, aiming to understand how students use Facebook to foster their involvement, and what type of impact Facebook has on the engaged campus community. In the final chapter, I discuss the larger implications of my findings and propose suggestions for future research on the topic of student engagement and SNS use.

Student Civic Engagement

The notion that as students progress through school they will become more involved in their communities is based on the logic that increasing awareness, experience, and motivation promote a deeper desire for a connection to community over time. This increasing attachment to campus communities would be exemplified by an increased number of organizations joined, more leadership roles, and a greater amount of time spent in student organizations the farther along one is in school, as proposed in

Hypothesis One. Table 3 documents significant results in regard to the increased acquisition of leadership roles in organizations as students progress through school.

Table 3: Relationship between Year in School and Leadership Positions Held (N=427)

	<i>Freshman</i>	<i>Sophomore</i>	<i>Junior</i>	<i>Senior or above</i>
<i>No leadership position</i>	76.6%	50.6%	54.6%	43.5%
<i>One leadership position</i>	15.6%	33.5%	33.0%	35.2%
<i>Two or more leadership positions</i>	7.8%	15.8%	12.4%	21.3%
	64	158	97	108

Gamma: .214 (p < .01)

Table 4: Relationship Between Year in School and Campus Event Attendance (N=427)

	<i>Freshman</i>	<i>Sophomore</i>	<i>Junior</i>	<i>Senior or above</i>
<i>Attend one or no type of event</i>	42.2%	17.7%	22.7%	8.3%
<i>Attend two types of events</i>	28.1%	33.5%	23.7%	31.5%
<i>Attend three types of events</i>	15.6%	29.1%	27.8%	22.2%
<i>Attend four types of events</i>	14.1%	19.6%	25.8%	38.0%
	64	158	97	108

Gamma: .269 (p < .001)

While the relationship between year in school and leadership roles is substantial, no relationship exists for the number of student organization memberships or hours spent in organizations per week, making Hypothesis One only partially true. This implies that time spent in the college community is not a major factor in predicting general involvement. Instead, it appears that students take on more responsibility in organizations

over their years in school. One possible interpretation of this pattern is that community engagement is encouraged by longevity in specific organizational communities rather than through connection to the general campus community.

Hypothesis Two predicts that as students progress through school, they should attend a greater variety of campus events. Table 4 shows the relationship discovered between year in school and types of events attended. While freshmen are more likely to have attended one or no type of event, seniors are much more likely to have attended all four types of campus events measured. However, the proportions attending two or three types of events are fairly similar across the years in school. This suggests that there is only a difference by school year in the extremes of event attendance. With the types of events attended jumping dramatically for seniors compared to the other grade levels, it seems as though students might have less time or desire to attend a variety of events until they reach their final year of college.

Previous research by Eklund-Leen and Young (1997) suggests that women are significantly more likely to be involved on campus than men. Hypothesis Three proposes that this finding will be demonstrated by a greater proportion of women joining student organizations, attending campus events, and volunteering. My data show that women are indeed more likely than their male counterparts to attend a variety of campus events (Table 5) and to volunteer (Table 6). These significant differences are consistent with Eklund-Leen and Young's results. While Shaheen (2006) had reported that over half of college students had volunteered in the past year, the results below show that the proportion reported may have been disproportionately female.

Table 5: Relationship between Gender and Campus Event Attendance (N=427)

	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
<i>Attend one or no type of event</i>	25.5%	15.7%
<i>Attend two types of events</i>	35.9%	25.1%
<i>Attend three types of events</i>	20.8%	28.5%
<i>Attend four types of events</i>	17.7%	30.6%
	192	235

Cramer's V: .210 (p < .001)

Table 6: Relationship between Gender and Volunteering (N=427)

	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
<i>Have not volunteered</i>	57.8%	46.8%
<i>Have volunteered</i>	42.2%	53.2%
	192	235

Cramer's V: .110 (p < .05)

Females exhibit no significant difference from men in the number of organizations joined despite their differences in other measures of engagement. This is similar to the previous findings for year in school, signifying that organizational membership may be fundamentally different from other dimensions of civic engagement (leadership positions, campus events attendance, and volunteering).

Hypothesis Four predicts that students whose parents have attained a higher level of education will be more involved in student activities. This hypothesis is based on Smith et al.'s (2009) finding that persons of higher SES are more often civically involved

than those of lower SES. However, my research fails to detect a relationship between parental education level (which represents SES) and number of organizations joined by students. This adds further weight to the idea that demographic descriptors, such as year in school, gender, and SES background, are not correlated with number of organizations joined by students. Additionally, there is no relationship between race and number of student organizations joined.

Overall these findings suggest that students who differ by year in school, gender, parental education background and race are similar in terms of the number of organizations to which they belong. However, this does not mean that there is no difference in student engagement among these categories; other measures of student engagement (leadership positions, event attendance and volunteering) are impacted by some of the descriptors mentioned. Organizational involvement may simply be too prevalent among all students to produce a relationship with these demographic characteristics.

Number of student organizations joined is further investigated in Hypothesis Five, which proposes a relationship with variety of events attended. As shown in Table 7, students who belong to no organizations are over ten times more likely to have attended one or no types of campus events than students who are in four or more student organizations. Similarly, students in four or more organizations are three times as likely as their non-organizational counterparts to have attended four types of events. The strong correlation between event attendance and student organization membership supports the

idea that there are fundamentally different categories of students, those who are civically engaged on multiple dimensions and those who are not.

Table 7: Relationship between Student Organization Involvement and Campus Event Attendance (N=427)

	<i>No organizations</i>	<i>One organization</i>	<i>Two organizations</i>	<i>Three organizations</i>	<i>Four or more organizations</i>
<i>Attend one or no type of event</i>	40.0%	25.6%	18.7%	15.0%	3.8%
<i>Attend two types of events</i>	25.5%	33.3%	35.0%	29.9%	17.3%
<i>Attend three types of events</i>	20.0%	21.2%	26.0%	24.3%	36.5%
<i>Attend four types of events</i>	14.5%	20.0%	20.3%	30.8%	42.3%
	55	90	123	107	52

Gamma: .290 (p < .001)

Table 8: Relationship between Involvement in Civically Oriented Student Organization Involvement and Voting in the 2008 Presidential Election (N=411)

	<i>No civic groups</i>	<i>One civic group</i>	<i>Two or more civic groups</i>
<i>Voted in presidential election</i>	62.1%	79.0%	79.7%
<i>Did not vote in presidential election</i>	37.9%	21.0%	20.3%
	161	181	69

Gamma: .326 (p < .001)

Students' choice of organizations signifies an intention to be civically engaged in their campus communities, but also demonstrates their interests. Membership in specific groups may be connected to actions that impact aspects of student lives beyond campus boundaries. Hypothesis Six predicts that students who are involved in civically oriented

student groups will be more likely to have voted in the 2008 presidential election. The results, presented in Table 8, are consistent with the hypothesis: students involved in one or more civically oriented groups are more likely to have voted than students in no civically oriented student groups. This is an indication that membership in civically oriented groups reflects student interests and actions taken outside of their campus communities.

The Relationship Between Facebook Use and Student Engagement

Hypotheses One and Two proposed that students gain leadership roles in student organizations and attend a greater variety of events as they progress through school.

Hypothesis Seven similarly expects that as students progress through school they will receive and respond to a greater number of Facebook invitations. Underlying this prediction is the assumption that as students become more connected to the community, they will expand their social network and will therefore gain opportunities to receive event invitations. However, there is no statistically significant relationship between year in school and receipt of invitations or attendance at events as a result of the invitations.

This is somewhat contradictory to Hypothesis Two's finding that students attend a greater number of events as they progress through college. However, it is possible that a disparity exists in the type of events students are invited to through Facebook. Perhaps younger students are invited to social events while older students are invited to the kinds of events included in Hypothesis Two.

The results for Hypothesis Three show that women are more likely to participate in community service and to attend a greater variety of events than men. Hypothesis Eight builds on these findings by predicting that women will more frequently receive and respond to community service Facebook event invitations than men. The hypothesis is consistent with Hargittai's (2007) conclusion that women are more likely to use SNS frequently, and with the work of Eklund-Leen and Young (1997). I find women to be roughly twice as likely to "sometimes" or "often" attend a service event that they discovered through Facebook than men, as documented in Table 9. This further supports Hypothesis Three, reiterating the pattern for women to be more civically engaged in the college community than men. It also supports the idea that persons who are already doing community service (in this case women) will be correspondingly receiving and responding to community service Facebook events.

Table 9: Relationship between Gender and Attending a Community Service Event Discovered on Facebook (N=411)

	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
<i>Never attend service event from Facebook</i>	58.2%	41.4%
<i>Rarely attend service event from Facebook</i>	27.2%	27.3%
<i>Sometimes attend service event from Facebook</i>	8.7%	20.7%
<i>Often attend service event from Facebook</i>	6.0%	10.6%
	184	227

Cramer's V: .209 (p < .001)

In the hope of better understanding whether students' campus activities overlap with their Facebook interactions, Hypothesis Nine investigates the relationship between students' membership in a service/leadership club and the amount of community service Facebook events students receive and respond to. According to Table 10, members of service/leadership clubs are over twice as likely to sometimes or often attend Facebook-announced service events than non-members. Previous scholars support this; Lampe, Ellison and Steinfield (2006), for example, found that college students' online interactions frequently mimic their offline interactions. The finding has important implications not only for the members of service clubs who learn about further opportunities, but also for those students who are not members of service/leadership clubs and do not discover community service Facebook events.

Table 10: Relationship between Service or Leadership Club Membership and Attending Community Service Events Discovered on Facebook (N=411)

	<i>Not member of service or leadership organization</i>	<i>Member of service or leadership organization</i>
<i>Never attend service event from Facebook</i>	52.7%	39.1%
<i>Rarely attend service event from Facebook</i>	29.4%	21.7%
<i>Sometimes attend service event from Facebook</i>	12.2%	23.5%
<i>Often attend service event from Facebook</i>	5.7%	15.7%
	296	115

Gamma: .314 (p < .001)

Table 11: Relationship between Frequency of Attending Community Service Events Discovered on Facebook and Frequency of Volunteering in College (N=411)

	<i>Never</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>
<i>Have not volunteered</i>	66.7%	42.0%	34.9%	22.9%
<i>Volunteer 1-2 times</i>	18.4%	33.9%	23.8%	22.9%
<i>Volunteer 3-4 times</i>	9.0%	16.1%	19.0%	14.3%
<i>Volunteer 5-9 times</i>	3.0%	3.6%	11.1%	11.4%
<i>Volunteer 10 or more times</i>	3.0%	4.5%	11.1%	28.6%
	201	112	63	35

Gamma: .437 (p < .01)

Table 11 examines the relationship between students who receive Facebook invitations to do community service and the frequency with which they volunteer. The results in the table hint that Facebook event invitations may be quite effective: students who “often” receive and respond to Facebook community service events are seven times more likely than those who “never” or “rarely” do to volunteer ten or more times while in college. Although I cannot determine for sure whether event invitations encourage frequent volunteering, or whether frequent volunteering provides social connections that generate Facebook invitations, it is clear that those who receive Facebook community service event invitations are much more likely to volunteer.

Thus far the research has provided evidence that student involvement is linked to Facebook event usage in the sense that those interested in service/leadership activities are able to amplify their opportunities for service through receiving event invitations.

However, this does not establish that all students who are involved in student

organizations utilize Facebook to increase their civic engagement opportunities. Hypothesis Ten explores the expectation that increasing involvement in student organizations will be associated with an increased number of received Facebook invitations, specifically to community service and student organization events. The evidence in Table 12 supports the hypothesis. This suggests that students who are engaged in the campus community further demonstrate their engagement in their Facebook actions, whereas students who do not engage in student organizations will reject involvement by more frequently ignoring invitations on Facebook.

Table 12: Relationship between Student Organization Involvement and Frequency of Responding to Received Facebook Events (N=411)

	<i>No organizations</i>	<i>One organization</i>	<i>Two organizations</i>	<i>Three organizations</i>	<i>Four or more organizations</i>
<i>Infrequently respond</i>	44.9%	22.1%	23.3%	17.9%	18.0%
<i>Sometimes respond</i>	51.0%	75.6%	71.7%	70.8%	60.0%
<i>Frequently respond</i>	4.1%	2.3%	5.0%	11.3%	22.0%
	39	86	120	106	50

Gamma: .297 (p< .001)

Having established that students who are involved on campus are more likely to respond to Facebook invitations, a logical next step is to investigate how these event invitations shape their engagement in various communities. I compare number of organizations students are involved with to their responses to Facebook invitations about community service events, student organization events, and parties. Students who are involved in three or more student organizations have been found to attend community

service events they discovered on Facebook nearly five times more often than are students who are uninvolved in student organizations (Table 13). The results for involved students attending student organization events discovered on Facebook are quite similar (Table 14). However, no relationship exists between student involvement in student organizations and attending parties announced on Facebook. These findings demonstrate the difference between involved students and uninvolved students. Involved students are significantly more likely to find civically engaging events on Facebook and attend them. Uninvolved students, on the other hand, are unlikely to respond to and attend events that encourage civic engagement.

Table 13: Relationship between Student Organization Involvement and Frequency of Attending Community Service Events Discovered on Facebook (N=411)

	<i>No organizations</i>	<i>One organization</i>	<i>Two organizations</i>	<i>Three organizations</i>	<i>Four or more organizations</i>
<i>Never attend service event from Facebook</i>	77.6%	59.3%	45.0%	39.6%	32.0%
<i>Rarely attend service event from Facebook</i>	14.3%	25.6%	31.7%	34.0%	18.0%
<i>Sometimes attend service event from Facebook</i>	4.1%	12.8%	16.7%	14.2%	30.0%
<i>Often attend service event from Facebook</i>	4.1%	2.3%	6.7%	12.3%	20.0%
	49	86	120	106	50

Gamma: .342 (p < .001)

Table 14: Relationship between Student Organization Involvement and Frequency of Attending Student Organization Events Discovered on Facebook (N=411)

	<i>No organizations</i>	<i>One organization</i>	<i>Two organizations</i>	<i>Three organizations</i>	<i>Four or more organizations</i>
<i>Never attend student org. event from Facebook</i>	46.9%	23.3%	19.2%	17.0%	16.0%
<i>Rarely attend student org. event from Facebook</i>	20.4%	26.7%	26.7%	19.8%	20.0%
<i>Sometimes attend student org. event from Facebook</i>	22.4%	30.2%	30.0%	28.3%	34.0%
<i>Often attend student org. event from Facebook</i>	10.2%	19.8%	24.2%	34.9%	30.0%
	49	86	120	106	50

Gamma: .229 (p< .001)

Table 15: Relationship between Student Leadership Positions and Sending Facebook Event Invitations About Club Events (N=411)

	<i>No leadership positions</i>	<i>One leadership position</i>	<i>Two or more leadership positions</i>
<i>Never sent Facebook invitations to student organization event</i>	92.5%	72.0%	56.9%
<i>Have sent Facebook invitations to student organization event</i>	7.5%	28.0%	43.1%
	214	132	65

Gamma: .634 (p< .001)

Does the use of Facebook to encourage engagement depend on students' offline involvement? This question is addressed by Hypothesis Eleven, which proposes that students who act as student leaders offline will also be responsible for sending event invitations on Facebook. The percentages in Table 15 demonstrate that students who hold leadership positions are indeed more likely to have sent an event invitation on Facebook regarding a student organization. This further supports the theory that students' offline and online lives resemble each other. Put differently, students are encouraged to become more engaged by Facebook's presence only if they are already active in their college communities.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The findings discussed in the previous chapter shed light on college students' varied forms of campus involvement and the association of Facebook use with that involvement. While there is still much to learn about the link between SNS and civic engagement among students, several conclusions can be drawn. First, students' number of organizational memberships cannot be predicted accurately by demographic descriptors. However, these demographic characteristics --most notably, year in school and gender-- do a better job of predicting leadership positions, campus activities, and types of involvement. Second, my research supports the belief that student online actions resemble their offline lives, with similar interests and networks evident in both spheres. Finally, I find that while Facebook is a useful tool for engagement, it is utilized mostly by those already involved on campus. Thus, SNS activity may foster some student civic engagement, but others may be receiving little or no benefit.

The lack of statistical relationship found between most demographic descriptors and organizational involvement suggests that student engagement in the form of simple membership is widespread. At the same time, the patterns for year in school and leadership positions reveal that as students progress through college they create a deeper connection to the communities they are in, feeling inclined to take responsibilities in them. Advanced students are also likely to attend a greater variety of campus events than newer students, demonstrating growth in awareness of, opportunities for, or interest in

event participation. Lastly, women have been found to be more civically engaged than men via volunteering, event attendance, and community service through Facebook. Indeed, of the demographic descriptors that I investigate, gender is the only one associated with substantial variations in involvement.

Another general theme is that student interests offline are reflected in their online Facebook activities. The number of community service invitations students receive and respond to on Facebook predicts their participation in service. This is true for students in service/leadership organizations, students who volunteer frequently, and women (who, as previously stated, are more likely to volunteer than men). In short, people who are interested in civic activity, such as volunteering, appear to have this interest represented and reinforced by their Facebook events. Further, those students playing leadership roles in their organizations are much more likely to have created a Facebook invitation for a club event than non-leaders, demonstrating that student leadership is transferable between online and offline roles. Students who choose to be a member of a greater number of student organizations respond more often to Facebook events they receive. This suggests that the individuals active in campus life are similarly active in their approach to Facebook.

Of course, while Facebook may be helpful in fostering engagement opportunities for some students, others will remain unaffected. For instance, students who are involved in a greater number of organizations frequently receive and respond to more Facebook invitations for organizational events, not to mention community service events. However, there is no relationship between number of organizations joined and party invitations received. The implication here is that while involved and non-involved students alike are

invited to parties through Facebook, only those active in their campus communities benefit from online opportunities for civic engagement. Even in the absence of Facebook, students who are involved in a greater number of organizations report attending a greater number of campus events. Thus, there is already a division in campus engagement and activity between students who are involved in student organizations and those who are not. This division has potentially been expanded by reliance on Facebook for engagement opportunity information.

More broadly, the results of this research provide support for both theories regarding the impact of the Internet and SNS use on youth civic engagement. While students already engaged in their campus communities appear to benefit from the tools made possible by Facebook, those who are uninvolved seem to be relatively unaffected. This suggests that the widespread SNS use on college campuses is helpful in fostering engagement, but only among those who would already be engaged anyway. Such a conclusion is still quite significant, implying that Facebook and other online tools do have the capacity to reinforce students' interests and activities. Currently, it appears that Facebook has not become a tool that can change the pre-existing tendencies of students. Given this knowledge, perhaps those who wish to promote engagement among college students would be wise to target their efforts toward offline methods, which might eventually lead to further engagement on Facebook.

This research has also shown that much remains to be discovered about the antecedents of students' campus involvement. If future investigators could gain a greater understanding of what causes disengagement among certain students, it would become easier to address the issue through online and offline methods. There is also a need for

more information regarding the evolution of student engagement. While I reference findings from the past, there is not enough evidence to draw conclusions about the impact of SNS versus natural change over time. Civic engagement among college students may be following a trajectory largely independent of that for Internet use, although the latter will certainly continue to grow.

While my research emphasizes student civic engagement as reflected in organizational involvement, there are other manifestations of engagement that could be further investigated. The types of youth engagement examined here are quite campus centered; an effort should be made to include more off-campus community activities in future investigations. Lastly, future work should compare the civic engagement of college students to that of young adults who are not attending college, as differences between the two groups might exist in both forms of engagement and SNS use. These expanded research foci would extend the findings reported here in valuable ways.

As the current generation of college students ages, it will be interesting to see how Internet tools may affect their civic engagement as adults. Similarly, the next generation of college students will have used SNS for a much longer span of their lives, leading to a potential for even greater impacts. Today's online technologies and tools are undoubtedly influencing our offline society, yet we may not know the full extent of that influence for quite some time.

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