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The Effects of Social Media and the Internet on Political Participation

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Abstract

The 21st century has been a century of many changes and technological advancements. Arguably the most important and influential technological advancement of this century has been the internet. With the internet came other branches of the internet such as social media that have now become extremely prominent in American daily life and culture. In the last few Presidential elections, candidates have used the internet and social media as an important part of their political campaigns.

This research project will look at the effects that social media and the internet has had on political participation during the most recent Presidential elections using the data found in American National Election Study and other surveys. This project will not only look at whether or not it has had an impact but how it has impacted political participation during the elections and if the internet and social media has made people more educated and interested in politics through correlation. This research project carries great importance in that the results show the increasing role that technology is playing on our society in even non-related areas such as politics.

Introduction

When asked to pick a research topic I was a bit stumped on what I could do it on and then ironically I saw a tweet from Kendall Jenner promoting Rock the Vote which is an organization that encourages young voters to get out and vote. After seeing how many "favorites" and "retweets" it got, I began to realize how much politics and political ideas/opinions are now voiced through social media sites and the internet and sometimes without us realizing it.

I plan to examine my research topic which is: The Effects of Social Media and the Internet on Political Participation, by using data from the American National Election Study and other surveys and polls. Although there are many ways to tackle this question, I am choosing to use levels of correlation as my indicator of the effects of social media and the internet on political participation. I will use this data in order to see if there is a correlation between the increase in social media and voter participation. Not only will the results on the correlation give a better understanding on the effects of social media and the internet but it will also show if social media and the internet is the best way for candidates to reach out to eligible voters. Although my research has just begun, so far my hypothesis is that: There is a correlation between social media, internet and voter participation.

Model:

DEPENDENT: rvote2012_xRECODED
PREDICTORS: post_EVERISIGN_Prompt
 Post_EVERTWIT_Prompt
 Pre_INFOSOURCES_7RECODED
CONTROLS: Post_PPGENDERRECODED
 Post_PPEDUCAT
 Post_PPETHMRECODED
 Post_ppagecatRECODED
 Post_PPINCIMP

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.316 ^a	.100	.098	.323

a. Predictors: (Constant), Household Income, Pre_INFOSOURCES_7 cleaned, Gender Recoded (Male = 0 ; Female = 1), Race recoded per White constrast, Aged <18 as missing, Education (Highest Degree Received)

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	54.602	6	9.100	87.168	.000 ^b
	Residual	493.811	4730	.104		
	Total	548.413	4736			

a. Dependent Variable: Voter turnout (yes = 1; no = 0)

b. Predictors: (Constant), Household Income, Pre_INFOSOURCES_7 cleaned, Gender Recoded (Male = 0 ; Female = 1), Race recoded per White constrast, Aged <18 as missing, Education (Highest Degree Received)

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.262	.034		7.689	.000
	Pre_INFOSOURCES_7 cleaned	.028	.015	.027	1.917	.055
	Gender Recoded (Male = 0 ; Female = 1)	.019	.010	.028	2.012	.044
	Race recoded per White constrast	-.023	.012	-.026	-1.878	.061
	Aged <18 as missing	.043	.003	.214	15.015	.000
	Education (Highest Degree Received)	.028	.003	.139	9.256	.000
	Household Income	.010	.001	.122	8.049	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Voter turnout (yes = 1; no = 0)

Results

The results using the data provided by the 2012 American National Election study proved that pre_infosources_7 had a significant value of .055 which makes it not significant. Gender, race, age education, and household income all proved to be significant. The R Square ended up being .100 and the Standard Error of Estimate was .323

Conclusion

After running the model, I quickly realized that the result is not what I thought it would be. The significance values proved that internet has no significant value in political participation. The significant value is close to being significant but it is not quite there yet. My hypothesis is rejected because internet and social media has no real significant effect on political participation like originally thought. What I found that does have a significant value in this situation is that age, gender, education, and income, they are all great factors in political participation. I was surprised to see this result because in the last few years, it has become common thought that the internet and social media has had great effect on how and if people vote. Even a few of the literature pieces that I read said that social media sites and the internet were now being used as public political arenas and it had become easier than ever to learn about political topics, therefore get more involved and vote. Overall, I do not just reject my hypothesis but the evidence that I found confuses the common idea in literature.

Literature Review

In recent years, the increase of social media and the internet has been astonishing. Although the internet had been around for years prior to the 2008 Presidential Elections, it used to be more of a luxury and now it has become a way of life. It is common belief that social media and the internet are now one of the most important features that a political candidate could have and it could make or break their race.

The article, "Predicting Elections with Twitter: What 140 Characters Reveal about Political Sentiment" gives knowledgeable information to this study because it shows how much social media has had an impact on our nation that now it is possible for a site such as twitter to give so much information about politics. They establish how part of the reason that President Obama had so much success in the 2008 elections is because of his effective use of social media sites such as twitter. They address that some political analysts believe that social media is a legitimate political arena while others think of it as "useless political babble". For their data they examined over 100,000 tweets that had to do with politics. They came up with the conclusion that although it does help out in voter participation, it can have a negative impact on politics in the future. Another interesting discovery that they made is that the political discussion on twitter is still this discussion is still "dominated by a small number of users: only 4% of all users accounted for more than 40% of the messages"

The journal in the Political Research Quarterly, "Unraveling the Effects of the Internet on Political Participation" does a great job in showing how much the internet has already affected political participation and how much more it can affect it. It starts out by saying how the biggest variables in political participation used to be education and income but now communication technology has become just or even more important in electoral behavior. Their data is from the American National Election study and PEW, and through bar graphs and other statistical information such as Chi-Squared they were able to find that people with access to the internet were most likely to vote and that it did increase overall political knowledge because people were now looking to the internet to education themselves on politics because they were dissatisfied with other forms of media. The critique on this study is something that could not of been avoided by them but it is something that could be avoided in mine. Due to the fact that this experiment was done so long ago, in a time where the internet was still not completely "universal" (2003), the people who had access to the internet that were more likely to vote because of this are also the richer and more educated. So in a way, at the time, goes back to what they said used to be the two biggest variables- income and education and ends up being the same thing. The reason my study will be different is since access to internet is now more universal and no longer just for the wealthy, the effects of social media and internet will be more clear.

Works Cited

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