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Online Engagement and Political Participation:					
Reception, Expression and Sharing in Facebook Groups and Discussion Forums					
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Abstract

This study examined college students' use of Internet for political purposes with regards to one of the most controversial issue, Housing Ownership Scheme (HOS), in Hong Kong in 2011. Reception, expression and sharing in both Facebook Groups and discussion forums were assessed in relation to political participation. Data from a survey of college students (N = 863) showed significant positive relationships between Facebook Group use in general and political participation. With regards to the specific uses in both platforms, only forum expression and sharing were significantly related to participation. Implications are discussed for political use of online engagement for young adults.

Keywords: reception; expression; sharing; online engagement; political participation; Hong Kong

Online Engagement and Political Participation:

Reception, Expression and Sharing in Facebook Groups and Discussion Forums

Like many places in the world, protests in Hong Kong have become one of the most important channels for citizens to voice. On 1 July 2003, 500,000 Hong Kong citizens marched on the streets to protest against the Tung Chee Hwa administration and the then imminent national security legislation. In terms of a report on the demonstration written by Chung and Chan (2003), the majority of the protestors were found to be young adults. According to their understanding, the mobilization process was mainly done through the Internet, and they suggest that the effects of Internet mobilization was shown to apply on those highly educated professionals who age 20 to 30 years old and who are frequent Internet users. Since the massive demonstration in 2003, demonstrations have become one of the most important tools for opinion expression in Hong Kong. Apart from the structural reasons like decreased satisfaction towards different government policies, the demonstrations mentioned may be due to the increased use of Internet by young adults. How does Internet use explain the emergence of new social movements?

The rise of the Internet has expanded and complicated the process of collective action (Davis, 1999; Galston, 2000). Given the rapid diffusion of the Internet as well as the increasing use of the medium for political purposes, certain uses of the Web might shape activism beyond traditional factors (Nah, Veenstra & Shah, 2006). Research has confirmed the crucial roles of political discussion in predicting various forms of civic and political participation (e.g., McLeod, Daily, Guo, Eveland, Bayer, & Yang, 1996; Sotirovic & McLeod, 2001). However, research on the role of Internet-based political discussion is only beginning to develop (Nah, Veenstra, & Shah, 2006).

Some suggest that social media rely "produsage", with users creating content for each other such that boundaries between producer and consumer are eliminated (Bruns, 2006).

Indeed, some recent research supports this contention, claiming the informational and expressive features of the Internet to support collective action (Shah, Cho, Eveland, & Kwak, 2005; Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001).

The purpose of this study is to examine college students' online engagement, namely, reception, expression and sharing and political participation regarding Housing Ownership Scheme (HOS). As people increasingly make use of the Internet for political purposes, it is important to explore the impact of interpersonal political communication in the contemporary political environment. This study extends previous research on the political utility of online platforms by introducing the various forms of engagement, and by comparing different aspects of online engagement on participation.

Literature Review

Scholars usually focus on the individual characteristics when explaining political participation, while seldom account for informal social interaction (McClurg, 2003). Indeed, relatively little research was done to investigate the influence of interaction within social networks on individual levels of participation. Nowadays, social media empower individuals to not only seek information, but also create and share content, as well as to communicate and collaborate with each other (Kim, Jeong, & Lee, 2010). These all have the potential to change the nature of political participation; therefore, research should take online social network into account when studying political participation.

Findings suggest that we have to study the Web as a "toolkit of features", as opposed to a singular tool (Smock, Ellison, Lampe, & Wohn, 2011). Such can then provide more insight into why people are using specific sites and even specific features of particular sites, so that the effects of any Web can be fully understood. This study extends past research exploring online engagement and its effects on political participation by focusing on specific

uses in two online platforms (Facebook Groups and discussion forums) – reception, expression, and sharing, as opposed to solely generic use of the sites.

Reception, Expression and Sharing

Besides providing political information, the Internet is itself a sphere for political expression (Dahlgren, 2000; White, 1997). However, much of the research on media effects mainly focus on reception of media message instead of looking into expression effects (Pingree, 2007). In other words, only the receivers are expected to be influenced by media messages but not the sender or creator.

According to Kushin and Yamamoto (2010), existing scholarship differentiates political Internet activity into two forms (Shah, Cho, Eveland, & Kwak, 2005; Wang 2007). The first form focuses on information-seeking behaviors, while the second form focuses on individual interactions with other Internet users. In this sense, individuals are no longer passive consumers but active producers (Nov, Naaman, & Ye, 2010). Individuals not only can share their opinions and knowledge (Cho, Chen, & Chung, 2010), but also other content types such as photos, videos and articles. Such sharing can occur anywhere; for example, in online communities such as Facebook and Youtube (Li, 2011). Katz, Rice and Aspden (2001) termed these active behavior "interaction," while Shah et al. (2005) termed it "interactive civic messaging." With the increase adoption and usage of the Internet, these kinds of online opinion expression and exchange have grown significantly in recent years. Indeed, studies have found that communication can strongly affect message senders. For instance, people who prepare for teaching can benefit cognitively (Bargh & Schul, 1980; Benware & Deci, 1984), and this is also the case for those who expect to communicate and justify their own thoughts (Lerner & Tetlock, 1999; Tetlock, 1983; Zajonc, 1960).

Recently, it is also found that the act of writing can increase working memory capacity (Klein & Boals, 2001) and individuals who give higher levels of support to others

with regards to threatening health experience actually reframe their own problems in a much positive light (Kim, Han, Moon, Shaw, Shah, McTavish & Gustafson, 2011). This is somewhat consistent with Pennebaker's (1997) finding on writing about one's thoughts about traumatic events, in which people actually can experience both cognitive and therapeutic benefits.

In sum, users involved in social media and many other online sites can actively participate in various ways, including setting the agenda by sharing and commenting on various types of content, in Goode's (2009) case, news content. As evidence accumulates that sharing political information via the Internet contributes to civic and political participation, scholars start to be aware of the way people communicate about politics in the online sphere (Zuniga, Veenstra, Vraga, & Shah, 2010).

Hypotheses

Most Internet studies analyze single discussion platform rather than comparing different sites with different context for communication (Pingree, 2007). While online discussion should not be characterized as a single phenomenon, the Internet should be treated as one single platform (Mitchelstein, 2011). To help overcome these limitations, this study examines online discussion by comparing how participants' online engagement relates to political participation in two different sites: Facebook Groups and discussion forums in the Hong Kong context.

Facebook Groups were chosen because they provide places for people with similar interests to group together and engage in discussions; however, such Groups have not yet received much scholarly attention. Any Facebook account holder can start a group of their interest and groups oriented towards political purposes have been more and more popular in

recent years and they could often catch media's attention to mention the Groups activities in mass media reports.

According to Kushin and Kitchener (2009), representation of viewpoints within the Facebook Groups was highly skewed in favor of discussion among like-minded participants. Therefore, social media network like Facebook Groups may play a major role in facilitating participants' exposure to agreeing parties and reinforcements in online political discussion, and therefore increasing participation. Facebook Groups use therefore are expected to raise awareness about collective problems and highlight opportunities for future involvement; thereby encouraging engagement in civic and political life (Bowen, 1996; Mutz, 2006; Walsh, 2004).

Although scholars do not agree on the effects of dissimilar views on participation, this study expects forum use to relate negatively to willingness to participate. As we have two platforms for comparison, this would be a good chance to compare the effects of the two with regards to amounts of disagreements present. According to Mutz (2002), exposure to dissimilar views decreases participation because disagreements can increase one's level of ambivalence and social accountability and thus participation. The two hypotheses thus test whether Facebook Groups use (homogeneous) relates positively to participation and whether forums use (heterogeneous group) relates negatively to participation.

H1: Facebook Group use relates positively to willingness to participate in related activities.

H2: Discussion forum use relates negatively to willingness to participate in related activities.

Regarding online reception ("lurking"), Mutz, Reeves, and Wise (2002) suggest that people actually are more willing to eavesdrop on others' conversations rather than participating themselves, at least initially. Although past research indicates that lurkers are

likely to become regular contributors to discussions, Ng and Detenber (2005) did not find such intention to participate in future discussions. They contribute such effects to lurkers not being able to identify themselves with the other discussants (Burgoon, Bonito, Bengtsson, Cederberg, Lundeberg, & Allspach, 2000) and therefore have the incentive to engage in discussion with strangers.

Reception can be actually seen as a form of information seeking, and such behavior is suggested to be positively interrelated with other modes of citizen communication such as greater political participation (Shah, Cho, Nah, Gotlieb, Hwang, Lee, Scholl, & McLeod, 2007). For Facebook Groups, people actually self-select and join the groups that they see consonance with their issue position or interest. They are therefore likely to be exposed to information about issue updates and future opportunities to participate while forum users are exposed to similar updates and future opportunities but probably with both sides present.

As people might get more involved with the content they are lurking, they might experience changes in their behavioral intentions (Ng & Detenber, 2005). Both platforms expose lurkers with more information related to the issue and opportunities to get involved; therefore, reception in both platforms is expected to relate positively to willingness to participate.

H3a: Reception (Lurking) in Facebook Groups relates positively to willingness to participate in related activities.

H4a: Reception (Lurking) in discussion forums relates negatively to willingness to participate in related activities.

Recently, researchers have started to devote more efforts to explore citizens' interactive modes via the Internet (Correa, Willard, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2010). It is found that self-expressing via the Internet can result in an increase in political participation (Shah, Cho, Eveland, & Kwak, 2005). Although not much research was done on the effects of sender in

terms of political expressions, one of the reasons behind such increase in participation might be the expression itself leaving one with an empowering feeling (Papacharissi, 2002).

In the context of Facebook Groups, participants express in an environment with like-minded others, and they are likely to be reinforcing each other. They might have a sense of bringing support to the group, which more likely to identify themselves to the group and the issue position. In this sense, expressing in such homogeneous context is expected to relate positively to willingness to participate. On the other hand, expressing in an ideologically heterogeneous environment, one requires more cognitive processes to think about the different arguments and evaluate the pros and cons of the issue. With one learning more about both sides and re-evaluating one's own position, one might get more ambivalent and therefore less willing to participate in related activities (Mutz, 2002).

H3b: Expression in Facebook Groups relates positively to willingness to participate in related activities.

H4b: Expression in discussion forums relates negatively to willingness to participate in related activities.

Finally, sharing in either platforms should have the same effects because participants in both context share what they think is valuable or interesting to people whom they know. They have an incentive to share because they feel for the position and they would like to spread the words out and advocate for what they believe in. Therefore, people who are motivated to do such effortful act are expected to be more willing to participate in related activities.

H3c: Sharing in Facebook Groups relates positively to willingness to participate in related activities.

H4c: Sharing in discussion forum relates positively to willingness to participate in related activities.

Method

To test these hypotheses, a survey (N = 863) was conducted between March 28 and April 21, 2011. The survey focused on the Housing Ownership Scheme (HOS), one of the most controversial issues in Hong Kong. Surveys were distributed in two universities, which represents both first- and second-tier universities in Hong Kong. Respondents were selected based on a multi-stage stratified random sampling technique (Leung, 2001), and the average response rate for both universities was 95.0%.

The conflict on whether to build more public housing, Housing Ownership Scheme (HOS), was examined because it was one of the heated topics that popped up sometime before the data collection period so that respondents were expected to remember their attitudes and activities done related to the issue. Moreover, a heated topic was chosen as this could ensure respondents know at least something about the issue involved and could possibly have engaged in related online activities.

Measures

Forum and Facebook Group use. As part of the survey, respondents were asked to indicate how frequent they participate in the discussion forums after they reported use of such platform. Using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (none) to 5 (very frequent), they were asked how often they perform the six activities in related forum(s), which include browsing, commenting, uploading pictures/videos/links, opening a discussion, sharing groups' information to his/her friends, and inviting friends to join forum discussions. All the questions were then combined into one index (HOS: M = .36, SD = .93; Cronbach's $\alpha = .87$). A similar question was asked for Facebook Group users, but with two more activities – liking and sharing groups' information on his/her own profile (HOS: M = .43, SD = 1.01; Cronbach's $\alpha = .82$).

Reception, expression and sharing. Questions for Facebook Group use and forum use were used. With regards to Facebook Group reception, question regarding how often they browse in groups was used (M = 3.12, SD = 1.13). For Facebook Group expression, questions regarding commenting, liking, uploading pictures/videos/links, and opening a discussion were used (M = 1.97, SD = .80; Cronbach's α = .83), while Facebook Group sharing included sharing groups' information to his/her friends, sharing group's information on his/her own profile and inviting friends to join groups (M = 2.85, SD = 1.37; Cronbach's α = .93). For forum reception, the question regarding browsing was used (M = 3.53, SD = 1.04). Forum expression included commenting, uploading pictures/videos/links and opening a discussion (M = 2.32, SD = .96; Cronbach's α = .65). Lastly, forum sharing included sharing groups; information to his/her friends and inviting friends to join forum discussion (M = 2.15, SD = 1.03; Cronbach's α = .89).

Willingness to participate and willingness to protest. Using a 5-point Likert-type scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), respondents were asked if they expect themselves to participate in six potential activities with regard to the two controversial issues. The six items included "discussion with others", "expression of opinion to government/politicians/other representatives", "expression of opinion through media channels (newspapers, magazines, radio stations, etc.)", "participation in collective activities", "online petition", and "petition in streets or other venues." The scores of each item were then averaged into one score (HOS: M = 3.15, SD = .80; $\alpha = .87$; Cronbach's $\alpha = .87$). Meanwhile, willingness to protest is just taking one of the above questions regarding participation in collective activities (M = 2.64, SD = 1.01).

Demographics. Personal data such as age (M = 20.95, SD = 1.38), gender (M = 1.52, SD = 0.50), education (M = 2.02, SD = .85) and family income (M = 7.51, SD = 2.71) were assessed and recorded. In addition, data on their interest in politics, internal efficacy, external

efficacy, and collective efficacy was also collected. Interest in politics was measured by the average of respondents' answers, with two 5-point Likert scaled statements (1 = totally not interested, 5 = very interested), to two questions regarding: (a) the degree of interest in Hong Kong's public affairs, and (b) the degree of interest in Hong Kong politics (M = 3.47, SD = .88; r = .76, p < .01). Internal efficacy was the average of respondents' agreement with two 5-point Likert-scaled (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) statements: (a) I have enough ability to understand politics, and (b) I have enough ability to discuss and participate in public affairs (M = 3.47, SD = .90; r = .83, p < .01). External efficacy was the average of respondents' agreement, with the same scale, also with two statements: (a) the current political system in Hong Kong can effectively respond to public opinion, and (b) the current Hong Kong SAR government can effectively respond to public opinion (M = 2.27, SD = .93; r = .83, p < .01). Collective efficacy was the average of respondents' agreements with another two statements: (a) collection action of HongKongers has a great impact on politics and public affairs, and (b) collective action of Hongkongers can reform the society (M = 3.64, SD = .87; r = .70, p < .01).

Results

Among the 863 respondents, 408 (47.7%) are male and 447 (52.3%) are female. The average age is 20.9 (SD=1.53), ranging from 18 years old to 25 years old. 128 of them (14.8%) reported prior Facebook usage regarding HOS while 97 (11.2%) reported forum usage, 30 (3.5%) reported using both, and 608 (70.5%) reported neither usage. The sample was split into four groups according to their past participation in related forum or Facebook Group activities.

Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995) list out four dimensions for political participation: voting, campaign activity, contacting officials, and collective activities. As

Hong Kong do not vote on issues, and they do not have campaign activity. What most of them can do is to express through different channels, either to people around them, to officials, to media, and the last resort is collective activities. As people are going online for expression nowadays, they might feel not feel the urge to express in other offline or traditional forms. However, as mentioned in previous sections, there has been an increase in protests. Therefore, this study look at willingness to participate and also willingness to protest to take account that people might retreat from expressive forms of participation in general after being expressive online.

Online Use and Participation

I begin by tackling *H1* and *H2*, which are concerned with the effects of Facebook Group use and forum use on participation. Multiple regression analysis was conducted with willingness to participate and willingness to protest as the dependent variables. The independent variables were added into the analysis in three blocks. The first block included the demographics, while the second block included the other control variables. Facebook Group use and forum use, the two keys to *H1* and *H2*, constitutes the third block. Although strictly speaking the cross-sectional survey does not allow us to discern causal direction, at least we can control for other variables.

Table 1 summarizes the results. As *H1* predicts, Facebook Group use relates positively to participation after controlling for the other factors. The positive coefficients obtained by the Facebook Group use variable are statistically significant in both cases — willingness to participate and willingness to protest. The main effect of Facebook Group use suggests that people are more likely to participate with an increase in Facebook Group engagement. On the other hand, forum use does not have any significant direct impact of willingness to participate. Therefore, H1 is supported while H2 being rejected.

Table 1.

Predict willingness to participate and willingness to protest

Willingness to					
	Participate		Willingness to Protest		
Demographics					
Gender	.04	.06	.01	.03	
Age	05	06*	.08*	.06	
Income	09**	12***	09**	12***	
Incremental R ² (%)	2.2	2.2	2.8	2.8	
Political Interest and Efficacy					
Interest	.35***	.41***	.38***	.36***	
Internal	.06	.07*	02	.01	
Collective	.05	.01	.09**	.05	
External	.05	.07*	.06	.10**	
Incremental R ² (%)	19.9	19.9	14.6	14.6	
Online Use					
Facebook Group use	.21***		.25***		
Forum use	.00		.01		
Incremental R ² (%)	4.0		5.6		
Facebook Group Use					
Reception		02		07	
Expression		.04		.02	
Sharing		.01		.04	
Incremental R ² (%)		0.2		0.5	
Forum Use					
Reception		.05		01	
Expression		32***		29***	
Sharing		.28***		.27***	
Incremental R ² (%)		1.9		2.3	
Total R ² (%)	25.3	23.1	22.2	19.0	

Note: Cell entries refer to the final standardized regression coefficient. N = 862.

p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

H3a, H3b and H3c expect different kinds of specific Facebook Group use (reception, expression and sharing) to relate positively to willingness to participate in related activities, while H4a, H4b and H4c expect a mix of relationships between forum use and participation. A series of multiple regression analysis were conducted again, with willingness to participate and willingness to protest as the two dependent variables. The first two blocks of independent variables were the same as the previous model, whereas two more blocks were included, the specific uses of Facebook Group and forum use, for examining the six hypotheses.

Table 1 again summarizes the results. H3a, H3b and H3c were not supported as no significant relationship was found regarding the specific uses of Facebook Group. However, forum expression and sharing do have significant impact on both willingness to participate and willingness to protest. In this sense, H4a was rejected as no significant result was found, while H4b and H4c are supported. Expression in forum negatively relates to willingness to participate and protest, while sharing in forum positively relates to willingness to participate and protest. These findings suggest that specific uses in Facebook Group do not predict willingness to participate although it has a main effect when Facebook Group use was an index of reception, expression and sharing. On the other hand, although forum use do not relate participate as a whole, reception and expression in forum do predict willingness to participate.

Discussion

As mentioned in previous sections, the Internet should be explored more in terms of more than one platform regarding online discussion, because features in different sites can result in opposite effects on participation. Moreover, while paying attention to reception of individual messages, the expression effects should be examined in detail too. As more and more Internet users are becoming content producers but not solely recipients, understanding

the effects of expression can be vital. For instance, measuring Facebook use solely by the overall time spent tells us little about the motivation of media choice and usage (Smock et al., 2011). In addition, forum expression was found to be a significant negative predictor of willingness to participate and protest, while sharing was found to be a significant positive predictor. These results echo Shen and Williams (2011), who suggest that knowing more about the specific uses of the Internet helps reveal relationships with psychosocial well-being that were otherwise hidden when use was only measured by time spent.

In this study, although Facebook Groups and discussion forums are both online sphere for discussion on public issues regarding the Housing Ownership Scheme, they differ in quite many ways. One of the big differences between the two is the amount of disagreements and agreements present (Author, 2011), where Facebook Groups are a much ideologically homogeneous platform than forums. When people participate in discussion forum, they are a lot more likely to encounter dissimilar views than Facebook Groups.

Facebook Group Use

Findings regarding Facebook Group use were consistent with Mutz's (2002) claim that participants in ideologically homogeneous platform are more likely to participate. This applies to both willingness to participate and also to protest. In general, Facebook Group can be a mobilization tool for organizing, spreading opinions and reinforcements throughout networks with like-minded others.

Although there is a significant relationship for Facebook Group use, no significant relationship was found for any of the specific uses (reception, expression and sharing). One of the reasons for such finding is because people tend to join groups to perform "expressive information sharing" (Smock et al., 2011). According to the authors, people perform in such sharing have an incentive to present information about a specific interest of themselves, to share information that may be of use or interest to others, to provide personal information and

tell others a bit about themselves. In general, joining a Group itself is an expression and sharing, which allows them to communication with a large audience at one time.

Same as Smock et al. (2011), at the time of data collection, when a Facebook user joined a Group, their affiliation of that Group was immediately shown and shared to their friends through the News Feed feature and also listed under their profile. In this sense, the action of expressing and sharing was performed at the moment one joined the group while the actions done within the Group was not as important as pressing the "join" button at the first place. According to the Smock et al. (2011), expressive information sharing predicts the use of Facebook Groups, and the purpose for joining Groups are not to engage in social interaction but more as having an icon to express something about oneself. They further show that such expressive information sharing significantly predicts use of one-to-many communication features but not one-to-one communication such as engaging in messaging and chat. Therefore, whether participants just lurk, express or share within the Groups do not matter because joining the group itself is already an expression and sharing.

Another reason for such findings lays on the fact that Facebook users log in to their account not purposes other than political purposes. They are not motivated to seek out for political information and they do not have the need to do so because they encounter political content when their friends share something political. In addition to their lack of motivation, they also do not need to spend much effort to seek out and to engage in discussion once they joined the Groups. They only need a click to join a Group, and instead of reading what others talk about an issue, most of the time, they just type in a few words to express their support or dislike. The lack of motivation and effort needed to be involved in expression and sharing in such Groups might be the reason why specific uses within Groups are not good predictors of willingness to participate.

Forum Use

Expression. While forum use does not have a main effect on willingness to participate and to protest, forum expression and sharing do have direct effects on both forms of participation. The negative relationship with regards to forum expression and participation can have two possible reasons. First, it might be the case that people get more ambivalent as Mutz (2002) suggests, and therefore people get demobilized. Discussion forums in Hong Kong do show a substantial amount of dissimilar views as compared with the amount of disagreements present in Facebook Groups, and it was shown that ambivalence actually mediates the negative relationship between forum use and participation (Author, 2011). Second, it might be the case that people gain a sense of empowerment after expressing their opinions online (Papacharissi, 2002), and therefore already felt they had done enough or even fulfilled their job as good citizens by expressing their opinions online already. In this sense, they feel less pressured to participate in other forms of participation.

Sharing. A significant positive relationship was found between forum sharing and willingness to participate. This is not surprising as getting into the forum needs motivation and incentive to do so, and sharing is not as easy as just a click as in Facebook Groups. In most forums, more buttons have to be clicked and sometimes users are required to type in the email address in order to share information to their friends and spread their opinions outside the discussion forum community. Although participants in heterogeneous discussion sphere has always been treated as unique in their patterns of participation, the findings actually suggest that even there are demobilizing effects on participation, sharing within heterogeneous forums do predict increased willingness to participate.

Internet and Democracy

Scholars have argued for decades whether the Internet acts as a democratizing medium to provide access to information and deliberation, bringing citizens together into the political process (Delli Carpini, 2000) or it actually acts as a polarizing sphere where like-

minded individuals come to share and reinforce their preexisting political beliefs without deliberation (Sunstein, 2001). This study does not give a definite answer to the debate but it does suggest scholars to explore different sites and platforms, and examine the effects of different features within each site. The findings can give completely different answers with regards to the relationship between Internet use and participation if we are looking at either Facebook Groups or discussion forums; therefore, perhaps before returning to the debate, more should be investigated in detail with the big question in mind.

Limitations

As with any study, this study comes with several limitations. First, such cross-sectional design limits the ability to make a strong inference about causal direction. It should be noted that the hypotheses assume online use as the cause. Yet, it is also theoretically possible for willingness to participate to lead one to engage in online platforms with more or less disagreements. Future research should validate the results with experiments which can test the causal relationships, and adopt longitudinal data of young adults' social media use to better assess the effects of online media.

Moreover, college students were chosen as the target sample for the study because they are likely to have access to the Internet and participate in online discussions. However, this unrepresentative sample of the whole population does represent the educated young adults who are Internet users well. Future studies should expand the sample and explore Internet users who are of other age groups. Besides, this study focuses on college students in Hong Kong, which may not be representative of Facebook Groups and forum participants in other countries. Comparing online discussion in different platforms in different nations would provide a more comprehensive depiction of the phenomenon.

Lastly, there are many more new actions available for young adults to get involved with in this new digital age (Bennett, 2008). It is important to explore the new ways of civic

and political participation that they are likely to participate. For instance, creating and spreading political content online, community volunteering, political consumerism, etc. (Bennett, 2008), which can better capture how youth participate nowadays and how deliberation can have an effect on them.

Conclusion

These limitations and considerations notwithstanding, this study has extended prior research by offering an expanded conception of features of online discussion platforms and by differentiating and comparing the effects of the specific uses dimensions of uses (reception, expression and sharing). Traditionally, Internet use has been treated in a rather homogeneous manner, assuming all users to employ the same set of features in the similar manner resulting in the similar effects. This research extends these studies by comparing two different discussion platforms and examining how reception and expression can possibly predict political participation differently. Research on specific features of social media is a growing line of inquiry, and further examination is required to better understand their impacts on political attitudes and behaviors as they develop and become more widely adopted.

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