A Practice-Based Approach to Online Participation: Young People’s Participatory Habitus as a Source of Diverse Online Engagement

# Details

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A sample of forty Italian and English 14- to 25-year-olds

# Abstract

Based on comparative qualitative research with 14- to 25-year-olds in Italy and the UK, this study draws on Bourdieu’s theory of practice and culturalist perspectives on citizenship, and situates participation as a socially embedded, contingent online/offline practice that is shaped by the interrelation between participatory habitus, differential access to resources, and the political context. Young people’s diversity is manifested in their different vocabularies of participation, which include a vocabulary of (a) citizenship orientations, (b) citizenship practices, and (c) digital engagement. Based on vocabularies of participation, 5 participatory habitus were identified: the legitimate, the critical, the alternative, the radical antagonist, and the excluded. Each participatory habitus is produced by different combinations of resources and political experiences, and in turn shapes how young people participate on- and offline.

# Outcome

"in this study, participation is conceptualized as a
socially embedded, and contingent online/offline practice that is shaped by the interrelation between
participatory habitus (experiences and attitudes), differential access to resources (as determined by social
class, education, ethnicity, and gender), and the political context.
The analysis of youth’s vocabularies of participation has shown that young people adhere to
different participatory habitus, each characterized by distinctive dispositions regarding (a) citizenship orientations, including orientations toward the institutions of representative democracy; (b) citizenship practices; and (c) digital engagement.
[...] consistent with prior research showing that the relationship between social media use and
youth participation is not linear, the findings highlight the diversity of young people’s uses of social media.
Those still adhering to a dutiful citizenship model tend to create a hybrid social media space in which news and relational spaces overlap; young activists who engage in on- and offline actualizing citizenship make political uses of social media-including forms of citizen journalism and media activism. By contrast, those who are more politically disenfranchised are actually engaged in a variety of creative uses of social media.
Additionally, the data show how young citizens combine different social media platforms in their communication repertoires and engage in diverse communicative spaces that are defined by the specific social and technological affordances of each platform." (Mascheroni, 2017, pp. 4642-4644).