YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT
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The following abbreviations have been used in the Report:

- **CNCS**: Corporation for National and Community Service
- **CPRR**: Process Approach Model for Community Peace, Recovery, and Reconciliation
- **CV**: curriculum vitae
- **DDOS**: distributed denial of service
- **EU**: European Union
- **FATA**: Federally Administered Tribal Areas
- **FIFA**: Fédération Internationale de Football Association
- **FIJE**: Federación Iberoamericana de Jóvenes
- **GEM**: Global Entrepreneurship Monitor
- **G20 YEA**: G20 Youth Entrepreneurs’ Alliance
- **HPA**: Harry Potter Alliance
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>HRC</td>
<td>Human Rights Campaign</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information and communications technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organization</td>
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<td>ITF</td>
<td>International Transport Workers’ Federation</td>
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<td>ITUC</td>
<td>International Trade Union Confederation</td>
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<tr>
<td>IVS</td>
<td>International volunteering and service</td>
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<tr>
<td>KPK</td>
<td>Khyber Pakhtunkhwa</td>
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<tr>
<td>LSE</td>
<td>London School of Economics</td>
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<tr>
<td>MENA</td>
<td>Middle East and North Africa</td>
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<tr>
<td>NEET</td>
<td>Not in employment, education or training</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development</td>
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<td>PATRIR</td>
<td>Peace Action Training and Research Institute of Romania</td>
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<tr>
<td>SFCG</td>
<td>Search for Common Ground</td>
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<tr>
<td>SMS</td>
<td>Short Messaging Service (text messaging)</td>
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<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN-Habitat</td>
<td>United Nations Human Settlements Programme</td>
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<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
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<td>UNOY Peacebuilders</td>
<td>United Network of Young Peacebuilders</td>
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<td>WAM!</td>
<td>Women, Action and the Media</td>
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<td>WPAY</td>
<td>World Programme of Action for Youth</td>
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<td>YBI</td>
<td>Youth Business International</td>
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<td>YLC</td>
<td>Youth Leadership Council (Tunisia)</td>
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INTRODUCTION

The terms “civic engagement” and “activism” traditionally evoke images of voting and volunteering for campaigns or marching in the streets, banners hoisted high. While these are still fixtures of political participation, a broader set of practices enabled by digital technologies is being created and applied by young people. Cathy J. Cohen, Joseph Kahne and others call this broader set of practices “participatory politics”, defined as “interactive, peer-based acts through which individuals and groups seek to exert both voice and influence on issues of public concern”. They emphasize that “these acts are not guided by deference to elites or formal institutions”.

This is part of a larger trend of youth avowing low confidence in national decision-making bodies and disaffection with elected officials and their ability to address issues. The biannual Harvard Institute of Politics poll indicated consistently declining levels of trust in government institutions among 18- to 29-year-old Americans between 2010 and 2015. According to a 2013 LSE Enterprise study, when European 16- to 26-year olds reflect on voting and institutional politics, they find “the political ‘offer’ does not match their concerns, ideas, and ideal of democratic politics”. At the same time, there are high levels of youth participation in issue-oriented activism, boycotting and boycotting, and protest activities. W. Lance Bennett refers to this new generation of young people as “actualizing citizens”, “who favour loosely networked activism to address issues that reflect personal values”, in contrast with “dutiful citizens”, who maintain a more collective and government-centred set of practices. Similarly, Cohen and Kahne found that interest-driven participation was a strong predictor of engagement in participatory politics among American youth.

If one thing defines this era of youth digital activism, it is the ability to make and widely share media. It is possible for “widely distributed, loosely connected individuals” to work together to solve a problem or create something new—a practice called.

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162 Cathy J. Cohen and Joseph Kahne, Participatory Politics: New Media and Youth Political Action.
crowdsourcing or peer production—because the costs of building loose networks of contributors and disseminating information digitally are nearly zero.\textsuperscript{163} When people make their own media they can assert power by framing issues in ways that compel others to change their minds or to adapt to new realities and perspectives. This form of “media activism” is not a new theory of change in itself; however, its practice is being transformed by the use of digital technologies for coordination and amplification. Agenda-setting power is shifting to a broader set of political actors with the necessary tools, savvy and timing.

Mobile computing, in particular, is allowing a new generation of citizens to access the Internet and enjoy lowered coordination costs. In Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States, 9 in 10 Millennials have a smartphone and spend 50-100 per cent more time on their mobile device than on a desktop computer.\textsuperscript{164} Affordable wireless Internet access and mobile phone ownership around the world constitute the most potent force for expanding the pool and potential of young digital activists. However, the young people best poised to transform the practice of democracy around the world are those who not only create media but also build the tools and platforms through which they are made, shared and organized. Lilly Irani calls this new movement of civic hacking and cultural remaking “entrepreneurial citizenship”.\textsuperscript{165} This represents a small but powerful cohort that is taking its cues for solving the world’s problems from Silicon Valley, identifying primarily as social entrepreneurs and designers and secondarily as political or as activists.

These new forms of digital activism are not without problems and controversy. Many youth are still excluded from civic and political participation. That is why it is important to comprehend the wide range of contemporary tactics, tools, and trends and the unique challenges youth digital activists face in connection with current laws, norms, market forces and educational practices. The current thought piece outlines these trends and challenges but also highlights relevant opportunities and offers recommendations for supporting youth digital activism.

**TRENDS IN DIGITAL ACTIVISM**

Digital activism is a rapidly growing phenomenon on a path to expand Cohen and Kahne’s already broad definition of participatory politics. The sources and targets of activism, the tools used, and the relevant outcomes vary across countries and are constantly evolving; at present, the communities coming together via Facebook, Twitter and other networks are incredibly important.\textsuperscript{166} Several of the genres that best illustrate the breadth of youth digital activism’s expansion and legitimization are highlighted.


below; they include networked social movements, issue-oriented activism, participatory politics through participatory culture (such as fan activism and political memes), civic hacking, and hacktivism.

**Networked social movements**

Social movements are defined in part by their means of communication, what brings people together, and how it happens; networked social movements are participatory because they rely on "self-configurable," "fluid," and less hierarchical networks of communication. This means more entryways to leadership for youth participants through decentralization, and it also demands adequate skill in the use of digital media.

**Uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa on Twitter and Facebook**

During the 2010/11 uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and replicated in the organization and broadcast of later demonstrations and protests throughout Europe, Latin America and the United States, the skilful use of Twitter hashtags and the leverage of social networks such as Facebook helped spread and legitimize uprisings in several countries in the MENA region. The movements had their seeds in long-standing networks of activists working towards regime change and masses of citizens exasperated by high youth unemployment and food shortages across the region. However, it was the savvy use of Facebook and Twitter to develop solidarity among those across the region and Arab diasporas, and then to influence the coverage of Western journalists, that allowed these movements to gain serious momentum. Local bloggers and activists worked together to create and disseminate carefully crafted messages and images during each revolution, which were retweeted by Western journalists who could amplify the message to a global audience. This audience included the bloggers’ and activists’ fellow countrymen, who could witness the solidarity with and legitimization of the revolutions reflected in the global response.

Participating in these uprisings online was as easy as retweeting new information shared via Twitter or changing or modifying a profile image in a way that displayed one’s support. Individually, these might appear to be very personal and ineffective forms of participation, but in aggregate they represent a formidable display of solidarity with the social movements that helped to encourage supportive reporting in the Western press and the material support of foreign benefactors and Governments.

**Issue-oriented activism**

Another wave of networked social movements even more strongly connected to youth and new forms of digital activism began in 2011 with the Occupy movement originating in New York City and the 15-M Movement in Spain and continued through 2014 with the Umbrella Movement (Occupy Central with Love and Peace) in Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. In these cases, youth disaffected by institutional politics chose to occupy prominent civic spaces

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168 Gilad Lotan and others, “The revolutions were tweeted: information flows during the 2011 Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions”, *International Journal of Communication*, vol. 5 (September), pp. 1,375-1,405.
and use an array of media activism tactics to change their societies' perspectives on specific issues such as income inequality, austerity policies and democratic rule. There was little expectation by the activists that traditional politics could achieve such goals. Rather, the tactics aimed at changing perceptions and social norms and calling for elites to respect youth and student voices and to witness a more democratic and participatory way of running society.

This is part of a larger trend of youth participating, sometimes fleetingly, around specific issues that resonate with their personal values. Prominent examples of campaigns that successfully activated youth along these lines are Invisible Children’s KONY 2012 campaign and the promotion of the red equal sign by the Human Rights Campaign (HRC). Invisible Children was a single-issue advocacy organization targeting youth in high schools, colleges and churches on the principle that they had a moral imperative to raise awareness about warlord Joseph Kony’s use of their fellow youth as soldiers in Eastern and Central Africa. In 2012, they launched an ambitious campaign called KONY 2012 using a 20-minute documentary about the warlord, imploring watchers to make Kony the most (in)famous person of 2012 and calling for action by the United States in pursuing him. Supporters were asked to tweet celebrities en masse with links to the video; comedienne and talk show host Ellen DeGeneres received 36,000 tweets asking her to respond. The campaign went viral, prompting reactions from many prominent celebrities and politicians and attracting 100 million views on YouTube in six days. The media awareness campaign worked so well that it included a massive critical response targeted at the organizers of Invisible Children for their tactics and portrayal of the issue, which led to the organization’s demise.

In the case of the red equal sign campaign, HRC was organizing around two United States Supreme Court cases relating to marriage equality in March 2012. In addition to traditional coalition and event organizing, including a video message of support from prominent politician and presidential candidate Hillary Rodham Clinton, HRC created a pink-on-red version of their equal sign logo intended to be shared by those wishing to express their support of marriage rights for gay and lesbian couples on social media. Millions of supporters, including straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth wanting to signify their solidarity on an issue on which they had an overwhelmingly more progressive stance than their parents’ generation, changed their profile image to a version of the red equal sign logo and drove millions of visits to the HRC website and social media properties.

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PARTICIPATORY POLITICS THROUGH PARTICIPATORY CULTURE

Fan activism

Issue-oriented campaigns such as KONY 2012 and the red equal sign campaign represent the mainstreaming by networked social movements of a set of culture-creating practices known as “participatory culture”. In fact, participatory politics is an extension of the broader participatory culture, wherein consumers are no longer passive recipients of professionally produced cultural content but instead are encouraged to create and share their own content and form communities to do so. This has long been true in fan communities, which generate their own homages and original material as part of their fandom. Fan activism, which has a history of pressuring media corporations to be responsive to fans’ wants and values, has now become a potent force for broader political activism in the form of communities such as the Harry Potter Alliance.

The Harry Potter Alliance (HPA) was founded in 2005 to organize fans of the Harry Potter stories to come together and fight against the evils of “our world” the same way the novels’ characters did in theirs. HPA has been extremely successful at drawing parallels between themes addressed in young adult fiction and major issues such as fair labour and marriage equality and using those narratives to energize a network of members to volunteer, to take actions such as creating their own testimonials and signing pledges, and to donate money and books to those in need. The organizing of these largely online and global actions has been enhanced by the development of a network of local chapters spanning 25 countries; the individual chapters coordinate their own actions and enable HPA to have local, national and global platforms.

Political memes

A mainstay of the activist repertoire and participatory culture is humour. For digital activists ranging from the Harry Potter Alliance and the Human Rights Campaign to the Occupy movement, political memes are one of the core tools. The most popular form is the easiest to create and share: the image macro meme takes an image easily recognizable to the audience and overlays a bold white caption on it. Numerous websites host generators that make it easy for users to make their own image macro memes. Given the universality of political humour and the simplicity of image macro-based memes, it is not surprising that this practice has spread to even the tiny online populations of countries that have only recently gained Internet access.

Prominent examples of political memes enlivening international political discourse have been those created to poke fun at terrorists. Terrorist organizations exemplified by the Islamic State are adept users of participatory culture for recruitment and information warfare, so it is only fitting that memes are used

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against them. Several lampooning memes came out of Osama bin Laden’s demise—image macros featuring bin Laden’s image and captions such as “Hide and Seek Champion 2001–2011.” More recently, in August 2015, “ISIS Karaoke” was launched on Twitter by a 32-year old who combined lyrics of pop songs with images of militants from Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) wielding microphones. This has spawned a growing collection of memes contributed by others using the hashtag #isiskaraoke.

Civic hacking

Some youth are going beyond making media and are making or using data for civic and political ends. Others are even building the next generation of technologies for their fellow digital activists to use.

The open data movement represents a community of technologists and activists who are pushing for the release of government data in countries around the world in order to support a range of practices. Recently, they have been arguing for the commercial and efficiency benefits of providing open government data to coders. As a result, civic hackathons are being supported at the highest levels of government in some countries. The longer history of this movement is one aligned with the political cause of transparency and accountability—the argument that citizens can better monitor the performance of the Government and ensure that it truly represents citizens’ best interests when they are able to access and analyse its data.

Civic hackers building tools for making their own data or organizing civic and political communities in new ways have had high-profile success. Activist-oriented civic hacking projects include the precursor to Twitter—TXTmob—built by young activist technologists who wanted a distributed SMS-based tool for coordinating protests. On the humanitarian side, tools have been developed to establish or strengthen community response mechanisms. For example, youth in the Russian Federation used the Ushahidi crowdmapping platform to create Help Map, which coordinated peer-to-peer mutual aid efforts during the 2010 wildfires in the Russian Federation. Those working with the Government rather than against it have been supported by organizations such as Code for America and Code for All. A number of Governments have a strong interest in creating opportunities for these talented youth to practise the kind of entrepreneurial citizenship Irani describes.

Hacktivism

Other groups of technologically adept youth, attracted more to anti-government and anti-corporate politics, express themselves through hacktivism. Unlike civic hacking, which is largely constructive while also potentially activist, hacktivism represents

180 See codeforall.org.
a more controversial genre of digital activism that views the Internet as a site for disruptive protest. Within the hacktivist repertoire are projects such as Wikileaks—with clear political goals similar to those of many open data activists—leaking sensitive documents and helping to maintain the infrastructure for anonymous submissions.

More controversial have been hacktivists—most notably those affiliated with one or more of Anonymous’s many incarnations—who have developed tactics for culture jamming vandalism of online property (replacing web pages with political manifestos), picket lines and roadblocks (distributed denial-of-service, or DDOS, attacks to take down web servers), and leaking private personal information in support of radical transparency (data exfiltration from private servers). Most versions of the offline analogues of these tactics are illegal, even if they are recognized as political acts; computer law is no different. The United States and many other countries treat such tactics as dangerously criminal and even terroristic. Harsh punishments can be meted out to participants, who may do little more than click a button on a software application that instructs their computer to send large amounts of data to a target web server; some hacktivists have been fined hundreds of thousands of dollars and threatened with long prison sentences to persuade them to accept felony plea deals.

Anonymous affiliates who participated in operations between 2010 and 2011 were arrested in six different countries. Many were identified by their computers’ IP addresses after participating in DDOS attacks. The string of hacks certainly captivated the attention of the media and terrified companies and Governments the world over. In this case, the spectacle was successful in setting the media agenda. However, Anonymous struggled to maintain a frame for its work that was political rather than criminal. In fact, the tactics used by Anonymous during its most notorious operations were disavowed by early hacktivists such as Oxblood Ruffin, who developed tools for censorship evasion, firewall penetration and obfuscation.

This new brand of digital activism is considered well outside the mainstream, and it represents a tiny fraction of the digital activism universe. It is unclear if hacktivist tactics such as DDOS will even stay within the repertoire of fringe digital activism. However, because government-affiliated hackers use these same tactics for cyberwar and espionage and because new forms of hacktivism can be expected to emerge, it is important to understand that certain practitioners view this as their contribution to participatory politics.

**CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR DIGITAL ACTIVISM**

Hacktivism is only the most extreme of the many challenges to traditional notions of legitimate political participation. Digital activism faces numerous obstacles to its growth and efficacy. More directly,

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it can pose risks to participants themselves, either legally in the case of the Anonymous hacktivists, or socially in the case of women who exercise their political voice in misogynistic parts of the Internet.

**Unclear impact and slacker activism**

Digital activism has been referred to as slacktivism or clicktivism, criticised on several fronts as being lazy, cowardly, ineffective, and perhaps even harmful to the larger process of civic renewal. Critics consider individualized, networked participation a poor substitute for traditional forms of collective activism exemplified by well-worn reductionist versions of 1960s-era campaigns such as the United States civil rights movement. It is fair to assert, as Peter Levine does, that digital activism may be able to achieve scale and diversity but not depth or sustainability—that online campaigns may all prove evanescent and lack an ability to handle and overcome valid criticisms or lack the infrastructure necessary to invite and train youth from apolitical networks to replace current leaders the way traditional political organizations could. The Invisible Children and the uprisings in the MENA region exemplify these problems with participatory politics.

It cannot yet be said whether youth digital activism is a poor substitute for traditional forms of youth activism, and it is hard to evaluate the direct effects of media activist tactics on long-term targets such as social norms. It is known that digital structures and tactics used in the uprisings in the MENA region, by Invisible Children, and even by the Harry Potter Alliance have had an impact on the world. Furthermore, with rates of volunteerism and informal political participation remaining high among youth—especially marginalized racial and ethnic groups in the United States—scholars such as Ethan Zuckerman see the potential for a new “ladder of citizen participation” leading from lightweight forms of digital activism such as sharing memes to political participation involving the same level of time and personal commitment as traditional activism. Although there are some concerns about social movements founded on participatory politics, successful and sustainable networked social movements may already be emerging as hybrids of new and traditional youth organizing around issues such as undocumented immigrant rights in the United States.

**Unprotected civil rights and an unfree Internet**

Outside of Western countries with strong free speech and assembly protections, the slacktivist critique of digital activists as lazy or cowardly does not

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hold up. Many countries have long track records of harassing and imprisoning online activists. In 2015, Reporters Without Borders counted 170 imprisoned “netizens” around the world. 190 Several countries run extremely sophisticated national programmes of Internet filtering and information control; some have even developed State-run alternative social networks to move domestic Facebook users into a more easily monitored space, and “patriotic hackers” may be tasked with taking down dissenting websites. 191

Digital activists in some countries have invented ways to evade censors and share their own brand of political memes using clever language and imagery that stand in for political topics. 192 However, pervasive censorship and surveillance undermine online political participation by creating a kind of “disciplinary society”, wherein users discipline themselves and cultivate a kind of political disaffection and apathy. 193 This is a threat not only in countries perceived as authoritarian. Edward Snowden’s leaks have exposed massive unwarranted surveillance operations by Western Governments, which may have chilling effects on citizens in countries used to the assurance of being innocent until proven guilty and free to say what they want, especially in spaces perceived as private. Following Jürgen Habermas’s formulation, losing those private spheres deprives individuals of a safe place to develop their political identities and can undermine their ability to participate effectively once they are in their public spheres. 194

These threats to Internet freedom are increasing as the world moves further into the mobile computing era and are likely to have a negative impact on the ability of youth to express themselves in contemporary forums. With an ever-growing percentage of online interaction channelled through apps controlled by private companies such as Twitter, Facebook, Google and Apple, users have less control over their data and expose themselves to more risk as companies share their data with Governments and other third parties. Millions of users in developing countries who have received free access to Facebook on their mobile Internet plans do not realize they are actually on the Internet; 195 they are not aware that their data are traveling through the same Internet cables that several Governments are surveilling, looking explicitly for social media metadata. Moreover, free access to Facebook is not access to the Internet and its rich array of information sources and communication forums. This is creating new digital divides in the name of addressing old ones.

Digital divides

For many youth, the biggest barrier to joining the world of digital activism is still some form of the

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digital divide or digital inequality. \(^{196}\) While the proliferation of mobile computing means that cheaper Internet connections are being offered to more people worldwide, the Facebook example suggests that it might not be a full, free Internet they can afford to access. This means that people who have the greatest access and the time to develop their skills and realize their full potential will pull away from their fellow citizens in terms of political agency. Moreover, this select few will be those civic hackers empowered to design and fully exploit the next generation of civic and political technologies.

In studying youth engagement in participatory culture, Henry Jenkins and his colleagues identified an insidious “participation gap”, finding that youth with poor access to the necessary hardware and software and to safe, scaffolded environments in which to develop skills for creating and sharing media will fall behind. \(^{197}\) Essentially, such youth do not have equitable opportunities to engage in participatory politics and digital activism. The gap is even worse for girls, who on average have significantly less access to educational opportunities than boys do in many countries. There is already a need to develop advanced digital skills in combination with traditional political knowledge and critical thinking skills if one wishes to participate fully in contemporary politics. Youth who do not have access to their own computers, smartphones, or even feature phones will be less able to practice the digital skills of media making and online participation necessary to fully join the online publics that are increasingly shaping the political agendas around the world.

### Technologies and communities that oppress

Even when youth make it online and have the skills necessary to participate, they can still be marginalized by oppressive cultures of misogyny and racism, as traditional forms of sociopolitical inequality bleed into online spaces. Many of the most open online spaces for political discourse—sites such as Twitter and reddit—also play host to bad actors who belittle and harass women and racial and ethnic minorities for creating and sharing political messages of empowerment for their respective groups.

Harassment in the digital age is insidious because it follows the victim home and inherently expands the size and scope of the public witnessing the shamming and intimidation. This may result in the spread of fear across whole communities and desensitization to violent language and imagery. \(^{198}\) In many countries, Internet-based violence directed at lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals is a common occurrence, with the oppression sometimes amplified by practices such as videotaping and uploading episodes of abuse online. In addition, several countries pay for or otherwise promote harmful disinformation.


online, drowning out anti-government voices on social media and in comment sections across numerous websites, which adds to and encourages online violence by authorities. This type of systematic ideological oppression is something technology companies should be working to address.

Twitter still struggles to identify nefarious bots on its platform; these automated software programs posing as and posting like real Twitter users have been used by a number of politicians around the world, sometimes simply to artificially inflate the popularity of a candidate but also to silence legitimate political speech. In one instance, during a 2012 national election, all the political parties were allegedly using Twitter bots to repeatedly send out messages to make their statements trend on Twitter; one party even co-opted opposition hashtags and activated tens of thousands of bots, in effect drowning out legitimate public speech.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Support the growth of a free and open Internet**

Millions of youth still need reliable, open access to the Internet, not just for political purposes but also to meet their educational and economic needs. This does not mean providing free Facebook access. Free and open access to the whole Internet also means continuing to combat online censorship and mass surveillance activities around the world, as these undermine political expression. Finally, this also means continuing to support efforts to address oppression online, including those undertaken by Women, Action, and the Media (WAM!) to audit Twitter’s harassment reporting mechanisms and to recommend changes.

**Teach digital and civic skills together**

To ensure that even those youth with complete access to the Internet can participate fully using contemporary technologies, steps must be taken to provide sufficient scaffolding for young people so that they are able to gain experience and an understanding of how these new systems of change and power operate. Youth should be developing their digital media skills (both media production and programming) while also being exposed to political knowledge and critical and systems thinking applied to social and political problems and changemaking. Educators should find opportunities for application of these skills in practical changemaking projects at the local level that help youth test their theories of change, construct new media or technologies with a purpose, and gain confidence in their ability to assume a civic leadership role.

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It is essential to look to the future of digital activism, as the next set of online platforms and civic technologies will be designed by today’s youth. Ensuring that future technologies are inclusive and representative in terms of who can use them and how they can be used requires a community of designers characterized by diversity—in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, language and socioeconomic status—who can design with that diversity in mind. Providing access to digital tools, relevant learning opportunities, and pathways to political participation that validate youth as effective citizens will be critical to expanding youth political participation.

Take the lead and take responsibility: musts for youth and Governments

Youth should and undoubtedly will continue to invent new forms and uses of media and technology to express themselves, set agendas, organize politically, and press for change in the world. Digital activism represents a space in which youth practitioners are uniquely positioned to serve as civic and political leaders by repurposing existing platforms for new civic purposes and capitalizing on the democratic opportunities available to those with the requisite skills and technology access. Youth should support their peers through collaboration, mentoring and advocacy to ensure that more young people can participate civically and politically using digital tools. Importantly, youth who ascend to leadership roles in traditional institutions of corporate or government power should push for reforms that make those institutions more accessible, transparent and responsive to current and future generations of actualizing citizens. Governments may be able to address the mistrust and disengagement characteristically associated with traditional political processes by engaging more authentically with youth both online and offline. This means not only promoting civic hacking or creating more efficient channels of official communication, but also strengthening protections for freedom of speech, assembly, the press, and privacy so that youth digital activists do not suffer the chilling effects of government and corporate censorship and surveillance and are not criminalized or castigated for non-violent political activity.

Fund digital activism impact studies

Research on digital activism is rapidly expanding, but that does not mean it is keeping up with innovation in the sector. Moreover, most of the current research efforts are theoretical or descriptive. Case studies can provide detailed representations of successful digital actions, though cases of failure need to be studied as well. In addition, efforts must be made to understand the real impact of individual digital activism tactics such as online petitions, meme sharing, or calling for celebrity attention on Twitter. Causal studies are needed to better understand this space and to inform the design of future forms of activism and civic technology. Politically engaged youth can and should be at the forefront of performing this research as both practitioners and scholars. The upcoming generation of researchers deserves funding to make sense of the important innovations in digital activism their fellow youth are devising.


Perceptions and Behaviours of Young People. He also collaborates with non-governmental organizations that seek to raise awareness of youth issues and increase youth turnout in British general elections.

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Chapter Four: Community Engagement

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