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Remediating Participation and Citizenship Practices on Social Network Sites

Abstract

Being mainstream places where a variety of online practices converge and are integrated, social network sites have also witnessed the emergence of grassroots and top-down political uses: from candidates' and parties' profiles, to single-issues campaigns' discussion groups, to petitions and forms of 'political fandom', political content is now a constant presence in social media. Since social network sites are pervasive in young people's everyday lives, questions of the efficacy of the internet in engaging disaffected youth and expanding the opportunities for participation are under debate. This paper discusses the findings of a qualitative study aimed at investigating political uses of social network sites and emerging practices of online participation among Italian youth. Participatory uses of social network sites are unevenly distributed among young people: political content tends often to be incorporated as identity marker, while other young people actively engage in citizenship practices online. Therefore, it is argued, civic and political uses of social media have to be contextualised in young people's everyday lives, especially in their 'civic cultures' and in the particular 'convergent media ecology' in which they are immersed. Depending on the civic cultures young people form and shape, and the digital literacy they develop, political uses are either a further outcome of networked individualism or the signal of new modes of participation which is mainly grassroots, non conventional and concerning identity and lifestyle choices.

Zusammenfassung

Als etablierte Orte an denen eine Vielzahl von online Praktiken verschmelzen und integriert werden, haben Social Network Sites in Hinsicht auf politisch motivierte Nutzung die Entstehung von bottom-up (Basisbewegung) wie auch top-down Elementen forciert. Von Profilen der Kandidaten und Parteien bis zu Diskussionsgruppen über thematische Kampagnen, Petitionen und Formen politischen ‚Fantums‘ sind politische Inhalte mittlerweile feste Bestandteile von Social Media geworden.

