The Social Media and Civic Engagement Matrix

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Introduction

- Studies of online civic engagement often focus on how it improves quality-of-life in democratic countries.
- Online engagement activities may benefit communities while violating democratic norms.
- We present a matrix for classifying engagement activities along two dimensions: sociality and effect.

What We Did

- We conducted interviews of nonprofit affiliates.
- Some participants said civic engagement can be a negative experience.
- We developed a way to classify the full range of engagement examples from our interviews while taking norm-violating behaviors into account.

The Matrix

- Classifies perceptions of civic acts and engagement behaviors.
- Civic acts either improve or exacerbate quality-of-life.
- Antisocial behavior violates or disregards democratic norms.
- Prosocial behaviors are positive and align with democratic norms.

Social Media and Civic Engagement Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Improve</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exacerbate</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Prosocial-effective actions include registering voters and raising money for a charitable cause.
- Antisocial-improve actions are disruptive but effective due to the conflict they create or reveal.
- Prosocial-exacerbate actions violate norms and make life worse.

Engagement Examples

1. Changing a Facebook profile picture as a show of solidarity for the survivors of a natural disaster rather than donating to relief efforts.
2. Registering citizens to vote via social media.
3. Posting stolen emails to WikiLeaks to prevent the election of a candidate with a history of supporting unilateral military action.
4. Teachers striking and students protesting schools closures.
5. Harassing individuals associated with a social movement you disagree with.

Conclusions and Next Steps

- Online engagement activities may violate social, democratic norms.
- We presented a framework to classify an expanded range of online engagement activities.
- This matrix decouples the sociality and effectiveness of various actions.
- We plan to test the matrix by collecting and analyzing data about citizen attitudes related to a range of online activities.

Further Reading


Acknowledgements

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