The Social Media and Civic Engagement Matrix

Finholt, Anders; Million, A.J.; Hemphill, Libby

The Social Media and Civic Engagement Matrix

Anders Finholt  
Kalamazoo College  
Kalamazoo, MI 49006, USA  
anders.finholt16@kzoo.edu

A.J. Million  
University of Michigan, School of Information  
Ann Arbor, MI 48109, USA  
millioaj@umich.edu

Libby Hemphill  
University of Michigan, School of Information  
Ann Arbor, MI 48109, USA  
libbyh@umich.edu

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

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

This material is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant No. 1822228.