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Paul Mihailidis and Roman Gerodimos

Youth and Civic Engagement in Digital Culture

A host of large-scale civic movements over the past decade have employed digital technologies as facilitators for the organization, engagement, and participation of citizens in democratic processes. The Arab Spring, (Eltantawy and Wiest 2011; Khondker 2011), the Obama 2008 and 2012 campaigns (Gerodimos and Justinussen 2014), Occupy Wall Street, the Ice Bucket Challenge, and the Kony 2012 movement are often cited as major catalysts for driving interest into the role of young people and social networks in civic engagement (Castells 2012; Milner 2010). Recent protest movements in Turkey, Greece, Ukraine, and Hong Kong have codified a certain category of civic uprising that, while not dictated solely by social media, utilizes social media to organize and facilitate information, and to document actions and events for the world to see.

These large-scale events, however, overshadow compelling local grassroots uses of connective technologies for engagement in civic life.

In 2012, in Scotland, a 9-year-old student named Martha Payne started a blog where she documented her school lunches visually through photos and commentary. She began to share her blog, “NeverSeconds,” with her friends and community, and soon her photos about the poor conditions of school food spread far and wide. She gained over 2 million followers and raised over 5,000 GBP for a school cafeteria in Africa. Her popularity, however, exposed conditions that were uncomfortable for local officials, who ordered the blog to be removed citing privacy issues and the use of a camera in the school (Russell 2012). As Martha’s followers heard about the decision to close down Martha’s site, they took to Twitter to voice their concerns and put pressure on local officials to reverse their decision. Within weeks, Scottish council leader Roddy McCuish “instructed senior officials to immediately withdraw the ban on pictures from the school dining hall” (Bryant 2012). Since then, Martha’s blog has reached over 10 million people, she has traveled to Malawi to visit the schools where her funds reached, and she has put pressure on Scottish officials to improve their school lunch offerings.





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Around the same time in Sanford, North Carolina, 12-year-old Marshall Reid had been struggling with his weight for years, and suffered from bullying at school as a result. After seeing the movie *Super Size Me*, Marshall decided to try and reduce the portions of his meals for 30 days, in an effort to lose weight. Instead of simply trying to implement his plan, Marshall and his family wanted to show the positive impact that healthy lifestyles could have on daily life. They chose to create YouTube videos that documented Marshall's new diet, and to use the platform as a space for Marshall to express his frustrations, joys, and the challenges that accompanied his journal. After posting more than 140 videos on YouTube (Hoffman 2012), a large community of supporters, followers, and friends offered support and encouragement, and shared in the plight of Marshall's attempt to lose weight. As Marshall's community grew and embraced his initiative, The Portion Size Me project launched a contest for portion control, published a book, and garnered media attention that led to community discussions on portions, healthy food, and youth in schools and communities (Hoffman 2012).

Just one year earlier, in 2011, 22-year-old Molly Katchpole, upon hearing of Bank of America's implementation of a \$5/month banking fee, took to the nonprofit Change.org site to mount a participatory campaign to protest the fee. Katchpole composed a letter expressing her concerns about the fee, calling out banks' role in the recession of 2008–2009 to support her point. She ended the letter by urging Bank of America to remove its fee, and asked the Change.org community to sign and support the letter to Bank of America. In very short time, Katchpole's petition garnered over 300,000 signatures, which led to mainstream media coverage, spinoff campaigns against Bank of America, and a widespread condemnation of the fee imposed by the bank. Within one month of Katchpole's campaign, Bank of America announced it was dropping its new fee, and a host of other national banks followed suit by dropping fees they had implemented or were planning to implement.

Stories of young people using their voices to fight against social oppression grow more common with each passing year. The well-documented DREAMer movement provides a strong example of young activists using their voices to repurpose narratives of immigration into calls for civic and political awareness (Zimmerman 2012). Their activism, in the form of videos, images, art, and text, provides a space for marginalized voices to gather, interact, and advocate for reform and rights. Citizens also utilized social networks to react to the events of racial injustice, oppression, violence, and death in Ferguson, New York City, Florida, and beyond. Hashtags were created to collate conversations and call for direct action in response to such injustices. #Blacklivesmatter continues to provide a space for ~~dialog~~ support and expression, and corresponds with Attorney General Eric Holder's call for a federal inquiry into the legal actions acquitting an officer in the death of Eric Garner in New York City. The hashtags #ICantBreathe, #Iamtrayvon, #HandsUpDontShoot, and #iftheygunnedmedown ~~also~~ brought together





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To:

Brian T. Moynihan, President and CEO, Bank of America

I'm writing to express my deep concern over Bank of America's decision to charge customers \$5 a month to use their debit cards when making purchases.

The American people bailed out Bank of America during a financial crisis the banks helped create. You paid zero dollars in federal income tax last year. And now your bank is profiting, raking in \$2 billion in profits last quarter alone. How can you justify squeezing another \$60 a year from your debit card customers? This is despicable.

American consumers can't afford these additional fees. We reject any claims by BofA that this latest fee is somehow necessary.

Please, do the right thing. Reverse your decision to charge customers \$5 each month for using their debit cards to make purchases.

Sincerely,

{Your name}

Figure 24.1

The petition letter written by Molly Katchpole and uploaded to Change.org. Credit: Molly Katchpole.

a nation of voices in protest against violence against black citizens. Other examples of meaningful hashtag activism, like #yesallwomen, #bringbackourgirls, and #umbrelarevolution, have led to a surge of research and inquiry into how this type of expression and activism can gather diverse civic voices in defense of social justice, equality, and tolerance (Constanza-Chock 2014; Gerbaudo 2012).

These examples are but a few of a what is a vastly expanding list of cases from around the world that show how communities are using media and networks to engage in civic life. Shumow (2014) argues that "from the leveraging of social media by protesters during the Arab Spring to the more recent use of a walkie-talkie phone app





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developed in Austin, Texas, and used by protesters in Ukraine and Venezuela (Parker 2014), the past decade has seen an explosion of grassroots, popular movements that use horizontal communication to bypass traditional power structures” (3). Civic media are bypassing not only traditional power structures, but also the “transaction costs” (Shirky 2010) that constrain civic voices to participate in traditional media outlets.

This growing presence of digital technologies as primary facilitators for participation in civic life brings about important questions about the competencies—or literacies—needed to effectively navigate digital spaces for civic engagement ~~and participation~~ in digital culture. How young people learn to engage in civic life is a question that has historically been explored by the ability to transfer rote knowledge of government structure, process, and function, and tangible actions that are situated in the physical world and rooted in measurable outcomes like voting, volunteering, paying taxes, ~~participating in jury duty~~, and attending ~~regular~~ town hall meetings. While such metrics still play an important role in understanding the myriad of ways people engage in civic life, the increasing centrality of digital technologies in daily life necessitates the re-imagining of how we approach teaching and learning about engagement ~~in civic life~~ today (Gerodimos 2008, 2012; Mihailidis 2014b, 2013).

This chapter explores the role of pedagogy in preparing young people for active and inclusive participation in civic life. It argues for a need to insert more explicit attention to civic voice—the dispositions and modalities of expression that young people use to participate in daily ~~civic~~ life—in media and digital literacy pedagogies that can support both formal and informal spaces of learning. The examples ~~cited~~ above reinforce the need to centralize participatory culture in teaching and learning about media’s role in civic life. Young people are using media for information and knowledge transfer, but also as tools for advocacy, participation, and engagement in daily life. Adults should acknowledge these uses accordingly and integrate them into the core of a civics education within and beyond the classroom walls.

The Role of Literacies in Civic Learning

It is often assumed that being “born digital” confers an instinctive understanding of and adaptability to digital tools. Research has shown, however, that young people have difficulty negotiating the wide range of information made available via those digital tools (Killi, Laurinen, and Marttunen 2008). They often lack the critical awareness to differentiate quality, intent, and bias across the myriad of converged platforms within which they are exposed to information (Fieldhouse and Nicholas 2008). At the same time, the simple connotation of the “digital native” assumes a level of sophistication that has not been supported by scholarship. Research has found that young people are often prone to overconfidence about their ability to critically navigate the Web with an alarming level of blind trust in search engines (Bartlett and Miller





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2011). Overconfidence in information consumption also led students to project a level of cynicism toward media outlets without warranted inquiry into the content and scope of the messages themselves (Mihailidis 2009).

In response to growing ubiquitous digital culture, a range of literacies has proliferated in the past decades, premised on providing a range of skills and dispositions aimed at teaching and learning about critical evaluation, inquiry, analysis, and production for savvy media and information consumption. Media literacy, perhaps the literacy with the most widespread application and appeal, emerged from an effects tradition incorporating the work of the Frankfurt School (Horkheimer 1937); critical theories of political economy and hegemony (Schiller 1975); and more recent work by Neil Postman (1985) and contemporaries, who argue for the need to offer a way to combat media messages and systems to facilitate young people in “deconstructing injustices, expressing their own voices, and struggling to create a better society” (Kellner and Share 2007, 20). This work embraces Freire’s (1970) *conscientização*—or “critical consciousness”—in which:

individuals develop the ability to perceive their social reality “not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform” (49). Media literacy education, then, prepares citizens for democratic participation by helping them analyze mediated *representations* of their communities, as well as address *issues within* their communities (Mihailidis, 2014a).

In response to collapsing media industries, a post–print media culture for youth, and a need to understand media in a more holistic context, media literacy advocates for pedagogies of “empowerment” (Buckingham 2005) that place the learner at the center of the mediated equation, and emphasizes that individuals must learn about media in the context of the situated political, social, and cultural ecosystems in which they are embedded (Buckingham 2003; Carlsson 2008). Empowerment narratives advocate for a set of skills and dispositions for young people to embrace media and digital literacies (Glister 1997)—Internet searching, hypertext navigation, knowledge assembly, content evaluation (Bawden 2008)—as a way to build constructive competencies in critical inquiry and expression online that are “fundamentally implicated in the practice of citizenship” (Hobbs 2011a, 16). Hobbs (2011a) argues that digital literacies have capacity to “turn people from passive spectators to active citizens, where people generate ideas that are relevant to their own communities. Technologically speaking, every person can be a pamphleteer” (154).

Digital literacies necessarily embrace participation in digital culture. In their seminal white paper entitled “Confronting the Challenges of a Participatory Culture,” Henry Jenkins et al., (2009) advocate for a cross-pollination of skills, dispositions, competencies, and modes of engagement that transcend any set approach to learning about media and offer a diverse set of constructs—from play and curation to transmedia





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navigation, simulation, and performance, among others—that support diverse avenues to engagement and participation in daily civic life. These “new media literacies” incorporate DIY maker movements (Lankshear and Knobel 2011), online navigation of texts (Coiro et al. 2014), and creation-based pedagogies that focus on a new set of digital fluencies for young people to “acquire multimedia communication skills and know how to use these skills to engage in the civic life of their communities” (Hobbs 2010, vii).

The emergence of the literacies provides a rich space for building deeper and more meaningful experiences that approach the civic potential of young people in digital culture. For decades, scholars, starting as far back as Dewey and de Tocqueville, have waxed poetic about the democratic potential of media literacy. British media education pioneer Len Masterman wrote back in 1985 that media education is an essential step in the long march toward a truly participatory democracy and the democratization of our institutions (13).

While these big picture modes of thinking have helped promote the literacies as central spaces for civic learning and engagement, they carry with them a set of constraints that has restricted how we understand their potential. Jenkins (2006) positioned his new set of literacies as a way to “encourage greater reflection and public discussion on how we might incorporate these core principles systematically across curricula and across the divide between in-school and out-of-school activities.” By and large, these discussions have been happening at the periphery of formal education spaces, and are largely lacking in underserved communities ~~and populations~~. Further, the impact of the literacies as avenues for meaningful civic learning has been largely anecdotal.

In *Net Smart*, Howard Rheingold (2012) notes the difficult position that formal spaces of education find themselves in relation to evolving technology and youth engagement with networks for informal collaboration, learning, and engagement. “Educational institutions,” notes Rheingold, “cannot change swiftly and broadly enough to match the pace of change in digital culture ...” (252). Not only are schools limited by testing standards tied to learning measurements, but also the space of the literacies is relegated to peripheral curricular spaces and implemented only by champion teachers. At the same time, civic education in secondary schools remains in the domain of what Ito et al. (2015) refer to as “in the head” work (for example, knowing who controls the judiciary branch or which party holds the majority in the U.S. Senate) (12). What results from this is a series of constraints that limits the application of the literacies into meaningful discussions about civic learning and civic engagement today.

First, the literacies are only peripherally associated with civic engagement as a direct outcome of their work, and at best assume civic learning as an implicit byproduct of their pedagogies. Studies have shown that media literacy education can result in more attention paid to news and politics (McDevitt and Kioussis 2006; Kahne et al. 2010), greater awareness about violence depicted in the media (Scharer 2002), media’s





implicit bias (Vraga et al. 2009), critical analysis of news content (Mihailidis 2009), and more knowledge about news and civics (Hobbs et al. 2013; Craft et al. 2013). These studies focus on young people and attainment of new skills or dispositions, but connections to any behavior changes or direct forms of engagement in civic life are often assumed. There have been few studies that approach the literacies as directly impacting civic learning or civic participation. Those that explore civics as part of work in the literacies often promote inquiry through ~~the~~ duty-based citizenship (Bennett 2007; Dalton 2009) ~~context~~, asking mainly about voting, volunteering, and paying attention to news and current events. (Hobbs et al. 2013; Bennett and Segerberg 2011; Walgrave et al. 2011; Buckingham 2007, 2008; Kahne et al. 2012, 2011).

Second, work in the literacies often suffers from its relative slippage between and across many ~~of the~~ disciplines. Media literacy's conceptual home ~~has often oscillated~~ between education and communication fields, while its content emerges from humanities, social sciences, life sciences, and in general across disciplines. This conceptual vagueness has helped the literacies gain attention, and appeal as applied modes of inquiry. The growth of information literacy, ~~media literacy~~, news literacy, political literacy, digital literacy, health literacy, and so on, has brought attention to how young people learn to use skills to better understand content, practice, and praxis. At the same time, the diffusion of the literacies has limited their ability to grow in unified ways and to be considered a distinct space of inquiry. Potter (2010) noted the conceptual vagueness in a piece called "The State of Media Literacy" where he wrote, "Media literacy is a term that means many different things to different people—scholars, educators, citizen activists, and the general public." He went on to critique the field as catering to different constituencies and failing to build an identity or cohesive body of work that moves beyond educational application. Hobbs (2011b), in an essay responding to Potter, makes note of the many contributions to the literacies that are proliferating around the world, noting "slowly but surely, digital and media literacy now are becoming a basic part of contemporary discourse" (421).

Lastly, because the literacies often encompass the formal space of education, they have been less willing to embrace explicit civic action as an outcome of their work. Formal education has long struggled with how to build effective approaches to teaching about citizenship while being wary of the complex political, social, and cultural constraints that are embedded in pedagogical design and approval. Civic action that is seen as overtly political in some way is harder to justify as a learning outcome. As a result, the work of the literacies can be agnostic toward social justice, inequality, underserved populations or communities, and the role of civic voice as a change agent. Ito (2008) sees this as a friction between an increasingly participatory youth and traditional pedagogical models. Learning in digital culture, Ito (2008) argues, should be about "more than being able to access serious online information and culture. Youth could benefit from educators being more open to forms of experimentation and social





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exploration that are generally not characteristic of educational institutions” (2). Working within the constraints of formal education spaces leaves advancement in the literacies vulnerable to large-scale bureaucracy, standardized testing, and alignment with rigid outcomes, and to problems of inequality that befall public school systems. This has made the work of the literacies a noble endeavor, but one that struggles to keep pace with the digital realities of individuals’ worlds and with the need to be agile, dynamic, and responsive.

The civic potential of literacies, then, must rely on an ability to build more connected, inclusive, and justice-oriented narratives for young people to engage with in daily civic life. The examples laid out in the introduction of this chapter highlight the potential that digital technologies have to bridge formal schooling and the online spaces that allow learning to be made active around social and civic issues.

Connected Civics and Civic Media

In their recent paper, “Learning Connected Civics,” Ito et al. (2015) build on the work of MacArthur-funded research groups in Connected Learning and Youth and Participatory Politics to advance the idea of “connected civics,” which they define as “a form of learning that mobilizes young people’s deeply felt interests and identities in the service of achieving the kind of civic voice and influence that is characteristic of participatory politics.” (11). They go on to qualify the learning aspect of this idea by noting:

learning connected civics does not entail individually driven “transfer” between the personally meaningful cultural projects young people actively create and modes of concerted political engagement, but is centered instead on building shared contexts that allow for what we elaborate below as “consequential connections” between these spheres of activity (11).

Connected civics builds three support structures for consequential connections—*hybrid narratives*, *shared civic practices*, and *cross-cutting infrastructure*—that collectively move the space of civic learning beyond rote knowledge retention and toward dynamic capacities for civic voice, in which young people are now more often “expressing or in some cases organizing resistance to institutions and ideologies they deem problematic, obsolete, or oppressive.” (Ito et al. 2015, 12).

Young people are also circulating content frequently and freely across connective networks that are not inherently political, and are exercising forms of citizenship in their support of a wide array of cultural and social interests (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013). Research in support of connected civics shows that such networks offer places of belonging (Deuze 2006; Turkle 2012), spaces for collaborative production (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Brashears 2006; Musick and Wilson 2008; Benkler and Nissenbaum 2006), and a participative potential for engagement in daily civic life (Brabham 2008; Jenkins et al. 2009). The general correlation between social media and participation in civic life is positive, though not necessarily transformative (Boulianne 2015).¹





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At the same time, Ito et al. (2015) acknowledge that “young people’s everyday experiences of agency in their social worlds, and of citizenship and community involvement, turn out to be largely disconnected from what most educators might think of as sites of civic and political engagement” (13). The experience of agency in lived social worlds is reinforced by scholarship showing that young people’s civic activity in digital spaces can promote constructive civic behavior offline: from supporting causes, to advocating for movements and raising local awareness about social issues (Fowler and Christakis 2010; Musick and Wilson 2008; Romer et al. 2009). While a range of research has highlighted the expansion of learning cultures to support participatory youth (Riley and Literat 2012; Middaugh 2012; Kligler-Vilenchik and Shresthova 2012; Williamson 2013), these remain somewhat removed from spaces of formal education.

By advocating for connecting participatory politics, participatory culture, and civic interests, connected civics embraces “diverse routes to civic and political participation as well as learning” that focus on “peer culture, personal interests and identities and opportunities for young people to be recognized in sites of power in the wider world” (Ito et al. 2015, 16). The literacies focus on skill attainment and youth development in order to, according to Hobbs (2011a), “not [teach] students what to think; rather, [media literacy] emphasizes the process of helping people arrive at informed choices that are consistent with their own values through the active, reflective, collaborative, and self-actualizing” (427–428). This perspective assumes that pedagogies focus on value formation and informed decision making in the context of the situated self in society. While arriving at an informed choice is an indication of active engagement in civic life, it rarely embraces a specific direction toward active civic participation, and we believe this limits the true civic potential of the literacies.

Connected civics, while not focusing explicitly on the space of formal education, advocates for pedagogies that do the explicit work of turning audiences into participants, users into makers, and citizens from those who fulfill duties to those who exercise their voices to become empowered in their daily lives. Central to this process is the realization that traditional forms of political participation, while still crucial, cannot adequately represent the complexity of agendas, richness of issues, and dispersion of power into networks that are characteristic of contemporary liberal democracies. Global flows and technologies of communication and information have become integral, if not the primary, elements of contemporary politics, which means that those who lack the means to follow and participate in this process are profoundly disenfranchised.

The Work of Pedagogies for Civic Media

Contrary to previous forms of explicit disenfranchisement—such as not having the right to vote—today’s inequalities are obscure precisely because the processes of voice





Figure 24.2

Engaged research design for civic media. Credit: Salzburg Global Seminar/Ela Grieshaber.

aggregation, representation, and decision making are less formalized and explicit. Therefore, pedagogies that support civic media become not just tools for critical thinking but essential components of the civic process; not just the means for exercising one's democratic power, *but also for finding out where that power lies and how to exercise it*. In other words, this entails acquiring and exercising agency, both individual and social, and negotiating the boundaries between the two, so that young people realize the affordances and limitations of individual actions, recognize the need to balance competing agendas and manage limited resources, and respect and are respected so as to coexist with others within the civic commons. That means that pedagogies for civic media have to become embedded parts of young people's political socialization and, as such, may start in, but cannot be limited to, formal pedagogy or education.

The paradigm of engagement outlined here is not about a particular political stance or skill set, but about the importance, value, and multiple benefits that exercising one's voice has in itself, both for the individual and for the community. Redressing injustice and tackling inequality are not the exclusive properties of any particular political or media space, but the foundations of a healthy and sustainable citizenry. However, adapting to this new paradigm so as to exploit its full civic potential requires shifting



our mindset from a conceptualization of power as a top-down and zero-sum game. In some contexts, one agent's (e.g., the citizens') acquisition of power may indeed require another agent's (e.g., an authoritarian regime's) loss of power. And in some contexts, situations require the top-down exercise of force so as to, for example, maintain law and order.

Yet, an alternative conceptualization, and one that is more connected to the complex realities of highly interdependent digital communities, would be to view pedagogies for civic media as *facilitators of civic voice*—that is, the realization of one's potential and incorporation into the body politic, which rather than reducing another actor's ability to make decisions, actually creates an environment of pluralism and interaction that has benefits for *all* actors within the system (Gerodimos et al. 2013, 2). In practical terms this means that pedagogical approaches to civic media are not just about formal learning or personal growth—i.e., about the absolute resources of individuals—but about an open and engaged attitude toward others in the community that benefits both; an approach to cultivating civic voice that is not solely based on either romantic notions of duty or cynical perceptions of self-interest, but on the willingness and ability to reach out to others so as to address real-life problems, as was the case with the grassroots cleanup movement (using the hashtag #riotscleanup and the account @riotcleanup) following the 2011 riots in England, the immediate aftermath of the 2013 Boston Marathon attacks, or the recent #blacklivesmatter movement in the United States.

The pedagogical models for civic media confront the common criticism of civic engagement online: that it creates a false sense of empowerment or that it lacks substance and impact. Bialski (2008) argued that “consuming the social web and sharing that content for others to consume is not, in fact, using the social web to its potential. Even content-creation, if it is not truly reflexive, is just a mechanic reproduction of a consumer product. ... [W]hat are these individuals sharing? What are they communicating? How are the countless social operating systems on Facebook, such as the “What Prostitute Are You?” actually being productive?” While it is true that the excessive hype by over-eager commentators or stakeholders can create unrealistic or just plain irrelevant expectations about what technological applications or innovations can achieve, it is also true that, in an effort to tackle citizens' perceived deficits of efficacy and link civic issues to their daily lives, pedagogies for civic media imply that action by an individual citizen should, can, or always will lead to tangible social or global change. Liking a Facebook post, retweeting a link, signing an e-petition, or donating to a campaign may not, and in fact probably will not, lead to noticeable change.

However, the impact of civic voices on social and civic problems takes different forms and is the result of both short- and long-term actions and interactions. In the aftermath of the January 7, 2015, terrorist attack against the French satirical weekly newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris, the slogan “Je suis Charlie” (“I am Charlie”) was





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launched. Within hours, millions of people used the hashtag on Twitter, changed their profile photos on Facebook, and reproduced the slogan in solidarity with the victims of the attack. Four days after the attack, millions of people participated in some of the largest-ever peace and unity rallies in Paris and across the world. While that outpouring of support was largely symbolic, it was also a moment that seems to have profoundly affected the identities, values, motivations, hopes, and fears of citizens not just in France but also across the globe. It sent a robust message of support of democratic values, while also sparking debate about freedom of speech and religious tolerance. That incident was a useful reminder that collective action, the intermingling of personal and public expression, and the use of connective technologies to share symbols and emotions are potent drivers of both engagement and change in civic life.

Furthermore, while from a rational perspective the impact of one citizen expressing their voice in social media or signing one e-petition may be negligible, surely the same could be, and has been, argued to be the case with voting or joining a political party. Yet, apart from the very real and very substantive benefits in terms of emotional investment, identity formation, and sense of belonging that engagement has for the individual concerned, the aggregate of those “clicks,” “likes,” votes, emails, or voices can ultimately create significant local, national, or even global change. Avaaz is a global Web movement promoting civic action on issues such as climate change, human rights, poverty, conflict, and government transparency founded in 2007 by a group of digital activists. It now has more than 40 million members in 194 countries (a community base that political parties in democratic countries could only dream of). Over the last eight years, Avaaz has made impactful and rapid-response interventions around the world, from banning bee-killing pesticides in the European Union and promoting worker safety plans in Bangladesh to organizing the biggest climate march in history, which took place in 2,000 communities around the world in September 2014.

These examples demonstrate that, as digital media coexist and in some cases replace “traditional” media, so will new forms of expression complement and coexist with more traditional ones. However, civic engagement in digital culture is not a linear process moving along a predetermined path. It depends on the extent to which citizens learn to use media to step out of their routines and comfort zones, experiment, fail, innovate, interact, argue, and learn. The pedagogy of civic media, then, requires addressing structural barriers that are ingrained both in human nature and in the architecture of digital culture (see Milan, chapter 4).

We argue that the role of pedagogies, stemming from work in the literacies and in connected civics, opens up the digital realities of civic life for young people, and finds ways to connect the classroom and the community to bring teaching and learning with and about civic media into relevant and applied social worlds of young people. One initiative that has influenced our work in pedagogies of civic media is at the Salzburg Academy on Media & Global Change, a summer activist pedagogy and action research





incubator where teaching and learning blend theory and practice, inquiry and expression, to advocate for inclusive engagement and participation in civic life.

Civic Media Pedagogy in Action: The Salzburg Academy on Media & Global Change

The Salzburg Academy on Media & Global Change was founded in 2007, and since then it has gathered more than 600 young people and 100 scholars, educators, and practitioners from around the world to engage in the development and implementation of projects that advocate for social change in local communities across the world. The Academy's objective is to lead the creation of media action plans, multimedia storytelling, and comparative research that collectively embrace the teaching and learning of media as an act of civic engagement.

Over the past ten years, we have seen our case studies implemented in rural schools in sub-Saharan Africa, and we have led media action projects in rural communities in Mexico and in the buffer zone of Cyprus. We have implemented active storytelling projects in Slovakia, used games for development in Egypt, and ~~launched~~ a project on



Figure 24.3

A global cohort of young people engaged in applied research for civic action. Credit: Salzburg Global Seminar/Ela Grieshaber.





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digital literacy ~~and human rights~~ in Beirut. Out of this work we have identified a framework that guides a pedagogy of civic media.

Our approach aims to enable participants to be part of positive change at local, national, and global levels, and to bridge divides, cross boundaries, and overcome deficits. The process of becoming an active citizen and being able to encounter and interact with the Other is intrinsically linked to the development of one's identity, one's relationship to community, and one's personal values. Our experience with various curricular iterations and interactions with people from all over the world has reinforced our conviction that change starts first and foremost with oneself and then moves outward, so we encourage our students to start by reflecting on their own identity, cultural "baggage," life goals, and values (the "Me" story). We then ask students to reflect on how they interact with, affect, and are affected by the communities to which they belong (the "We" story), before examining issues and causes that are important to them and the ways and means of taking action.

We present this framework not as a prescriptive approach to pedagogies that support civic media, but as a set of constructs that may guide considerations of how pedagogies can better embrace civic media and civic voice as explicit aims for teaching and learning with and about media, participation, and civic life. We focus on three steps that are key to developing and exercising civic voice in global digital culture:

(a) **LISTEN:** How do citizens encounter and make sense of diverse voices? And how do they process stimuli so as to develop their identities and open up to change? These questions guide the situated space of listening that we advocate. Stepping out of one's comfort zone so as to encounter voices and opinions that challenge beliefs and preconceptions is key to developing empathy, rejecting stereotypes both about the self and the Other, and questioning assumptions that drive conflict and inequality. This can be done online, using news curation tools, so as to access and evaluate multiple perspectives on a given issue, as well as offline, in the safe and "unplugged" space of a room in which people from diverse, often clashing, backgrounds are encouraged to speak out and explore their differences. Creating a micro-environment of respect and tolerance is paramount to enabling young people to talk, listen, and appreciate the value of open interaction.

(b) **SHARE:** How can young people articulate their voices so as to reach out to the community and make an impact? Storytelling is key to articulating and sharing one's ideas, grievances, and visions and to becoming empowered. In addition to practical skills, such as multimedia production, storytelling entails reflecting on the factors that enable civic campaigns and messages to become successful and drive change, including the emotional and symbolic elements of civic engagement highlighted earlier. A common issue identified in our students' early attempts to produce and share is that they often do not appreciate the potential power of their own thoughts and words. Realizing





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the extent to which simple, everyday stories told with empathy, positivity, and wisdom can affect others is a very empowering experience.

(c) **ACT:** In what ways and through which means can citizens take meaningful action to address problems of inequality, injustice, and lack of freedom? While listening to others and participating in the dialogue is important, the civic potential of the literacies can only be fulfilled through participation and the realization of agency. Despite the linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic barriers that divide young people, we have repeatedly and consistently observed in such diverse cohorts a profound ability to come together and design small-scale community interventions that harness the power of crowds, are based on emerging modes of collaboration and co-creation, and are able to address real-life concerns.

Most of the examples of civic media mentioned earlier in this chapter are *reactions* to events such as natural and humanitarian disasters, conflict, oppression, and crisis. However, meaningful civic action can also be *proactive*, starting at the local (and even



Figure 24.4
Students at Salzburg Academy using Art for Public Expression. Credit: Salzburg Global Seminar/
Moses Itani.





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individual) level. The space of civic media continues to open up new ways for young people to advocate for their rights, to support issues that matter to them, and to engage in active forms of participation to better their communities. Our argument incorporates work already done in the literacies and in connected civics, to call for pedagogies aimed at cultivating diverse and vibrant civic voices that contribute to a virtuous cycle of engagement and empowerment. This is not so much a matter of scale, as one of motivation and determination. Or, as anthropologist Margaret Mead put it, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

Note

1. Boulianne (2015) notes “... the metadata raise questions about whether the effects are causal and transformative. Only half of the coefficients were statistically significant. These findings raise doubts about transformative effects” (534).

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