

Chapter 4

Engaging Young Voters in the Political Process: A Conceptual Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this chapter is to analyse young voter engagement in modern Western democracies. Why young voters? Young voters are disengaged from the political process. In order to complete the analysis, the author adapts an engagement model from social media marketing. The adapted model consists of three parts: consumption, contribution, and (co) creation of brand related materials. The author hypothesises that each aspect of the model is related to the other and that all three aspects of the model are positively related to loyalty to the political party brand. The aim of this conceptual adaptation is to investigate a new way to re-engage young voters with the political party brand, thereby strengthening one pillar of modern democracy.

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INTRODUCTION

Edward Snowden in an interview by Brian Williams on NBC (2019):

WILLIAMS: What do you make of Donald Trump?

SNOWDEN: I think he`s actually quite simple to understand. Donald Trump strikes me like nothing so much as a man who has never really known a love that he hasn`t had to pay for. And so everything that he does is informed by a kind of transactionalism, I think, and what he`s actually looking for is simply for people to like him. Unfortunately, that produces a lot of negative effects.

A frenzy of rapid growth and many recent papers has marked recent research on the concept of engagement (Becker, Van Doorn, & Verhoef, 2018; Harmeling, Moffett, Arnold, & Carlson, 2017; Pansari & Kumar, 2017; Calder, Isaac, & Malthouse, 2016; Schivinski, Christodoulides, & Dabrowski, 2016; Mishra, 2019). The concept has become prevalent in many disciplines including sociology (Mondak, Hibbing, Canache, Seligson, & Anderson, 2010), psychology (Huo, Binning, & Molina, 2009), organisation behaviour (Crawford, LePine, & Rich, 2010) and marketing (Hollebeek, Srivastava, & Chen, 2019). However, one perspective, the political perspective, has received comparatively less attention.

The aim of this chapter is to analyse young voter engagement with the political party brand. Why young voters? Young voters are often characterised as alienated, mistrustful, and disinterested in political systems (Barrett & Brunton-Smith, 2014; Dermody & Hanmer-Lloyd, 2004; Macnamara, Sakinofsky, & Beattie, 2012). Young voters (18–35 years) are less likely to vote, less likely to get involved in conventional political activities such as joining and supporting political parties, and hold negative attitudes toward the electoral process (Barrett & Brunton-Smith, 2014; Macnamara, Sakinofsky, & Beattie, 2012). Additionally, young voters are seen as disenchanting with politics, distrustful and cynical of political institutions, and have limited identification with political parties (Dermody & Hanmer-Lloyd, 2004; Dermody, Hanmer-Lloyd, & Scullion, 2010). Put another way, many young voters are disengaged from the political process and often feel alienated from it. This has led a variety of scholars (Boonen, Meeusen, & Quintelier, 2014; Fieldhouse, Trammer, & Russel, 2007; Wagner, Johann, & Kritzinger, 2012) to call for further research addressing young voter participation and associated confounding variables. The author of this chapter suggests a need to understand the engagement and disengagement patterns of young voters, as this will help provide solutions to young voter disengagement, and allow for the development of long-term strategies to mobilize the young electorate (Lilleker & Koc-Michalska, 2017; Macnamara et al., 2012; Mann & Mayhew, 2015).

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