

Chapter 9

Perception Differences of Online Voting Between Young and Senior Voters

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents a research study that examines the antecedents to voting intention with regard to the use of computer-based, online voting systems. The research is based on the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) model. Subjects from two different age groups (18-to-25 and 60+ years) in the United States are surveyed to determine the factors affecting their intent to use online voting systems. The results indicate that performance expectancy, social influence, and computer anxiety are factors affecting the intent to use online voting. Significant differences were found between the young adults (18-to-25) and seniors (60+ years) study groups on all four independent variables as well as on intent to use online voting. For young adults performance expectancy, social influence, and computer anxiety are significant factors affecting the intent to use online voting, while for senior citizens, performance expectancy and computer anxiety are significant factors. Ease of use was not a significant indicator of intent to use online voting for either group.

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Table 1. National voter turnout for U.S. federal elections – 1960 to 2008

Year	Eligible to Register	Registered Voters	Voter Turnout	Percentage Of Turnout
2008*	231,229,580	NA	132,618,580*	56.8%
2004	221,256,931	174,800,000	122,294,978	55.3
2000	205,815,000	156,421,311	105,586,274	51.3
1996	196,511,000	146,211,960	96,456,345	49.1
1992	189,529,000	133,821,178	104,405,155	55.1
1988	182,778,000	126,379,628	91,594,693	50.1
1984	174,466,000	124,150,614	92,652,680	53.1
1980	164,597,000	113,043,734	86,515,221	52.6
1976	152,309,190	105,037,986	81,555,789	53.6
1972	140,776,000	97,328,541	77,718,554	55.2
1968	120,328,186	81,658,180	73,211,875	60.8
1964	114,090,000	73,715,818	70,644,592	61.9
1960	109,159,000	64,833,096	68,838,204	63.1

*Source: 2008 election results: http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout_2008G.html.

Source: Federal Election Commission. Data are drawn from Congressional Research Service reports, Election Data Services Inc., and State Election Offices. Information Please® Database, © 2008 Pearson Education, Inc. All rights reserved.

INTRODUCTION

Voting has always been viewed as a very special privilege accorded to United States citizens. This privilege applies to many other countries around the world. The early history of voting in the United States excluded suffrage for women. This changed in 1920 with the 19th amendment to the United States constitution. Also, the age at which voting privileges were extended to citizens varied among the states. The 26th amendment to the United States constitution standardized the voting age at 18 years in 1971, and this applies to all federal, state, and local elections.

Given the history of various suffrage efforts across the world, one might conclude that voting is a very important aspect of our lives. Unfortunately, while school systems teach youth about the importance of the privilege of voting, it is an obligation that is ignored by many of those eligible to vote. In countries where voter turnout is low this is viewed as a sort of social problem reflecting apathy on the part of many voters. Table

1 gives the turnout for presidential federal elections from 1960 to 2008 in the U.S. only. As you can see, the highest percentage of turnout was in 1960 with 63.1% of those eligible to vote actually casting ballots. The lowest percentage was the 1996 election with 49.1% casting a ballot, a turnout of less than 1 in every 2 voters.

In addition to the presidential elections held every four years in the United States, there are also federal elections every two years for various members of the Congress. While not shown in Table 1, voter turnout for non-presidential election years is considerably lower. Since 1974, voter turnout during these “off-year” elections ranged from low of 36.4% to a high of 39.8%, with fewer than two out of every five eligible voters casting ballots.

The failure of individuals to vote is often decried in the popular press. Whether the decision to not vote is driven by apathy or is a rational choice by the eligible voter, it is generally believed that if the costs associated with voting were reduced, turnout would increase (Rallings and Thrasher,

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