The Influence of Media Consumption on Trust, Political Efficacy and Social Media Activism among Young Adults

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Abstract
For many years, trust in government and political efficacy has increasingly been an area of interest for political scientist. Recently, social media activism has become just as intriguing. With social media playing such a dominant role in society, individuals are consuming news through their social media timelines, without having to seek it out themselves. This is especially true for young adults. Through the advancement of non-traditional media outlets, this generation is submerged in endless Facebook statuses, tweets, and television coverage of civil unrest and political polarization that has certainly had both social and political implications. While past studies conducted by the Black Youth Project, have investigated attitudes of young racial minorities regarding trust in government and political efficacy, more research is needed to determine how digital natives are navigating the political terrain. This dissertation will assess whether media consumption has affected levels of trust in government, political efficacy and social media activism among young adults. This study will also examine the utility of Cultivation Theory and Uses and Gratification Theory for political science research. In addition, an analysis of how trust in government and political efficacy has changed over time among young adults will be offered. By performing quantitative analysis on primary data from 2017-2018, this dissertation finds: (1) Media consumption is not a predictor for trust in the government or political efficacy; (2) high levels of media consumption is a predictor for social media activism; (3) race continues to be a predictor for trust in government, political efficacy, and social media activism and (4) Cultivation Theory and Uses and Gratification Theory has utility in political science research. As social media involvement continues to grow, it is becoming increasingly important for social scientists to gain a better understanding of its sphere of influence, as well as determine how it can be used as a tool for change.