Facebook: The enabler of online civic engagement for activists

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Highlights

• We examined online civic engagement among activists on social issues.
• We used social activist as our unit of study and Facebook as the platform.
• Five modes of Internet Activism were used by activists.
• Facebook appears to be a civic communicative tool to gather, mobilize and organize information.

Abstract

This exploratory study aims to investigate the existing efforts in civic engagement using Facebook. Previous work describes the typical usage of Facebook for connecting with others, to educate and inform in a wide range of context. Little research exists, however, on the emerging role of Facebook as an enabler for civic engagement in a social network environment. With over one billion global Facebook users, there is emerging evidence that activists are making concerted efforts to utilize Facebook’s dynamic ability for addressing social issues. The present study conducted face-to-face interviews with twelve activists in examining how Facebook was used to conduct civic engagement activities that address social issues. The analysis was based on the five criteria of Internet activism, i.e. collection of information; publication of information; dialogue; coordinating actions and lobbying for decision makers. The results revealed that activists are using Facebook to seek information, check on others, follow links, post civic messages, promote social events, appeal for donations, call for volunteers, discuss social issues, schedule plans and advocate change. These findings indicate that activists are using Facebook to shape the traditional civic engagement landscape in an online realm. Future opportunities for this stream of research are then discussed before concluding.

Keywords

Social networking sites; Civic engagement; Facebook; Activists; Social media; Social issues

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