SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES INFLUENCE ON CIVIC AND POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT; EXAMINING THE USE OF FACEBOOK BY YOUNG ADULTS

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AIKATERINI KOSTOPOULOU

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ABSTRACT

Background. At a time when young adults have been at the forefront of declining levels of political participation and civic engagement, everywhere around the world, studying how a popular social network might be able to promote their engagement in public affairs is of significant importance.

Aims. This study was aiming to study how Social Networking Sites are associated and the ways might influence young adult’s civic and political engagement. Specifically, it is trying to identify the relationship between offline political and civic actions and online civic and political activities on Facebook.

Methods. In order to gather the data mixed method approach was followed. First, a web based questionnaire was used in order to collect the quantitative data; the survey was distributed by using the university mail and answered from 184 students of the University of Sheffield. The research continued with face-to-face semi-structured interviews so, from the students that had already completed the survey 6 were chosen to take part in a follow up interview.

Results. The findings showed that the sample population is engaged more with less time consuming civic and political activities in their everyday life and as regards civic and political actions on Facebook young adults are more engaged with less active while more observing activities. The interview sample findings revealed that although Facebook has potentials, as for information distribution and organization regarding civic and political issues, still it is not enough and it’s not the solution for promoting and enhance young adults political and civic engagement offline.

Conclusions. This study found some interesting findings and raised some recommendation so as to future studies to identify ways to reduce, if not to eliminate young adult’s disengagement.
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Finally, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my parents, for their endless love, support, understanding and motivation during all these years. Without their contribution, none of these could be happened.

“One of the penalties for refusing to participate in politics is that you end up being governed by your inferiors.”

Plato
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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 The background of the study

I am using Facebook seven years now but it was this year where I can undoubtedly classify myself as an avid user spending more than four hours per day on it. What was the reason? This year I left my county, Greece coming to England for my master degree. Back to Greece I was much interested and engaged in several, every day activities having both political and civic character. So, away from my country I started using Social Media, especially Facebook to stay informed but also to distribute political and civic information for letting more people to be aware. When I realized this new usage of the online platform I was making, several questions came to my mind. Does this “online activism” have any impact on real life? Do Social Networking Sites (abbreviated as SNS) promote, supplement or deteriorate political and civic situations and offline events? What other students think about these issues?

That was the background before specified the topic on my dissertation and conclude in the specific issues I would try to explain and clarify as much as I could.

1.2 Context

1.2.1 Offline events where social media played a vital role

In the nearest past, one can number several offline events, such as the Arab Spring (Wolfsfeld, Segev & Sheafer, 2013; Gerbaudo, 2012; Tufekci & Wilson, 2012), the “Indignados” movement in Spain (ibid), the Greek Indignados Movement (Lu, Cheliotis, Cao, Song & Bressan, 2012), the Occupy Wall Street movement in US (ibid), protests in Chile (Valenzuela, Arriagada & Scherman, 2012) the Guatemalan justice movement (Harlow, 2012) and more recent, the Turkey’s Protest Movement (Aslan, 2013) and the massive protests in Brazil (Stauffer, 2013). All associated with political and civic context, where the use of SNS was a significant feature in common. In some cases it was on SNS where these offline movements created and in some others, SNS acted as a supplementary tool for their enhancement.
1.2.2 Why it’s important to study the relationship between SNS and political/civic participation?

Significant concepts of this study are “Youth”, “Political”, “Civic” and “Engagement” online and offline but, more important is the relationship between these.

Several studies (Holt, Shehata, Strömbäck & Ljungberg, 2013; Bakker & Vreese, 2011; Valenzuela, Park & Kee, 2009) reported that young adults display low levels of engagement and civic and political participation, especially as regards traditional ways of participation (Pippa, 2003); while at the same time they constitute the most active group using SNS (Bakker & Vreese, 2011; Gennaro & Dutton, 2006).

Therefore, studying the relationship between the use of online SNS by young adults and engagement in public affairs and the possible ways SNS might impact participatory behaviors is of importance. This is because it may provide as with new ideas for boosting active citizenship and enhancing engagement and participation in civic and political actions (Gil de Zuniga, Jung & Valenzuela, 2012) or ever help to create SNS being able to increase the motivation and the ability of users to participate in social and political change (Rotman, Preece, Vieweg, Shneiderman, Yardi, Pirolli, Chi & Glaisyer, 2011).

However, there is a gap in the existing literature on whether and in what ways SNS are related to political and civic activities of young adults offline and in what extend they can influence them. (Zhang, Johnson, Seltzer & Bichard, 2010; Valenzuela, Park & Kee, 2009). This study will try to address these issues and explain the shift by which younger’s starting turning towards social media, for example to organize street protest or sign petitions, and become disengaged from traditional ways of political and civic participation and what the implications might be.

Although the existence of Twitter, which is another widely established social network has been acknowledged, its impact on political and civic activities will not be examine in this research due to time limitations. It was decided to concentrate on the effects Facebook might have on young adult’s public life. The use of Facebook
among University students in the UK, specifically at The University of Sheffield will be examined.

1.3 Research aims and objectives

1.3.1 The aims of the research

- Investigate young adults civic and political actions “offline”
- Examine how students use Facebook for civic and political actions
- Investigate which specific features of Facebook mostly produce these effects
- Investigate whether Facebook is related with students offline civic and political engagement
- Examine what make students hesitate to use Facebook for civic and political issues

1.3.2 Research Questions

- What are the general political and civic activities young adults engage in?
- What political and civic activities on Facebook do young adults engage in?
- Do young adults perceive Facebook as an appropriate venue for political activity?
- What is the relationship between online and offline civic and political participation and more specifically; Does political activity on Facebook influence general political and civic participation?

1.3.3 The objectives of the research

- To identify what features of Facebook influence political and civic activity
- To identify the reasons students use or not Facebook for civic and political activities
- To identify if Facebook enhances or decreases students civic and political engagement offline
• To identify how Facebook could be used to further support and enhance its user’s civic and political engagement.

1.4 Conclusion

The structure of the dissertation is organized as follow: Chapter 2 presents academic works and past researches on the field under investigation and the findings they concluded. Chapter 3 offers information about the research methodology followed and the research tools used. Also, it refers to the sampling population and the final response rate. Chapter 4 informs the reader about the findings of the research as well their interpretation and their link back to the literature review. Finally, Chapter 5 presents the key conclusions, an evaluation of the findings and some future recommendations.
Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction
Given the aims and the research questions cited in the previous chapter, this chapter reviews the current literature in this topic area and identifies the most relevant sources. It starts with trying to define civic and political participation, highlighting various scholarly positions and the different ways in which these terms are linked to this study. Then it moves on to Internet suitability as a possible venue of participation. Subsequently, it defines important concepts, like ‘cultural capital’ and ‘social networking sites’ and then it is concentrated around key studies on the relationship between SNS and engagement.

2.2 A try to define civic and political engagement
Researchers on this field give different definitions for the terms civic participation, political participation civic engagement and political engagement, based on the purpose of their study.

According to what has been written, civic engagement and participation has been used and defined mostly as actions oriented towards promoting happiness to other people without waiting something back for exchange. Particularly is described by voluntary activities for help solving problems in society such as volunteering to help the needy, fundraising for nongovernmental organization etc (Zuniga, Jung & Valenzuela, 2012; Hirzalla & Van Zoonen, 2010; Zhang, Johnson, Seltzer & Bichard, 2010; Valenzuela, Park & Kee, 2009; Quintelier & Vissers, 2008).

Political engagement and participation has been frequently used to define traditional activities, such as voting, coupled with non-traditional actions such as protesting and boycotting, trying to manipulate and control governmental policies, either by using direct or indirect methods (Holt, Shehata, Strömbäck & Ljungberg, 2013; Zuniga, Jung & Valenzuela, 2012; Vitak, Zube, Smock, Carr, Ellison & Lampe, 2011; Zhang, Johnson, Seltzer & Bichard, 2010; Valenzuela, Park & Kee, 2009; Quintelier & Vissers, 2008). Though, some studies adopt a diversified definition,
considering that only conventional and traditional forms should be included in the definition of political participation (Conroy, Feezeli & Guerrero, 2012).

In some other academic works, the concept of civic and political participation are ascertain as one unique variable, with civic behaving as a wider term including political participation (Dahlgren, 2009). However, the distinction is oriented towards the notion of “engagement” and “participation” with the former operating as a necessary requirement for the appearance of the other (Dahlgren, 2009).

2.3 Social Capital, Social Networks, and Political Participation
As several studies advocate (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Lampe, Ellison & Steinfeld, 2006) people use SNSs mainly to stay in contact with their already established network of friends and for acquiring more information about people that they first met “offline”. Because of that, subsequent studies (ibid; Jung, Gray, Lampe & Ellison, 2013; Brandtzaeg, 2012; Burke, Kraut & Cameron, 2011; Yoder & Stutzman, 2011; Ellison, Steinfeld & Lampe, 2011; Valenzuela, Park & Kee, 2009; Steinfeld, Ellison & Lampe, 2008) when examined the role of SNS concerning civic and political attitudes concentrated mostly on how individual’s social capital can be influenced. Therefore, fewer scholars have been engaged with the influence and derived effects that SNSs might have on citizen’s political and civic engagement and participation (Johnson, Zhang, Bichard & Seltzer, 2011; Ellison, Steinfeld & Lampe, 2007).

According to Steinfeld, Ellison & Lampe, (2008) the term social capital refers to the benefits individuals obtain from their relationships with other people. SNSs use might be responsible for causing both decreases and increases in social capital. Furthermore, Gil de Zúñiga et al (2012) identified social capital as people’s behavior which involves mutual benefit and aims at creating a positive impact on their community or at a political level. In their study Wellman, Quan-Haase, Witte & Hampton (2001) divided social capital into ‘network capital’ and ‘participatory capital’. Indicating that, the former is mainly connected to individual’s involvement with politics and voluntary actions. In another academic work by Valenzuela, Park & Kee, (2009) a different discrimination of the term has been applied; while social capital is been divided into ‘intrapersonal’, ‘interpersonal’ and ‘behavioral’;
however, only in the latest actions relevant with individuals participation in civic and political actions are involved.

On the one hand several studies consider the effects of online, either general with the use of internet or more specifically through SNSs, engagement together with measures of social capital (Bimber, 2001; Wellman, Quan-Haase, Witte & Hampton, 2001; Boulianne, 2009). On the other hand, there is a great variety of studies concentrated mainly around social capital as a dependent variable (Wellman, Quan-Haase, Witte & Hampton 2001; Ellison, Steinfeld & Lampe, 2007; Burke, Kraut & Cameron, 2011; Yoder & Stutzman, 2011; Steinfield, Ellison & Lampe, 2008; Kraut, Kiesler, Boneva, Cummings, Helgeson, & Crawford, 2002; Kraut, Patterson, Lundmark, Kiesler, Mukopadhyay, & Scherlis, 1988).

This study examines both political and civic forms of participation and the focus is on political and civic activities, rather than the effect of Internet and SNS uses on social capital. For the purposes of this study, political participation includes behaviors both conventional such as:

- Voting,
- Talking to others about candidates or parties
- Working for a political campaign or political group, and
- Attending meetings or a rallies for a candidate

And non-traditional political behaviors such as:

- Protesting
- Boycotting products
- Signing petitions

Civic participation has been defined as forms of voluntary activity aimed towards solving problems in the society and helping others through non-governmental or non-electoral means, such as:

- Fundraising for charity
- Volunteering for a non-electoral organization
• Participating in community problem solving
• Participating in fundraising run/walk/ride

2.4 Internet use and political/civic participation of young adults

A wide variety of studies has attempted to identify the effects that Internet use might have on individual’s civic and political engagement and the extent to which these can play a substantial role or not. The conflicting results scholars concluded have given rise to ‘cyber-enthusiasts’ and ‘cyber-skeptics’, two terms widely used to describe the two opposite sides (Auškalnienė, 2012).

2.4.1 ‘Cyber-enthusiasts’ and the ‘Cyber-skeptics’

On the one hand, scholars argued that Internet constitutes a dangerous environment, mostly for unengaged citizens that cannot affect offline political and civic interactions. It sharpens the digital divide and it might even create higher levels in citizen’s disengagement (Davis, 2010).

Furthermore, concerns have also been expressed that political character Internet applications are mainly used by already engaged and active citizens (Davis, 2010; Xenos & Moy, 2007). Such uses of the Internet are not inclined to mobilize political participation but instead to normalize it and to enlarge the existing gaps in participation. Likewise, Perez (2008) in his study adopts a similar view, acknowledging Internet’s capability to engage the individuals that are already politically engaged and is taking a step forward claiming that Internet mainly serves to fulfill individual’s curiosity for additional information when traditional media are provide them with insufficient information.

On the other hand, there are several scholars supporting a contrary view. García-Castañon, Rank & Barreto (2011) by examining the relationship between online and offline political participation came to the conclusion that regardless the race and the ethnicity, individuals captivating with political affairs online show evidence of increased participation in offline political actions. Furthermore, Jennings & Zeitner (2003) in their study concluded that Internet use generates positive impact on
individual’s civic engagement. Additionally, a more comprehensive study analyzing both political and civic effect on “offline” engagement, found a positive relationship which associate engagement through the Internet and civic and political participation offline. (Weber, Loumakis & Bergman, 2003)

Scholars representing a more optimistic school of thought conceive Internet as a platform for mobilizing individuals, which can boost political participation while it decreases the cost of engagement and suggests new ways in order people to share information and get organized in groups. What is more, it can enhance the progress of horizontal communication among citizens and exceed restrictions characterizing traditional media (Kann, Berry, Gant & Zager, 2007; Gennaro & Dutton, 2006; Tolbert & Mcneal, 2003).

2.4.2 Positive effects but with substantial impact
More skeptic scholars (Hirzalla, Zoonen & Ridder, 2011, Hirzalla & Van Zoonen, 2010; Boulianne, 2009) agree that Internet does have a positive effect on citizen’s civic and political engagement but they doubt it is of substantial impact. They try to highlight the need for researchers being more cautious with the conclusions they draw on Internet and political mobilization relationship and avoid being over enthusiastic.

More precisely, Streck (1997) found that using Internet for political issues does not automatically leads to participation offline. What is more, a study by Bimber (2001) came to support previous findings of Streck (1997) by concluded that individuals that are engaged online with political affairs have very limited chances to be politically active in their everyday life.

2.4.3 Time spent online
Somewhere in the middle of ‘cyber-enthusiasts’ and ‘cyber-skeptics’ lay the group of academics who have concentrated in the impact that, more specific uses of Internet, can have on political and civic participation. Wellman, Quan-Haase, Witte & Hampton (2001) suggest that Internet constitute a prosperous ground for participatory capital meaning that, the more time individuals spent using the Internet for civic and political activities will result in greater offline involvement.
2.4.4 Type of activities individuals perform online.

Findings from Quintelier & Vissers, (2008), however, tend to contradict the previous observations by argument that the amount of time individuals spent online has very limited if any effects on the inclination to participate in offline political and civic activities. For them what really matters is the type of activities one performs online.

More specifically, it has been demonstrated (Bakker & Vreese 2011; Gil de Zúñiga & Valenzuela, 2011; Quintelier & Vissers, 2008; Shan, Kwak & Holbert, 2001) that activities oriented toward the information nature of the Internet, such as following the news, participation in discussion groups, chatting with unknown people about public affairs and forwarding political e-mails might lead in positive outcome as regards individuals civic and political engagement offline.

2.5 SNSs use for political/civic engagement

The relationship between Internet and individuals’ civic and political engagement has already been discussed. The debate is now shifting further; while academics on the field trying to create the picture of how SNSs might affect online and offline political participation and examine the impact on political and civic participation they might have (Auškalnienė, 2012). However, in relevant literature less attention has been given to the way in which individuals and particularly young adults are using social media, such as Facebook.com to be engaged in politics and civic activities (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010).

2.5.1 Definition of Social Networking Sites

Using the study of Boyd, & Ellison (2007), some of the key authors in the field of researching social media, SNS can be defined as: ‘web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site.’ (Boyd, & Ellison 2007, p.211)
2.5.2 Basic Facebook features

Facebook, one of the most used SNS among young adults (Duggan, & Brenner, 2012) enable its users to create a personal profile, send and receive friend requests as well as facilitating direct (e.g., wall postings, instant messaging, messages) and indirect (e.g., posting notes, status updates) communication. Furthermore, on a space called the “Wall” they can interact with their peers by posting comments, videos, links, and photos. Facebook facilitates its users with the capability to join virtual groups based on communal interests and also “like” activities of other members or groups. Facebook members can see their friend’s interests, status, hobbies, and political beliefs and also notified about upcoming events (Boyd, & Ellison, 2007; Vitak, Zube, Smock, Carr, Ellison & Lampe, 2011).

2.5.3 Major differences between online and offline participation.

Several features, particularly with regard to Facebook as the examined SNS, have been identified by scholars (Vitak, Zube, Smock, Carr, Ellison & Lampe, 2011; Kushin & Kitchener, 2009) that can help people participate in political conversations. Moreover, taking advantage of these features could help users to share their opinion about issues they are worry about and at the same time enhance both online and offline engagement. Their main argument unfolding around the reduced resources needed for someone to engage in politics through Facebook. Vitak, Zube, Smock, Carr, Ellison & Lampe, (2011) declared that it is much easier for individuals to engage in politics through SNS as it requires less time and effort. The same theory can be applied to civic actions on Facebook, where users are capable, almost for free to be informed and to develop their civic skills (Vitak, Zube, Smock, Carr, Ellison & Lampe, 2011).

For instance, users may easily join a political or civic group, “like” a page or become fan of a political candidate; moreover, they can make use of the “News feed” for read their friend’s posts about current political events or even for signing an online petition.

However, some other studies raise some concerns for the validity and the completeness of the above mentioned by introducing the idea of “digital divide”.
They claimed that, although people may want to engage with politics and are motivated to participate in civic actions online, they may still do not have access to these forms of technology (e.g. possessing a computer, or have Internet connection) (Norris, 2003; van Dijk, 2008).

2.5.4 The positive relationship between offline and online, through SNS, civic and political participation

Recent research suggests that SNSs use has a positive impact on individuals’ civic and political engagement and participation. More specifically, both Valenzuela, Park & Kee (2009) and Alujevic (2012) observed a positive relationship between online and offline civic and political participation. The interpretation of their research results indicated that the more individuals use Facebook for their online political engagements the more they started take part in real life political and civic activities. In addition, Enjolras, Steen-Johnsen & Wollebaek, (2012) after conducting a 2-wave Web survey, equate their attitude with the above findings, characterized SNS as an alternative to the mainstream media where people can resort for establishing and enhance their political and civic skills. Aslan, (2013) moved a step further criticizing the inadequacy of traditional media to cover people needs for civic and political information whereas at the same time highlighted the ability of SNS to meet these needs.

2.5.5 SNS affect only individuals’ civic engagement offline

There are some different research findings (Zhang, Johnson, Seltzer & Bichard, 2010; Johnson, Zhang, Bichard & Seltzer, 2011) arguing that dependence on SNS does not indicate significant effect on offline political activities but it does so for civic activities constituting a useful platform for citizens civic engagement. Both, after conducting a survey based research identified Facebook and similar SNS, as potential platforms capable to increase user’s civic participation, but not political engagement.

2.5.6 What matters are the uses and activities performed online.

Furthermore, academics focused their research on specific uses and activities users perform online and the type of effect that might have on individuals while, some
other scholars preferred to concentrate their studies on people and how different characters might display dissimilar impact.

Initially, Zuniga, Jung & Valenzuela, (2012) demonstrated that when people use SNS to fulfill their information needs it implies the increase of online and offline civic and political participatory actions. Moreover, in their study, Holt, Shehata, Strömbäck & Ljungberg (2013) implicated that when a certain category of people make use of SNS for political purposes, that can be a possible way to get motivated and transfer their action offline. Also, participation in groups using SNS has been proved by Conroy, Feezeli & Guerrero, (2012) able to enhance the levels of offline political participation. Similarly, a research, concentrated mostly on Facebook groups’ usage, conducted by Park, Kee & Valenzuela (2009), concluded that both civic and political engagement can be enhanced through the informational utilization of SNSs. Moreover, Macafee & De Simone, (2012) concluded that both ‘informational’ and ‘expressive’ use of SNSs boost online engagement as well as offline, leading to increment in participation.

2.5.7 What matters is the character of the user

From another point of view, what differentiates the effects of SNS on their users potential political and civic participation depend on whether an individual can characterized as ‘active’ or ‘inactive’ (Gustafsson, 2012). While active individuals conceive SNS as a useful platform for promote their ideas and discuss about them, inactive individuals remain apathetic but admit they get influenced by what they notice through their friends’ links, posts and videos. Moreover, Quintelier & Theocharis (2012) acknowledged that online political engagement with SNS reveals greater numbers of participation for more extraverted people.

Furthermore, a dissimilar categorization introduced by Enjolras, Steen-Johnsen & Wollebaek, (2012) concluded that younger people from lower socioeconomic classes are the ones mostly influenced by SNS, especially Facebook and Twitter, to transfer activities performing online offline; with participating in demonstrations being the most usual. Also, they indicated that, more educated individuals tend to
mobilized mostly through their personal network and mobile messages while older people by using more traditional media.

2.5.8 Questioning the role of SNS regarding engagement offline.
In their article, Rotman, Preece, Vieweg, Shneiderman, Yardi, Pirolli, Chi & Glaisyer, (2011) wandered whether individuals participating in political and civic actions through SNS achieve anything meaningful eventually. They based their argument on the fact that activism online can only enhance users awareness about political and civic events, doubting this can be translated into substantial and tangible actions offline.

What is more, after carrying out a research on that topic using a web survey method Baumgartner & Morris, (2010) concluded that although the perception of SNS as being an appropriate space to express, discuss and acquire information relevant with political issues, SNS seems to offer very little to enhance individuals participation offline. Their findings indicated that SNSs users may only note higher rates in online political activity such as blogging or forwarding a political e-mail etc; and not in traditional offline political actions like voting. Moreover, Alterman (2011) recognized the beneficial character of social media yet not of great importance.

2.5.9 The negative effect of SNS on both civic and political engagement.
Some studies differ in their interpretation of the effects of SNS on political and civic engagement and participation claiming negative consequences.

A dominant work on that field by Morozov (2011) explained that online civic and political activities on SNS not only does not promote citizens engagement but also play a negative role towards real life actions making people engaged with less meaningful activities than with the real important occurring offline.

He expanded on that by explaining that, as political forms of action on SNS are easy to performed, for example to post a video about the latest demonstrations in your country, many users will carry them out. However, he argues that, the outcome will only be negative causing information overflow and disorientation.
Another negative effect of SNS when used for political issues mentioned in the work of Morozov (2011) and Christensen (2011), both using anecdotal evidence, constitutes the possibility users to be under the surveillance of the state security. There are several real life examples, where users have been sentenced to prison because of their activity online.

In his study Gladwell (2010) refered to a different negative outcome, rendering SNS ineffectual for promoting civic and political engagement. He focuses on their structure based on weak ties; this kind of online activism can only motivate people to do ‘things that people do when they are not motivated enough to make a real sacrifice’ (Gladwell, 2010 p. 4). Fenton & Barassi, (2011) complement the above declarations be mentioning that the ‘self-centered’ character of participation through SNS can only constitute a threat for real life political activities.

2.5.10 The phenomenon of “slacktivism”

Several studies on the field refer to SNS activism for political and civic causes as ‘feeling good’ activism, where users engaged in surface activities with no substantial influence and meaning, demanding very little effort (Gustafsson, 2012; Vitak, Zube, Smock, Carr, Ellison & Lampe, 2011). This attitude, which has been adopted by several individuals especially the younger one, give rise to a new term called “slacktivism” (Vitak, Zube, Smock, Carr, Ellison & Lampe, 2011). In her similar study, boyd (2008) has been argued that social media burden the gap between those who are already engaged with civic and political activities and those who are apathetic towards every day political issues; suggesting that the cause is not SNS itself but the reasons leading people to become disengaged and disinterest from contributing in public political and civic affairs. (Boyd, 2008)

The existence of that new form of online ‘feel good’ activism or ‘slacktivism’ when people online, join a group, or like a page but they do not perform any actions in their real everyday life ,not only will not help but most probably will make things worse (Gustafsson, 2012; Vitak, Zube, Smock, Carr, Ellison & Lampe, 2011).
2.6 Conclusion
This chapter has reviewed the current literature in relation to the broader themes of civic and political participation, social capital, Internet use for engagement and detailed the relevant literature on SNS for civic and political engagement in order to set the background for the subsequent study, research design and analyses that will follow.
Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction
In this chapter, description of the fundamental framework of the research will be addressed. Furthermore, the methodology chosen for conducting the study will be illustrated in more details and the specific tools used for gathering and analyzing the data. Also, in order the choice to be more justifying main features of the chosen method, the rationale for choosing it and also some limitations that might accompany it will be demonstrated as well (Crotty, 2005).

3.2 Methods for gathering data

3.2.1 Qualitative vs. Quantitative approach
In the relevant literature on research methods one can apply when investigating social phenomena, there is a debate, started 50 years ago but continues until today. The academics on the field mainly focus their argument around the possible value between data gathered and analyzed using qualitative techniques and those collected by using a quantitative approach (Matthews & Ross, 2010).

In the following paragraphs, both the strength and the weaknesses of the two main research approaches, the qualitative and quantitative, will be compared and contrasted (Gray, 2004).

The two approaches derive from different philosophical ideologies. From the one hand, the qualitative paradigm has its roots on Constructivism and Interpretivism. Suggesting that there no universal and objective reality but “multiple truths” one can embrace; and that the world is interpreted through our minds (Gray, 2004; Sale, Lohfeld & Brazil, 2002). From the other hand, the quantitative paradigm has its foundations on Objectivism and Positivism. The advocates of these theoretical perspectives accept that there is only one reality and one universal truth which are independent from the investigators perception (Gray, 2004; Sale, Lohfeld & Brazil, 2002).

Regarding the relationship between the researcher and the study, in the qualitative approach the influence in unavoidable. As Becker (1996) pointed out, qualitative
researchers cannot, as easily as quantitative researchers, “protect” themselves from data. Whereas, when carrying out a quantitative research the investigator generally is detached from the object of his research. This can favor the last mentioned, in drawing more objective results (Sale, Lohfeld & Brazil, 2002; Matthews & Ross, 2010).

Moreover, investigating feelings, opinions, meanings and answering “why” questions are the core of the qualitative studies (Sale, Lohfeld & Brazil, 2002; Sandelowski, 2000; Matthews & Ross, 2010). Contrary, in quantitative research, the main focus is on understanding and interpreting the statistical relationships between the chosen variables (Sale, Lohfeld & Brazil, 2002).

In other words, acquiring a qualitative approach the researcher might easier describe better complex phenomena and in more depth (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Sandelowski, 2000). However, it will be more difficult to isolate him from the data gathered so findings might be biased (Sandelowski, 2000; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

In-depth and focus group interviews and participants observation are the main techniques used by qualitative studies to gather their data (Sale, Lohfeld & Brazil, 2002); whereas, tools such as surveys or questionnaires are the main instruments to collect information when apply a quantitative method (Matthews & Ross, 2010; Sale, Lohfeld & Brazil, 2002). According to Bryman, (1984) qualitative techniques imply a greater sensibility with regard to the complex nature of social phenomena. Lunt & Livingstone, (1996) supplement the above statement by arguing that validity appearing in qualitative methods seems to compensate the reliability characterizing most quantitative approaches.

With reference to the sample used for quantitative studies, they mainly tend to account large populations in order to be statistically representative of the investigated population. Though, when considering qualitative samples they are inclined towards small purposeful samples but with the opportunity to draw more in-depth information. (Sale, Lohfeld & Brazil, 2002)
Concerning the data a researcher can gather, several differences appear between the two approaches. In the qualitative research approach researchers mostly collect unstructured data in the form of words and expressions of participants while in quantitative methods data represented by numbers and codes with statistical meaning and importance (Matthews & Ross, 2010).

An advantage gaining from applying a quantitative methodology is the possibility to generalize from the data, by assuming that the research has been conducted based on random sample of adequate size. Whereas, findings it is not possible to generalized when implementing a quantitative technique (Matthews & Ross, 2010; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

3.2.2 Chosen method: Mixed methods

After considering the strengths and weaknesses of both qualitative and quantitative methods and at the same time taking into account the nature of the research questions for the topic under investigation, a mixed-method approach has been adopted. Data has been decided to gather using both online questionnaires and semi-structured interviews (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Fidel, 2008).

By combining both qualitative and quantitative techniques facilitated to overpass the gap among quantitative and qualitative research data and balance possible limitations from each method (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Mixed methods offer more educational, inclusive, unbiased and solid research results adequate to deal with the complexity of social phenomena, offering another justification of the choice undertaken (Matthews & Ross, 2010; Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner, 2007; Sandelowski, 2000).

Using mixed method it was possible to investigate more complex research questions more sufficiently. By incorporating the advantages of both qualitative and quantitative methods the reader was provided with more stronger and concrete results. Furthermore, it was offered the potential to verify the validity of the data and cross checking the findings (Matthews & Ross, 2010).
Nevertheless, more time was needed to acquire the adequate knowledge for combine those and implement both. (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Fidel, 2008)

In this study, the mixed method approach has been applied at the level of data collection, and data analysis where both qualitative and quantitative tools were combined (Sandelowski, 2000).

The research started with the use of online questionnaires, a quantitative tool for data collection, followed by semi-structured interviews, a qualitative technique to collect information. This facilitated to recognize small groups of people who were different or have interesting characteristics and to identify some interesting relationships between variables and then explore these issues in more depth (Matthews & Ross, 2010). Moreover, adopting the methodological triangulation approach, imparted greater validity, reliability as well as trustworthiness to the results of the research (Gray, 2004).

3.3 Tools for collecting the data

3.3.1 Online questionnaire

The relevant literature on quantitative data gathering tools features several different types of surveys a researcher can apply such as postal, email, or web-based. This study made use of the web-based online questionnaire (Van Selm & Jankowski, 2006; Gray, 2004).

The decision to apply the specific tool was driven mainly from two reasons. First, it was the subject of the study; in the literature review conducted, one could identify several scholars researching social media implications, to make use of web-based online questionnaire for gathering their data (Gustafsson, 2012; Hirzalla, Zoonen & Ridder, 2011; Vitak, Zube, Smock, Carr, Ellison & Lampe, 2011; Alujevic, 2012; Zuniga, Jung & Valenzuela, 2012 Hirzalla & Van Zoonen, 2010; Zhang, Johnson, Seltzer & Bichard, 2010; Boulianne, 2009; Valenzuela, Park & Kee, 2009; Gennaro & Dutton, 2006). The second reason was the nature of the web-based online questionnaire itself; the features characterize it and how it could match with the goals and the requirements of the existed research.
More specifically, the online questionnaire could help acquiring higher response rates compared to a paper based survey especially in a research like this, targeting towards the young adults age group (Van Selm & Jankowski, 2006; Wright, 2005). Furthermore, the anonymity offered by using the Internet to distribute it could help participants feel more comfortable to fill in their truth experiences. This characteristic was particularly important for this research which negotiated a relatively sensitive subject (Van Selm & Jankowski, 2006).

Moreover, online questionnaires may result in more “quality” answers by enabled participants to choose themselves when they want to feel it (Van Selm & Jankowski, 2006; Evans & Mathur, 2005). However, this has been challenged by Lefever, Dal & Matthíasdóttir, (2007) arguing that this freedom can lead to the opposite results, as to postpone or even forget to complete it.

Finally, another reason for using online web based survey was that it has been classified as inexpensive and quick tool for researchers to gather their data. Researchers can save money by moving to an electronic medium instead of a paper based, an aspect important for this project which was self funding (Van Selm & Jankowski, 2006; Evans & Mathur, 2005; Wright, 2005).

As regards the questionnaire design, very few open ended questions used so as to minimize the time and effort participants needed for finishing it and to increase the rates of completion (Bryman, 2008; Denscombe, 1998). The questionnaire consisted of 14 questions, (see appendix 1) compiling to serve the purpose of this research. It was divided into three categories reflecting the research objectives and the main themes identified in the literature review. The first category was “Demographics” the second about participants “offline civic and political participation” and the third about issues relevant to Facebook.

The survey distributed via the 'My Announce' system of the University of Sheffield to the following group only: student-volunteers which includes all types of student, used for requests to take part in experiments and surveys. The web based software tool hosting the survey was SurveyGizmo (http://www.surveygizmo.com/) .The
particular software was chosen mainly for its export capabilities and because it offers free account for university students.

3.3.2 Semi-structured interviews as a tool to gather qualitative data.

For the collection of the qualitative data 6 one-to-one, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews was conducted.

Between the three different types of interviews; unstructured interactive interviews, semi structured interviews, and structured interviews, the second one chosen mainly because it gives participants the freedom to express their thoughts and opinions and also for being capable to adjust each interview flow on the needs of each interviewee and at the same time being able to keep a general format for all the questions to be answered (Stokes & Bergin, 2006; Gray , 2004; Corbin & Morse, 2003).

These objectives could not be met using structured interviews, which require applying exactly the same questions in the same order for all the participants. On the other hand, unstructured interviews won’t be as beneficial as semi-structured as they indicate only open-ended questions that rising from the conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

Furthermore, the decision to conduct individual and not group interviews was mainly driven by the nature of the research which has been characterized by the Information School Research Ethics Panel as sensitive. As Matthews & Ross, (2010) indicated, individual interviews grant a more confidential circumstances for the interviewee to unpack his/her thoughts and reveal his/her experiences. What is more, individual interviews help exporting more deeply results whereas group interviews generally emit more surface information but of a wider range. (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006)

As Matthews & Ross, (2010) indicated, the participants are more likely to give their undivided concentration when the interviewer is there and the presence of the interviewer may help them relax and if needed distress them when feeling
psychological pressure. For the above reasons real time face-to-face interviews was preferred over postal or email or even online through Skype interviews.

In order to ensure the validity of the research the questions used for the interviews tried to be closely tied with the research questions (Gray, 2004). The interviews took place during the period from the 2nd of August until the 4th August in one of the University of Sheffield libraries. Transcripts of interviews are presented in Appendix 3.

3.4 Sampling Approach
This study adopted a mixed method approach for data gathering as both qualitative (individual semi-structured interviews) and quantitative (online questionnaire) tools applied.

The sample population of this research was young adults between 18 to 29 years old studying at the University of Sheffield. The studied population was chosen to be particularly from the University of Sheffield mainly for time constrains. The researcher acknowledges that this decision constitute a sample biased as participants will not be from diverse educational backgrounds as the minimum level of education will be having a bachelor degree.

As regards the questionnaire sample composition, the research followed a random sampling technique for the quantitative data as the participants were invited through the “student-volunteers” list. The university mail was used in order to distribute the questionnaires, mainly to avoid a sampling bias by sending it to the email addresses of students already known to the researcher.

The online questionnaires had one last questions asking for participants to take part in the follow up semi-structured interviews. That was the initial approach in order to recruit the desirable number on interviewees. The participants were not chosen randomly, the research was seeking particularly for individuals with some experience on the topic in order to seize more information related to the subject. In other words it was targeting in a purposive sample instead of a random which
was the case as regards questionnaire approach. (Gray, 2004) Specifically, it was looking for students engaged with political and civic activities either offline or online through Facebook (Matthews & Ross, 2010).

3.5 Ethics in social research
The research received ethical approval (See Appendix 4). Interviewees was provided with the consent form which they read and signed before the interview. The link to the online questionnaire started with the information sheet followed by the consent form which was explaining what the research was about and several things relevant to their participation. The informed consent was conventional to the University of Sheffield’s Research Ethics Policy (See Appendices 5 and 6).

3.6 Approaches to data analysis
As a result of data gathered, a spreadsheet of 138 questionnaire responses and 6 interview transcripts were gathered.

Qualitative approach of thematic analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data following the steps proposed by Braun & Clarke, (2006). First, in order to transform data into information interview transcripts were read over and over again. Then, initial codes started to emerge, these categories combined for the creation of the themes. Themes were reviewed, named and a thematic map was also created (page 49, 50). This form of thematic analysis using the inducted approach is associated with grounded theory and themes are very closely linked to data themselves (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The interviews were transcribed and categorized into themes with the use of Microsoft Word Document.

Quantitative techniques were used to analyze quantitative data. Data from questionnaires had undergone some simple statistical correlation tests with the help of SPSS. Excel also used mostly for results better representation. Both qualitative and quantitative data combined at the interpretive stage of the study (Figure 1.), but each data set remained analytically separate from the other as indicated by Sandelowski (2000).
Figure 1. The approach undertaken; where qualitative and quantitative data will be combined only in the interpretation level.

3.7 Reflections

3.7.1 Choosing the appropriate tool for gathering qualitative data

A change has been made regarding the method that it was planning to apply in order to gather the qualitative data. Initially, it had been chosen to conduct two focus group interviews. However, after considerable thought around issues of causing any psychological harm and in order to protect participants from feeling uncomfortable, the focus group option was revised. Additionally, in order to preserve causing any possible discomfort, since the research characterized highly sensitive, the chosen method was one-to-one semi-structured interviews as being less risky and more secure.

Relevant literature on sensitive topics indicated that participants may feel more comfortable to reveal their thoughts, beliefs and actions when only one person is in front instead of more people being present (Stokes & Bergin, 2006; Lunt & Livingstone, 1996; Morgan & Spanish, 1984;). It was only a study from Ward, Betrand & Brown, (1991) indicating focus groups are more suitable for acquiring sensitive data.

Moreover, after considering what the research wanted to reap from the qualitative data collection method and the strengths and weaknesses of both focus group and interview tools it was concluded that for this topic under investigation, the
application of the focus group strategy would not have offered any further information. Actually it could create the opposite effects, with participants giving away less information.

3.8 Limitations
Finally, time limitations were the main cause influencing research quality as well as reliability. If there was more time, questionnaires could have been piloted in order to assure for clarity. Finally having more time left the survey could remain open for a longer period so as to acquire more answers making the sample more representative to the population under investigation. As it was proposed by an online software able to calculate adequate sample sizes (http://www.raosoft.com/samplesize.html ) 377 answers must had been collected in order findings to be able to generalize.
Chapter 4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Introduction
This chapter includes a detailed indication of the findings from the research conducted alongside with the discussion of these results. The whole chapter is unfolding around the research questions, emanated from the literature of the area under investigation. The findings from the questionnaire and their discussion are presenting first following by data from the interviews and their interpretation. The chapter ends with a summary of the key findings of both questionnaires and interviews and some limitations identified.

4.2 Results and discussion from Questionnaires

4.2.1 Demographics of participants
From 184 students that started the survey 138 completed it while, the remaining 46 questionnaires were partial answered and were not used in the data analysis. The 52.9% of the sample population was women, the 46.4% was men, whereas 0.7% chose other. The highest percentage of participants was European (72.3%) followed by students from Asia constituting the 17.5%. A small proportion of participants were from Africa (1.5%), America (8%) and Australia (0.7%). Regarding their current level of study, the two prevailing categories were young adults in a master program (52.9%) and in a bachelor (34.8%). The majority of participants belonged to the faculty of Social Sciences (31.9%) followed by the faculty of Engineering (29.1%) while, only 6.4% of the sample was students from the faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health.

4.2.2 Research Question 1(a). What are the general political activities young adults engage in?
First of all, the various ways in which the sample population took part in the political and civic actions offline were investigated. Participants were asked: ‘In the last 12 months which of the following actions have you performed?’ Results (Table 1) revealed that the most common forms of traditional political participation were
'talked to others about candidates or parties' (73,5%) followed by 'voted' (37%). The 90,3% had never worked for a party or a candidate. A similar pattern was observed for the action ‘attended rallies’, with 78,4% answering no, never.

In the last 12 months which of the following actions have you performed?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Yes, within the last 12 months</th>
<th>Yes, but not in the last 12 months</th>
<th>No, never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voted</td>
<td>37,0%</td>
<td>40,7%</td>
<td>22,2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talked to others about candidates or parties</td>
<td>73,5%</td>
<td>11,0%</td>
<td>15,4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worked for a party or candidate</td>
<td>3,0%</td>
<td>6,7%</td>
<td>90,3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended rallies</td>
<td>9,0%</td>
<td>12,7%</td>
<td>78,4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Percentages of traditional political actions students performed.

Regarding the non-traditional political actions performed, around six out of ten had signed a petition this year, three out of ten had boycotted a product or a service and two out of ten had gone to a protest. A graphic representation of the non-traditional actions performed can be seen in Table 2.
In the last 12 months which of the following actions have you performed?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Yes, within the last 12 months</th>
<th>Yes, but not in the last 12 months</th>
<th>No, never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Went on a protest or demonstration or march</td>
<td>18,2%</td>
<td>19,0%</td>
<td>62,8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boycotted a product or a service for ethical reasons</td>
<td>32,1%</td>
<td>13,9%</td>
<td>54,0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signed a petition</td>
<td>59,6%</td>
<td>18,4%</td>
<td>22,1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Percentages of Non-traditional political actions students performed.

Results regarding both traditional and non-traditional political actions indicated that young adult’s engage more with activities that require less time and effort and are more common. Same findings pointed out in a research by Vitak, Zube, Smock, Carr, Ellison & Lampe (2011) investigating the political participation of undergraduate students at Midwestern university in United States.

Comparing the mean of traditional and non-traditional activities performed in the last 12 months (column: Yes, within the last 12 months in Table 1 and Table 2) with this of previous years (column: Yes, but not in the last 12 months in Table 1 and Table 2) it was observed that this year young adults shifted their preference towards non-traditional ways of political participation (Table 3). A possible explanation might be that they are seeking for alternative ways to express their beliefs and for their opinions to be heard. (Pippa, 2003)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Traditional political actions</th>
<th>Non-traditional political actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Performed this year</td>
<td>30.4%</td>
<td>36.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performed previous years</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Compares the preference of young adults between Traditional and Non-traditional actions.

4.2.3 Research Question 1(b). What are the general civic activities young adults engage in?

For revealing their civic actions participants were asked: “In the last 12 months which of the following action have you performed?” As quantitative data indicated, the most preferable civic actions that participants performed within the last 12 months were volunteering (7.5%) and fundraising for charity (34.7%). Less common actions carried out by the sample students were those of participation in community problem solving and participation in fund raising run/walk/ride with percentages of 14.5% and 13% accordingly (Table 4).

‘Disengaged’ or ‘Dual Activists’?

An attempt was made to categorize participants in the realm of civic and political engagement. The idea emerged from the academic paper of Andolina, Keeter, Zukin & Jenkins (2003) which constitutes a guide for creating survey questions in order to capture civic and political engagement.
In the last 12 months which of the following actions have you performed?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Yes, within the last 12 months</th>
<th>Yes, but not in the last 12 months</th>
<th>No, never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fundraised for charity.</td>
<td>34.7%</td>
<td>38.7%</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteered for a non-electoral organization</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
<td>30.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participated in community problem solving.</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
<td>25.4%</td>
<td>60.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participated in fund-raising run/walk/ride.</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>39.1%</td>
<td>47.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Percentages of Civic actions students performed

In order to investigate young adults political and civic actions this year, answers about conducting the action but not within the last 12 months combined with the ‘no, never’ answers. One new variable for political actions and one for civic actions were created in SPSS capturing the percentages of the amount of actions students had performed. A graphic representation has been captured in Figure 2(a) and 2(b).

Figure 2(a) represents how many political actions, both traditional and non-traditional, participants had carried out. It is composed of eight bars. For example, the last bar illustrates that 12.3% of young adults had done none of the seven possible actions while the most common pattern was participants having performed three out of the seven actions (23.9%). However, results revealed that, of the students answered the survey none had done all seven actions. As regards the civic actions (Figure 2b), figures represented a downward trend with the biggest percentage of young adults having performed zero civic actions (45.7%). Students performed all four civic actions this year constituted the 2.2%.
Then another variable was created in SPSS, in order to investigate young adult’s political or civic disengagement, which set to be able to accept four different values; value zero was equal to students categorized as ‘Disengaged’ value one was equal
to ‘Political Specialists’ value two was equal to ‘Civic Specialists’ and value tree equal to ’Dual Activists’.

Data sorted according to the following pattern: The category of **Disengaged** included students scored zero or one on the civic dimension (meaning they only performed at most one of the four possible civic actions) and zero, one or two on the political dimension (meaning the carried out up to two political actions out of the seven). The **Political Specialist** category consisted of students scored three or higher on the political dimension and zero or one on the civic. As regards the class of **Civic Specialist** it encompassed young adults performed two or more actions on the civic dimension and zero, one or two on the political dimension. Finally, in the fourth class, which was **Dual Activists** included participants scored two or higher on the civic dimension and three or higher on the political (see Table 5).

For instance, an individual scored less than two on both civic and political dimensions will be portrayed as ‘disengaged’ whereas those scored more than two, both on civic and political dimension, as ‘dual activists’. This typology has been also used by Andolina, Keeter, Zukin & Jenkins (2003) however, the way applied in this study was slightly different regarding the amount of actions required in order one to characterized as disengaged or political specialists. Future studies might capture this aspect differently as it’s a very thin line, mostly depending on the discretion of each researcher.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposed typology of engagement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Civic Activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 or more</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 5.** Percentages of participants type of engagement.
Findings, which are illustrated in Table 5, coincide with general patterns of previous academic works (Bakker & Vreese, 2011; Snell, 2010; Valenzuela, Park & Kee, 2009) characterizing young adults as being disconnected and detached from the civic and political sphere. The highest percentage of the created variable for participant’s type of engagement was that of “Disengaged” up to 39.1%.

Moving further into the research, participants were asked whether or not they operate a Facebook account (Figure 3). The 95.7% answered yes while out of 138 students undertaken the survey only six answered no (4.4%). Results came to an agreement with Pew Research Center study about the demographics of social media users (Duggan & Brenner, 2013) indicating that young adults aged between 18 to 29 years old constitute the greatest percent of Internet users who operate Facebook. It should be noted that although Pew research was about U.S students and this study was about students studying in UK, it can be argued that nationality may not be a factor influence student’s engagement with Facebook.

![Do you have Facebook?](image)

*Figure 3. Percentages of Facebook users*

From that point on survey questions are only referred to those students having Facebook and consequently our sample population from 138 is now reduced to 132 students.

A question was posed to the participants asking how much time they spent on Facebook on a typical day. The two higher categories were those of ‘10 to 30 minutes’ and ‘more than 30 minutes up to 1 hour’ with 27.3% and 23.3%
correspondingly. Whereas, exactly the same rate, 10.6%, appeared for both students spending less than 10 minutes and those spending more than 3 hours.

A Spearman’s correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between young adults time spent on Facebook and the number of political and civic activities they perform on it. A statistically significant positive correlation was found for both the political actions ($p=0.011$) and the civic ($p=0.022$) indicating a relationship between the time participants spend on Facebook and the amount of actions relevant to civic and political issues they perform online. It can be argued that, the more time already engaged students spent on Facebook the more they can exhilarate their engagement. Similar findings were mentioned in a study by Valenzuela, Park & Kee, (2009) indicating a positive relationship between intensity of Facebook use and students’ civic engagement, and political participation.

The next two questions on the survey raised to the participants, were relevant to the civic and political activities they choose to perform or not on Facebook. Such an exploration will provide as with some more specific evidence of the way in which the sample population makes use of the platform regarding these specify issues and some evidence to answer which these activities are.

4.2.4 Request Question 2(a). What political activities on Facebook do college students engage in?

Participants were asked to indicate which political actions they had performed or not on Facebook and whether it was that week or not. The exact question can be seen in Appendix 1.

At this point, for the clarity of the research a justification should be made, regarding the different timeframe given between political and civic actions offline and online. It was chosen to ask the sample population whether they had performed an action within a week and not within the last 12 months, as it was asked for general civic and political activities, mainly because less time and effort is needed in the online realm for an action to perform.
Taking into consideration previous researches conducted by Vitak, Zube, Smock, Carr, Ellison & Lampe (2011) and Alujevic (2012), both investigating similar attitudes, a 14-item index capturing student’s political participation online was created. It should be mentioned although that a different approach was followed. (Figure 4) The 14 options given started with online actions that usually require more effort to performed and individuals carried them out could characterized as ‘active online’ such as “Become a fan of a political candidate or group”, “Joined a group relevant to political issues” or “Posted a wall comment about politics” etc. These constituted the first six items of the question followed by 4 ‘less active’ options where the participants were asked if they had ‘liked’ a status update about politics or ‘liked’ a photo that had something to do with politics etc. Additionally, the last 4-items referred to more ‘passive’ actions requiring from the participants just to be an observant of what his/her friends posted on Facebook relevant to political issues. For example, options such as “saw a link about politics” or “saw a wall comment about politics” etc. were included.

Figure 4. The three proposed categories of political actions on Facebook
Exactly the same approach was followed for the structure of the question targeting to investigate which civic actions young adults mostly performed on Facebook. The 14-item index was updated for the needs of the questions in order to capture sample’s civic position.

Findings of the survey (Appendix 2) revealed that the 6 first ‘most active’ political options individuals could perform highlighted the lowest percentages fluctuated between 14.4% which corresponded to “Posted a link about politics” and 3.8% matched with “Become a fan of a political candidate or group”. Noticeable higher rates emerged for the next 4 indexes requiring less effort in order to be accomplished ranged between 20% to 23.5% with the last mentioned percentage accounted for “liked a status update that mentioned politics”. Finally, even higher percentages were observed for the 4 more “observable” indexes such as 64.4% for “saw a status update that mentioned politics”, which was the higher between them. A graphic representation can be seen in Figure 5.
Figure 5. Presents the percentages of the political actions performed by young adults on Facebook within last week.

4.2.5 Request Question 2(b). What civic activities on Facebook do college students engage in?

Of the 14 possible civic activities on Facebook, again the most common were the 4 indicating from the participant only to ‘observe’ a civic action performed by someone else with the most common form being, “saw a status update that mentions civic issues” (50,8%). Actions requiring from the sample population to ‘like’ something were once more in the middle of the three categories with rates fluctuating between 22,7% and 18,3%. As with political items previously, the least common forms of civic engagement on Facebook appeared on actions requiring
more active behavior such as “Posted a wall comment about civic issues” being the lowest at 6.1%. More details are presenting at Figure 6.

Results from both questions (question 13 and 14 at Appendix 1) indicated a decreasing trend when the effort for performing that action raised either it has to do with political or with civic issues. Similar results had been previously obtained by Vitak, Zube, Smock, Carr, Ellison & Lampe, (2011) when trying to give answer in the same research question.

However, their approach was different as they observed this trend between only actions of the same category. For example between posting a wall comment and posting political status messages. However, this study moved a step forward by not only discriminating and comparing actions in the same category but actions across categories (‘active’, ‘less active’, ‘observing’).

**Relationship between civic and political activities on Facebook**

A Spearman’s correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between political actions on Facebook and civic actions on Facebook. A statistically significant positive correlation was found (p=0.001) indicating a relationship between civic and political activities online. It can be argued that Facebook user’s conducting political actions online are more likely to conduct civic and vies versa.
Figure 6. Presents the percentages of the civic actions performed by young adults on Facebook within last week.

4.2.6 Request Question 4. Does political activity on Facebook influence general political participation? More specifically what is the relationship between online and offline civic and political participation?

4.2.6.1 Traditional actions “offline” and political activities on Facebook
This study was aiming to investigate the complex relationship between traditional political activities young adults perform and political activities on Facebook. Therefore, several Chi-square tests were conducted as well as Spearman’s correlation coefficient calculations however, results indicated that there was no significant positive correlation.
Results contradict previous studies (Alujevic, 2012; Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009) indicated positive significant association between online and “offline” political and civic participation interpreting it as, the more individuals will get involved with civic and political actions on Facebook the more they will participate in civic and political issues in their everyday life. Nevertheless, findings seem to agree with what Baumgartner & Morris, (2010) claimed that, SNSs offer very little to enhance individual’s participation offline. The results of this study are closer with Rotman, Preece, Vieweg, Shneiderman, Yardi, Pirolli, Chi & Glaisyer, (2011) findings, wandered whether individuals participate in political and civic actions through SNS achieved anything meaningful eventually.

4.2.6.2 Non-traditional actions “offline” and political activities on Facebook
Several Pearson Chi-square tests conducted in order to see if there is any association between non-traditional actions “offline” and political activities on Facebook. A very small probability of the observed data under the null hypothesis of no relationship found for all possible variable combinations. So, it can be argued that young adults non–traditional political actions offline influenced by their online political activities on Facebook.

A relevant correlation can be made with Pippa’s (2003) research findings indicating young adult’s inclination towards non-traditional ways, which she named as ‘cause-oriented actions’, of expressing their political beliefs. It can be argued though that this preference, young adult indicated, in non-traditional actions is the reason for the positive relationship found before.

4.2.6.3 Civic actions “offline” and civic activities on Facebook
Pearson Chi-square tests conducted in order to define the association between civic actions ‘offline’ and civic activities on Facebook. However, results were varying as between some variables there was a significant correlation while with other no.

Earlier research by Zhang, Johnson, Seltzer & Bichard, (2010) and Johnson, Zhang, Bichard & Seltzer, (2011) declared that dependency on SNS indicate significant effect on civic activities constituting a useful platform for young adults civic
engagement. Both identified Facebook and similar SNSs, as potential platforms capable to increase user’s civic participation, but not political engagement.

4.3 Results and discussion regarding Interviews

4.3.1 Introduction to thematic analysis

In order to investigate the next two research questions qualitative data from the interviews were used. The transcripts from the interviews can be seen at Appendix 3.

The approach followed for the interviewees recruitment was the following: From the students that had already undertaken the survey and volunteered to participate in a face-to-face interview six were chosen with the requirement, in some extend to be involved with civic and political activities either online or offline or even better in both environments. From the six interviewees, five had Facebook and only one did not.

Using as a guide for conducting thematic analysis the proposing views by Braun & Clarke (2006) the rest of the chapter is oriented toward the investigation of whether students conceive Facebook as an appropriate environment for their civic and political activities. Furthermore, using qualitative data from the interviews an attempt was made to better understand whether political or civic activity on Facebook influence general civic and political participation. As a consequence, the structure will be developed around the themes emerged from the thematic analysis, matched with the request questions. A graphic representation of the themes identified can be seen in Figure 7.
Figure 7. Thematic Map
4.3.2 Request Question 3. Do young adults perceive Facebook as an appropriate venue for political activity?

Following the rationale of Vitak, Zube, Smock, Carr, Ellison & Lampe, (2011) it was considered important for the outcome of this study to discover whether students consider Facebook as an appropriate and useful venue to reveal and discuss their civic and political thoughts.

Theme 1. Factors influence political and civic activities on Facebook

The concept of factors that might influence student’s activities online although was not very popular within interviewees answers, as very few mentioned something relevant, it was consider of high importance as it could add some extra knowledge to the existing literature and some thoughts for future research on the field.

Findings showed that their network of friends and ones character are the main factors identified for influencing Facebook user’s civic and political engagement online. Student 1 said that, “you can receive some information about those topics just because your friends have the same worries as you or the same motivations as you”. Student 6 expanded on the way your network can influence you by saying, This year I met some friends from foreign countries and add them on Facebook and I connected to news coming from other countries whereas before I couldn’t have this kind of news.

These findings replicate those of Vitak, Zube, Smock, Carr, Ellison & Lampe, (2011) who also identified that your friends’ political activity as well as the time spent online could increase the level of engagement online.

Furthermore, findings showed that the character of the user may also influence its engagement online. Student 2 expanded on that issue by saying “if someone doesn’t mind and are very sure about their opinion, they know what they want to say, and they don’t care what other people may say.” and explained indicating that, There is a lot of cyber-bulling everywhere, so it depends if someone can stand that, if they are influenced too much by other people opinions, or perhaps negative comments then it’s not an appropriate place.
The above findings give support in Quintelier & Theocharis (2012) inference that online political engagement reveals greater numbers for more extraverted people on SNSs.

The next two themes represent two different sides of the same coin. Results indicated that while interviewees acknowledged several points constituting Facebook a suitable venue for young adults’ civic and political engagement at the same time they also identified several weaknesses of the particular SNS.

**Theme 2. Facebook suitability for young adult’s civic and political activities**

The predominant justification posed by interviewees regarding Facebook’s contribution to young adults’ general civic and political engagement was its suitability for events to be organized that afterwards could take place offline. Student 3 said that “It’s so easy to create an event on Facebook for people to know where and when” and explained by mentioning that,

You have some discussion going on on Facebook like the groups; to organize an event or anything and this you can have it on the ground, to have a real event or a protest or anything.

Student 2 said similarly: “it’s easy to share and it’s easy to organize something with greater participation”. Furthermore as Interviewee 4 said, not only “allows the organization of protests or revolutions I mean to easy communication and decide about the time and place” but it can also “used for petitions”.

Student 1 expanded on the subject by saying that “Facebook can be a social network allows you to organize different groups of people that maybe don’t even know each other”. Subject 2 supplement on that by mentioning the concept of distance annihilation, indicating that “It is an easier way to approach people that may not leave in the same place”.

The majority of interviewees in order to justify their viewpoint cited examples of real life. Student 1 mentioned an example of its country: “In Spain in March of 2011
I think or 2012 not sure, there was that movement called The Indignants which was born purely on Facebook. It was an idea that no one knew about it except people in this social media” Furthermore, another offline example mentioned by participants was that of Egypt. As Student 4 said “Clear example is the Arab Spring especially in Egypt they made it quite popular they even sprayed some buildings that Facebook helped them”. Interviewees 2 and 5 mentioned the same example. Student 6 expanded on that by saying that,

In Limbic and also in Egypt that people that have different opinion and wanted to undermine the government used Facebook and then they had some help from outside their country in order to keep providing information all over the world about what was happening in their country.

Finally, an example of civic character mentioned by student 2 saying, “I also have attended some events in order to clean some areas from garbage or paint some areas, it was called Atenistas if you know”.

Some more areas of Facebook’s contribution in young adults’ general civic and political engagement identified. First, all interviewees mentioned the facilitation of information dissemination. For example, Student 1 pointed out that, “you can be benefited from this by receiving information about civic and political issues” and student 2 supplemented, “I can be informed better, I can share and exchange opinions with other people and also I might find links that interest me also contact some people that might interest me”. Interviewee 3 mentioned that, “people are now exposed to different views than the one in official media or the alternative media so it can have an impact”. Moreover, Facebook can also used as a venue to exert influence as identified by Student 3 saying, “like making some kind of pressure for people to do something”.

**Theme 3. Facebook inappropriateness regarding young adult’s civic and political activities online.**

Nevertheless, students also talked for several issues and weaknesses of Facebook made them, in some extend, hesitated to use it for discussing their civic and
political concerns. The prevailing concerns expressed was about the privacy issues and the absent of information filtering on Facebook.

Particularly, when Student 1 was asked what makes it hesitate to use Facebook for political and civic reasons it answered, “… there is no filter at all”. Student 2, regarding the same topic said,

Also sometimes some fault information its easily shared and it’s very easy to spread online and misguide other people.

Student 4 was in agreement saying: “wrong information may also be spread more easily and since it’s not filtered and everyone gives personal ideas and it may also used wrongly”. Furthermore, there were strong concerns expressed about the privacy policy on the site as well as possible monitoring of their data. Specifically when Student 5 asked what made him hesitate to use the site for civic or political reasons it answered, “I think privacy!”. Similar answered interviewee 3 by declaring that, “I think about the security issue because I don’t feel safe as I said” and student 1 by saying, “privacy policy of Facebook could make me feel embraced”. Finally, Interviewee 6 shared its convictions about the topic declaring that,

We know that the central information agencies are using this site and information on Facebook to their own benefit.

Two more issues emerged from students answers. First that Facebook makes them feel uncomfortable when they disagree with a Facebook friend for civic or political issues. Particularly Student 3 said: “Yes either has to do with religion, so not all my friends appreciate or accept me criticizing a religious thing or with political things because I come from a country where it’s still a monarchy and there not much freedom of expression.” Student 2 revealed its relevant experience saying that,

The discussion was about death penalty, and I felt quite uncomfortable as we have totally different opinions, and it was a really passionate discussion, and I felt that it could at some point ruin our friendship if I had let her take it further.
The second issue was relevant to Facebook general concept which participants thought was not oriented towards serious issues. As Student 1 explained “Facebook looks like a friendly place where you usually share friendly stuff with your friends, it’s not a serious place”. Particularly, Student 1 said that “When you want to discuss you really want people that are committed to discuss” and added that,

You read and see things related to civic and political issues on Facebook but sometime you realize that Facebook is not something you we usually use for political and civic issues as a primary goal.

This concern of Facebook nature was only mentioned by Student 1; however, it was chosen to be presented at the study as it may be an unconscious indirect reason making young adults not conceive it as an appropriate venue to reveal their thought and concerns.

Results showed that students identified both positive features of Facebook that in some extend constituting an appropriate venue for theirs civic and political activities and negative aspects made them hesitated and concerned about its suitability. The same pattern observed in the relevant literature with scholar debating about the role of SNS regarding civic and political engagement.

In this point is may be useful to quote some findings where students compared Facebook appropriateness to boost civic and political engagement with that of other SNS. Three students said they do not use other social media except Facebook while the rest use also Twitter to promote their civic and political issues. Nevertheless, when they asked which one they think is more appropriate all interviewees said Facebook except one. Student 5 said that Twitter is more appropriate by mentioning that,

I think Twitter its better from Facebook for discuss and promote civic and political issues, because it’s more oriented towards that. The people that participate there are more serious when they something.

Its rationale was the above mentioned problem of Facebook’s nature, not suitable for serious conversations.
This could open the gates for further research, comparing the two social media in order to identify their distinct strengths or weaknesses so as to obtain a more complete picture.

4.3.3 Request Question 4. Does political activity on Facebook influence general political participation? More specifically what is the relationship between online and offline civic and political participation?
In order to unravel the potential connection between civic and political activities on Facebook and civic and political participation generally and also to shed some light in the relatively new concept of “slacktivism” students were asked whether political activity on Facebook influence general political participation.

Theme 4. Young adult’s opinion regarding the relationship between civic and political activities on Facebook and civic and political engagement generally.

Half of the interviewees think that Facebook cannot offer considerable help neither influence young adults civic and political engagement. Student 2 declared that,

So people need to realize that with “like” something doesn’t mean they help the world to become a better place.

Interviewee 4 similarly said that “Overall it shouldn’t be totally left as an online thing. People should get to meet in real time and space.” Student 6 explained that “Social media it’s only a part it’s not the solution, it’s only a medium.”

However, the rest of the interviewees expressed their views as seeing Facebook as a supplementary promising platform not used properly. More specifically Student 5 said that,

I think Facebook it’s just a social media site and it’s not yet in an appropriate form to be used for political and civic issues.
Student 3 was in agreement saying that “It’s a starting point. I am one of the people who benefitted from Facebook to know a lot about the news. So yes it can be a starting point for whoever is interested to know more” added that in the future it might be more effective by saying that “because a small number of people in certain societies use Facebook it can’t but maybe in the future it can”.

Findings from the interviews replicated those of Rotman, Preece, Vieweg, Shneiderman, Yardi, Pirolli, Chi & Glaisyer, (2011), Baumgartner & Morris, (2010) and Alterman (2011) questioning the role of SNS so as to enhance young adults civic and political engagement offline. While at the same time contradict findings from Valenzuela, Park & Kee (2009), Alujevic (2012) and Enjolras, Steen-Johnsen & Wollebaek, (2012) who supported that, the more individuals use Facebook for their online political engagement the more they will participate in offline political and civic activities. Also, results argued a different view from the opponents of the theory that SNS not only do not enhance civic and political engagement but contrary, play a negative role towards real life actions making people engaged with less meaningful activities than with the real important occurring offline (Morozov, 2011; Christensen 2011).

**Theme 5. Suggestions about what may enhance young adults’ civic and political engagement generally.**

Student 2 said that,

There is the think that sometimes people are very active online but they do nothing in real because they believe that if they “like” something or if they “re-tweet” something they did something but they don’t. It is just passing information it’s not real action against the problem.

Alongside, Interviewee 6 expanded by saying that; “It’s easier for people to like a post. They state their support online but without being actually after in the demonstration or in the real event. They mostly indicate their support without having any other form of commitment. So they just do the “like”. In their mind they
might believe they had participated in the act but I believe the physical presence it’s more important”.

Unconsciously and without being asked directly they both gave a very simple and comprehensive explanation of “Clicktivism”; a tendency that has been identified by several scholars (Vitak, Zube, Smock, Carr, Ellison & Lampe, 2011; Gustafsson, 2012) as a behavior adopted by mostly young adults as regards their disengagement from civic and political issues. Student 5 answered what a possible reason for this behavior of young adults might be by saying,

Sometimes I see and just “like” things relevant to civic and political issues to be honest but just because I didn’t have the time to participate, it’s not that I didn’t liked the subject but it was because I didn’t have the time.

As regards “offline” ways in order this trend to mitigated and young adults engage more with civic and political issues, students believed that family, education and the environment surrounding an individual are the factors playing the most vital role. For example, Interviewee 3 said: “to start from the schools and their free time to encourage them to be aware of the political issues. It’s not only for politicians everyone should be responsible and it come from school family and the surrounding”.

Additionally, an interesting suggestion mentioned by student 2 regarding a solution coming from the online empire was to: “Find a way that combines what interests them but at the same time is effected and includes political and civic issues and the situation of their country. There should be something that will attract and engage them and in this way it will grab their attention”.

4.4 Results summary section
A review section summarizing key findings will follow.

Of the 7 possible general political activities, 4 traditional and 3 non-traditional, most common form of participation among the sample population this year were talked
to others about candidates or parties (73.5%) and signed a petition (59.6%). The least common of “offline” participation were worked for a party or candidate (3%) and attended rallies (9%). It can be argued that activities require less time were the most common. Furthermore, of the 4 possible civic actions sample population within this year had mostly volunteered for a non-electoral organization (37.5%) and fundraised for charity (34.7%) whereas the least common form was participated in fundraising run/walk/ride (13%).

In an effort to categorize our sample regarding their ‘offline’ engagement we created 4 groups: the ‘Disengaged’, the ‘Political Specialists’, the ‘Civic Specialists’ and the ‘Dual Activists’. Unfortunately, the highest percent identified in the disengaged category scoring 39.1%.

Of the 14 potential political activities one can perform on Facebook, survey findings indicated that young adults are mostly engaged with observing their friends political actions with most common between these seeing a status update that mentioned politics (64.4%). The least common forms were those of posting a wall comment about politics (3.8%) and joined a group about politics (7.6%). Overall, it can be argued that young adults have adopted a more passive attitude preferring to engage more with less active not time consuming actions.

Exactly the same findings were founds for the civic actions on Facebook young adults can perform.

Interviewees identified several features of Facebook that can enhance their online civic and political engagement. As it was mentioned, depending on your network of friends and ones character, Facebook can offer a venue where young adults can easily get organized and acquire more information in less time. However, they also pointed out some weaknesses of the site mainly concern its privacy policy and the absent of filtering. Also, they were skeptical regarding its nature thinking that is not oriented towards discussing serious issues and several concerns were raised as regards its appropriateness when different beliefs and opinions come together. It was mentioned that, it could become more appropriate if it imposed some changes.
For answering the last research question, data from both questionnaires and interviews used to facilitate acquiring deeper findings. Results from questionnaires identified three distinct patterns, differentiating effects of Facebook usage for civic and political purposes, on traditional political actions, non-traditional and civic actions. Statistics showed that political activities online can influence non-traditional ways of political participation offline such as protesting, boycotting products and signing petitions, whereas, results revealed no significant relationship between traditional politics offline, for instance voting, attending rallies etc, with young adults political actions on Facebook.

In order to unravel the potential connection between civic and political activities on Facebook and civic and political participation generally and also to shed some light in the relatively new concept of ‘slacktivism’ students were asked whether political activity on Facebook influence general political participation. Results from interviews were more of the same direction as students’ answers questioned the role of Facebook, indicating mostly weak or no relations at all between civic and political activities online with those ‘offline’.

4.5 Limitations

There are some limitations in this research that are to be acknowledged. Regarding the statistic tests carried out and the sample population; the survey was started by 184 students; however, not all those who started it finished it. The quantitative data analysis was carried out using responses from 138 students as 46 were partial. Furthermore, some questions were not “required” to be answered as asking for the participants to reveal more sensitive data. As a result it may be some statistical errors at the statistical calculations. Though it can be argued that these possible errors could not convert the findings and the overall patterns identified but must be mentioned in a try future research to overcome them.

Finally, as this study examined only the case of Facebook and how it’s related to young adult’s civic and political engagement it should not be assumed that findings can be transferred and applied to other SNSs.
4.6 Conclusion

This chapter had detailed the analysis of findings from both questionnaires and interviews and the discussion and interpretation of them. In the next, final chapter conclusions from the study and future recommendation will be presented.
Chapter 5 Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Restatement of the aims
The key aim of the study was to investigate the relationship between young adults’ civic and political engagement offline and their engagement with civic and political activities on Facebook. Furthermore, it was directed toward the examination of the most common civic and political actions both online and ‘offline’. Also, it was aiming to examine whether students conceive Facebook as an appropriate venue or not to promote and discuss these issues. Finally, it was seeking to investigate whether using Facebook for civic and political reasons could enhance or decrease young adult’s engagement offline.

5.2 Restatement of the findings
After the analysis of data from both questionnaires and interviews several issues was raised according to the research questions under investigation:

- **What are the general political and civic activities young adults engage in?**
The findings showed that the sample population was engaged more with less time consuming civic and political activities ‘offline’. The most common, carried out by 73,5% this year, was talked to others about candidates or parties while the least common was worked for a party or candidate (3%). This year young adults showed an inclination towards not-traditional political actions.

- **What political and civic activities on Facebook do young adults engage in?**
Results dedicated to the online realm revealed the same patterns for both civic and political activities on Facebook. Young adults were more engaged with less active while more observing activities as results indicated. Percentages were much higher for indexes such as “saw a status update that mentions political issues” and “saw a status update that mentions civic issues”, that went up to 64,4% and 50,8% respectively than for indexes of more active behavior such as “posted a wall comment that mentions political issues” and “posted a wall comment that mentions civic issues”, that just reached 3,8% and 6,1% correspondingly.
• Do young adults perceive Facebook as an appropriate venue for political activity?

The interview sample answered that although Facebook has potentials, as for information distribution and organization regarding civic and political events still it has some weaknesses. It was mentioned that, privacy issues, absent of information filtering and the nature of the site, not oriented toward ‘serious’ conversations were the main reasons made them hesitate to use Facebook for their online civic and political needs.

• What is the relationship between online and offline civic and political participation and more specifically; does political activity on Facebook influence general political and civic participation?

Results from questionnaires showed no relationship between online political activities and offline traditional political actions (e.g. voting) whereas revealed a significant association with non-traditional action offline (e.g. demonstrations) and political activities on Facebook. Quantitative findings seem reasonable taking into consideration that interviewees considered the organization of demonstrations and the formation of social movements as some of the most useful contributions of Facebook to young adult’s political engagement offline. Moreover, findings from interviews mentioned that although Facebook is a promising platform, yet it is not the solution for promoting and enhancing young adults政治 and civic engagement offline.

5.3 Evaluate the findings

Reflecting on the objectives of the research that were stated at the beginning it was covered in a great extend. More specifically,

• Objective No1: To identify what features of Facebook influence political and civic activity.

It can be argued that, one’s chosen network of friends on Facebook and the civic and political character actions they perform play a vital role in young
adult’s engagement, as well as already engaged young adult’s time spent on the site. From both qualitative and quantitative data it can be concluded that the “event” application of Facebook, the “like” bottom, the ability to join groups and post links and pictures on the “Wall” influence young adult’s civic and political engagement.

- **Objective No2: To identify the reasons students use or not Facebook for civic and political activities**  
  Interviewees answered that they mostly use Facebook because it facilitates information sharing, and make it easier for individuals that don’t know each other and live in different places to get organized. Also because it constitutes a source offering dissimilar content of information comparing to more traditional media that makes it possible for diverse types of views and voices to be heard. Although, interviewees indicated also some reasons that made them hesitate to reveal and discuss their civic and political issues on Facebook. Some of the most significant were the privacy policy of Facebook, the absent of information filtering and the unfriendly nature of the site regarding discussing civic and political issues.

- **Objective No3: To identify if Facebook enhances or decreases students’ civic and political engagement offline.**  
  It can be pointed out that Facebook may enhance the participation of already engaged students and also promote non-traditional ways of political participation such as protests, demonstrations and petitions. However, students argued that even if Facebook is a promising platform not being exploiting in the right way, it cannot offer considerable help. Interviewees suggested that the solution for young adults’ disengagement from civic and political activities should be searched somewhere else.

- **Objective No4: To identify how Facebook could be used to further support and enhance its user’s civic and political engagement.**
In order to ‘trust’ Facebook for their civic and political purposes, students demanded several changes to be applied on the site concerning mainly the privacy policy and the creation of a platform, oriented towards civic and political issues. However, it was argued that for making young adults more engaged and prevent an increase of ‘clicktivism’, a solution should be developed in the offline realm; with ways able to capture their attention and interest or through the institutions of family and education.

5.4 Recommendations for future research

A couple of areas related to this topic can be further researched. It would be highly relevant to further extend this research with a greater number of participants for both questionnaires and interviews in order to acquire more rigid findings. Also, it would be highly recommended future studies to conduct a research including data from several Universities so as to increase the validity of the results.

Scholars may be inclined to create a more balance sample regarding the qualitative part of the research. A suggestion for future research could be the sample undergone interviews to include equal number of students that have Facebook with student that do not have but both of them are engaged to political and civic activities offline and the same number of students that are not engaged but either they operate a Facebook account or not.

This study should be interpreted as an initial step in a relatively novel and promising direction. However, this area would be benefited from a more systematic qualitative approach including also observations on Facebook usage. That could result in a better understanding of young adult’s inclinations when they are using SNSs for civic and political purposes. Another venue for future research could be the comparison of Facebook usage, for civic and political issues, with that of other social media, such as Twitter.

As young adults political and civic engagement is an important issue, especially during a period of political apathy, further research on the field should be carried out so as to, a more precise and helpful solution to be found (Alujevic, 2012); either
arising from the online realm of SNSs or from the offline. Finally, additional research should take place concerning the enhancement of political and civic engagement “offline” through political and civic participation online. However, researchers should not stand solely on this approach. The goal should not be to prove whether this can be achieved through Facebook or other SNSs but to provide a solution to enhance young adults’ engagement.
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APPENDIX 1 ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE

Short survey on Facebook implications on young adults political and civic engagement

Information Consent

1. Social Networking Sites influence on Civic and Political Engagement; Examining the use of Facebook by young adults.

Information Consent

The University of Sheffield.

Researcher: Alkaterini Kostopoulou
MSc Information Systems
email: akostopoulou1@sheffield.ac.uk

Supervisor: Dr Farida Vis
Research Fellow In Social Science
email: f.vis@sheffield.ac.uk

The research scopes to identify the main political and civic activities in which students between 18-29 years old are involved both offline and online through Facebook. Moreover, the reasons students choose to use Facebook for their political activities and the causes that deter them from using it. Finally, the research will try to identify if Facebook enhances or decreases students’ civic and political engagement and participation.

You will not be asked questions such as to reveal what political party you support, or who you voted for in the past elections. At the end of the questionnaire you will be asked whether you want to participate in a follow up interview. In order to do so you will have to fill in your email address.

As data will be stored on secure, password-protected devices, your email addresses will also be kept securely. We are anonymising the data and coding the computer files with a random number. We will be analyzing the data for inclusion in my master’s dissertation. After that point, the data will be destroyed.

I confirm that I have read and understand the description of the research project, and that I have had an opportunity to ask questions about the project.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without any negative consequences.

I understand that I may decline to answer any particular question or questions, or to do any of the activities. If I stop participating at all-time, all of my data will be purged.

I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential, that my name or identity will not be linked to any research materials, and that I will not be identified or identifiable in any report or reports that result from the research.
I give permission for the research team members to have access to my anonymised responses.
I give permission for the research team to re-use my data for future research as specified above.
I agree to take part in the research project as described above.

Note: If you have any difficulties with, or wish to voice concern about, any aspect of your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Angela Lin, Research Ethics Coordinator, Information School, The University of Sheffield (school_ethics@sheffield.ac.uk), or to the University Registrar and Secretary.

---

Demographics

2. What is your age? *

[ ]

3. What is your gender? *

☐ Male
☐ Female
☐ Other

4. What is your nationality? *

[ ]

5. What is your current level of education? *

☐ Bachelor’s degree
☐ Master’s degree
☐ Professional degree
☐ Doctorate degree
☐ Other [ ]

6. What is the name of your degree and in which faculty it belongs? (please separate them with a comma) *

[ ]

7. What was your family’s total income last year?

☐ Less than £30,000
☐ £30,000 - £49,999
☐ £50,000 - £74,999
☐ £75,000 +
### Offline political and civic participation

**8. In the last 12 months which of the following actions have you performed?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Yes, within the last 12 months</th>
<th>Yes, but not in the last 12 months</th>
<th>No, never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voted</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talked to others about candidates or parties</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worked for a party or candidate</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended rallies</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**9. In the last 12 months which of the following actions have you performed?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Yes, within the last 12 months</th>
<th>Yes, but not in the last 12 months</th>
<th>No, never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Went on a protest or demonstration or march</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boycotted a product or a service for ethical reasons</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signed a petition</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**10. In the last 12 months which of the following actions have you performed?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Yes, within the last 12 months</th>
<th>Yes, but not in the last 12 months</th>
<th>No, never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fund raised for charity</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteered for a non-electoral organization (hobby club, environmental group, etc.)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participated in community problem solving.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participated in fund-raising run/walk/ride.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Questions relevant to Facebook**

**11. Do you have a Facebook account?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

**Frequency of Facebook use**

**12. On a typical day, about how much time do you spend on Facebook?**

- ☐ Less than 10 min
- ☐ 10 to 30 min
- ☐ More than 30 min, up to 1 hr
- ☐ More than 1 hr, up to 2 hrs
- ☐ More than 2 hrs, up to 3 hrs
- ☐ More than 3 hrs
### Forms of political participation through Facebook

For the purposes of this study, political participation has been defined as: "activities and actions trying to influence governmental policies and actions".

| 13. In the last week which of the following actions have you performed on Facebook? |
|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| **Yes, within the last week** | **Yes, but not within the last week** | **No, never** |
| **Joined a group about politics** | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| **Become a "fan" of a political candidate or group** | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| **Posted a status update that mentions politics** | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| **Posted a photo that has something to do with politics** | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| **Posted a wall comment about politics** | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| **Posted a link about politics** | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| **"Liked" a status update that mentions politics** | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| **"Liked" a photo that has something to do with politics** | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| **"Liked" a wall comment about politics** | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| **"Liked" a link about politics** | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| **Saw a status update that mentions politics** | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| **Saw a photo that has something to do with politics** | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| **Saw a wall comment about politics** | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| **Saw a link about politics** | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |

### Forms of civic participation through Facebook

For the purposes of this study, civic participation has been defined as: "forms of voluntary activity aimed towards solving problems in the community and helping others through non-governmental or non-electoral means", such as volunteering for building a homeless shelter or working on a community project, joining an environmental group, "like" a page for endangered species, become "fan" of a nonpolitical group such as a hobby club, environmental group or minority student association etc.

| 14. In the last week which of the following actions have you performed on Facebook? |
|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| **Yes, within the last week** | **Yes, but not within the last week** | **No, never** |
| **Became a "fan" of a group relevant to civic issues** | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| **Joined a group relevant to civic issues** | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| **Posted a status update that mentions civic issues** | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| **Posted a photo that has something to do with civic issues** | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| **Posted a wall comment about civic issues** | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| **Posted a link about civic issues** | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| **"Liked" a status update that mentions civic issues** | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| **"Liked" a photo that has something to do with civic issues** | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| **"Liked" a wall comment about civic issues** | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| **"Liked" a link about civic issues** | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| **"Saw" a status update that mentions civic issues** | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| **"Saw" a photo that has something to do with civic issues** | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| **"Saw" a wall comment about civic issues** | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| **"Saw" a link about civic issues** | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
15. I am looking for volunteer participants to take part in follow up interviews. These will take the form of one-to-one semi structured discussion, asking more in-depth questions about your political and civic activities in your every day life and if you have a Facebook account also your political and civic actions through it. Please add your contact (email address) here if you would like to take part.

Thank You!

Thank you for taking our survey. Your response is very important to us.
# APPENDIX 2 STATISTICAL RESULTS TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Yes, within the last week</th>
<th>Yes, within the but the last week</th>
<th>No, never</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joined a group about politics</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
<td>62.1%</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>82</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Become a &quot;fan&quot; of a political candidate or group</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>25.8%</td>
<td>70.5%</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>93</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posted a status update that mentions politics</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
<td>39.4%</td>
<td>48.5%</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>64</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posted a photo that has something to do with politics</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>62.9%</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>83</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posted a wall comment about politics</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>38.6%</td>
<td>53.8%</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>71</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posted a link about politics</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
<td>31.8%</td>
<td>53.8%</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>71</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Liked&quot; a status update that mentions politics</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>43.9%</td>
<td>32.6%</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>31</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Liked&quot; a photo that has something to do with politics</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
<td>38.6%</td>
<td>39.4%</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>52</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Liked&quot; a wall comment about politics</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
<td>40.2%</td>
<td>40.2%</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Liked&quot; a link about politics</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
<td>32.6%</td>
<td>47.0%</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>62</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results from question 13: “In the last week which of the following actions have you performed on Facebook?”

| Action                                                                 | Yes, within the last week | Yes, within the last week but not last week | No, never | Responses |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Became a “fan” of a group relevant to civic issues                     | 9.8%                      | 40.9%                                       | 49.2%     | 132        |
| Joined a group relevant to civic issues                                | 8.4%                      | 40.5%                                       | 51.1%     | 131        |
| Posted a status update that mentions civic issues                      | 7.6%                      | 39.4%                                       | 53.0%     | 132        |
| Posted a photo that has something to do with civic issues              | 7.6%                      | 37.1%                                       | 55.3%     | 132        |
| Posted a wall comment about civic issues                               | 6.1%                      | 37.4%                                       | 56.5%     | 131        |
| Posted a link about civic issues                                       | 10.7%                     | 36.6%                                       | 52.7%     | 131        |
Results from question 14: “In the last week which of the following actions have you performed on Facebook?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>14</th>
<th>48</th>
<th>69</th>
<th>132</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Liked&quot; a status update that mentions civic issues</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
<td>48.5%</td>
<td>28.8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Saw&quot; a status update that mentions civic issues</td>
<td>50.8%</td>
<td>37.1%</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Liked&quot; a photo that has something to do with civic issues</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
<td>44.7%</td>
<td>34.8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Saw&quot; a photo that has something to do with civic issues</td>
<td>48.5%</td>
<td>35.6%</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Liked&quot; a wall comment about civic issues</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
<td>43.9%</td>
<td>37.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Saw&quot; a wall comment about civic issues</td>
<td>46.2%</td>
<td>40.9%</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Liked&quot; a link about civic issues</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
<td>46.6%</td>
<td>35.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Saw&quot; a link about civic issues</td>
<td>47.0%</td>
<td>40.2%</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 3 Interview Transcripts
Interview No 1

Q Do you think a social networking site like Facebook has the power to influence civic or political issues in real life?

S1. Yes they have

Q Why do you think so?

S1. Well, I think it has the power to do it both in the good and in the bad way. Nowadays, Facebook is part of this massive internet that can give as lots and lots of information but that can also be bad because there is no filter at all about it, but receiving these information and having a network that allows you to organize yourself can make it easier for you to participate in real life issues.

Q Can you, as an individual, be benefited from using Facebook for civic and political purposes? In what ways?

S1. Yes you can, as said before the main way you can be benefited from this is by receiving information about it, so that just by.. in terms of.. Politically it’s very easy to get lots of information through Facebook because everyone is involved in politics and in terms of civic issues its easier because of the friends you have you will end up having information about the things that connect you to those friends, so all the things you have in common with them, usually things you like and you really care of, you can receive some information about those topics just because those friends have the same worries as you or the same motivations as you.

Q Can society (generally) be benefited from using Facebook for civic and political purposes?

S1. Yes it can.

Q In what ways?

S1. As society has always face the same problem which is apart from having the information you really need to be able to make any decision you also need the means to organize yourself to do that. ok this way now Facebook can be a social network allows you to organize different groups of people, that maybe don’t even know each other, but they can still organize themselves within a group or page on Facebook where they can share information and discuss things Even though they don’t know each other. Basically they are keeping a platform, a network where they can discuss.
Q Do you think using Facebook to share and discuss your civic and political issues have any impact on your civic and political activities offline? In what ways?

S1. Yes it does though not always. It’s very typical now that you receive a lot of information in Facebook and many people don’t care about it but the ones who care have the possibility to find other people who care about the same thing and later those people can prepare lots of different events offline. Use this massive network to spread the news and find people who want to join for it; somehow Facebook can like the best media to advertise your events.

Q Do you have any example; you have done or see anything on facebook and then transferred it in your real life to take the form of action? For example to see an event about a charity and went to help, or an upcoming demonstration and attend it? So, an activity online that you had transferred it into an action in your real life.

S1. Does it have to be particularly about me?

Q Yes, but if you don’t have its ok.

S1. In Spain in March of 2011 I think or 2012 not sure, there was that movement called the indignadons which was born purely on Facebook. It was an idea that... no one knew about it except people in this social media. Suddenly there was a huge but I mean huge huge, like one of the greatest demonstrations ever in history of Spain. And the authorities didn’t know what was going on because no one was looking at that except people that were involved on that and suddenly it was an explosion of demonstrations that no one could see coming.

Q So you first heard about that on Facebook or from your friends?

S1. I didn’t receive it but the main impact of this action happened in Madrid so mostly people from Madrid were the one receiving all the news about these events. Quickly the news spread and everyone went there.

Q So, do you think Facebook in an appropriate venue for individuals to share and discuss their civic and political issues?

S1. Well, yes and no. In my opinion is a really good way of sharing information, though information can always be a bad thing too. But in terms of discussion I think Facebook is not good at all.

Q why you say so?

S1. Because internet in general is not a good place for discussion. Even though, in Facebook you are not anonymous.

Q do you think that that it’s a problem?
S1. In Facebook having a name can be an advantage and a disadvantage. Some people don’t want to saw their political ideas whereas at least it prevents people from being anonymous and just say whatever crap they want. But no matter what people in internet talk too much. When you want to discuss you really want people that are committed to discuss. People that are committed to that, that not only appear there to say whatever. You want people that are really interested on it and Facebook make it too easy for people that are not interested to it just enter and say as much crap as they want. This usually leads to those politically battles of independency, territories, stupid political comments, trying to attack each others

Q Have you ever felt scared or embraced to post, discuss, like something that has to with political or civic issues?

S1. Not scared but the privacy policy of Facebook could make it possible. Embraced a little bit just because..Hm.. You read and see thin related to civic and political issues in Facebook but sometime you realize that Facebook is not something you we usually use for political and civic issues as a primary goal. Facebook is something that we usually use just to be in contact with your friends. So sometime you say: I am goanna do this. It could be like a huge poster hanging out of your window says what you politically think! This is too obvious or evident and I think a little part of intimacy in that area.

Q Do you think it would be beneficial to change or improve anything in order to make Facebook a better venue for its user’s civic and political purposes? Or, let’s say if someone wanted to use Facebook for civic and political issues do you think it would be better Facebook to have some different features?

S1. It could be improved but in my opinion there should be something separate from it. Facebook looks like a friendly place where you usually share friendly staff with your friends, its not a serious place. I think that there’s a lot of serious staff going on at the moment on Facebook but it should be taken out into another social network that could be something done specifically for people that are concerned about any civic and political issues. Maybe you don’t reach as many people as if you are spreading something on Facebook but you can make it sure that the people that are interested on it can really make the most of exchanging ideas, sharing information. So I guess that having a new social network specifically dedicated to political and civic issues could be the best way.

Q Do you use other social media to promote and discuss civic and political issues?

S1. No I don’t.
Interview No 2

I Do you think a social networking site like Facebook has the power to influence civic or political issues in real life?

S2 Yes I do believe has power to influence civic or political issues in real life. As we have seen in many countries like Greece or Spain or in Egypt, many protests or people gathering to demand their rights and to change things in their country started through a Facebook event. It is an easier way to approach people that may not leave in the same place, otherwise won’t have known about this event, it’s easy to share and it’s easy to organize something with greater participation.

I Can you, as an individual, be benefited from using Facebook for civic and political purposes? In what ways?

S2 Yes it can be benefited from using Facebook. I can be informed better, I can share and exchange opinions with other people and also I might find links that interest me also contact some people that might interest me for some reason and have a more personal communication with them on such matters.

I Can society (generally) be benefited from using Facebook for civic and political purposes?

S2 I think it can be benefited because people participate more and its much more easy for them to access and to know what is happening but it’s also very easy to manipulate people in a greater scale. As we see now with far extreme right parties that have their groups on Facebook it’s much easier to reach people that are vulnerable and influence them and get them to their party, like the golden don in Greece a neo-Nazi party.

I Do you think using Facebook to share and discuss your civic and political issues have any impact on your civic and political activities offline? In what ways?

S2 Yes I might attend an event that might interest me, I might find a book or another source I find interesting and discuss with other people, I could attend a charity event

I Do you have any example; you have done or see anything on Facebook and then transferred it in your real life to take the form of action?

S2 I have attended a demonstration in Athens, the equivalent with Spanish Indignados, I have attended some of those protests and I also have attended some events in order to clean some areas from garbage or paint some areas it was called atenistas if you know
S2 They make areas more beautiful and clean.

I So, do you think Facebook in an appropriate venue for individuals to share and discuss their civic and political issues?

S2 Well that depends on how open they want to be, how much anonymous or not. It depends on what they want to share is someone want to be very private it’s not the place to do so. But if someone doesn’t mind and are very sure about their opinion, they know what they want to say, they don’t care what other people may say. It could be an appropriate venue although there is a lot of cyber-bulling everywhere, so it depends if someone can stand that, if they are influenced too much by other people opinions, or perhaps negative comments then it’s not an appropriate place.

I have you ever felt scared or embarrassed to post or discuss or like something that has to with your political or civic thought and beliefs?

S2 Scared or embarrassed not but I have felt uncomfortable because it was an issue that it started from discussing a debate between republicans and democrats in USA and I am quite informed about this issue. I was having a conversation with some of my friends online from the states and not only from the states and a friend who apart from her political beliefs is a good friend but apart from her political and civic beliefs – in US civic and political issues are quite mixed because especially republicans they are engaged much into religion and doing or not abortions and death penalty, that civic issues they are using them in their political campaigns – The discussion was about death penalty, and I felt quite uncomfortable as we have totally different opinions, and it was a really passionate discussion, and I felt that it could at some point ruin our friendship if I had let her take it further, so I had to stop.

I Do you think it would be beneficial to change or improve anything in order to make Facebook a better venue for its user’s civic and political purposes?

S2 Well it is a bit thin line, if there is a way to stop cyber-bulling and trolling because there are some people that act like trolls to other. Where is the line between someone telling his opinion if it is harsh or someone attacking? There should be some type of definition, a clear definition because when people sign in and they say they agree with the term they never read them. So there should be a way to know that if they act if they cyber-bull someone if they attack someone or if threaten someone in some way that there are some implication and a mechanism preventing actions like that. Find a way that those people won’t be able to create another account.
I Do you use other social media to promote and discuss your civic and political issues?

S2 I use also twitter

I do you think twitter offer a better environment for you civic and political needs?

S2 Well better no. My Facebook is more protected and more closed I can set what other see or not whereas in twitter it can be either open or closed and that’s it there is no middle situation state of account but on the other hand twitter it’s much more immediate, you can just write a comment and you can replay to many journalism or politicians or many newspapers and others news agencies that post tweets about these issues. It’s easier to do these through twitter.

I in your opinion what is the best way to help young adults for engaging with civic and political activities? Is social media a way?

S2 it is but again it should be monitor oh young adults I thought teenagers. If it is young adults they don’t need monitoring. So, it is a good way to engaged, but it can easily disoriented and mislead people in a great scale

I Many studies had shown that young adult are disengaged from civic and political activities so in your opinion what might be a way to make them engaged and to participate more?

S2 well finding a way that combines what interests them but at the same time is effected and includes political and civic issues and the situation of their country There should be something that will attract and engage them and in this way it will grab their attention. There is the think that sometimes people are very active online but they do nothing in real because they believe that if they “like” something or if they “re-tweet” something they did something but they don’t. It is just passing information it’s not real action against the problem. So people need to realize that with “like”, sharing or re- tweeting something doesn’t mean they help the world to become a better place. And also sometimes some fault information is easily shared and it’s very easy to spread online and misguide other people.

Interview No 3

Q Do you think a social networking site like Facebook has the power to influence civic or political issues in real life?

S3 Yes it has to some extend

I. why you think so?
S3 Well people now are exposed to different views than the one in official media or the alternative media so it can have an impact.

I. Can you, as an individual, be benefited from using Facebook for civic and political purposes? In what ways?

S3, yes, like making some kind of a pressure or gathering people to do something; awareness, petitions and all these things.

I. Can society be benefited from using Facebook for civic and political purposes?

S3. As a society it can I guess but unfortunately because a small number of people in certain societies use Facebook it can’t but maybe in the future it can

I. Do you think using Facebook to share and discuss your civic and political issues have any impact on your civic and political activities offline in your real life? In what ways?

S3 yes definitely because you have some discussion going on Facebook like the groups , also to organize an event or anything and this you can have it on the ground , we have a real event or a protest or anything

I. Do you have any example where you “liked” something related to a charity or a demonstration and then participate in it in your real life?

S3. Yes a lot, because it’s so easy to create an event on Facebook for people to know where and when, and if it’s going to change and hear different views of people especially if it’s a debate you can prepare yourself before you go.

I. Do you think Facebook in an appropriate venue for individuals to share and discuss their civic and political issues?

S3. It’s not that appropriate because you don’t want just people to talk give their views behind the screens. It’s a way, but you want them to encourage them to go to a debate and face to face because some people are so amazing when they write but when you talk to them they don’t have this power. So, you don’t need it just to be the only venue.

I. Have you ever felt scared or embraced to post, discuss, like something that has to with political or civic issues?

S3. Yes either has to do with religion, so not all my friends appreciate or accept me criticizing a religious thing or with political things because I come from a country where it’s still a monarchy and there not much freedom of expression. So sometimes I do feel – I have a self sensor!
I. Do you think it would be beneficial to change or improve anything in order to make Facebook a better place for its user’s civic and political purposes?

S3. Well I think about the security issue because I don’t feel safe as I said, also being attacked from others who disagree with me or anything.

I. Do you use other social media to promote and discuss civic and political issues?

S3. Yes twitter but not much and there is a website I think is change.org where you can sign petitions

I let say about twitter compared to Facebook. Do you think it offers a better environment for its users political and civic needs?

S3. For me Facebook its better, I don’t like twitter that much because there is lots of news you can’t control. Facebook it’s much easier

I. In your opinion what is the best way to help young adults for engaging with civic and political activities?

S3. It has to start from the schools and their free time to encourage them to be aware of the political issues. It’s not only for politicians everyone should be responsible and it come from school family and the surrounding

I. Do you think SNS can be an option to help young adults be more aware about civic and political issues?

S3. It’s a starting point. I am one of the people who benefitted from Facebook to know a lot about the news. So yes it can be a starting point for whoever is interested to know more.

Interview No 4

I. You choose not to have Facebook. Do you think a social networking site like Facebook has the power to influence civic or political issues in real life? Why yes or why no.

S4. I think yes it has the power to influence. Clear example is the Arab Spring especially in Egypt they made it quite popular they even sprayed some buildings that Facebook helped them.

I. Do you have any movement like this in your country?

S4 No. Also one can see what the popular things going on, for example from the number of likes and one can know what the important issues for the majority are.
I. But still you decided not to have Facebook does your decision has to do with these issues?

S4. No it’s other reasons

S4. There is also the possibility of more communication even for example in times of elections with elected officials discussing with them. Probably from their side as well when there are elections data analysis allows the campaigners to see where to target more. It also allows the organization of protests or revolutions I mean to easy communication and decide about the time and place. And also used for petitions. I heard there was one case in my country where a petition was used for a decision not to change the headmaster of a school

I. So what happened?

S4 They did the petition many mothers or families signed the petition and they decided to leave the headmasters. I also help to overcome maybe difficulties or differences between different groups of people. It may be possible that users get better views about something about issues that are being shared. However, also wrong information may also be spread more easily and since it’s not filtered and everyone gives personal ideas and it may also used wrongly to spread hatred for example.

I. I am sure that most of your friends have Facebook accounts, and indeed some of them use it for civic and political activities. In your opinion, can they, as individuals, be benefited from using Facebook for civic and political purposes? In what ways?

S4 they maybe more informed about what is going on as we said earlier during election campaigns for example campaigner are able to reach more people and faster so the voter maybe is allowed to do a more informed decision. I think in us Facebook was use a lot in the last elections. And it is also easier to see what other think and share concerns or reassurances.

I. And what about society? Can society (generally) be benefited from using Facebook for civic and political purposes?

S4 yes more people are involved especially the youth who use them more. Maybe youth its nit much interesting on things; through social networks they are involved somehow. Maybe it offers more transparency and everyone is allowed to contribute as well.

I. Do you think Facebook is an appropriate venue for individuals to share and discuss their civic and political issues?

S4. Yes
I. Do you use other social media to promote and discuss civic and political issues? If no, so how you get informed...?

S4 No, not much

I. So how you get informed about what is going on regarding civic and political issues?

S4. Mainly from newspapers and websites.

I. What is the best way to help young adults for engaging more with civic and political activities?

S4 Discussing topics and proposing things which are of interest to them. Encouraging youth to be part of a group even online may increase civic engagement or volunteering or charitable events. But I think that overall it shouldn’t be totally left as an online thing. People should get to meet in real time and space.

**Interview No 5**

I. Do you think a social networking site like Facebook has the power to influence civic or political issues in real life?

S5. Yes I think Facebook has great power in order to influence a lot of people we saw for example in Egypt that they use it a lot to promote all these issues they wanted. I think it’s a very powerful tool in the hands of people in order to do something good.

I. Can you, as an individual, be benefited from using Facebook for civic and political purposes? In what ways?

S5. At the moment I am not using Facebook for any of these political or civic purposes so I cannot say very clearly if it would be any helpful for me but certainly if there is a serious problem that I think I can help certainly I will participate.

I. So what about society generally? Do you think that society can be benefited from using Facebook for civic and political purposes?

S5 Yes I think is very beneficial because all the voices can be heart and all the voices of people can clarify what actually belief for the good of their country.

I. Do you think using Facebook to share and discuss your civic and political issues have any impact on your civic and political activities offline? In what ways?
S5. As I said before because I don’t use it for any civic or political reasons I don’t have a very clear view of that.

I. So is there any example that you have seen something about charity let say and then transfer it in your real life.

S5. Sometimes I see and “like” things relevant to civic and political issues to be honest but just because I didn’t have the time to participate its not that I didn’t liked the subject but it was because I didn’t have the time.

I. Do you think Facebook in an appropriate venue for individuals to share and discuss their civic and political issues?

S5. Yes Facebook is a powerful platform as many people participate so all the voices should be taken into account and I think maybe political issues can be discussed.

I. Can I ask you the reason you don’t use Facebook for any civic and political issues?

S5. First of all I use Facebook only for personal reasons. I think Facebook it’s just a social media site and it’s not yet in an appropriate form to be used for political and civic issues because many people can take advantage.

I. So what you think its Facebook main problem?

S5. I think privacy!

I. If that was different will you consider using it for express your civic and political issues?

S5. Certainly! If there wasn’t these barriers yes!

I. Do you use other social media to promote and discuss civic and political issues?

S5. Sometimes I am using twitter when I am angry about something in my society. I think it’s a very good tool to use. I think twitter its better from Facebook for discuss and promote civic and political issues, because it’s more oriented towards that. The people that participate there are more serious when they something. In Twitter when people discuss these issues are more honest and more novel.

I. in Facebook most of the people have their real Identity whereas in twitter that happening less do you think that this is a reason ...

S5. Sometimes you hide your identity for obvious reasons because when you are saying something you may are fear of the government trace them after.

I. What is in your opinion the best way to help young adults for engage more with civic and political activities?
S5. I think to go to protests to participate that writing something on Facebook. Because the social media limit your presence. Making people do real actions and not just sitting and writing something on their PC.

I. Do you think SNS is a way to make young adults more informed?

S5. Yes there are very good tools for young adults to get informed to learn about a new subject and after it’s up to them to decide what they want to do.

**Interview No 6**

I. Do you think a social networking site like Facebook has the power to influence civic or political issues in real life?

S6. Yes I think during the last years many people using Facebook so it become something of everyday life therefore everything goes on on this particular site has an influence and maybe previously it wasn’t very connected with political issues whereas now it’s more easy for them to connect with it because it’s easy to access it and because many people feel comfortable to speak behind their anonymity. You have a lot of friends there and all these may help to have influence.

I. Can you, as an individual, be benefited from using Facebook for civic and political purposes? In what ways?

S6. I don’t know if it’s beneficial but there are cases where they can affect something related to the political system like hoe I interact or that I made to thing about thinks I see on Facebook. As I said previously it is something of our everyday life so it’s obvious that influence us and it will affect us more in the future.

I. Was it let’s say something you didn’t new and you informed through Facebook?

S6. Yes, this year I meet some friends from foreign countries and them on Facebook and I connected to news coming from other countries whereas before I couldn’t have this kind of news because there was lets say something more isolated or it was affecting only this country. So it was something helpful to understand and realize what issues other countries have.

I. Do you think that society can be benefited from using Facebook for civic and political purposes?

S6. Well I remember this kind of thing happened in Limbic and also in Egypt that people that have different opinion and wanted to undermine the government used Facebook and then they had some help from outside their country in order to keep providing information all over the world about what was happening in their
country. However, we know that the central information agencies are using this site and information on Facebook to their own benefit. In the past I have read that they realize it is easier for people to share information and give their identity on Facebook more freely by themselves than given it to the government. So it’s controversial and beneficial and not.

I. Do you think using Facebook to share and discuss your civic and political issues have any impact on your civic and political activities offline? In what ways?

S6. In my opinion there are two sides. I mean offline Facebook now it’s most of the same thing. Facebook is part of our life we use it all the time to connect and all that ideas are passing to as by this medium. Either you go out and have a political conversation or inside the site I think in some manner it’s the same.

I. Do you have any example; you have done or see anything on Facebook and then transferred it in your real life to take the form of action?

S6. With Facebook people can gain information freely. A person that doesn’t own a newspaper through Facebook can channel to a lot of people information about political and civic issues that in the previous years was impossible.

I. Do you think that the actions people do on Facebook transfer them in their real life?

S6. It depends but generally, it’s easier for people to like a post. They state their support online but without being actually after in the demonstration or in the real event. They mostly indicate their support without having any other form of commitment. So they just do the “like”. In their mind they might believe they had participated in the act but I believe the physical presence it’s more important.

I. Do you think Facebook in an appropriate venue for individuals to share and discuss their civic and political issues?

S6. Well, this is controversial. I believe in the freedom of speech and the internet generally is a medium to use for that, to share ideas and beliefs. But on the other hand this information these ideas expressed online are in databases without knowing how they will use the information exactly. Everything you post is exposed to many people when something goes on Facebook it is public it’s like you are broadcasting something! People must be more concerned about what they let other people to see.

I. Have you ever felt scared or embraced to post, discuss, like something that has to with political or civic issues?
S6. Not exactly. But information that is on Facebook sometimes is controversial. So easy to like or dislike such beliefs because most of the people and its normal have different opinions. In my mind it’s better to have your opinion than agree with someone, its better for discussion and democracy!

I. Do you think it would be beneficial to change or improve anything in order to make Facebook a better venue for its user’s civic and political purposes?

S6. I think the problem it’s not on Facebook! I think the problem it’s between the people and how educated and how informed are individuals. Facebook is only a medium and nothing else. How we are going to use it it’s up to us. I believe some legal issues must be resolved for the public good and not for the companies good. The people must be educated by themselves not by some other mean; they must have their own opinion about all the things around the world.

I. In your opinion what is the best way to help young adults for engaging with civic and political activities?

S6. I think this issue happened a long time ago, the young people felt that political things are not concern them it’s something that adults engaged with and something that may felt because they were frustrated from the political system, and the general attitude against younger populations related to these issues. I think younger people see all these things happening around them and they want to change the world but they are not so connected with the political system.

I. Do you think social media can help them engaged more and make them more involved?

S6. I think this is a difficult issue, because I believe that younger people must have their own opinion about the political system. Social media its only a part it’s not the solution, it’s only a medium.

I. Do you use other social media to promote and discuss civic and political issues? If no, so how you get informed...?

S6. No, I only use Facebook but I still get information from other sources such as newspapers or the electronic part of the newspaper either from my county or English and American newspapers trying to have more political knowledge about all the issues of all the countries.
APPENDIX 4 CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

Information School Research Ethics Panel

Letter of Approval

Date: 24th July 2013

to: Aikaterini Kostopoulou

The Information School Research Ethics Panel has examined the following application:

Title: Social Networking Sites influence on Civic and Political Engagement; Examining of Facebook by young adults.

Submitted by: Aikaterini Kostopoulou

And found the proposed research involving human participants to be in accordance with the University of Sheffield’s policies and procedures, which include the University’s ‘Financial Regulations’, ‘Good Research Practice Standards’ and the ‘Ethics Policy Governing Research Involving Human Participants, Personal Data and Human Tissue’ (Ethics Policy).

This letter is the official record of ethics approval by the School, and should accompany any formal requests for evidence of research ethics approval.

Effective Date: 24th July 2013

Dr. Angela Lin
Research Ethics Coordinator
# APPENDIX 5 CONSENT FORM

| The University of Sheffield. Information School | Social Networking Sites Influence on Civic and Political Engagement; Examining the use of Facebook by young adults. |

### Researchers
Researcher name: Aikaterini Kostopoulou  
Email: akostopoulou1@sheffield.ac.uk

### Purpose of the research
The research scopes to identify the main political activities in which students are involved. It will also identify the reasons students choose to use the Facebook for their political activities and the causes that deter them from using it. Moreover, the research will try to identify if Facebook enhances or decreases students’ civic and political engagement and participation. Finally, it aims to identify how Facebook could be alternatively used or what could be changed for further support and enhancement of its users’ civic and political participation.

### Who will be participating?
I am inviting young adults over 18 until 29 years old who are using Facebook to discuss about the influence it may have regarding civic and political activities of its users in real life.

### What will you be asked to do?
I will conduct a 30-40 minutes one-to-one semi structured interview about the use of Facebook for political purposes. You will not be asked to reveal any sensitive data about your political beliefs nor your very personal data as your name or telephone number.

You will not be asked to answer questions such as reveal what political party you support, or who you voted for in the past elections. The research is not about investigating your political beliefs. The main purpose is the relationship between your online actions on Facebook and how these can be transferred in your real life.

### What are the potential risks of participating?
The risks of participating are the same as those experienced in everyday life.

### What data will we collect?
I will be audio recording the interviews, and I will also write down some notes for being able to transcribe the answers afterwards. All data will be kept in password-protected devices.

### What will we do with the data?
I will analyze the data for inclusion in my master’s dissertation. After that point, the data will be destroyed.
Will my participation be confidential?
I will anonymize the data and code the computer files with a random number. No identification information will be retained.

What will happen to the results of the research project?
The results of this study will be included in my master’s dissertation which will be publicly available. Please contact the School in six months.

I confirm that I have read and understand the description of the research project, and that I have had an opportunity to ask questions about the project.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without any negative consequences.

I understand that I may decline to answer any particular question or questions, or to do any of the activities. If I stop participating at all time, all of my data will be purged.

I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential, that my name or identity will not be linked to any research materials, and that I will not be identified or identifiable in any report or reports that result from the research.

I give permission for the research team members to have access to my anonymised responses.

I give permission for the research team to re-use my data for future research as specified above.

I agree to take part in the research project as described above.

Participant Name (Please print)                                    Participant Signature

Reseacher Name (Please print)                                       Researcher Signature

Date

Note: If you have any difficulties with, or wish to voice concern about, any aspect of your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Angela Lin, Research Ethics Coordinator, Information School, The University of Sheffield (ischool_ethics@sheffield.ac.uk), or to the University Registrar and Secretary.
# APPENDIX 6 APPLICATION FORM

## The University of Sheffield
### Information School

### Proposal for
#### Research Ethics Review

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<th>Students</th>
<th>Staff</th>
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<tr>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
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<td>Postgraduate (Research) – PGR</td>
<td>This project is funded by:</td>
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### Project Title:
Social Networking Sites Influence on Civic and Political Engagement; Examining the use of Facebook by young adults.

### Start Date: | End Date: |

### Principal Investigator (PI): [student for supervised UG/PGT/PGR research]
Akateri Kostopoulou
Email: akostopoulou1@sheffield.ac.uk

### Supervisor:
If PI is a student
Farida Vis
Email: f.vis@sheffield.ac.uk

### Indicate if the research: *(put an X in front of all that apply)*

- Involves adults with mental incapacity or mental illness, or those unable to make a personal decision
- Involves prisoners or others in custodial care (e.g. young offenders)
- Involves children or young people aged under 18 years of age
- ✗ Involves highly sensitive topics such as ‘race’ or ethnicity; political opinion; religious, spiritual or other beliefs; physical or mental health conditions; sexuality; abuse (child, adult); nudity and the body; criminal activities; political asylum; conflict situations; and personal violence.

### Please indicate by inserting an "X" in the left hand box that you are conversant with the University’s policy on the handling of human participants and their data.

- ✗ We confirm that we have read the current version of the University of Sheffield Ethics Policy Governing Research Involving Human Participants, Personal Data and Human Tissue, as shown on the University’s research ethics website at: www.sheffield.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/ethicspolicy
Part B. Summary of the Research

B1. Briefly summarise the project’s aims and objectives:
(This must be in language comprehensible to a layperson and should take no more than one-half page. Provide enough information so that the reviewer can understand the intent of the research)

Summary:
The aim of this thesis is to investigate Social Networking Sites (SNS) and their influence on young adult’s political and civic engagement and participation in real life events. The scope is to examine whether students, between 18 to 29 years old, use SNS and particularly Facebook for civic and political activities such as reading an article, watching or posting a video to name but a few. In particular, the project aims to examine if Facebook is related to young adult’s “offline” civic and political engagement or participation. In other words, it is an attempt to identify the role of Facebook in real life events such as protests, demonstrations, etc. and try to find which specific features of this Social Network, such as joining a group, “liking” a page or posting a political video on Facebook, mostly influence students’ political awareness. Moreover, examine the reasons why young adults hesitate to use Facebook for political purposes and whether there are any specific features that deter them from doing that (e.g. privacy issues).

It is of paramount importance to clarify that the participants will not be asked to answer sensitive questions such as to reveal what political party they support, or who they have voted for in the past elections. The research does not concentrate in the political beliefs of the participants. On the contrary, the main focus will be on the relationship between their online actions on Facebook and how these can be transferred in their real life.

The project scopes to identify the main political activities in which students are involved. It will also identify the reasons why students choose to use Facebook for their political activities and the causes that discourage them from using it. Moreover, this research will try to clarify if Facebook enhances or decreases student’s civic and political engagement or participation. To conclude with, it will aim to explore how Facebook could be alternatively used or what could be changed for further support and enhancement for its users’ civic and political participation.

B2. Methodology:
Provide a broad overview of the methodology in no more than one-half page.

Overview of Methods:

In order to obtain the desirable data, both qualitative and quantitative methods will be used.

First, online questionnaires will be distributed. The questionnaire will be divided into three categories. The first category “Demographics” will be about participant’s precise age, gender, race, and family’s annual income. The second category will be about participants “offline civic and political participation” asking them if they vote, attend rallies, donate money for political causes, raise money for charities etc. The third category will be about issues relevant to Facebook, requesting from
participants to answer whether they search for political information through Facebook, how often they watch a political video, how often they post political related videos or whether they have joined a political group, to name but a few.

A change has been made regarding the method that the researcher will apply in order to gather qualitative data. Initially, I had chosen to conduct two focus group interviews after collecting some initial data from questionnaires. In general, focus groups will help me answering the “why” questions which most of the times require an open answer, difficult to obtain through questionnaires. However, after considerable thought around issues of causing any psychological harm and in order to protect participants from feeling uncomfortable, the focus group option was revised. Additionally, in order to preserve causing any possible discomfort, since the data that I want to collect are characterized highly sensitive, the new chosen method will be one-to-one semi-structured interviews.

I have reflected on the initial data collection strategy and have come to the conclusion that semi-structured interviews are a less risky method to collect my data for, participants may feel more comfortable to reveal their thoughts, beliefs and actions when only one person is in front instead of a group of people. Moreover, after considering what I want to reap from the qualitative data collection method and the strengths and weaknesses of both focus groups and interview tools, I came to the conclusion that for this case and the topic that I will be investigating, application of the focus group strategy will not offer any further information. Actually that could create an opposite effect, having the participants giving away less information.

As a result, I concluded to the actualization of one-to-one semi-structured interview which is more appropriate for this specific research as the participant will be able to speak more freely and any potential embarrassment will be avoided.

It is important to clarify that the researcher will not at any point ask the participants to disclose specific information. Since the research is about social media and young adults’ political engagement, questions such as which political video have you watched, which political groups have you joined etc. are outside the boundaries of my research. The research is not about what political party one supports or what political party one voted for in the previous elections. On the contrary, I am only interested in the action, e.g. if they voted, not who they voted for. The questions will be around issues like if they perform these actions, how often and whether they have an impact in their everyday life.

Finally, the participants on both the questionnaires and one-to-one interviews will be informed from the beginning that their involvement and participation is volunteering and that they are not obligated to continue the questionnaire or the interview if they don’t want to, and also that they can skip the questions that make them feel uncomfortable.

If more than one method, e.g., survey, interview, etc. is used, please respond to the questions in Section C for each method. That is, if you are using both a survey and interviews, duplicate the page and answer the
questions for each method; you need not duplicate the information, and may simply indicate, “see previous section.”
C1. Briefly describe how each method will be applied

Method (e.g., survey, interview, observation, experiment):
The research will use two different methods: a web-based questionnaire, following by one-to-one semi-structured interviews, for young adults and their use of Facebook for civic and political purposes.

Description – how will you apply the method?

Questionnaires:
Online questionnaires will be distributed having closed type questions and only a few open.

Interviews:
The researcher will interview around 6 to 8 students, all students at the University of Sheffield.

About your Participants

C2. Who will be potential participants?

Questionnaires:
Young adults aged between 18 to 29 years old

Interviews:
Young adults aged between 18 to 29 years old

C3. How will the potential participants be identified and recruited?

Questionnaires:
An invitation to participate will be sent by my supervisor via the University’s ANNOUNCE email list to all students at the University of Sheffield.

Interviews:
Students from the University of Sheffield will be recruited that are between 18 to 29 years old. At the end of the online questionnaire participant will be asked whether they want to participate in a one-to-one semi structured interview. If they wish to participate, they would be asked to fill in their email address in order to contact them in order to arrange the interview.

C4. What is the potential for physical and/or psychological harm / distress to participants?

Questionnaires:
Participating in this research will cause no greater harm than participating in everyday life.

Interviews:
Participating in this research will cause no greater harm than participating in everyday life.

C5. Will informed consent be obtained from the participants?

Questionnaires:

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Interviews:

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If Yes, please explain how informed consent will be obtained?

**Questionnaires:**
The Information Sheet/Consent form will be used in digital form. The participants will also be provided with an email address to ask additional questions if they want so. At the end of the questionnaire the following text will be included: "By submitting my responses to the questionnaire, I confirm that I have read the information sheet and consent to take part in this study."

**Interviews:**
The participant will be fully informed of the details of the study in the Information Sheet/Consent Form; by signing this document, participants indicate that they fully understand the research in which they will be engaged.

If No, please explain why you need to do this, and how the participants will be de-briefed?

**C6.** Will financial / in kind payments (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants? (Indicate how much and on what basis this has been decided)

**Questionnaires:**
No compensation or honoraria will be provided.

**Interviews:**
No compensation or honoraria will be provided.

**About the Data**

**C7. What data will be collected? (Tick all that apply)**

**Questionnaires:**

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**Interviews:**

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<td>be easier to analyse them</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**C8. What measures will be put in place to ensure confidentiality of personal data, where appropriate?**

**Questionnaires:**

*Information School Research Committee – Research Ethics Application Form, version 1.1, 2012*
At the end of the questionnaire, the participants will be prompted to fill in their e-mail address, if they wish, in order to take part in a follow-up interview. However, all data will be anonymised and their participation in the project will be confidential. Each questionnaire will be assigned a randomly generated code which will be used to identify all pieces of data collected. The participants will also be informed about the way findings of the research will be used so that they can make a proper decision about participation.

**Interviews:**
Participants will not be identified in the research and their participation in the project will be confidential. Each interviewee will be assigned a number starting at 1. That code will be attached to the participant demographics questionnaire, and post session interview. The audio recording will only be used by the researcher. The interviewees will not be asked to include very personal details such as name or email or telephone number. The participants will also be informed about the way findings of the research will be used so that they can make a proper decision about participation.

**C9. How/Where will the data be stored?**

**Questionnaires:**
The data will be stored on a password-protected device.

**Interviews:**
The data will be stored on a password-protected device. There will be no key to match the audio recording to a person’s identity. The audio recording will only be used by the researcher. After the data are analysed, the interviews will be purged from the computers by the investigator.

**C10. Will the data be stored for future re-use? If so, please explain**

**Questionnaires:**
The data will be destroyed after analysis, report submission and mark received.

**Interviews:**
The data will be destroyed after analysis, report submission and mark received.

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**About the Procedure**

**C11. Does your research raise any issues of personal safety for you or other researchers involved in the project (especially if taking place outside working hours or off University premises)? If so, please explain how it will be managed.**

**Questionnaires:**
There are no anticipated issues of personal safety to the participants or researchers.

**Interviews:**
There are no anticipated issues of personal safety to the participants or researchers.
The interviews will take place only in one of University of Sheffield premises during normal office hours.
Title of Research Project: [Social Networking Sites influence on Civic and Political Engagement; examining the use of Facebook by young adults.]

We confirm our responsibility to deliver the research project in accordance with the University of Sheffield’s policies and procedures, which include the University’s ‘Financial Regulations’, ‘Good Research Practice Standards’ and the ‘Ethics Policy Governing Research Involving Human Participants, Personal Data and Human Tissue’ (Ethics Policy) and, where externally funded, with the terms and conditions of the research funder.

In submitting this research ethics application form I am also confirming that:

- The form is accurate to the best of our knowledge and belief.
- The project will abide by the University’s Ethics Policy.
- There is no potential material interest that may, or may appear to, impair the independence and objectivity of researchers conducting this project.
- Subject to the research being approved, we undertake to adhere to the project protocol without unagreed deviation and to comply with any conditions set out in the letter from the University ethics reviewers notifying me of this.
- We undertake to inform the ethics reviewers of significant changes to the protocol (by contacting our academic department’s Ethics Coordinator in the first instance).
- We are aware of our responsibility to be up to date and comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data, including the need to register when necessary with the appropriate Data Protection Officer (within the University the Data Protection Officer is based in CICS).
- We understand that the project, including research records and data, may be subject to inspection for audit purposes, if required in future.
- We understand that personal data about us as researchers in this form will be held by those involved in the ethics review procedure (e.g. the Ethics Administrator and/or ethics reviewers) and that this will be managed according to Data Protection Act principles.
- If this is an application for a ‘generic’ project all the individual projects that fit under the generic project are compatible with this application.
- We understand that this project cannot be submitted for ethics approval in more than one department, and that if I wish to appeal against the decision made, this must be done through the original department.

Name of the Student (if applicable):

[Alkaterini Kostopoulou]

Name of Principal Investigator (or the Supervisor):

[Farida Vis]

Date: [insert date]

05/07/2013
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Name: Aikaterini Kostopoulou
Department: School
Signed:
Date: 27.05.2013

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