

Political information sources for young citizens: a case study of Lithuanian youth information behavior

Andrius Šuminas

Vilnius University, Faculty of Communication,
Media Research Lab
E-mail: andrius.suminas@kf.vu.lt

Anna Mierzecka

University of Warsaw, Faculty of History,
Institute of Information and Book Studies
E-mail: anna.mierzecka@uw.edu.pl

The way young people obtain political information and engage with political content has changed since the new media technologies have emerged on a large scale. Starting with a discussion of different roles of online media in the transformation of political engagement, this article analyzes political engagement from the perspectives of political interest and participation in the context of new forms of online interaction. Findings from a national survey in Lithuania (n = 412, age 18 to 22) reveal the main sources and channels through which young people receive political information and news. The result of the study shows the importance of the Internet as a political information channel for the young people, however, the use of social media and other online channels for political engagement has been discovered to be low, especially with regard to two-way interactions with politicians or political parties.

Keywords: *political information sources, media use, political information channels, political engagement, youth, information behavior.*

“Remember, democracy never lasts long. It soon wastes, exhausts, and murders itself. There is never a democracy that did not commit suicide”.

JOHN ADAMS, second President of the United States, in a letter to John Taylor (15 April 1814)

This controversial statement was uttered by America’s second president John Adams in a polemic with John Taylor, a republican lawyer and member of the state legislature. Today, exactly 200 years after Adams’ words were spoken, we know that his opin-

ion about democracy was overly pessimistic, and his own homeland is cited as one of the best examples of democratic society. However, while democracy persists and, according to *World Forum on Democracy*, electoral democracies represent 120 of the 192 existing countries, in the last decade a significant amount of research has revealed the issue of decreasing levels of citizens’ political participation, a growing problem throughout Europe and the entire world. Low election turnouts, lack of basic political knowledge and a widespread belief that pol-

iticians do not listen to their voters are listed among the most serious concerns leading to a situation “where citizens are feeling a loss of ownership in the democratic process and where the ‘representativeness’ of elected assemblies is put into question” (Macintosh 2008, p. 87). This, in turn, undermines the basic principles of democracy.

The problem of declining rates of youth’s participation in political and civic life is discussed as particularly dangerous (e.g., Henn Weinstei & Wring 2002, Kaid, Mc-Kinney & Tedesco 2007). Analyses comparing metrics such as electoral participation and membership in associations indicate that young people are less active than the generation of their parents and grandparents at the same age (Mindich 2005). Putnam’s research (2000) points to the growing apathy of young Americans who reject the modes of civic and political involvement favored by the older cohort. Putnam argues that negotiations skills, which are essential for democracy, are acquired during face-to-face discussions or meetings, and those forms of activities are refused by the young people. Putman found it to be a dangerous sign for democracy and blamed for this situation the rise of television and broadcast media consumption as a factor undermining the participation in public life. Those observations are confirmed by Baumgartner and Morris, reporting that “youth are less likely to participate in politics by voting, contributing money, volunteering time, or showing up to a protest rally than are older Americans” (2009, p. 25). Mindich (2005) explains this changing attitude towards politics by more individualistic, even hedonistic behavior of the young people who are less

interested in gathering political information about their community. The decrease in the levels of political knowledge translates to the youth’s turnout at the election. Calenda and Meijer’s data (2009) paint a picture of a steady decline in the youth voters’ turnout all around the world in the last decades: in the United States, Canada, Latin America, Japan, and Western Europe. Moeller and colleagues (2013) argue that teenagers and adolescents, who find the political sphere very complicated, refuse to participate in it because they do not feel competent enough to vote.

However, in spite of the abovementioned indicators and findings, several researchers disagree with the thesis about the decrease in the youth’s political participation. “The suggestion that the next generation of citizens is any less politically engaged than previous ones seems at least premature”, claim Loader *et al.* (2014, p. 143), and they describe the phenomenon of *cultural displacement*. The mode of civic and political activities is no longer limited to the traditional set of indicators such as voting in the elections, donating to or volunteering for political parties, participating in political protests and debates or communicating with political representatives. Young people’s turning away from mainstream politics can be observed in many countries (Niemi & Weisber, 2001; Blais et al., 2004; Mindich, 2005; Fieldhouse, Tranmer & Russell, 2007; Macintosh, 2008; Van Biezen, Mair & Poguntke, 2012), but the phenomenon of political participation today is much more complex and includes diverse political and civic activities. The survey conducted by Zukin *et al.* (2006), whose goal was to

verify Putnam's observations, shows that, in place of abandoned political and civic practices new forms of citizen engagement appeared that were omitted or downplayed by earlier research. Zukin emphasizes that while those findings picture transformation or a cultural displacement of youth's involvement, they do not prove the fall of democracy. The new forms of citizen engagement include participation in online communities, such as social network sites (SNS), but are connected rather with single issue movements and networks than with general involvement (Norris 2002, Della Porta & Mosca 2005). Young people are more likely to choose the way to express their opinion about specific issues or become members of non-governmental groups than act in the parties or vote (Norris 2002). The crucial role in this displacement of youth's civil and political practices is played by the Internet, a preferred form of communication for the digital natives. Researchers who describe this phenomenon often cite Castells' (2001, see also Wellman 2001) idea of "networked individualism": young people interact through social networks forming temporary alliances according to single, dynamic interests. This kind of behavior creates completely new, volatile patterns of political participation whose major part has a digitally mediated form (Calenda & Meijer 2009; Loader, Vromen & Xenos 2014). Loader *et al.* (2014) emphasize the wide range of opportunities for social and political behavior offered by the Internet. Their conclusion about the political attitude of young citizens refutes the thesis about their political apathy: "The skepticism expressed by young people towards those who

represent them rather than being taken as a measure of apathy could instead be seen as a perfectly legitimate democratic attitude of reflexively engaged citizens conscious of their personal circumstances" (Loader, Vromen & Xenos 2014, p. 148). While such statement may seem controversial, the crucial role of the Internet which transforms the way of engagement is indisputable. For the sake of the further discussion, a broad multidimensional definition of political participation and engagement is needed to encompass a full array of political actions.

Our study's final aim is to produce general insights into the young generation's patterns of using political information sources. In this article, we focus on two aspects of political engagement – interest and participation, including new forms of Internet activism in correlation to information behaviors. Such an approach has led to the necessity of a precise and contemporary definition of such basic notions as political engagement, political participation, and interest. The notions of engagement and participation are sometimes treated as almost synonymous, especially in the articles that fail to provide a clear definition of those terms. Boulianne (2009) does not differentiate between them and defines political engagement broadly as behaviors that relate directly to political institutions and the work of political institutions, excluding from the definition political knowledge, political interest, and attitudinal variables. However, typically, political or democratic engagement is treated as a wider term which consist of cognitive engagement, political voice, and political participation (Delli Carpini 2004, Bakkers & de Vresse 2011, Hargittai &

Shaw 2013, Holt et al. 2013). The notion of political participation has been a subject of discussion for decades (see Bakkers & de Vresse 2011, Conge 1988). In our study, we base on the proposal by Vissers & Stolle (2013) and view political participation as all behavioral components of political engagement in which citizens express their political opinion and/or convey this opinion to political decision-makers, including the activities based on the use of the online communication tools. Political interest, a motivational component of engagement, is another important element in our research. Here, we adopt the definition by Lupia and Philpot of “a citizen’s willingness to pay attention to political phenomena at the possible expense of other topics” (Lupia & Philpot, 2005, p. 1122). Additionally, we include as a part of political engagement the entire array of information seeking behaviors connected with the political sphere of life, such as visiting the websites or social media profiles of political parties, reading political news or watching them on TV.

The Internet and its potential for transforming the nature of political engagement, especially with respect to youth behavior, has been a subject of extensive discussion for the last decade. Within this area of research, four main approaches have emerged: 1) the Internet has a negative influence on the political engagement level; 2) the Internet does not affect political engagement in any way; 3) the Internet reinforces the existing patterns of those who are already politically active; 4) the Internet opens up new avenues to participation. The initial fears raised by the Internet have been connected with the notion that it is the

next medium whose entertainment offer disconnects people from the real life and undermines deliberation in the public sphere (Kraut et al., 1998; Nie & Erbring, 2002). Cass Sunstein describes those problems as common claims that: “The Internet is bad for a democracy because it is reducing common experience and producing a situation in which people live in echo chambers of their own design” (Sunstein 2001, p. 205). Sunstein himself does not endorse those claims, indicating the diversity and potential of the Internet to increase citizens’ activism. Those fears also have not found support in later research. A meta-analysis conducted by Bouillanne (2009) among 36 studies about political engagement in the United States allows for the claim that there is little evidence to sustain the argument that Internet use is contributing to civic decline.

The potential of the Internet and online based forms of activity to reverse political inequality and mobilize to political engagement is enormous: it reduces the costs (time, finance) of accessing political information and provides more convenient methods of engaging in the political sphere. Particularly with regard to the young people who are active users of digital media (Loader 2007, Norris 2002), the benefits of online activism are likely to be strong, e.g., social media offer the possibility for the youth who are disconnected from politics to become involved in politics, obtaining political information through their online network of friends.

The presence of a correlation between the Internet use and the increase of political engagement became the focus of several analyses, although there is no clear

answer which of the approaches presented above is correct. Some of the research supports the thesis about the lack of influence of the Internet on political engagement: Baumgartner and Morris (2009) examined the political uses of social networking web sites (SNS) by the youth before the 2008 presidential election in the U.S. They report that the potential of SNS to increase young citizens' political engagement has not been realized as SNS users are no more inclined to participate in politics than are the users of other media: "Users of these sites tend to seek out the views that correspond with their own; they are no more knowledgeable about politics (in general and about the field of presidential candidates) than are their counterparts and, in fact, seem to be less so. Their political participation, as such, seems to be limited to the Internet activity, and they do not seem to be more likely to vote." (Baumgartner & Morris, 2009, p. 38). Apart from the findings about the lack of relation between SNS use and political engagement, this research points to another phenomenon important from the point of view of a healthy democracy, i.e. the danger of the fragmentation of information on the Internet, conducive to the avoidance of beliefs or viewpoints contrary to the ones that were antecedently held.

Generally, the majority of research shows that the Internet use in various forms and under certain conditions has positive effects on political engagements (e.g., Norris, 2001; Johnson & Kaye, 2003; DiMaggio *et al.*, 2004; Hendriks *et al.*, 2004; Krueger, 2002; Weber *et al.*, 2003; Lupia & Philpot, 2005; Xenos & Moy, 2007; Shah, Cho, Eveland, & Kwak, 2005; Valenzuela *et al.*, 2009;

Vitak *et al.*, 2011; Bode, 2012; Conroy *et al.*, 2012; Gil de Zúñiga 2012; Zhang *et al.*, 2013), however, sometimes the influence is not very strong. Bouillanne (2009) used the meta-analysis approach to the current research to assess the hypothesis that the Internet use has no significant effect on engagement. She examined 38 studies and their results: 166 effects testing the relationship between the Internet use and political engagement – from 127 positive effects, only 74 were statistically significant. Among them, the main difference can be noticed between the research reporting that the Internet played an important role in the processes of youth's involvement in politics and those who posit that it just activates the engagement of people already politically interested. The latter approach is based on or supported by Norris' (2000) theory of virtuous circle concerning media use in general: they serve to stimulate the engaged rather than mobilize new participants to become involved in the political sphere.

This question was one of the main foci of research conducted by Hargittai and Shaw (2013) among young American adults around the time of the 2008 U.S. presidential election. Their findings show that even though the Internet does not directly affect one of the most important forms of political participation, i.e. voting, the more skilled Internet and SNS use can facilitate social capital building and political engagement. Hargittai and Shaw found a strong connection between Web skills, SNS usage, and political engagement, but the additive or causal character of this relation was not possible to be determined. Xenos *et al.* (2014) also attempted to define the role played

by SNS in the process by which young adults become politically engaged. They conducted their research in three countries: Australia, United States, and United Kingdom, examining 3685 young people. Their basic assumption was that individuals uninterested in politics but exposed to political engagement of others expressed in social media can become more involved as well. They used different metrics to determine the political engagement of respondents that they related to the frequency of use of different social media platforms. In all three countries, the results lend a strong support to the hypothesis that “social media are positively related to political engagement, and suggest a number of patterns consistent with a flattening out of social asymmetries in political engagement over time, via a process of generational replacement” (Xenos *et al.*, 2014, p. 163). Holt *et al.* (2013) investigated how the media use (traditional and online) differs across age groups and whether this matters for people’s inclination to participate politically. Their findings prove that the use of SNS for political purposes by young people has a positive correlation with political interest, as well as with offline political participation. Moreover, it can also increase political interest and participation.

There certainly are situations where the contribution of online tools to political engagement is indisputable, such as the most frequently recalled and analyzed case of the “Arab Spring”, where Facebook, YouTube and Twitter played a crucial role and affected a meaningful social change (Hussain & Howard, 2013; Howard *et al.*, 2011). The importance of political online participation on Facebook and Twitter, which spurred

offline protest activities, is mentioned in the case of the Gezi park protest in Turkey, Occupy protest in the Zuccotti Park, and students’ protests in Quebec against the increase of the tuition fee. Further, the success of Barak Obama in the 2008 presidential election in the U.S. is often associated with the active online campaign in social media to mobilize the youth to vote.

There have also been acts of political participation which are completely new and do not have an offline equivalent, such as Camping 16, an action that took place after the 2010 federal election in Belgium, related to the government formation, when people in protest pitched virtual tents outside of the Prime Minister’s office in Brussels – located at “16” Rue de la Loi. The “Big March” is another great example: repeated successfully in 2010, 2012, and 2014, “Big March” was a global virtual demonstration against bullying taking place across hundreds of European websites. Participants created their avatars which literally marched across the partner websites. Signing petitions online and participation in online campaigns are less spectacular but increasingly popular.

Political participation online can also take extreme forms, as the actions taken by the Anonymous, a group of hacktivists who attack the government and other websites to manifest their objection, e.g., against the online censorship ACTA, or their support of WikiLeaks.

These examples show the importance of online activities which cannot be ignored as a part of democratic engagement – the research mentioned mostly supports the claim that the Internet tools have the po-

tential to politically engage young citizens does exist and that the online media may motivate them to political activity, including its traditional forms such as voting. However, due to the complexity of the issue, attention needs to be paid also to the heterogeneity of the Internet as a medium in general and to the variety of types of social media in particular as well as to the different patterns and possibilities of using them. This is why the recent research uses various approaches and different methodologies to examine those issues closely. Different are also the ways of measuring political interest and participation (Hargittai & Shaw, 2013). The study conducted by Bode (2012) concerns the behavior of young American citizens during the time of the 2008 U.S. presidential election, as did the previously mentioned research, but Bode focused on the connection between the behavioral patterns of Facebook users and different types of political participation. The key factor examined in the study was the intensity of engagement with the Facebook community instead of the often considered frequency of SNS uses. Interestingly, the analyses reveal that closer, personal relations with other members of the Facebook community do not encourage political participation – users who remained in contact on FB with their relatives or close friends did not mention or discuss political issues more frequently than others do. However, the higher level of the Facebook activity in general spurs the likelihood of all types of political participation. Furthermore, different types of motivation related to the Facebook engagement may be correlated with political activity; e.g., the motivation to meet new people on Facebook

was negatively related to voting and online political participation. This shows the diversity of factors which should be examined to provide a deeper understanding of the role and potential of SNS for democratic engagement.

Thorston (2014) also stresses the crucial role of the way how SNS are used, especially their informational use. She points to the risks and problems related to Facebook as an object of information behavior and communication research due to its constantly changing algorithms, privacy settings and other rules of communication on FB. Her own research concerns social ambiguities related to audience and reception of posts on Facebook, shaping the forms of political interaction among young citizens on the site. She has found that in the case of political interaction on the site, the perceptions of what is appropriate is crucial. Depth interviews with young people allowed her to distinguish two main groups: “One collection of motivated, passionate youth experiment with ways to ‘do politics’ on everyday Facebook and others engage in protective strategies to avoid the possibility of offense or misinterpretation or an inaccurate presentation of self” (Thorston, 2014, p. 2013). Political participation online cannot be treated as highly reasonable and based on rational behaviors – it is strongly influenced by individuals’ characters. Those findings present the crucial problem with SNS in relation to political engagement research problems – the social media environment is unstable and volatile, and there are several factors influencing the behaviors of the respondents which are subjective and strongly related to particular individuals and

particular situations. On the other hand, the diversity of the ways to measure online participation means that even research attempts focused on a similar issue are often impossible to compare. This results in difficulties in drawing more general conclusions about youth behaviors.

However, there is an even more serious problem related to online political participation: the phenomenon called “slactivism”. Some researchers worry that political activity observed in SNS often represents only “feel-good participation” which has little real-world impact (Barney, 2010; Gladwell, 2010; Christensen, 2011; Morozov, 2009). The effort needed to sign an online petition, take part in an online campaign, donate online is so minor that those activities become superficial and meaningless. Those kinds of behavior are compared to consumers behavior: the Internet users have limited themselves to consuming the content instead of being involved in active creation online. The research by Vitak *et al.* (2011) reports that the majority of the examined young people’s activities was at the same time the least time-consuming and the least intrusive. Besides, the diversity of online forms of political participation causes that political participation is watered down and contains everything (van Deth, 2010, Vissers & Stolle 2013). The extension of political participation definition to include online activities is necessary, many of important behavior and actions have place through the Internet, but there is also a wide array of online participation actions which do not have any major consequences, do not affect political problems in any way. The method of measuring the effectiveness of those ac-

tions in order to distinguish the meaningful ones is another research problem.

So far, we have discussed mainly the problems of youth’s political engagement in relation to the potential of online tools for increasing the participation rate. The Internet changes the situation also with regard to offering new ways to access political information. The relationship between political knowledge and political interest is indisputable (Delli Carpini & Keeter 1996; Eveland & Scheufele 2000). The importance of the problem of political information sources is aptly pointed out by Strömbäck and Shehatapo: “The number of people who experience politics directly is limited, and even those who are politically active gain most of their political information through traditional mass media or new media such as the Internet, (...) politics has increasingly become mediated as well as mediatized (Strömbäck & Shehatapo, 2010, p. 576). The issue of the influence of news media consumption on political participation was discussed broadly. Some research, according to media malaise theories, reports a negative influence of news media on people’s political engagement (Cappella & Jamieson 1997; O’Keefe 1980; Robinson 1976). However, most researchers agree that the news media usage is positively correlated with the political participation, especially with regard to traditional media use (Drew & Weaver 2006, Boulianne, 2009; Delli Carpini, 2004; Norris, 2000; Strömbäck and Shehata, 2010; Dimitrova *et al.*, 2011; Holt *et al.* 2013). The research conducted by Strömbäck and Shehatapo shows that there exists a relationship between political interest and news media exposure, and it is

differentiated depending on the type of a medium (Strömbäck & Shehatapo, 2010). This association was found true also in the case of the young people engagement, with regard to newspapers (Chaffee & Kanihan, 1997) as well to watching TV news (Delli Carpini, 2000; Shah, McLeod, & Lee, 2009). There is also evidence that youth's interest in the traditional media use is decreasing (Lenhart *et al.*, 2010; Wattenberg, 2004), which is seen by some researchers as a proof of their political apathy (Baumgartner & Morris, 2009).

On the other hand, the Internet, discussed above in terms of political participation options, offers access to digital media, new sources of information with a different array of possibilities, especially social and interactive (Moeller *et al.*, 2013). Digital media allow not only for information reception, but also are conducive to news sharing, commenting, and remixing. There is research suggesting that young people's lack of interest in traditional media is compensated by the use of digital media (Lenhart *et al.*, 2010; Loader, 2007). However, one must not forget the problematic aspects of the Internet use in general, and SNS use in particular, such as accessing fragmentary news or the least intrusive, superficial consumption of the content, as already mentioned above. Moeller and colleagues (2013) compared different sources of political information of young citizens. Their results show that "newspaper reading is still the most effective information source with regard to the development of internal political efficacy" (Moeller *et al.* 2013, p. 696). Concerns about the youth's political engagement in the light of the aforemen-

tioned results and the downturn in newspaper reading seem justified. As reported by Moeller *et al.*, the Internet sources, of key importance to digital natives, may have a positive influence on political engagement only under the condition of active participation in the communication process: commenting on the news or sharing them with one's social network. In such cases, the effect on political efficacy is stronger than the effect of any other form of news, including newspapers. There is one more important conclusion in the presented analysis: if the young citizens perceive themselves competent enough to vote during their first election, they are likely to become engaged citizens throughout their life. This shows the importance of political engagement in the young age.

The majority of political participation research is conducted in periods around the election (e.g., Calenda & Meijer, 2009; Strömbäck & Shehatapo, 2010; Vitak *et al.*, 2011; Bode, 2012; Hargittai & Shaw, 2013; Vissers & Stolle 2013; Holt *et al.*, 2013; Moeller *et al.*, 2013; Thorson 2014). Voting is one of the most important constituents of political participation, and election is the time of increased mobilization when people pay more attention to political news and are more likely to involve themselves in political activities. Some patterns of behavior during this period become more visible, which provides an opportunity for more meaningful research results.

This paper presents also the results of a survey conducted among the young citizens around the time of presidential election in 2014 in Lithuania. From the wide array of issues related to political engagement, we

have chosen to focus on the problems of the use of political information sources, the importance of which has been presented above. Taking into account the specific character of the election time as well the youth media usage habits discussed earlier, we have included in our research the traditional media, digital media, but also such sources of information as flyers, handouts or outdoor advertisements. Special attention was paid to the issue of active and passive use of the SNS content, bearing in mind its distinctive impact on political engagement (Bode, 2012; Moeller *et al.*, 2013). The presented analysis is only the first stage of the planned wider research which aims at picturing the situation of young people's political engagement in Lithuania.

had the right to vote at the moment of data collection, and their age ranged from 18 to 22 years. The overall number of the study participants was 412.

We decided to use the *Paper & Pen Personal Interview* rather than the *Computer-assisted Web Interview* because a direct method of data collection provides more accurate results; besides, young people are more likely to participate in a research if they are asked about it directly. All survey questionnaires were distributed and collected just before or straight after the lectures at the Vilnius University. Students had enough time to carefully read the survey questionnaires and mark the selected options.

Carrying out the survey, we tried to keep the proportions of students from different

Table 1. Background of study participants

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Gender	
male	43.9
female	56.1
Field of studies	
humanities and social sciences students	59.9
physical and technological sciences students	40.1
Year of studies	
first year of bachelor	48.3
second year of bachelor	33.7
third year of bachelor	18.0

Data collection and results

We conducted our research using the technique of the *Paper & Pen Personal Interview* in May 2014, in two week periods before the first and the second rounds of the Lithuanian president election. Survey questionnaires were distributed among the undergraduate students of the Vilnius University. All participants of the survey

fields of study so that the number of survey participants from humanities / social and physical / technological sciences would reflect the general proportions of students from different fields at the Vilnius University. The general characteristics of the survey participants are presented in Table 1.

First of all, while conducting the survey, we sought information about the general

interest of young people in politics and political processes, as well as their interest in the forthcoming Lithuanian president election 2014. To capture the respondents' political interest, we asked the students to rate themselves on a five-point scale from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". The research data have shown that 61.6% of students in general are interested in politics and political processes (agree and strongly agree), 22.9% are not interested (strongly disagree and disagree), and 15.5% don't have any opinion on this issue. The forthcoming presidential elections generated even a bigger interest among the young people – 70.4% claimed interest, 14.3% disinterest, although the number of students who had no opinion on this issue was almost the same as in the previous question.

not mean that they become more involved in political processes.

Trying to find out the main political information sources of the young people, we listed different forms of media in the questionnaire and asked the students to rate themselves on a five-point scale from "never" to "very often" in order to find out the frequency they have used those media for political purposes. In this part of the questionnaire, we intentionally did not mention the social media means, such as social networking sites, etc., as information sources. In the proposed typology of political information sources, different means of social media do not fit in because in the perspective of our research they are rather channels of obtaining news than sources of information. The type of content they may include ranges between articles from news portals or newspapers,

Table 2. Interest in politics and political processes (in percentage)

	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>No opinion</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>
Interested in politics and political processes	4.9	18.0	15.5	49.5	12.1
Interested in the forthcoming elections	3.9	10.4	15.3	51.0	19.4

The election period is a time of increased political communication, so it is not surprising that the interest of young people in elections is bigger than general interest in politics and political processes. The amount of politically related information during electoral campaigns increases several times, drawing much bigger attention from potential voters, even those who are not interested in political information. This is the reason why many young people who in general are not interested in politics take part and vote at least during the election, although it does

information shared by TV or radio stations, or news posts by friends. All those types of sources have been mentioned in our typology. We are interested here in general sources of information which exclude the personal Facebook profiles, blogs, etc. However, considering the importance and the specific character of news shared through social media channels, we prepared a separate set of questions paying particular attention to the activism of the communication processes participants, described above as crucial for political engagement.

Table 3. *General sources of political information and news (in percentage)*

	<i>Never</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Occasionally</i>	<i>Frequently</i>	<i>Very often</i>
Newspapers and journals	13.1	30.3	30.1	19.7	6.8
Radio	16.3	32.3	26.2	19.4	5.8
Television	9.2	14.3	21.1	29.6	25.8
News portals (Delfi.lt, 15min.lt, etc.)	1.0	4.1	12.4	24.0	58.5
Friends, acquaintances, relatives	1.9	16.8	36.4	35.4	9.5

The Internet news portals are the main sources of political information and news for the young people: 82.5% of the students get political information from news portals on a regular basis – 58.5% very often and 24% frequently. Only for a small part of youth the online news portals play no important role as a source of political information.

Newspapers, journals, and radio are not important sources of political information for the young people. Only 26.5% of students get political news from newspapers and journals frequently or very often, respectively; radio is even less frequently (or very often) used as political information source – 25.2%. Young citizens read less printed newspapers and journals and spend more time online, which is shown by the data proving the importance of the Internet news portals. Those results are in agreement with the general data about the media use related not only to political issues. However, they contradict the results of research which demonstrate that political interest is associated with newspapers readership (Strömbäck & Shehatapo, 2010; Chaffee & Kanihan, 1997). We suppose that this situation can be explained by the time that passed from the former research and changed a lot in the area of media consumption: today journals and newspapers

function increasingly online. On the other hand, it is possible that the statement of political interest is nothing more than a declaration which does not reflect the reality. Moreover, we were surprised by the low rate of radio use in gathering political news. Our supposition concerning this fact is that probably young people still listen to the radio, only their attention is not directed at news-oriented radio broadcasters such as the national Lithuanian broadcaster LRT radio, but rather at entertainment radio stations not featuring political news or news at all.

Television still plays a surprisingly big role in the young citizens' political news consumption: 55.4% of students get political news from television frequently (29.6%) or very often (25.8%), another 21.1% occasionally. It is not clear what kind of political content young people watch on television – news programs, serious and analytical debates, or a soft political content such as comedy shows or satire, etc. On the basis of the conducted survey we cannot explain this phenomenon, but we are going to examine it deeper in a further research.

Personal communication in the process of receiving political news is an important source of information for the youth as well: 9.5% of students very often and 35.4 frequently receive political news from friends,

acquaintances or relatives. Respectively, the number of young people who never get any political news from their surrounding social contacts is very small – only 1.9%. This issue is also worth of attention to find out if the youth rely on news from their friends, relatives or other authorities.

With another part of the questionnaire we aimed to clarify the main channels of political and electoral information for the young people before the forthcoming Lithuanian presidential elections. Our main goal here was to find out not the sources of political

the last month before upcoming elections was the Internet – for 72.1%, but outdoor adverts had almost the same rate – 71.6% of young people received information about election through these channels frequently or very often (Table 4). Television was an important electoral information channel for 60.7% of youth (frequently 30.6%; very often 30.1%). At this point, it should be stated that the outdoor adverts are a very superficial source of information, so, from the perspective of political engagement they are not very valuable. However, it is

Table 4. Channels of political and electoral information during the last month before upcoming elections (in percentage)

	<i>Never</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Occasionally</i>	<i>Frequently</i>	<i>Very often</i>
Newspapers / journals	24.0	26.5	28.9	15.5	5.1
Radio	35.9	27.7	21.1	12.1	3.2
Television	14.1	8.7	16.5	30.6	30.1
Internet	2.7	9.2	16.0	35.7	36.4
Flyers and handouts	25.0	21.9	20.6	18.2	14.3
Outdoor adverts	1.5	7.5	19.4	38.8	32.8

information but the channels through which the youth get news and information related to the upcoming elections. In some cases, sources and channels can be the same (i.e. radio and television content, where a radio and television are the sources and the channels at the same time) and in other cases they are not (i.e. television content shared by people in social media channels).

We have already mentioned the particularity of the electoral period and some specific aspects of election campaigns to which we decided to add not only traditional news channels but also flyers and handouts, as well outdoor adverts.

The main channel of political and electoral information for young citizens during

important to know that those channels can be used to influence young citizens.

The role of various kinds of printed material and radio as important political and electoral news channels was considerably lower. Flyers and handouts prepared by politicians and political parties were an important information channel for 32.5% of youngsters, printed newspapers and journals for 20.6%, radio only for 15.3%. Once again we noticed that the youth do not pay a lot of attention to the newspapers and radio. Another interesting observation concerns the fact that from the two typical election information channels – outdoor adverts and flyers, – the first ones are useful to elucidate the interests of young citizens

Table 5. Usage of online media during the last month before the upcoming election (in percentage)

	<i>Never</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Occasionally</i>	<i>Frequently</i>	<i>Very often</i>
Visited an official website of a political party or a politician	60.2	18.2	16.5	4.1	1.0
Subscribed to receive a newsletter from a political party or a politician	90.3	5.6	2.4	1.5	0.2
Visited an official blog of a political party or a politician	63.1	18.4	12.9	4.6	1.0
Commented a post on an official blog of a political party or a politician	83.5	9.0	5.8	1.0	0.7
Visited the official Facebook page or profile of a political party or a politician	33.7	18.0	28.4	14.3	5.6
Sent a request to a friend to join the Facebook page of a political party or a politician	89.8	5.3	2.7	1.7	0.5
Accepted a friend's request from an official Facebook profile of a political party or a politician	84.7	8.0	5.3	1.5	0.5
Clicked the "like" button on a post on the official Facebook profile of a political party or a politician	47.6	13.6	21.6	11.6	5.6
Posted comments on a post viewed on an official Facebook profile of a political party or a politician.	79.9	10.4	7.5	1.9	0.3
Visited an official YouTube channel of a political party or a politician	65.3	18.0	13.3	2.7	0.7
Viewed a video on the official YouTube channel of a political party or a politician	51.2	21.4	19.9	6.3	1.2
Viewed photos on the official albums (e.g., Flickr) of a political party or a politician	72.3	13.6	9.0	4.1	1.0
Followed an official Twitter profile of a political party	87.1	5.1	4.4	2.4	1.0
Shared a political party or politicians posts on the Twitter platform	93.4	2.7	2.2	1.2	0.5

while the second ones do not influence them in any way.

On the basis of the desk research, we predicted the importance of online information channels. This is why we have dedicated a part of our survey to analyze the way of interacting with those channels. To determine whether young people engage with political content online, we asked whether they had a contact with a political party or a politician’s website, blog, Facebook or Twitter profile, video or photo sharing sites during the last month before the upcoming elections.

As we have already discussed, there is a huge difference in online political participation when people only visit the political online presence and actively engage in political conversations and other activities. Here, we can refer to the phenomenon of “slactivism” when social media users prefer to consume the content instead of being involved in active creation online. That is why we divided online interaction into passive (visiting online or social media channel, clicking “like,” etc.) and active (writing a comment, sharing a content, etc.).

Among various ways of a passive interaction with the online political content, young people most often visited official Facebook profiles of political parties or politicians. During election time, 5.6% did it very often, 14.3% frequently, and 28.4% occasionally. Another more frequent way of passive engagement with political content was clicking the “like” button on the offi-

cial Facebook profile of political parties or politicians. The number of young citizens who did it very often was exactly the same as in the previously mentioned interaction, only the frequency interaction volumes were lower – 11.6% frequently and 21.6% occasionally.

Active engagement with the online political content was much lower than passive, actually almost non-existent. Even if social media channels provide possibilities for interaction and active communication, young people prefer to stay passive and not to take an active part in and interact with politicians or political parties online. On the other hand, these results can raise doubts regarding the reliability of the youth’s declarations of their interest in politics: from all who declared interest in politics, only one third had any kind of interaction with a political content on social media. Not all types of social media means request the same level of interactions, but even on the user-friendly social networking site, Facebook, the engagement level was considerably low.

At the end of the questionnaire, we asked about the intention of young people to vote in the forthcoming Lithuanian election. They could rate themselves on a five-point scale from “definitely not” to “definitely yes”.

The majority of the respondents – 63.8% – claimed that they definitely were going to vote, another 23.6% answered that they probably were going to vote. In

Table 6. Intention to vote in the forthcoming Lithuanian president elections 2014

<i>Definitely not</i>	<i>Probably not</i>	<i>Maybe</i>	<i>Probably yes</i>	<i>Definitely yes</i>
1.2	3.4	8.0	23.6	63.8

general, 87.4% declared their decision to participate in the election and vote. In contrast, only 4.6% of respondents declared that they were not going to vote (1.2% definitely not; 3.4% probably not), and 8% of young people did not make a final decision about participation in the forthcoming election.

The results of the previous research show that Lithuanian youth are the most passive in the entire European Union with regard to voting in elections (EU Youth Report, 2012). Among the EU members, Lithuania was the only country where less than half of young respondents (age, 15–30) said they voted; in other countries, the numbers were significantly bigger. Our results show a huge improvement, because in our research almost two thirds of the respondents were absolutely sure about their voting.

Of course, it is a declarative knowledge, and probably it is not correlated with actual results of young people's voting activity, but it describes the attitude of youth toward elections in general. Although it is noticeable that there is a group of young citizens who are not interested in politics, they know that they should participate in the elections, so possibly it is the reason why they declare their willingness to vote. Here, one can see a difference between the official attitude and the real behavior.

Conclusions

Political information sources used by young people are an issue that receives increasing attention all around the world. A significant number of studies connected with information sources of young citizens were conducted in different countries, but their results are often quite contradictory

and show opposite tendencies. The common opinion about the increasing political apathy among the youth is changing to the opinion that today the forms of political participations have evolved: the way young people engage with the political content by using interactive forms and channels of communication makes us to redefine the term of "political". The growing importance of the Internet as a channel and source of political information is indisputable, but there are still difficulties in measuring the online political participation activities and their relation to political behavior such as voting or actively supporting parties or politicians.

The results of our research show a rather big interest in politics among the young people (61.6%) as well as interest to the forthcoming elections (70.4%) which contradicts the research positing the growing political apathy of the youth (Niemi & Weisber, 2001; Blais et al., 2004; Mindich, 2005; Fieldhouse, Tranmer & Russell, 2007; Macintosh, 2008; Van Biezen, Mair & Poguntke, 2012). On the contrary, the interest of the Lithuanian youth to political issues seems to be strong, which could be explained as a growing political awareness of young democracies where people in general are more interested in political and public processes and still want to take part in decision making. On the other hand, we may be dealing with only the declarative statements of young people, resulting from the public pressure to be politically active or at least to state such an attitude.

The importance of the Internet news portals as the main political information sources for the young people is obvious; what was unexpected in the results was the

significance of television which still plays an essential role of political news source for more than a half of the students. This means that the further research should be conducted in order to verify what kind of television content exactly serves as a source of political information for youngsters. The other traditional news media means – radio and printed news press – are much less important as sources of political information, and this trend reflects research results on the same topic from other countries.

It is not surprising that the Internet is the main channel through which young people get political news and information. However, having in mind the specific time frame of our research, i.e. the election period, it is worth stressing the huge role of outdoor advertisements which have the same importance for the youngsters as the Internet. This fact is significant from the perspective of political campaigning – politicians and campaign organizers, in order to attract the youth's attention, should plan their communication through the young people's most accessible and notable channels.

Considering the results which prove the importance of the Internet as a channel of political information, it is puzzling that the usage of social media for political purposes is so low. It can be understandable in the case of Youtube which serves more as a place of video storage and is not dedicated to a direct transmission of political news, as well as Twitter which is not popular and not actively used in Lithuania. However, it is really strange with regard to the Facebook social networking site which is really popular and actively used in the country, especially in comparison with the

research results from other countries where a significant importance of this medium was noted (Bodie, 2012; Thorston, 2014). Such a considerably low usage of Facebook for the interaction with political content could result from the big popularity of Lithuanian news portals, such as Delfi.lt, 15min.lt, Lrytas. Lt, etc. that provide all news content completely free, which is not common in the Western countries. Our research shows that 82.5% of young people use news portals for political information purposes frequently or very often, which allows us to formulate the assumption that they already have developed habits to get political information from online news media.

Social media are often considered as a perfect means for political engagement, providing possibilities for a two-way communication. Our research results show that young people not only rarely use social media channels for the purposes of political engagement, but that they do it even less frequently for a two-way interaction with politics or political parties. While those youths obviously spend a lot of time using various social media channels, their goals are apparently different than taking an active part in political engagement.

Finally, what should be stressed is the difference between the number of youth who have stated interest in the forthcoming elections and the ones who were going to vote. We have found that 70.4% of young people were interested in the forthcoming elections but as many as 87.4% declared their plans to go to vote in the presidential elections. This leads to the conclusion that there is quite a substantial number of youth who do not pay attention to politics but

still declare willingness to take a political action and vote. Hypothesizing about the possible explanation for this, we can only assume that there is a general attitude and social pressure requiring that the young

citizens participate in the elections and vote, but those social circumstances are not strong enough to force them to get political knowledge and engage more deeply in the democratic decision-making processes.

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JAUNŲ ŽMONIŲ POLITINĖS INFORMACIJOS ŠALTINIAI: LIETUVOS JAUNIMO INFORMACINĖS ELGSENOS ATVEJO ANALIZĖ

Andrius Šuminas, Anna Mierzecka

S a n t r a u k a

Atsiradus ir masiškai paplitus naujoms technologijoms, pasikeitė būdai ir formos, kaip jauni žmonės gauna politinę informaciją ir naudojami kitu politiniu turiniu. Iš pradžių aptariami skirtingi požiūriai į interneto įtaką politinio išitraukimo pokyčiams, paskui analizuojami jaunimo politinės informacijos gavimo šaltiniai ir jaunų žmonių politinio išitraukimo formos tradicinių ir naujųjų medijų sąveikos kontekste. Lietuvoje 2014 metais atliktos apklausos rezultatai (n = 412, respondentų amžius 18–22 metai) atskleidė pagrindinius šaltinius ir kanalus, iš kurių jauni žmo-

nės gauna politinę informaciją ir naujienas. Tyrimo rezultatai rodo interneto, kaip politinės informacijos kanalo, svarbą jauniems žmonėms, tačiau socialinių medijų ir kitų interaktyvių kanalų naudojimas politiniam išitraukimui vis dar yra labai menkas, ypač kalbant apie dvikryptę komunikaciją su politikais ar politinėmis partijomis.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: politinės informacijos šaltiniai, medijų naudojimas, politinės informacijos kanalai, politinis išitraukimas, jaunimas, informacinė elgsena.