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Municipal Government: Social Media and Youth Engagement

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MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT: SOCIAL MEDIA AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

By
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"Municipal Government: Social Media and Youth Engagement"

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December 6, 2018

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ABSTRACT

Social media outlets such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube allow for the development of an online community for individuals to communicate and connect with others throughout the world. For this paper, social media outlets are understood to offer a solution to the ongoing issue of political disengagement found among youth between the ages of 18 and 34. Municipalities commonly experience low voter turnout during elections, causing a shift in candidates' focus from traditional forms of campaigning towards the use of social media. The political disengagement among youth has been attributed to a lack of knowledge on politics and a lack of mobility during elections. As youth are the most active age demographic on social media, the use of these outlets has been understood as a solution to political disengagement. As a result, for this paper I have identified four main categories for analysis; which include, social media accounts used by councillors, municipally operated social media accounts, electoral turnout in municipal elections, and the average age of councillors. This paper uses these points of analysis to investigate the impact social media has on the level of engagement among youth in the functions of municipal governments.

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Introduction

Canadian municipal governments struggle to engage citizens to participate in municipal affairs. These affairs can include attending Council meetings, voting, and providing feedback.[1] Municipalities have an extensive history of low political engagement and voter turnout for elections; however, social media offers a potential solution.[2] The increase of social media usage by politicians and municipalities has targeted young people within Canadian municipalities in an attempt to increase engagement by improving transparency and access to information while eliminating concerns of corruption.[3] In recent years, political candidates and municipalities have utilized social media outlets to increase awareness and potentially increase political engagement and participation among youth.[4] It is therefore important to understand the ongoing efforts and the potential success these efforts may have in municipalities.

This research is critical in addressing an under researched demographic group that tends to be heavily reliant on services provided by municipal governments. These services include public transportation systems, entertainment, and emergency and police services.[5] Youth attending universities or colleges as well as those working within city limits rely heavily on public transit. The growing numbers of youth using public transit, becoming involved in community events, participating in entertainment events, and attending educational institutions allows for an opportunity to analyze how disengaged

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[1] Melissa W. Graham, Elizabeth J. Avery, and Sejin Park, "The role of social media in local government crisis communications," *Public Relations Review* 41, no. 3 (2015): 387.

[2] Delia Dumitrica, "Imagining engagement: Youth, social media, and electoral processes," *Convergence* 22, no. 1 (2016): 35.

[3] John Carlo Bertot, Paul T. Jaeger, and Justin M. Grimes, "Promoting transparency and accountability through ICTs, social media, and collaborative e-government," *Transforming Government: People, Process and Policy* 6, no. 1 (2012): 78.

[4] Delia Dumitrica, "Imagining engagement: Youth, social media, and electoral processes," 35.

[5] Robert Candido, "Youth must learn how City Council affects their lives," *The Star* (Toronto, ON), Oct. 20, 2018.

youth are with respect to municipal affairs.[6] This paper will analyze the relationship between social media usage and youth in Canadian municipalities. This paper is important because despite the extensive scholarly research on social media's impacts on governmental bodies, there continues to be a lack of research done on social media in Canada at the local level.

Review of the Literature

This section will focus on identifying and explaining imperative information regarding social media, municipalities, and youth. Further, this literature review will focus on defining key terms used repeatedly throughout this paper, providing background information, and outline supporting claims to the research puzzle that will be presented in the following section.

What is Social Media and why does it Matter?

To begin, social media, as defined by Xenos, Vromen, and Loader, is a "variety of Internet-based tools that users engage with by maintaining an individual profile."[7] According to Bertot, Jaeger, and Grimes, social media outlets allow users to interact with other users by sharing and creating content. These authors state social media appear online in the form of "blogs, wikis, media-sharing services, collaborative editing tools, and social networking services."[8] The most commonly used social media sites are Facebook, a social networking site, Twitter, a micro-blogging site, and YouTube, a video

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[6] Tavia Grant, "Toronto tops list of Canada's most youth-friendly cities," *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto, ON), May 9, 2019.

[7] Michael Xenos, Ariadne Vromen, and Brian D. Loader, "The great equalizer? Patterns of social media use and youth political engagement in three advanced democracies," *Information, Communication & Society* 17, no. 2 (2014): 152.

[8] John Carlo Bertot, Paul T. Jaeger, and Justin M. Grimes, "Promoting transparency and accountability through ICTs, social media, and collaborative e-government," 82.

sharing service.[9] According to Dumitrica, youth believe Facebook and Twitter are "technologies of engagement," which allow engagement to be fostered among citizens as they access social media and other online technologies provided by governmental bodies.[10] It has been argued Twitter acts as both a social networking and a micro-blogging site. For municipalities, Twitter can be used to promote or announce events, provide information, and respond to citizens' concerns.[11] Municipalities release a large amount of data on new bylaws, road closures, events, opportunities, and provide other content residents may be interested in accessing. This has led municipalities to use social media in an attempt to assist citizens in understanding the "overwhelming amount of data that is being generated."[12] It is also important to note, aside from the use of social media for engagement, social media acts as an "important technology for disaster response," as it allows for information to be shared between users rapidly.[13]

Social media services allow for the development of an online community. These communities allow groups of individuals with similar interests to gather in a common online location.[14] Social media outlets act as online locations for individuals to share content such as "videos, photographs, documents, and presentations," while simultaneously allowing others to provide feedback through a "like" button or comment

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[9] Chitat Chan and Michael J. Holosko, "The utilization of social media for youth outreach engagement: A case study," *Qualitative social work* 16, no. 5 (2017): 681.

[10] Delia Dumitrica, "Imagining engagement: Youth, social media, and electoral processes," 36.

[11] Enrique Bonsón, Lourdes Torres, Sonia Royo, and Francisco Flores, "Local e-government 2.0: Social media and corporate transparency in municipalities," *Government information quarterly* 29, no. 2 (2012): 125.

[12] Andrea L., Kavanaugh Edward A. Fox, Steven D. Sheetz, Seungwon Yang, Lin Tzy Li, Donald J. Shoemaker, Apostol Natsev, and Lexing Xie, "Social media use by government: From the routine to the critical." *Government Information Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (2012): 484.

[13] Melissa W. Graham, Elizabeth J. Avery, and Sejin Park, "The role of social media in local government crisis communications," 386.

[14] John Carlo Bertot, Paul T. Jaeger, and Justin M. Grimes, "Promoting transparency and accountability through ICTs, social media, and collaborative e-government," 83.

section.[15] Social media outlets allow local governments to provide information found on

the administrative website through a "mass distribution" network. Since social media has

the ability to reach large numbers of people, information may be received by more people

than the number of individuals that accessed the official administrative website.[16] This

means, through the use of sharing, re-tweeting, or quoting on social media outlets, online

municipal posts and accounts will be spread for wider consumption. The primary uses for

social media by municipalities is to share important information on elections and events,

provide services, and receive feedback from citizens.[17] In addition, it is important for

local politicians to use social media to promote campaign platforms and "mobilize the

public and their supporters—in ways never before thought possible."[18] As social media

has become an increasingly important part of modern society, municipalities and other

governmental bodies have rapidly adopted the use of these outlets.[19] As a result of the

growing importance of social media, municipalities throughout Canada have begun

adopting the use of several different social media outlets to increase engagement.

       The use of social media is related to the concept of e-government. E-government

has been defined by West as a method of delivering "government information and

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[15] Enrique Bonsón, et al., "Local e-government 2.0: Social media and corporate transparency in municipalities," 125.
[16] Enrique Bonsón, et al., "Local e-government 2.0: Social media and corporate transparency in municipalities," 126.
[17] Melissa W. Graham, Elizabeth J. Avery, and Sejin Park, "The role of social media in local government crisis communications," 386.
[18] Sounman Hong, and Daniel Nadler, "Does the early bird move the polls?: The use of the social media tool 'Twitter' by US politicians and its impact on public opinion," In *Proceedings of the 12th Annual International Digital Government Research Conference: Digital Government Innovation in Challenging Times*, (2011): 182.
[19] Karen Mossberger, Yonghong Wu, and Jared Crawford, "Connecting citizens and local governments? Social media and interactivity in major US cities," *Government Information Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (2013): 351.

services online through the internet or other digital means."[20] Bertot, Jaeger, and Grimes

provide a similar definition of e-government while asserting that most e-government

initiatives also emphasize the role of social media. Further, these authors understand this

shift as an opportunity for youth to be targeted by political engagement initiatives. [21]

Municipalities have made the use of social media relevant to municipal government

researchers with the utilization of social media outlets and the Internet in general.

Who Uses Social Media?

Many scholars have focused on youth presence on social media and have

attempted to find correlations between political engagement and social media usage.[22]

This kind of study is becoming increasingly important as some scholars continue to find

dis-engagement among youth. For example, Dumitrica reports a "40 percent decline in

the number of first-time voters since the 1960s." This scholar attributes this decline to the

dominance of television, lack of mobility, lack of knowledge on politics, and online

socializing among youth.[23] Despite Dumitrica's claim that social media has led to a

decline in political engagement, scholars continue to study social media and believe it

offers a solution to disengagement. For example, Xenos, Vromen, and Loader found a

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[20] Darrell M. West, "E-government and the transformation of service delivery and citizen attitudes," *Public administration review* 64, no. 1 (2004): 16.

[21] John Carlo Bertot, Paul T. Jaeger, and Justin M. Grimes, "Promoting transparency and accountability through ICTs, social media, and collaborative e-government," 80.

[22] Michael Xenos, Ariadne Vromen, and Brian D. Loader, "The great equalizer? Patterns of social media use and youth political engagement in three advanced democracies." See also, Delia Dumitrica, "Imagining engagement: Youth, social media, and electoral processes;" Karen Mossberger, Yonghong Wu, and Jared Crawford, "Connecting citizens and local governments? Social media and interactivity in major US cities;" Enrique Bonsón, et al., "Local e-government 2.0: Social media and corporate transparency in municipalities;" Wendy Olphert and Leela Damodaran, "Citizen participation and engagement in the design of e-government services: The missing link in effective ICT design and delivery," *Journal of the Association for Information Systems* 8, no. 9 (2007); Melissa W. Graham, Elizabeth J. Avery, and Sejin Park, "The role of social media in local government crisis communications;" Sounman Hong, and Daniel Nadler, and "Does the early bird move the polls?: The use of the social media tool 'Twitter' by US politicians and its impact on public opinion."

[23] Delia Dumitrica, "Imagining engagement: Youth, social media, and electoral processes," 39.

"strong, positive relationship between social media use and political engagement among young people."[24] Similarly, Hong and Nadler found the "first empirical evidence" that suggests there is a relationship between social media and political engagement. It is important to note that their findings were not statistically significant. This means, the authors could be incorrectly interpreting and reporting their findings.[25] Despite evidence of a relationship between social media and political engagement there continues to be political debate between scholars. This paper will act as a preliminary study of the link between social media and youth engagement at a local level. This paper will apply similar frameworks in search of a relationship between social media and youth engagement in Canadian municipalities.

Youth aged 18 to 24 are an important age demographic to study, as this group tends to be the dominant social media demographic. According to Cohen and Kahn, while 96 percent of American youth report having access to the Internet for social media use, only 41 percent reported having "engaged in at least one act of participatory politics."[26] Youth are often found to have the lowest level of political participation, particularly when discussing voting. For example, Dumitrica finds 37 percent of Canadians aged 18 to 24 participated in federal elections between 1997 and 2008. In contrast, 46 percent of citizens aged 25 to 29 participated in these federal elections.[27] According to Elections Canada, overall voter turnout for this period was 62.5 percent.[28]

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[24] Michael Xenos, Ariadne Vromen, and Brian D. Loader, "The great equalizer? Patterns of social media use and youth political engagement in three advanced democracies," 151.

[25] Sounman Hong, and Daniel Nadler, "Does the early bird move the polls?: The use of the social media tool 'Twitter' by US politicians and its impact on public opinion," 185.

[26] Cathy J. Cohen and Joseph Kahne, "Participatory politics. New media and youth political action," *ICTlogy* (2011): vii.

[27] Delia Dumitrica, "Imagining engagement: Youth, social media, and electoral processes," 39.

[28] Canada, Elections Canada, *Voter Turnout at Federal Elections and Referendums,* Ottawa, 2018, http://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=ele&dir=turn&document=index&lang=e/.

In part because of these trends, municipalities find social media to be a viable option for increasing participation. Municipalities continue to use social media outlets because the number of people on social media has "more than doubled since 2008."[29] According to Chan and Holosko, "individuals younger than 30 were more likely than those 50 or older to use social media."[30] Regardless of age, citizens are becoming reliant on social media to connect with friends, families, online communities, and governments.[31] Further, municipalities utilizing social media outlets are able to provide a participatory and interactive government; which, potentially allows for increased engagement among citizens.[32] As early as 2010, "three-quarters of American adults" have used the Internet to communicate on social media outlets. In addition, 93 percent of youth reported using social media outlets to connect with other users. This shows youth have been the fastest age demographic to adopt social media into their regular Internet activities.[33] This research focuses on studying youth engagement and social media to address the juxtaposition between social media as an outlet for engagement and the continued assertion from scholars that youth are politically disengaged.

Barack Obama's 2008 election acts as a strong example for the use of social media to mobilize youth. In 2008, social media outlets such as Facebook and Twitter were slowly gaining members throughout the world. In the United States, Obama's

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[29] Karen Mossberger, Yonghong Wu, and Jared Crawford, "Connecting citizens and local governments? Social media and interactivity in major US cities," 352.

[30] Chitat Chan and Michael J. Holosko, "The utilization of social media for youth outreach engagement: A case study," 681.

[31] Andrea L., Kavanaugh, et al., "Social media use by government: From the routine to the critical," *Government Information Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (2012): 484.

[32] Karen Mossberger, Yonghong Wu, and Jared Crawford, "Connecting citizens and local governments? Social media and interactivity in major US cities," 356.

[33] Teresa Correa, Amber Willard Hinsley, and Homero Gil De Zuniga, "Who interacts on the Web?: The intersection of users' personality and social media use," *Computers in Human Behavior* 26, no. 2 (2010): 247.

election campaign utilized social media platforms effectively to reach voters. Through

Obama and his team's efforts, they successfully mobilized youth to vote and won the

presidency.[34] During his campaign, Obama's team "signed up 2.4 million Facebook users

and supporters." Obama's use of Facebook has been credited with gaining new voters and

contributed to his victory.[35] Following Obama's election and continued throughout his

administration, the Federal Chief Information Officer "strongly encouraged" the

expansion and increased use of social media outlets for information distribution and

government transparency.[36] Obama's administration made it a priority to continue to

engage youth by promoting open government for "greater transparency, participation, and

collaboration through information and technology."[37] Despite the use of social media and

the Internet in general by politicians to promote and practice open government, West

finds there is "no significant relationship between visiting" the United States federal

government's website and the ideas of "trust, confidence, or government effectiveness."[38]

Throughout the United States, the use of social media by politicians,

governments, and federal agencies has grown rapidly. Social media is used to provide

information to targeted groups. For example, the Department of Veterans' Affairs

established a presence on Facebook and YouTube to reach veterans and their families.[39]

The United States have made a clear goal to use social media to target specific groups,

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[34] Michael Xenos, Ariadne Vromen, and Brian D. Loader, "The great equalizer? Patterns of social media use and youth political engagement in three advanced democracies," 151.

[35] Weiwu Zhang, Thomas J. Johnson, Trent Seltzer, and Shannon L. Bichard, "The revolution will be networked: The influence of social networking sites on political attitudes and behaviour," *Social Science Computer Review* 28, no. 1 (2010): 80.

[36] John Carlo Bertot, Paul T. Jaeger, and Justin M. Grimes, "Promoting transparency and accountability through ICTs, social media, and collaborative e-government," 80.

[37] Karen Mossberger, Yonghong Wu, and Jared Crawford, "Connecting citizens and local governments? Social media and interactivity in major US cities," 351.

[38] Darrell M. West, "E-government and the transformation of service delivery and citizen attitudes," 22.

[39] John Carlo Bertot, Paul T. Jaeger, and Justin M. Grimes, "Promoting transparency and accountability through ICTs, social media, and collaborative e-government," 83.

including youth, to gain support for elections and increase awareness of services and information. In the 2018 midterm elections for the United States, 29-year-old Alexandia Ocasio-Cortez became the youngest women to be elected into Congress. Throughout her campaign and after she was elected, Ocasio-Cortez has been using social media to remain transparent and provide citizens with an understanding of the functions of their government.[40] It will becoming increasingly important for researchers of social media and the government to study campaigns, such as Ocasio-Cotez's campaign, to understand the effect social media had on the election results.

The Puzzle

A review of the literature emphasizing youth, political engagement, and social media leaves one dominant question: does social media have an impact on the level of engagement among youth in municipal governments' affairs? For example, according to Mossberger, Wu, and Crawford, municipal governments provide a "manageable scale" to study citizen engagement.[41] Current studies, such as the study conducted by Xenos, Vromen, and Loader have found a connection between social media and engagement in the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom; however, it is important to note it is unclear whether the relationship is "limited to individuals who would likely be relatively engaged without social media."[42] Social media has been credited with creating an environment that has "appeared as both the tool that produced engagement and the space where this engagement unfolded."[43] According to Bonson, Torres, and Royo,

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[40] Helena Andrews-Dyer, "Alexandira Ocasio-Cortez adds a Documentary to her list of Accomplishments," *The Washington Post* (New York, NY), Nov. 29, 2018.
[41] Karen Mossberger, Yonghong Wu, and Jared Crawford, "Connecting citizens and local governments? Social media and interactivity in major US cities," 351.
[42] Michael Xenos, Ariadne Vromen, and Brian D. Loader, "The great equalizer? Patterns of social media use and youth political engagement in three advanced democracies," 152.
[43] Delia Dumitrica, "Imagining engagement: Youth, social media, and electoral processes," 35.

Twitter is the most frequently used social media site by municipalities in the European Union. Their 2012 study found 32 percent of local governments had an official Twitter account, while only 17 percent had a Facebook page.[44] As noted by Graham, Avery, and Park, social media is important for the study of political science because both politicians and governments have begun viewing Facebook and Twitter an as opportunity to reach citizens more effectively than "traditional media, such as television and radio."[45] For this study, it is important to test whether or not youth political engagement is affected on municipal social media. In support of this claim, this study will focus on select Ontario municipal governments that provide public information on youth within their municipality.

Citizen engagement, according to Olphert and Damodaran, "can be defined as the active participation of citizens, in partnership with government, in decision and policy making process."[46] According to Graham, Avery, and Park municipalities use social media for "recruiting activities, reaching out to citizens and other publics, disseminating information to the public and sharing information across government agencies, enhancing and promoting community participation, and achieving transparency."[47] The level of engagement among youth has become a popular debate in political science. Young people are commonly called "politically apathetic" and accused of "failing in their duty

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[44] Enrique Bonsón, et al., "Local e-government 2.0: Social media and corporate transparency in municipalities," 128.

[45] Sounman Hong, and Daniel Nadler, "Does the early bird move the polls?: The use of the social media tool 'Twitter' by US politicians and its impact on public opinion," 182.

[46] Wendy Olphert and Leela Damodaran, "Citizen participation and engagement in the design of e-government services: The missing link in effective ICT design and delivery," 494.

[47] Melissa W. Graham, Elizabeth J. Avery, and Sejin Park, "The role of social media in local government crisis communications," 387.

to participate in many democratic societies worldwide."[48] There is relatively little

research on youth engagement in Canadian municipal governments. In response to the

above question, I hypothesize that social media outlets have increased the level of

engagement among youth in municipal governments' affairs. Following a review of the

literature on the subject, it appears plausible that social media has increased political

engagement among youth in elections. This question and hypothesis became of interest to

research as scholars have turned to studying citizen engagement. To prove the hypothesis,

data on the percentages of youth that have voted in municipal elections, the amount of

youth that

Behaviouralism Theory

To support my research question and hypothesis Behaviouralism theory has been

selected as the most representative theory available for this study. According to Dowding,

Behaviouralism allows political scientists to "examine political behaviour…to discover

uniformities of behaviour."[49] This theory allows scholars to study and interpret both

individual and group behaviour in societies. Behaviouralists focus on the observable

behaviour of actors to explain why a "behaviour should be susceptible to empirical

testing."[50] This theory will help to the degree to which youth are engaged in municipal

politics.

Studying human behaviour allows researchers to understand the environment

during the time of the behaviour. This means, social media users follow, un-follow,

[48] Brian D. Loader, Ariadne Vromen, and Michael A. Xenos. "The networked young citizen: social media, political participation and civic engagement." (2014): 143.
[49] Keith Dowding, "The Compatibility of Behaviouralism, Rational Choice and New Institutionalism," *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 6, no. 1 (1994): 106.
[50] David Sanders, "Behavioural Analysis," in Theory and Methods in Political Science, ed. Vivien Lowndes, David Marsh, and Gerry Stoker (London: Palgrave, 2018): 20.

comment, or react to municipalities' posts differently depending on their current concerns. Behaviouralism was selected as the supporting theory for this research because it allows researchers to understand and make inferences to understand why people act in a particular way.[51] Further, scholars that support and use Behaviouralism argue the approach allows them to discover the "facts through impartial observation and to offer political neutral theories" of behaviour.[52] The application of Behaviouralism provides an important approach to the way youth engagement is studied within this paper. Most notably, this theory helps is important as it provides a basis insight into the data collection method chosen for this analysis. This choice will be explained in the following section.

Methodology

To answer the question and attempt to prove my hypothesis, it is critical to identify the most effective method for data collection and analysis. To address the research puzzle this paper will use a qualitative analysis to provide insight into the individuals using social media, how many local politicians use social media, who follows or likes municipal pages, how many people that follow social media voted, and how many young people have social media accounts. The remainder of this paper will attempt to answer these questions through an analysis of social media accounts used in Toronto, Guelph, and Sarnia. These municipalities were chosen to narrow the scope of this paper to Ontario, Canada. In addition, Toronto, Guelph, and Sarnia all share an education system, rules for governing municipalities, and the types of political pressures that influence voter turnout. These three municipalities provide a glance at social media use

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[51] Keith Dowding, "The Compatibility of Behaviouralism, Rational Choice and New Institutionalism," 106.
[52] David Sanders, "Behavioural Analysis," 29.

by municipalities of different sizes with varying population densities. Further, these

municipalities were selected for the information the administrative teams provide the

public. These municipalities were among the few that provide concrete information on

youth engagement. The type of information provided on Toronto, Guelph, and Sarnia's

websites will be identified in the *Content Analysis* section of this paper. The content

analyzed will focus on identifying the average number of councillors that use social

media, municipal social media metrics, voting turnout over time, and the average age of

elected officials. Each of these sections will use information gathered from social media

outlets and municipal websites to address the questions listed throughout this section and,

in turn, address the research question.

For this paper, the social media outlets selected for analysis were Facebook,

Twitter, and YouTube. These three were selected as the most viable options for

candidates and municipalities to utilize, as other forms of social media do not offer

opportunities for releasing information for residents. This means, Facebook, Twitter, and

YouTube offer an environment for municipalities and candidates to attempt to increase

youth engagement within the municipality. Facebook was used because it continues to be

a rapidly growing social networking site. Facebook was created in 2004 for Harvard

students before being opened for the general public. By 2009, Facebook was ranked the

"most used social network worldwide."[53] Twitter was selected because it gained

popularity rapidly following its 2006 creation. By 2008, millions of people around the

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[53] Edosomwan Simeon, Sitalaskshmi Kalangot Prakasan, Doriane Kouame, Jonelle Watson, and Tom Seymour, "The history of social media and its impact on business," *Journal of Applied Management and entrepreneurship* 16, no. 3 (2011): 82.

world had begun using Twitter.[54] YouTube was selected because it remains a useful way to post videos that provide individuals with information or advertise a campaign. Since YouTube's creation in 2005, the website remains the "world's most popular online video community" used by millions throughout the world.[55] Other types of social media are not as widely used or do not offer an environment for municipalities and candidates to present information effectively. For example, MySpace has not been popularly used by individuals, especially youth, since Facebook became popular in 2008.[56] By analyzing content from municipal websites and social media outlets, a chart will be presented in an attempt to draw general conclusions from the data gathered.

Analysis

This section will provide the content that will allow for the hypothesis to be tested. The content discussed in this section will be used to present the scope and parameters of this research. The content analysis will provide context to the *Findings* section that follows this section.

Councillor Social Media Accounts

This section will assess the types of social media used by councillors in Toronto, Guelph, and Sarnia. Further, this will demonstrate the average number of councillors that reported having different types of social media accounts for citizens to learn, support, or follow the campaign. Following an extensive review of newly elected officials from the October 2018 municipal election, the use of social media for youth engagement will

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[54]Bernard J., Jansen, Mimi Zhang, Kate Sobel, and Abdur Chowdury, "Twitter power: Tweets as electronic word of mouth," *Journal of the American society for information science and technology* 60, no. 11 (2009): 2172.

[55] Edosomwan Simeon, et al., "The history of social media and its impact on business," *Journal of Applied Management and entrepreneurship* 16, no. 3 (2011): 83.

[56] Ibid, 82.

become apparent. This section does not seek to compare the average number of

councillors with social media in 2018 to candidates' social media from previous years'

electoral candidates, as it will be difficult to determine whether social media pages were

removed or overhauled for another election cycle. Future research could use the analysis

and averages presented in this section to create an analysis of social media use overtime.

This would allow for a more concrete understanding of the increase, decrease, or

insignificant significant change to the average number of councillors using social media.

To begin, data were gathered from municipal websites relating to the official

election results for the 2018 election. In October 2018, twenty-five individuals were

elected onto Toronto's City Council.[57] Of those elected, twenty-three were on Facebook,

twenty-four were on Twitter, and ten were on YouTube. In Guelph, twelve councillors

and one mayor were elected to represent the constituents.[58] Of those elected, nine used

Facebook, nine used Twitter, and four used YouTube for their campaigns. In Sarnia, one

mayor and eight councillors were elected.[59] Of those elected, six used Facebook, four

used Twitter, and one used YouTube. To determine the average number of councillors

using social media, the total number of councillors using each social media outlet is

totalled and divided by the total number of councillors studied. For this study, a total of

47 councillors elected during the 2018 municipal election were studied. This allowed for

a rounded average of 81 percent of councillors using Facebook, 79 percent using Twitter,

and 32 percent using YouTube. All councillors in the City of Toronto used at least one

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[57] City of Toronto, "General Election Results," *Toronto*, 2018, https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/elections/general-information/election-results/general-election-results/.
[58] City of Guelph, "Guelph's Unofficial 2018 Municipal election Results," *Guelph*, 2018, https://guelph.ca/2018/10/guelphs-unofficial-2018-municipal-election-results/.
[59] City of Sarnia, "2018 Election Results," *Sarnia*, 2018, http://www.city.sarnia.on.ca/city-government/elections/2018-election-results.

form of the social media used for this study to reach residents and potential voters. Two councillors in Guelph and one in Sarnia did not use Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube during the election. It is important to note, the three councillors that were elected without the use of social media used websites during the campaign period.[60]

Municipal Social Media Accounts

This section will identify the types of social media accounts used by municipalities as well as provide insight into the number of people that follow, like, or subscribe to a municipality's social media accounts. Table 1 (Appendix A) should be used to accompany the information found in this section. The information presented in the chart was gathered from Toronto, Guelph, and Sarnia's official social media pages. Quick and simple access to the official pages is available throughout the municipal websites. Table 1 provides an analysis of the use of social media outlets by municipalities. To understand the relevance of the number of followers and subscribers, it is important to look at the population of each municipality. For this study, municipalities of different sizes were selected. According to the Government of Canada's 2016 Census Profile 5.4 million people live in the Toronto metropolitan area.[61] Toronto's population is the largest that will be addressed. Guelph has 132,000 people living within the city.[62] Sarnia's population is significantly smaller than the populations of Toronto and Guelph.

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[60] Bob Bell, *Bob Bell: Independent Thinking, Plain Talking,* 2018, http://www.bobbell.ca/; Christine Billings, *Christina Billings,* 2018, http://www.christinebillings.ca/; Mike Stark, *Vote Stark, Thank you for your Support,* 2018, https://www.votestark2018.ca/.

[61] Statistics Canada, *Toronto Census Profile, 2016 Census*, 2016 Census. Ottawa, 2016. https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=POPC&Code1=0944&Geo2=PR&Code2=35&Data=Count&SearchText=Toronto&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=All&GeoLevel=PR&GeoCode=0944&TABID=1&wbdisable=true.

[62] Statistics Canada, *Guelph Census Profile, 2016 Census*, 2016 Census. Ottawa, 2016. https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=CSD&Code1=3523008&Geo2=CD&Code2=3523&Data=Count&SearchText=Guelph&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=All&TABID=1.

There are 96,151 people living in the City of Sarnia.[63] The population of each

municipality is relevant because it allows the number of followers each municipality has

to be put into perspective.

The City of Toronto maintains a Facebook Page, Twitter Account, and a YouTube

Channel for municipal affairs. Since the City joined Facebook in 2015, almost 12,300

people have liked the page.[64] Similarly, Guelph has gained 12,366 Facebook followers

since the municipality created the page in 2009.[65] In addition, Sarnia joined Facebook in

2011 and has 4,935 followers.[66] The number of people that liked each municipality's

Facebook page is similar for Toronto and Guelph, but vastly different from the number

that follows Sarnia's page. For Twitter, Toronto maintains a significantly higher number

of followers than Guelph and Sarnia. Toronto Twitter in 2009 and maintains around

352,000 followers,[67] while Guelph has gained 46,500 followers since joining in 2009.[68]

Sarnia has the fewest number of followers of all three municipalities identifies. Sarnia has

obtained 4,361 followers since joining Twitter in 2011.[69] Of these three municipalities,

Toronto is the only one that has utilized YouTube as a social media site to reach

residents. The City created their YouTube channel in 2013 and has gained 2,100

subscribers to the channel.[70] These figures will be used in the Findings section in an

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[63] Statistics Canada, *Sarnia Census Profile, 2016 Census*, 2016 Census. Ottawa, 2016.
https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-
pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=CMACA&Code1=562&Geo2=PR&Code2=35&Data=Count&S
earchText=Sarnia&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=All&GeoLevel=PR&GeoCode=562&TABID
=1.
[64] City of Toronto, *City of Toronto – Municipal Government*, Facebook, 2018,
https://www.facebook.com/cityofto/.
[65] City of Guelph, *The City of Guelph*, Facebook, 2018, https://www.facebook.com/cityofguelph/.
[66] City of Sarnia, *City of Sarnia*, Facebook, 2018, https://www.facebook.com/cityofsarnia/.
[67] City of Toronto, *City of Toronto*, Twitter, 2018, https://twitter.com/TorontoComms.
[68] City of Guelph, *City of Guelph,* Twitter, 2018, https://twitter.com/cityofguelph.
[69] City of Sarnia, City of Sarnia, Twitter, 2018, https://twitter.com/Sarnia_Ontario.
[70] City of Toronto, Toronto City Council, YouTube, 2018,
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCfe2rzOnQzgEDvNzRRPUJsA.

attempt to identify the nature of the relationship between municipal social media and youth engagement.

Electoral Turnout

This section will focus on the electoral turnout in the municipalities being analyzed, while providing specific data on youth turnout from the 2014 municipal election in Toronto, Guelph, and Sarnia. Youth turnout is restricted specifically to 2014, as this is the year municipalities began studying electoral turnout in depth. In 2014, some municipalities provided detailed demographic reports of citizens that voted. For Toronto, a comprehensive election study was conducted for the 2014 municipal election. This study conducted a pre-election survey and a post-election survey of 3,000 and 2,232 Toronto citizens, respectively. The study found 12.9 percent of citizens aged 18 to 34 voted in the 2010 election, 34.8 percent of people aged 35 to 54 voted, and 52.3 percent aged 55 and over voted.[71] This study has not yet posted results for voter turnout by age demographics for the 2014 municipal election. For this reason, this paper will look at the number of people reporting they were "certain to vote" in the election. The number of people that said they were likely to vote in the municipal election was excluded because the numbers were dramatically higher than traditional electoral turnout for municipal elections. For the 2014 Toronto municipal election, 14.3 percent of people aged 18 to 34 stated they were certain to vote, 36.2 percent aged 35 to 54 were certain, and 49.5 percent age 55 and over were certain to vote.[72] Overall voter turnout for the 2014 Toronto election was 54.67 percent. Voter turnout in Toronto has been steadily increasing since

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[71] Michael McGregor, "Toronto Election Study," *ODESI,* (2018), https://search1.odesi.ca/#/details?uri=%2Fodesi%2Fcora-tes-E-2014.xml.
[72] Michael McGregor, "Toronto Election Study."

2003 when voter turnout was 38 percent.[73] It is important to note that the percentage of

certain voters is higher than actual voter turnout.

During the 2014 election in Guelph, voter turnout reached 45 percent.[74]

According to open data provided to the public on the City of Guelph's website, 26

percent of youth between the ages of 18 and 21 voted in the 2014 election. This number

is compared to the 22.6 percent between the ages of 22 and 29 that voted, the 32.5

percent between 30 and 39 that voted, the 44 percent between 40 and 49, and 56 percent

of people aged 55 and older voted.[75] For Sarnia, data on youth voter turnout was provided

for the 2018 election. This data shows more than 25 percent of youth between the ages of

18 and 35 voted, around 45 percent of residents aged 36 to 55 voted, and more than 50

percent of people 56 or older voted.[76] It is important to note there are a number of factors

that encourage people to vote or to not vote. According to Harder and Krosnick,

individuals are influenced by demographic, social, and psychological factors such as

education, income, occupation, age, gender, mobility, residency, race, type of

neighbourhood, marital status, political efficacy, among other categories.[77] This study

provides insight into why the youth vote is consistently lower than other age

demographics. Although individuals are influenced by several factors analyzed by Harder

and Krosnick, their analysis of age explains how young people become more likely to

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[73] City of Toronto, "General Election Results."

[74] "Voter turnout stagnant in Waterloo region, dips in Guelph," *CBC News,* Oct. 23, 2018, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/kitchener-waterloo/voter-turnout-waterloo-region-municipal-election-2018-1.4874217.

[75] City of Guelph, "Voters by Age," *Guelph,* 2014, https://fusiontables.google.com/DataSource?docid=1LkrddNScb7B5iHD9cBgK2-guEy_TajweBO3rpnnh#rows:id=1.

[76] City of Sarnia, "Official Election Results: 2018 Municipal and School Board Election," *Sarnia,* 2018, http://sarnia.ca/city-government/elections/2018-election-results.

[77] Joshua Harder and Jon A. Krosnick, "Why do people vote? A psychological analysis of the causes of voter turnout," *Journal of Social Issues* 64, no. 3 (2008): 532-536.

vote, as they grow older. In addition, this study looks to historical events that increased

the likelihood of young people voting.[78] This analysis is important for this study because

the invention of the Internet could be considered another historical event influencing

youth voting. This section focuses on the strict percentages of people in each age bracket

that voted in municipal elections. The data presented in this section are important for

understanding the relationship between youth engagement and social media. This section

will be used in the Findings section to contextualize and provide evidence of this

relationship.

Average Age of Councillors

This section will address the average age of councillors and the lack of fair

representation of youth in Ontario municipalities. On average, councillors are "older,

more predominantly male, with higher incomes and more education" than other members

of Ontarian society, particularly in rural municipalities.[79] Municipalities throughout

Ontario continue to underrepresent youth, women, people of colour, members of the

LGBTQ+ community, and other minority groups. For example, despite women

representing around half of the population, women won only 30 percent of council seats

in the 2018 municipal election.[80] Although the underrepresentation of the aforementioned

groups remains important to researching politics, this paper will focus solely on youth

representation. The substandard representation of marginalized groups makes this paper

an important analysis of youth. Throughout Ontario, youth continue to be

underrepresented on councils. This may be for a number of reasons, including the

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[78] Joshua Harder and Jon A. Krosnick, "Why do people vote? A psychological analysis of the causes of voter turnout," 536.
[79] Ryan Deska, "Municipal Councillor Profile," *Rural Ontario Institute,* (2016): 9.
[80] Lauren Pelley, "Women make up only 30% of Toronto's next council but advocates 'encouraged' by strong showings," *CBC News* (Toronto, ON), Oct. 30, 2018.

inability to run for office due to monetary constraints, running for election but not being

elected, and political disengagement.[81] According to the Rural Ontario Institute, "the

median age for councillors and mayors is 60, relative to Ontario's median age of 40."[82] It

is apparent that the demographic make up of Ontario's municipal councils fail to

adequately parallel the demographic variation found in society.

It is important to research and study youth engagement because only 9 percent of

councillors are between 18 and 40 years old, yet "most would agree that younger

councillors bring fresh new ideas to [council]."[83] This discrepancy between the average

age of the population and the average age of members of municipal government needs to

be researched to encourage youth to become involved in municipal government. The age

discrepancy found in local government is not unique to Canada. For example, in the

United Kingdom, councillors continue to be "more than 20 years older than the typical

citizen."[84] Recently, there has been increased interest in youth engagement from

municipalities. For example, a councillor in the City of Sarnia has requested youth be

offered a role in local government that will allow for young people to learn about the role

of the municipality in their lives.[85] Further, municipalities have attempted to address this

age discrepancy through the implementation of youth councils. These councils allow

youth, typically between the ages of 15 and 29 to make recommendations to council on

youth issues, create events, and represent youth in their municipality.[86] The

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[81] Andrew Kurjata, "Low pay a barrier to getting young people to run for city council, say millennial politicians," *CBC News* (Kelowna, BC), Jun. 28, 2018.
[82] Ryan Deska, "Municipal Councillor Profile," 10.
[83] Ibid, 18.
[84] David Paine, "Fears for diversity as average age of councillors tops 60 for first time," *LGC,* (2014).
[85] Tyler Kula, "Councillor calls for youth voice at city hall," *The London Free Press,* (Sarnia, On), Oct. 2, 2018.
[86] City of Guelph, "Guelph Youth Council," *Guelph Youth,* 2018, https://youth.guelph.ca/guelph-youth-council/.

implementation of youth councils can be an effective method of increasing the

representation of youth issues by council; however, the average age of councillors

remains a prominent issue. Without fair representation of demographic groups on

council, these groups will continue to be underrepresented. Further, the average age of

councillors may affect the level of youth engagement. Youth regularly use social media

to interact with their friends and people with similar interests.[87] It is difficult to determine

whether youth follow social media accounts of local politicians and why they may or may

not choose to follow councillors' accounts.

Findings

      This section will take the information presented in the Content Analysis section

and apply it to the hypothesis presented in this paper. This section will attempt to

discover whether or not social media outlets have increased the level of engagement

among youth in municipal government affairs. First, the use of social media by newly

elected councillors during the 2018 election was staggering. Each elected official used at

least one social media outlet. Typically, elected officials used a combination of the three

to advertise their election. This may be attributed to the belief that social media can be

used to mobilize and engage youth in online social interaction.[88] Social media usage

among all age demographics has been steadily increasing since its invention. Since 2010,

social media platforms have been an integral part of "daily life for most young people" in

the world.[89] Similarly to the growing number of councillors using social media for

campaigns, there are a growing number of municipalities using social media to reach

[87] Cathy J. Cohen and Joseph Kahne, "Participatory politics. New media and youth political action," vii.
[88] Sounman Hong, and Daniel Nadler, "Does the early bird move the polls?: The use of the social media tool 'Twitter' by US politicians and its impact on public opinion," 182.
[89] Chitat Chan and Michael J. Holosko, "The utilization of social media for youth outreach engagement: A case study," 681.

their residents to provide a sense of community and shared identity.[90] As the number of

youth using social media has increased, it has become an important platform for citizen

engagement. Many local governments in the United States have recognized the

opportunity social media creates for citizen engagement and participation and have

developed social media accounts. In 2009, only 13 percent of American local

governments were on Facebook. By 2011, almost 87 percent created a Facebook page.[91]

The increase in social media use as a result of the growing popularity of social media can

be attributed to the recognition of social media's ability to increase youth engagement.

Based on the information gathered in this paper, it remains too early to confidently

determine whether or not social media has a profound impact youth engagement.

Table 1 (Appendix A) shows the number of followers or subscribers Toronto,

Guelph, and Sarnia has on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. This table acts as a good

start to determining whether or not social media has an impact on youth engagement. The

table coupled with the percentage of youth that voted in municipal elections provides

insight into the impact social media has on youth engagement. The low percentage of

youth turnout in municipal elections has led to desires to try new methods of obtaining

the youth vote. Social media use by municipalities has been viewed as a viable solution

to low voter turnout. Social media allows municipalities to reach residents and create a

sense of online community.[92] Further, the average age of councillors has led to concerns

over the difficulty councils have in representing youth. Youth are underrepresented

because only 9 percent of councillors are between the ages of 18 and 40, while the vast

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[90] Tavia Grant, "Toronto tops list of Canada's most youth-friendly cities," *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto, ON), May 9, 2019.

[91] Karen Mossberger, Yonghong Wu, and Jared Crawford, "Connecting citizens and local governments? Social media and interactivity in major US cities," 352.

[92] Delia Dumitrica, "Imagining engagement: Youth, social media, and electoral processes," 35.

majority are over the age of 50.[93] Social media have offered an opportunity for

councillors and municipalities alike to ask for feedback and engage with youth.

Governmental and administrative bodies use social media to increase community

engagement by providing information and offering events to citizens.[94] The content

analysis provided in this paper has provided a preliminary understanding of the impact

social media has on youth engagement. As a result of the inability to determine a concrete

causal relationship between municipal social media and youth engagement in this paper,

it is evident that future research and data collection is required to provide the hypothesis.

This paper suggests, it is likely social media has a positive impact on social media in

particular events such as Obama's 2008 election; however, it remains difficult to

determine whether this impact is prevalent in other countries and at all levels of

government.

Limitations

It is important to understand the limitations to the research presented in this paper.

To begin, this paper was unable to provide statistical evidence of a relationship between

youth engagement and social media. This evidence must be found to produce and

replicate a study that will prove or disprove the hypothesis presented in this paper. In

addition, he research did not address youth in demographic areas or socioeconomic

situations that do not have access to the Internet or, more specifically, do not have social

media accounts. This research is limited in its ability to determine the difference between

youth that are engaged as a result of social media, and those that would be engaged

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[93] Ryan Deska, "Municipal Councillor Profile," *Rural Ontario Institute,* (2016): 10.
[94] Melissa W. Graham, Elizabeth J. Avery, and Sejin Park, "The role of social media in local government crisis communications," 387.

regardless of presence of social media.[95] For example, individuals that have an understanding of politics and believe they have a civic duty or "moral obligation to participate in politics" will be engaged with or without the existence of social media.[96] This research has limited the scope to three cities within Ontario: Toronto, Guelph, and Sarnia. These cities were selected as they have the most data on municipalities using social media and percentages of youth that participated in municipal elections. Unfortunately, many municipalities could not be studied, as they do not provide the public with information on the age demographics of voters or do not gather this data. This paper may have been more effective in proving the hypothesis if there had been more time to conduct research and offer a survey to youth groups on their social media use, community involvement, use of municipal services, and level of knowledge on their municipality.

Moving Forward

Following the research done for this paper, it is apparent, municipalities should be doing more to encourage engagement from all age demographics. Currently, Toronto, Guelph, and Sarnia all uses their Twitter and Facebook accounts to promote education campaigns, provide residents with up-to-date news, promote events, and encourage voting in campaigns. For example, in December 2018, the City of Toronto used their Twitter account to promote a youth "job fair and clothing giveaway" to help young people connect with employers and receive free business clothing.[97] Similarly, during the municipal election in October 2018, the City of Guelph used both Facebook and Twitter

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[95] Michael Xenos, Ariadne Vromen, and Brian D. Loader, "The great equalizer? Patterns of social media use and youth political engagement in three advanced democracies," 152.

[96] Joshua Harder and Jon A. Krosnick, "Why do people vote? A psychological analysis of the causes of voter turnout," 536.

[97] City of Toronto, *City of Toronto*, Twitter, 2018, https://twitter.com/TorontoComms.

to encourage residents to vote. On Twitter, Guelph made several posts to promote the election and explain to people how to vote. For example, on October 22, 2018 Guelph explained residents one piece of identification was required to vote.[98] The City of Sarnia has used their Facebook page to help educate residents on changing policies while asking for feedback from citizens. For example, following the legalization of marijuana the City has requested resident feedback on whether or not business owners should be allowed to open a "cannabis retail store."[99] The current use of social media by Toronto, Guelph, and Sarnia has allowed for residents to become involved and engaged with their local government. Municipalities, as well as other governmental bodies, should work to improve their use of social media. For the future, social media will remain a relevant and important aspect of governments' functions.

Conclusion

This paper has assessed whether social media has an impact on the level of engagement among youth in municipal governments' affairs. Throughout the paper it has become apparent that social media is believed to act as an outlet for municipalities to increase the level of youth engagement in municipal government; however, there is little evidence to suggest this the case. This paper has provided a comprehensive literature review to define key terms and contextualize concepts in the parameters of this paper. The literature explained the necessity of this research as social media use among youth is increasing while youth continue to be disengaged in politics. The content analyzed for this study allowed for a glimpse into a few indicators of the impacts social media has on youth. Through an analysis of the types of social media councillors and municipalities

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[98] City of Guelph, *City of Guelph,* Twitter, 2018, https://twitter.com/cityofguelph.
[99] City of Sarnia, *City of Sarnia*, Facebook, 2018, https://www.facebook.com/cityofsarnia/.

utilize, electoral turnout, and the average age of councillors, there is an apparent relationship between social media and youth engagement in municipalities.

Following the completion of this paper, it is apparent the main conclusion I have reached is that more research needs to be conducted on this subject. It is recommended municipalities continue to use social media to engage young people. Although there is not a lot of evidence to support the claim that youth have become more engaged, social media continues to be a viable option for increasing engagement. The ability to advertise community events, council meetings, and elections allows a municipality's information to reach a wider audience. Further, future research should continue to look for a clear relationship between social media use and youth engagement in any level of government across western nations. Identifying this relationship and replicating the results in multiple countries will allow for conclusive evidence in support of the claims put forward in this paper. With the development and increasing popularity of social media in recent years, this subject will continue to be relevant in political science. Further research should be done to advance the research presented in this paper.

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APPENDIX A

Table 1: Municipal Social Media Accounts

Content Analyzed	Social Media Type	Social Media Metrics	Totals
Toronto	Facebook	Has Facebook Page	Yes
		Number of Likes	12,300
	Twitter	Has Twitter Account	Yes
		Number of Twitter Followers	352,000
		Number of Tweets	24,500
	YouTube	Has a YouTube Channel	Yes
		Number of Subscribers	2,100
Guelph	Facebook	Has Facebook Page	Yes
		Number of Likes	12,366
	Twitter	Has Twitter Account	Yes
		Number of Twitter Followers	45,500
		Number of Tweets	21,800
	YouTube	Has a YouTube Channel	No
		Number of Subscribers	N/A
Sarnia	Facebook	Has Facebook Page	Yes
		Number of Likes	4,935
	Twitter	Has Twitter Account	Yes
		Number of Twitter Followers	4,368
		Number of Tweets	2,848
	YouTube	Has a YouTube Channel	No
		Number of Subscribers	N/A

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