

HOW CONTENT FORMAT AFFECTS ENGAGEMENT WITH POLITICAL CONTENT  
AMONG GENERATION Z AND MILLENNIALS ON TWITTER

by

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## **Abstract**

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M.S., 2021

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The political power of younger generations (millennials and Gen-Z) is rapidly growing, meaning that political actors will have to learn how to communicate with these potential voters and activists through their native communication channels: social media. Informed by previous scholarship with online pathways to political participation and media richness theory, the present study examines how one aspect of social media communication, post format, affects how these young generations evaluate and engage with political social media content.



## Introduction

It is no secret that for millennials and Generation Z (Gen Z), politics – like most everything else – happens online, More specifically, it happens on social media (SM). Indeed, many of the prominent figures of, and issues prominent within, youth politics have either first appeared on the public stage via social media or have utilized social media to expand their reach. These figures and issues have emerged from both sides of the political spectrum. On the left, we've seen the rise of environmental activist Greta Thunberg (Myhr, 2021), the survivors of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting who established March for Our Lives (Deng, 2018), and Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (Corasaniti, 2020). On the right, the “Blue Lives Matter” movement rose as a response to the left’s massive Black Lives Matter movement (Valencia, 2020), and prominent figures include Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene (Rogers & Skelley, 2021) and former president Donald Trump – although it should be noted that both have been banned from some social media platforms in response to their inflammatory tweets (Macdonald & Brown, 2022).

This rise in politics on social media coincides with the rising power of millennials and Gen Z in offline politics. The 2020 presidential election was the first time in decades that the Silent Generation and Baby Boomers made up less than 50% of voters (Igielnik et al., 2021), signaling a shift in political power to the younger generations. Gen Z by itself made up 8% of the vote, while millennials made up 22%. However, together, these younger generations also made up 49% of non-voters. While the younger generations have the potential to wield unprecedented political power, only a few are actually exercising that power. Data also suggests that these generations have the weakest affiliations with either of the major parties, leaving them

“politically homeless” (Abrams, 2021). If politicians can spark and maintain interest among these generations, mobilizing them to be active voters and civic participants, it could very well change the face of American politics. The only problem is figuring out how to do that.

This study aims to solve a small piece of the political puzzle by determining how post type affects millennial and Gen Z’s evaluations of political social media content on Twitter by testing the younger generation’s willingness to engage with posts of different formats (text, photo, and video).

## **Literature Review**

### **Politics and Social Media**

Across the world, democratic citizens and political actors are utilizing social media for political purposes. While political social media is relatively common among citizens, who use SM to learn about and interact with politics, politicians, political parties, and organizations, governments themselves are also utilizing these new digital tools to reach and persuade voters and citizens into action (Arshad & Khurram, 2020). In their proposal of a network media logic distinct from the traditional media logic, Klinger and Svensson (2014) assert that content distribution on social media is based on the “logic of virality” (p. 1248) wherein the content is spread from person to person, rather than from a single sender to a massive population of receivers. This disrupts the traditional dissemination of political content via the mass media to mass audiences, as social media audiences are smaller and more fragmented. As a result, political communication content on social media must also adapt to be “differentiated and have more positive, personalized and emotional” (p. 1253) aspects to incite social media users to pass the content along the network. However, most political actors tend to use social media “in ways that follow the logic of traditional campaigning” (Koc-Michalska et al., 2016, p. 1807), rather

than adapting their tactics and messaging to the platform and audience. In other words, political actors are using social media as a new outlet for “pushing” their message, similar to buying a television ad or sending campaign literature through the mail. However, the interactive nature of social media not only allows for, but necessitates a more advanced use of the platform to spread a message. This can still align with traditional campaign tactics. For example, social media messages could be crafted to recruit “digital canvassers” that will spread the message by sharing it to their networks.

This lack of adaptation presents a major obstacle to the effective use of social media for promoting political participation. Research shows that the effects of political communication on social media are mediated by several factors, such as (1) the social media platform, including platform-specific characteristics (Dimitrova & Matthes, 2018), (2) the characteristics of the social media audience, including prior political participation and interest, (3) audience motivations for using social media use (Dimitrova & Matthes, 2018; Heiss et al., 2019; Macafee, 2013; Lane et al., 2017), (4) the political content itself (Karnowski et al., 2017), and (5) the source of the political content (Dimitrova & Matthes, 2018; Karnowski et al., 2017; Kim & Ellison, 202; Klinger & Svensson, 2014; Park, 2013; Weeks et al., 2017). If political messengers do not account for these factors in their attempts at persuasion, their messaging is unlikely to succeed.

The present study will examine how one specific element of political content on social media – post format (i.e., whether the content is in video, photo, or text form) – influences younger generations (here defined as Gen Z and millennials) engagement with said content.

## **Defining Political Participation**

Political participation has been defined in many ways, under many different names. This study chooses to use “political participation” as the term to describe political behavior as it has been the most widely accepted and used term in recent scholarship.

One of the most popular definitions comes from Verba et al.’s 1995 book *Voice and Equality*, wherein the authors define what they term “political behavior” as “activity that has the intent or effect of influencing government action – either directly by affecting the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make those policies” (p. 40). Although at the time this definition was written, online political behavior had scarcely been explored, many recent works have expanded the original purview of this definition to include online political activities (Bode, 2017).

Other definitions and terms include a description of “democratic participation” by Koc-Mischalska et al. (2015) as “the extended involvement of individuals in a collective political decision-free and/or decision-making process” (p. 1808), as well as Theocharis’ (2015) definition of “digitally networked participation,” or DNP, as

a networked media–based personalized action that is carried out by individual citizens with the intent to display their own mobilization and activate their social networks in order to raise awareness about, or exert social and political pressures for the solution of, a social or political problem. (p. 6)

Activities and behaviors that comprise political participation include classic examples such as voting in an election or volunteering for a campaign, as well as newer examples including liking or commenting on online political content (Bode, 2017; Knoll et al., 2018).

## **Effects of Social Media on Political Participation**

Social media can have a number of effects on an individual's political participation. These effects depend on certain factors, such as the way people are exposed to political content on social media, or their motivations for using social media. Several factors relevant to this study are examined below.

**Incidental v. Intentional Exposure to Political Content.** One commonality in the literature concerning social media and political participation is the differentiation of incidental versus intentional exposure to political content. These terms refer to the two ways an individual can encounter political content on social media. Intentional (also referred to as selective) exposure occurs when a user specifically searches for political information or puts effort into curating political content as a part of their "newsfeed" (Heiss et al., 2020; Knoll et al., 2018; Nanz et al., 2020; Weeks et al., 2017). Incidental exposure occurs when a user happens to encounter political content during their social media use, whether it be from a connection sharing the information in some way, the content appearing while searching for something else, or simply the platform's algorithm including it in on the user's feed (Heiss et al., 2020; Knoll et al., 2018; Lee & Xenos, 2020; Nanz et al., 2020; Weeks et al., 2017).

This distinction is of great importance in the field because these different types of exposure affect how SM users process the political information they encounter (Heiss et al., 2020; Knoll et al., 2018; Weeks et al., 2017) and predict patterns of political engagement (Knoll et al., 2018; Heiss et al., 2020; Oeldorf-Hirsch, 2018; Lee & Xenos, 2020). It is generally agreed that intentional exposure leads to greater elaboration (i.e. processing) and thus greater increases in political participation. And while some research suggests that social media users prefer to "stumble upon" news content rather than seek it out (Oeldorf-Hirsch, 2018; p. 226), there is also evidence that even those who are not politically active still engage in political content curation

when they encounter dissonant information – information contrary to their own opinions and beliefs – and subsequently alter their social media experience via various filtering options to create a social media experience that is more to their tastes (Lane et al., 2017, Weeks et al., 2017, Nanz et al., 2020).

**Motivation for Social Media Use & Audience Characteristics.** Two of the most utilized measures when looking at how social media use affects political participation are the user’s motivations for using social media in the first place and the characteristics of the audience.

While research has found that motivation can be linked to specific activities on social media in addition to the general use of the platforms (Macafee, 2013), the primary use for determining motivation for political social media use in past research has been to place users on either the intentional or incidental path to encountering political information (Heiss et al., 2020; Knoll et al., 2018). Motivations for social media use are usually categorized as (1) information gathering, (2) entertainment, (3) self-expression/self-promotion, and (4) relationship building & maintenance (Heiss et al., 2020, Knoll et al., 2018, Lane et al., 2017). Generally, only information-gathering and self-expression/self-promotion motivations have been linked to intentional exposure to political content. However, in recent years, many have observed the melding of politics and entertainment in the United States (Hamedy, 2017) as news programs become entertainment and nightly talk shows become political commentary. Rather than seeing political activity, events, and news as an informative or civic endeavor, it is yet another piece of the ever-expanding entertainment landscape. Given this shift, and the rise in Gen Z and millennial political activity online (Andersen et al., 2020), it is possible that entertainment may be emerging as a major motivator for online political participation, which will lead to increased offline participation among those who use social media for entertainment. Additionally, research has suggested that the relationship between incidental news exposure and political participation

may be reciprocal, rather than causal (Lee & Xenos, 2020). In other words, political participation may lead to more incidental exposure, and vice versa. Therefore, social media users' history of political participation may serve as an indicator of their motivations for social media use, rather than the other way around.

### **Online Pathways to Political Participation**

In recent years, there have been several studies that indicate online pathways to political participation exist. While the effect may be small, there is evidence to support the idea that low-effort ways of interacting with political content online can serve as “gateway political behaviors” (Bode, 2017, p. 2) to eventually engaging in more traditional and effortful activities in the same way that forming a habit of voting can lead to offline political participation on a larger scale (Gerber et al., 2003; Gil De Zúñiga et al., 2014). This is due to the low barrier of entry for most online engagement, as opposed to the high barrier imposed by the cost of investing “effort, time, and commitment” (Lee & Xenos, 2020, p. 5) into offline political participation. If nothing else, the prevalence of political content online offers users more opportunities to engage with politics, and the more opportunities one has, the more likely they are to take one (Gil De Zúñiga et al., 2014).

Three theoretical models map these pathways: the Social Media Political Participation Model (SMPPM) (Knoll et al., 2020), the social media affordances approach (Kim & Ellison, 2021), and the peripheral elaboration model (Shahin et al., 2020). Each utilizes a different theory of cognitive processing to explain how encountering political content on social media can result in political participation.

The Social Media Political Participation Model was conceived to “predict under which conditions exposure to social media fosters PP [political participation]” (Knoll et al., 2018, p. 138). To do this, the SMPPM follows the social media user's journey from “pre-exposure” to

behavioral outcomes, following two distinct exposure pathways, using goal systems theory as a cognitive guide. According to goal systems theory, “human behavior is driven by goals” (p. 136), therefore every action we take is done to achieve a certain goal. Within the model, these goals are translated into motivations for using social media, including information gathering, entertainment, social interaction, self-expression, and the reinforcement of the self (p. 139).

According to the SMPPM, goals will direct SM users to either the intentional or incidental exposure pathways. Once users encounter political content, regardless of the exposure method, the content is then evaluated for relevancy – determining whether the content is worth thinking about more in-depth, or if it can simply be scrolled past (p. 142). On the intentional pathway, an affirmative relevancy appraisal is followed by an appraisal of the content’s implications, wherein users will decide whether the content presents a “discrepancy between a present state and a future state” (p. 143). If a discrepancy is identified, it leads to a state of wanting, or a goal to prevent the discrepancy. If the goal is deemed attainable and does not compete with other goals, it leads to action, and in this case, political participation (p. 143-144). On the incidental pathway, if content is deemed relevant to one’s goals, it can lead either to following the effortful processing path laid out on the intentional pathway, or immediately to low-effort political participation (p. 140). However, if the information is not relevant to one’s goals, it can still indirectly lead to political participation via the priming process, wherein users store information related to possible future goals to be retrieved later when a related goal is formed and/or activated (p. 146). Finally, the cycle loops; whether a SM user engages in high-effort, low-effort, or no political participation, their actions affect what pathway they will take the next time they encounter political information on social media (p. 147-148). Subsequent testing of the model revealed that the intentional pathway was positively related to both on- and offline engagement, and that the incidental pathway did not produce offline or online



engagement, however, data did not show that the incidental pathway resulted in online engagement either (Heiss et al., 2019),

The Social Media Affordances approach was developed by Kim & Ellison (2021) and is based on social learning theory as well as the concept of affordances. According to this theory, people learn by observing and mimicking the behavior of others (p. 3). As social media has massively expanded the number of people we can observe on a daily basis, it allows us to observe more behaviors and therefore mimic more behaviors. Affordances are defined as the “‘possibilities for action’ when a user interacts with a technology” (p. 3). Four main affordances arise from social media use. The first, visibility, allows SM users to make previously unseen characteristics of themselves visible and to see the same from others (p. 3). The second, persistence, refers to the fact that activities on social media are “‘preserved in the original form’” and accessible after the original posting (p. 4). This not only allows users to curate a specific image of themselves but also allows them to refer to social media for behavioral models at any time. The third affordance, editability, allows users to carefully craft whatever message they wish to post before actually posting it, and then edit it after it has been posted (p. 4-5). This means that users can alter their own image to fit the model of their network’s when they find their behavior to be abnormal or contrary. Finally, the association affordance comes from the defining characteristic of social media as being a platform for creating and maintaining connections (p. 5).

With these affordances and the premise of social learning theory in mind, the social media affordances approach posits that observation of political activity on social media will lead to the performance of political activities both on social media and offline (and that online social media will also contribute to more offline participation) (p. 5, 10). There are two important mediators of this relationship: first, the effect on online participation will be stronger when a user

observes the political behavior of someone they see as similar to them (p. 5-6), and second, the degree to which users participate politically both on and offline will depend on their citizenship norms – their beliefs about how a good citizen should act (p. 7-8). Initial survey data supported all of the relationships proposed in the model.

The third proposed pathway, the peripheral elaboration model, specifically examines how incidental exposure to news content could lead to increased political participation (Shahin et al., 2020). The model posits that like intentional exposure, incidental exposure to news content is positively related to both on and offline political participation, mediated by news elaboration (p. 150-151). There are two routes to this elaboration, the central route and the peripheral route. Central route elaboration is high effort and occurs when the user “thoughtfully examines the message and considers its arguments before deciding what to do” (p. 151). This kind of elaboration is unlikely to occur with content encountered incidentally. The peripheral elaboration route is comparably low effort and relies on subjective evaluation of the message (such as, how much the user likes the message) to determine whether action is taken as a result of the message. Survey data provided support for incidental exposure, mediated by news elaboration, increasing online political participation, but not offline participation (p. 156-157).

Among the literature predicting the positive relationships, some scholars warn of placing too much value on these pathways to political participation. In an examination of social media’s contribution to political learning as compared to traditional media use, Shehata and Strömbäck (2018) conclude that social media “does not displace as much as complement traditional news media” (p. 140). Oeldorf-Hirsch (2017) adds that social media should not necessarily be seen as a place for learning, but rather for “engaging with and thinking about this information [politics and news], particularly when not actively seeking it” (p. 241). Essentially, news content on social media serves a priming function as opposed to an educational one. Others add that most social

media engagement is actually a result of those who already participate offline seeking to include politics in their online network, and therefore it is primarily offline participation that leads to online engagement, rather than vice-versa (Lee & Xenos, 2020).

### **Elements of Political Content**

A factor of political content on social media that often gets looked over in analysis of social media effects on political participation is the actual content itself. Karnowski et al. (2017) examined how a series of “content-dependent factors” affected SM users’ intention to read a news article they encountered on social media. Two of the three factors, “topical interest” and “feelings toward spreader” had a significant, positive impact on reading intention, whereas the third, “prior knowledge” had a negative effect (p. 47).

As of now, there has been relatively little research into how specific elements of social media political content elicit different reactions for social media users, or how their evaluation of content is affected by these elements. For those who craft political content, this information could be critical to formulating a successful social media strategy for a campaign, legislative agenda, or elected official.

Elements of brand and marketing social media content that have been studied include attitude toward content, level of commerciality, emotional sentiment, format/media richness, interest to users, purpose, personalization (Barger et al., 2016), call(s) to action (Moran et al., 2019), and the level of informational or entertainment content (Menon et al., 2019). In this study, we will specifically be examining post format, including the dimensions of media richness and telepresence.

**Media Richness.** The theory of media richness was first proposed by Daft and Lengel (1986) as a contributor to efficient “organization structure and internal systems” (p. 554). Specifically, media richness was one factor of organizational design used to “facilitate

equivocality reductions, or to provide data to reduce uncertainty, or both” (p. 559) to improve communication and organizational efficiency. According to the theory, the richness of a specific medium is determined by the presence of “(a) immediate feedback, (b) multiple cues, (c) language variety, and (d) personal focus” (Ishii et al., 2019, p. 124).

However, media richness theory does not imply that high richness media are always superior to low richness media. Rather, the richness required of a given message should be determined by the level of clarification or interactivity needed in a given situation (Daft & Lengel, 1986). For example, Shahbaznezhad et al. (2021) found that rational, emotional, and transactional appeals each require different levels of media richness in order to produce the desired result from audiences. Additionally, Lee and Yu’s (2020) study of social media posts from political actors following crises found that low richness posts were better received, as they reduced the audiences’s uncertainty about the scenario, and a study examining engagement with the social media of the Chinese government during the Covid-19 crisis produced similar results (Chen et al., 2020).

Within the technology of the 1980s, Daft and Lengel considered face-to-face communication to be the medium with the highest richness, followed by telephone communication and written documents, with numeric documents the leanest medium (p. 560). More recent developments in communications technology are considered leaner than face-to-face communication, although their exact position within the richness hierarchy has yet to be empirically determined (Ishii et al., 2019). Within the realm of social media, the concept of telepresence has sometimes been fused with that of media richness to determine how engaging and therefore effective, communication could be (Moran et al., 2019).

**Telepresence.** The concept of telepresence refers to “the experience of presence in an environment by means of a communication medium” (Steuer, 1992, p. 6), and was first proposed

in reference to the emerging field of “virtual reality” in the early 1990s. When a digital medium provides sufficient telepresence to the user, the digital reality will take precedence over actual reality in terms of how much attention is paid to the media.

There are two dimensions to telepresence: vividness and interactivity (p. 11). Interactivity refers to the “extent to which users can participate in modifying the form and content of a mediated environment in real time” (p. 14). Social media is a highly interactive form of communication, as most popular platforms provide users the opportunity to react to, comment on, and even repost content. Since this study is contained to a singular platform (Twitter) the interactivity of our content will remain static. Therefore, we will be focusing more on the manipulable vividness dimension of telepresence.

Vividness refers to the stimuli presented by a medium and is comprised of two variables: depth and breadth. The breadth of a medium’s vividness is determined by the number of senses (specified by Steuer as equilibrium, sound, touch, taste/smell, and sight) a media can engage (p. 12). For example, a virtual reality gaming system, which engages one’s sense of balance/equilibrium and presents the user with auditory and visual stimuli (and with emerging technologies, even tactile or olfactory stimuli), will have more breadth than an e-book, which contains only visual stimuli. The depth of a medium refers to the quality of content presented within it (p. 13). For example, a simple, low-resolution movie from the 1940s would be considered to have less depth than a modern, CGI-filled blockbuster. While both contain the same basic elements (sound, picture, and a story), the quality of the newer movie is greater, therefore giving it more depth.

Recent studies looking at how media richness and the dimensions of telepresence (further referred to simply as “richness”) affect how social media users engage with both branded and unbranded social media posts have shown that greater richness/telepresence is typically

associated with higher intention to engage with content (Moran et al., 2019, Cao et al., 2021). However, these studies were conducted using engagement data from actual brand tweets, which presents several limitations. First, while brands' presence on social media is commonplace, many social media users indicate that they are "annoyed" by the presence of brand social media posts that they did not specifically seek out on their feeds, as well the content appearing repetitively (Sprout Social, 2016). Second, since the data from Moran et al. (2019) came from actual Facebook posts, the message contained within each tweet varied and in Cao et al. (2021), the subject of the studied content was luxury fashion, a naturally visual-rich subject.

The present study will be focusing not on branded or promotional content, but rather on organic (i.e. not sponsored) political content, eliminating the "annoyance factor" (Sprout Social, 2016, p. 4). Additionally, our research will be conducted as an experiment, where each tweet format will contain the same message, providing more accurate data as to how format affects the reception of the message.

### **Hypotheses**

H1: Video tweets will have higher engagement than photo or text-only tweets.

H2: Photo tweets will have higher engagement than of text-only tweets but lower than video tweets.

RQ1: How is offline political participation related to intention to engage with the political tweet stimuli?

RQ2: How is online political participation related to intention to engage with the political tweet stimuli?

RQ3: How are audience attitudes towards content related to intention to engage with the political tweet stimuli?

## **Method**

The goal of this research is to determine how millennial and Gen Z social media users' evaluation of and willingness to engage with political social media content is affected by the format of the post. To accomplish this, an experiment was conducted to test various elements of political social media content and their evaluations among millennials and Gen Z.

### **Sample Population**

Respondents were recruited and received compensation via Prime Panels. Each participant was coded by their generation following the birth year cutoffs used by the Pew Research Center (Igielnik et al., 2021), with millennials born between 1981 and 1996 and Gen Z from 1997 and after. However, due to the age range of Gen Z, including those who are too young to be aware of politics, the age range of Gen Z for the study was limited to those over the age of 18 (born by 2004). No participants born in 1980 or before were included, as they are not the focus of the study. Participation in the experiment was voluntary. The sample size for the pre-test was 57; for the main experiment 227 complete responses were collected.

### **Measures**

#### ***Political Participation***

Because of extant evidence that prior political participation affects how individuals encounter and appraise political social media content, each participant's prior political participation was measured via a questionnaire given to each participant before the experiment. Both offline and online political participation were quantified using extant, validated measures.

Offline political participation was measured using the ten-item scale developed by Kalaycioglu and Turan (1981) with some modifications. This scale measures voting records in the last two national elections, three kinds of campaign-related activities, four measures of

political discussion, and whether or not the respondent is a member of a sociopolitical organization. The first 6 items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale. The remaining 4 required only a yes or no answer, including voting records, working on a political campaign, and membership in a socio-political organization. Given that the participants are selected from the youngest generations, additional responses were added to voting record questions to allow participants to indicate that they were not old enough to vote in the specified election. For data analysis, only the items measured on a Likert scale were used. The final scale is detailed in Table 1.

**Table 1**

***Offline Political Participation Scale***

Item							
	Scaled Items						
1. I talk about local issues with my friends, neighbors, etc.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. I contact government officials about local issues	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. I talk about national issues with my friends, neighbors, etc.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. I contact government officials about national issues	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. I try and influence others to vote	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. I attend political rallies	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Nominal Items						
Did you vote in the most recent national election (2022 Midterm Election)?							
Did you vote in the most second recent national election (2020 National Election)?							
Have you ever worked or volunteered for a political campaign?							
Are you a member of a socio-political organization (political parties, interest groups, etc.)?							

*Note.* For items 1 through 6, respondents were asked to indicate how often they perform a particular activities on a scale of 1 to 7, where an answer of "1" means you never perform in that activity; "2" indicates that you perform the activity rarely (in less than 10% of the chances where you could have); "3" indicates that you perform the activity occasionally (in about 30% of the chances where you could have); "4" indicates that you sometimes perform the activity (in about 50% of the chances when you could have); "5" indicates that you perform the activity frequently (in about 70% of the chances when you could have); "6" indicates that you usually perform the activity (in about 90% of the chances where you could have), and "7" indicates that you perform the activity every time you have the chance. Because there was the possibility that our respondents would have been ineligible to vote based on their age, for items 7 through 10, additional responses beyond “yes” and “no” were included for the questions regarding voting history. They were (1) “I was not eligible to vote, but I would have if I was able,” or (2) “I was not eligible to vote, but even if I was able, I wouldn’t have.”



Online political participation was measured using Waeterloos et al.'s (2021) Social Media Political Participation Scale. The items on the scale are divided into four "themes": (1) latent engagement, which refers to online behaviors which involve "cognitive engagement through information-seeking and -consumption" (p. 3), (2) counter engagement, which consists of "behaviors aimed directly at the political system" usually in the context of account hacking or sharing personal information without permission (p. 4), (3) expressive engagement, wherein one creates their own content or shares another's, and (4) follower engagement, which involves high-level interaction with other's content, such as signing or sharing petitions, joining groups, or RSVPing to an event (p. 5). The counter engagement items were omitted from the study, as the goal was to identify content factors to encourage productive political participation rather than potentially illegal behaviors. Two items on the scale were omitted, as they were specific to another social media platform (i.e., not Twitter), and four were been modified to better apply to Twitter's platform. The complete, modified scale can be found in Table 2.

**Table 2**

***Online Political Participation Scale***

Item							
1. I read news articles or other kinds of information (e.g. opinion pieces) related to politics	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. I read comments on Twitter related to politics	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. I watch videos on Twitter related to politics	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. I visit the Twitter profiles of politicians or public figures related to politics	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. I sign petitions about politics after I see them on Twitter	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. I share petitions about politics after I see them on Twitter	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. I join Twitter groups related to politics	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. I post things (statuses, memes, links) about politics on Twitter in a private way (e.g. in a closed group, by limiting who can see my posts, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. I comment on posts about politics on Twitter in a private way (e.g. in a closed group, by limiting who can see my posts, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. I "like" posts about politics on Twitter	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. I post things (statuses, memes, links) about politics on Twitter in a public way	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. I "reply" to posts about politics on Twitter	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. I "retweet" posts about politics on Twitter	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14. I send things about politics through messaging features on Twitter	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. I comment on posts about politics on Twitter in a public way	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16. I post things (statuses, memes, links) about politics on Twitter in a public way	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

*Note.* Respondents were asked to indicate how often they perform a particular activities on a scale of 1 to 7, where an answer of "1" means you never perform in that activity; "2" indicates that you perform the activity rarely (in less than 10% of the chances where you could have); "3" indicates that you perform the activity occasionally (in about 30% of the chances where you could have); "4" indicates that you sometimes perform the activity (in about 50% of the chances when you could have); "5" indicates that you perform the activity frequently (in about 70% of the chances when you could have); "6" indicates that you usually perform the activity (in about 90% of the chances where you could have), and "7" indicates that you perform the activity every time you have the chance.

***Attitude Toward Stimuli***

Attitude toward stimuli was measure using a scale adapted from Mirbagheri and Najmi's (2019) research into consumer engagement with social media marketing campaigns. There are five statements included in the scale, which were modified to better fit the Twitter format.

Participants were asked to rate their agreement on a 5-point Likert scale with each statement. Four statements indicate a positive attitude toward the content. The fifth, which represented a negative attitude, was reverse coded in the analyses. The full scale can be found in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Attitude Toward Stimuli Scale*

Item	Strongly Disagree					Strongly Agree
1. This tweet is fun.	1	2	3	4	5	5
2. This tweet is very boring. <sup>a</sup>	1	2	3	4	5	5
3. This tweet is interesting.	1	2	3	4	5	5
4. Reading this tweet is an enjoyable experience.	1	2	3	4	5	5
5. This tweet is exciting.	1	2	3	4	5	5

<sup>a</sup>This item was reverse-coded.

*Demographics*

Demographic data, including age, gender, education, and income, were also collected. An additional variable, political ideology, was measured by asking which political party participants most identify with, Republicans, Democrats, or neither. Those who identify with a party were asked to rate the strength of their party allegiance, while those that signal no affiliation will be asked to identify which party they feel closest to.

**Experiment Design**

Prior to the experiment itself, a pre-test was conducted to determine what issues the sample population cared most about, if separate samples were necessary for those of opposing political ideologies, if the sample content was realistic, and whether each sample tweet was equally informative and/or entertaining as its counterparts. For each issue included in the pre-

test, three sample posts were created: one video, one photo, and one text-only tweet. The samples each contained the same message and information. Sample tweets can be found in Appendix C.

To determine issue importance, participants were asked to indicate, on a 5-point Likert scale, how much they care about an issue. A “1” indicated that the participant did not care about the issue at all, a “3” indicated that they care about the issue but cared about other issues more, and a “5” indicated that a specific issue is the most important to them of all. The political ideology scale listed above to determine respondents’ ideologies. This information was used to determine if one set of sample tweets would be equally relevant to people on different sides of the political divide, or if the main study ought to use different tweets for participations from different political parties. Prior research has shown that since people tend to follow those with similar characteristics, the political content they are exposed to, whether intentionally or incidentally, will most often reflect their own political ideology (Karnowski et al., 2017, Lane et al., 2017). Additionally, those that are politically interested and intentionally seek out (i.e., follow) political content creators on Twitter will curate their feeds to their own ideologies and tastes (Lane et al., 2017). However, pre-test data showed that this was ultimately unnecessary, as there were no significant differences in how respondents of differing political leanings reacted to the experimental tweets.

The pre-test data made it possible to identify an issue that the sample population indicated was most important to them, which was considered realistic, and which did not vary by format (i.e., text, image, video) in terms of attitudes. This was important because one goal of the main experiment was to identify whether tweet format, on its own, would affect intentions to engage with the tweet.

The issue that was chosen was voting rights. The sample content was derived from a post by the Rock the Vote organization and contained information on the Youth Voting Rights Act.

Like the pre-test, the experimental survey was distributed through Prime Panels. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three groups. After filling out demographic information, participants were shown three tweets, one of each format. Only one tweet in each set contained the issue content determined by the pre-test. The other two were controls, simulating non-political tweets that one may see on their own Twitter feed. These tweets were all taken from various “Best Tweets of the Week” articles published by BuzzFeed. These can be found in Appendix C. Those in group “A” saw the text-only stimuli, those in group “B” the photo, and those in group “C” the video.

To evaluate the tweets, each participant was asked questions regarding their attitudes toward the content and what their intentions to engage with the post would be on their own timelines. Engagement included how likely they were to (1) read/watch the content of the tweet, (2) like the tweet, (3) “retweet” the tweet, (4) reply to the tweet, (5) share the tweet on another platform, such as Facebook, Instagram, text message, etc., (6) indicate that they are “not interested in this tweet” so as not see similar tweets in the future, (7) follow the source of the tweet, (8) mute the source of the tweet, (9) block the source of the tweet, (10) report the tweet or (11) talk about the tweet offline.

### **Pre-Test Results**

There were no statistically significant differences found between pre-test respondents’ intention to engage with or attitude toward the experimental “voting rights” tweets in the pre-test. Due to this, and the fact that evaluations towards that set of tweets were positive overall, regardless of political affiliation, this set was used the main study.

Because the goal of this study was to identify differences based on the message format (i.e., media) used in political tweets, repeated-measures ANOVAs were used to make sure the

voting rights tweets did not differ in terms of how interesting, entertaining, informative, or realistic they were. There was no significant difference between the three formats (text, image, video) in terms of how interesting they were,  $F(2, 55) = 1.34, p = .27$ , or how entertaining they were,  $F(2, 55) = .01, p = .99$ . Furthermore, there was no significance difference in how informative the formats were,  $F(2, 55) = 1.22, p = .30$ , or how realistic they were perceived to be,  $F(2, 55) = 2.41, p = .10$ .

### **Respondent Profile**

The experiment was distributed via Prime Panels. A total of 228 responses were collected. One was discarded, as the birth year of the respondent was not given, and so it was impossible to determine if that person was a member of the sample population.

Of the 227 remaining respondents, 71.4% ( $n = 162$ ) were born between 1981 and 1996, and were therefore categorized as Millennials. The other 28.6% ( $n = 65$ ) were born between 1997 and 2004, and were identified as Gen Z. Respondents self-identified both their race and gender. Most respondents identified as female (59.5%,  $n = 136$ ), while 36.6% ( $n = 83$ ) identified as male, and 3.5% ( $n = 8$ ) as neither male nor female. Respondents' racial identities and levels of education can be found in Tables 4 and 5.

**Table 4**

#### ***Respondent Race (Self-Identified)***

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
White	148	65.2	65.2
Black	43	18.9	84.1
Native American	4	1.8	85.9
Asian	9	4.0	89.9
Other/Multiracial	20	8.8	98.7
Prefer not to say	3	1.3	100.0

**Table 5*****Respondent Education (Self-Reported)***

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Some high school or less	13	5.8	5.8
High school diploma or GED	62	27.7	33.5
Some college, but no degree	47	21.0	54.5
Associates or technical degree	23	10.3	64.7
Bachelor's degree	50	22.3	87.1
Graduate or professional degree (MA, MS, MBA, PhD, JD, MD, DDS, etc.)	27	12.1	99.1
Prefer not to say	2	.9	100.0

*Note.* Three respondents did not answer this prompt. The percentages are therefore calculated where  $n = 224$ .

Respondents were also asked about their political affiliation. Nearly twice as many identified as a Democrat (37.9%,  $n = 46$ ) as did Republican (20.3%,  $n = 46$ ). However, a plurality (41.9%,  $n = 95$ ) did not identify with either party, instead indicating that they were independent, aligned with a third party, or had no party preference. This is consistent with past observations of the sample population's political affiliations (Abrams, 2021). Those that did align with either Democrats or Republicans were asked to indicate whether they would consider themselves a "strong" or "not very strong" member of their chosen party. Most Democrats (69.4%,  $n = 59$ ) identified as "strong," as did 56.5% ( $n = 26$ ) of Republicans. Those who did not align with either major party were asked which party they considered themselves closest to; 62.1% ( $n = 41$ ) said Democrat, and 37.9% ( $n = 25$ ) said Republican.

## **Results**

After reviewing existing literature on media richness and social media use in politics, this study hypothesized that: (H1) video tweets would have higher engagement than photo or text-only tweets, while (H2) photo tweets would have higher engagement than text-only tweets but lower engagement than video tweets. The study also examined how both offline political

participation (RQ1), online political activity (RQ2), and audience attitudes towards content related to engagement with political tweets.

A one-way ANOVA was used to verify that overall attitude toward the three experimental tweets (text, image, and video) did not vary significantly; see table 6. The responses for (1) offline political participation, (2) online political activity, (3) attitude towards the experimental tweets, and (4) intent to engage with the experimental tweets were combined into scales representing each of the four variables. For scales with a Cronbach’s alpha below .7, the individual items within the scale were examined, and those that were negatively impacting scale reliability were removed. See Table 4 below for more information.

**Table 6**

*Intention to Engage by Format*

Item	Mean ( <i>M</i> )	Standard Deviation ( <i>SD</i> )
Experimental Text Stimuli	3.11	.54
Experimental Photo Stimuli	3.19	.52
Experimental Video Stimuli	3.24	.66

**Table 7**

*Scale Means and Reliability Statistics*

Scale	Mean ( <i>M</i> )	Standard Deviation ( <i>SD</i> )	Cronbach’s Alpha ( $\alpha$ )
Offline Political Participation	3.41	1.74	.91
Online Political Participation	3.33	1.95	.98
Attitude Toward Stimuli	3.35	.072	.81

A multiple regression model was used to determine whether post format, offline political participation, online political participation, or attitude toward the content predicted higher



engagement with the experimental tweets. The overall regression model was a statistically significant predictor of intention to engage with the political tweets ( $R^2 = .54$ ,  $F(4, 222) = 65.70$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

### Multiple Regression Model

**Table 8**

#### *Linear Regression Model*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	95% <i>CI</i>		<i>p</i>
				<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>	
Constant	1.329	.143		1.046	1.611	.000
Offline Political Participation	-.026	.029	-.078	-.082	.031	.375
Online Political Participation	.092	.026	.313	.040	.144	<.001
Attitude Toward Stimuli	.457	.043	.569	.372	.543	<.000
Tweet Format	.051	.033	.071	-.014	.115	.122

*Note: N = 227*

While the results of the experiment did show a slight increase in engagement between text ( $M = 3.11$ ,  $SD = .54$ ) and photo ( $M = 3.18$ ,  $SD = .52$ ) stimuli, and photo to video ( $M = 3.24$ ,  $SD = .66$ ), the regression model showed that medium was not a statistically significant predictor of engagement ( $\beta = .071$ ,  $p = .122$ ). Therefore, H1 and H2 were not supported.

Higher levels of offline political participation were found to not have a significant effect on engagement with political Twitter content ( $\beta = -.078$ ,  $p = .375$ ). However, higher scores in online political participation were shown to have a significant, positive effect on engagement ( $\beta = .313$ ,  $p = .001$ ). Finally, respondents' overall attitudes towards the experimental tweets (e.g., how interesting, informative, etc. the tweets were) were a significant predictor of increased engagement ( $\beta = .569$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

## **Discussion**

This thesis examined factors that affect young adults' engagement with political content on Twitter. As younger generations continue to grow in their ability to wield political power (Igielnik et al., 2021), it will be increasingly important for political communicators to be able to communicate with them effectively. As these generations are much more likely than those that precede them to be frequent social media users, efficient use of these platforms will be vital to winning the votes and support of millennials and Gen Z. The results of this study show that people born between 1981 and 2004 are more likely to engage with political tweets when they already have a history of online political activism and if they have positive attitudes toward the content of the tweets. However, their engagement is not affected in any significant way by the format of the content, nor by their previous offline political activities. This section discusses the theoretical and practical implications of these findings.

### **Theoretical Implications**

The results of this study show that for purely informational political social media content, richer media are not necessarily superior to leaner media. Translating the same information from some simple text to a more dynamic video only marginally (i.e., not significantly) improved respondents' intent to engage with our experimental stimuli. This is in line with Daft & Lengel's (1986) position that the richness required for a specific medium should match the requirements of the situation and Lee and Yu's (2020) results on political social media. The appeal of the stimuli in this study was purely informational, or rational. It did not try to provoke any emotions from its audience, simply to relay information. This makes the results consistent with those from Chen et al. (2020) and Lee et al. (2020)—the message did not require emotional or persuasive elements, simply the facts. If the purpose of a message is simply to disseminate information, the

additional stimuli of a richer medium are not necessary. One does not need to be presented with a grand spectacle just to find out the elements of a bill, whether a law was passed, or an election won. However, messages that did require an emotional or persuasive appeal may require a richer medium. This is discussed more in depth further on.

These results are also in line with Heiss et al.'s (2019) Social Media Political Participation Model, in that a link was found between intention to engage with political social media content and online political participation. However, contrary to all three pathways to political participation discussed earlier (Heiss et al., 2019; Kim & Ellison, 2021; Shahin et al., 2020), no link was found between offline political activity and political social media engagement. Within the sample, offline activity did not impact social media engagement. The data seem to be in opposition to research such as Lee & Xenos (2020), which posits that it is the higher effort offline political activity that is the greater predictor of online engagement.

However, the present results lend support to the peripheral elaboration model. The main factor within the peripheral elaboration model that determines whether a person goes through the process of elaboration is their subjective evaluation of the message itself. In our results, a positive attitude toward the experimental stimuli was a major predictor of respondents' intention to engage with the content. Though the model does suggest that there is a greater effect when political content is encountered intentionally, it also posit a connection between incidental exposure and increased online political participation. This is also supported by the finding that while *online* participation increased intention to engage, offline participation did not. It is therefore possible that the habits associated with offline activism do not necessarily translate to online activism among those young enough to be very familiar with the online space. It is

possible that the gratifications received from online versus offline activism differ enough that someone who enjoys one may not enjoy the other.

### **Practical Implications**

The study results show that the medium, or format, of the tweet does not matter on its own—it is the message of the content itself, and the attitude viewers have towards that content, that affect how engaging the content will be. To improve content, political actors should prioritize the quality of their message, not the medium through which it is delivered. Investing time and resources into turning a message into a flashy photo or video will not guarantee higher engagement. There is no shortcut to being interesting and engaging with young voters.

However, the results seem to be at odds with the current direction of social media. With the overnight success of the short-form video platform TikTok, other sites have been quick to replicate the model (e.g. YouTube Shorts, Instagram Reels, etc.). However, according to the present results, rich video content may not be ideal for spreading political messages. But if the trend towards video content continues, and these platforms displace more traditional social media like Facebook and Twitter, political actors will have to learn how to successfully adapt their messages to the new standard social media formats.

### **Limitations**

There were several limitations to our research. The sample tweets about the Youth Voting Rights Act were used here because those were the stimuli that were most appealing to the pre-test sample, regardless of political affiliation. It is possible that a more provocative set of tweets could have generated higher levels of engagement, but the goal was to focus on the format of the tweet, rather than the content. The results could also have been skewed by the fact that only one

political issue was tested. Had the experiment used several different issues, it could have examined how different issues affected engagement throughout different formats.

The timing was also less than ideal. Only a month before the main experiment, Elon Musk finalized his multi-billion-dollar purchase of Twitter. In the coming weeks, the eccentric entrepreneur began to make many changes to the platform, which prompted many left-wing users to abandon the platform, while many right-wing users rejoined (Tiffany, 2022). It is possible that the present results were affected by the changes in people's evaluations of Twitter as a platform. Also, the experiment was conducted just after a midterm election that featured several high-profile, contentious races. As a result, participants could have been experiencing political burnout, negatively impacting their intention to engage with political content.

Another limitation was our video stimulus. While it did feature animation and audio, it was less rich than many videos on social media. A richer video, which featured narration and footage of actual people, may have performed better than the one we selected.

Finally, the sample was self-selected. While using a platform like Prime Panels allowed respondents who do not fit the study criteria to be filtered out, there may still have been some effects of self-selection bias. However, because participants were randomly assigned to one of three groups, any differences between participants was controlled.

The sample was also overwhelming white and female, and with a pronounced Democratic lean. A sample with a more even demographic and ideological distribution may have provided more insight as to how different populations interact with political content in different ways.

## **Directions for Future Research**

More extensive research using more varied methods may offer more insight than can be provided here. Studies where a more realistic social media environment can be simulated may reveal deeper insights about how people actually engage with organically encountered social media content. As discussed above, a wider range of issues within experimental stimuli may also reveal further insights into how various levels of media richness impact engagement with various political topics. For example, increased media richness may indeed enhance engagement with more emotional political topics, rather than purely informational messages.

## **Conclusion**

This research has sought to discover how post format (i.e. text, photo, or video) affects how members of the youngest voting-age generations—millennials and Gen Z—engage with political content on social media, and how their past political participation as well as their attitudes towards individual posts affect their intentions to engage. The study hypothesized that formats with higher levels of media richness would produce higher engagement. Through an experimental survey, it was determined that neither increased media richness nor past offline political activity had a significant effect on engagement levels. However, a history of online political participation, and a positive attitude towards political content *did* predict higher intention to engage. These results suggest that political actors should focus on refining their message to appeal to a politically interested online audience, rather than attempt to appeal to the masses with a flashy photo or video.

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## Appendix A: Pre-Test Survey Items

### Questions regarding political issues:

Please indicate how **interested** you are in the following political issues.

*Scale: Not at all interested---Slightly interested---Moderately interested---Very interested---Extremely interested*

1. Climate Change
2. Student Loan Debt
3. The Economy
4. Healthcare
5. War in Ukraine
6. Gun Control
7. Voting Rights

Please indicate how **important** the following political issues are to you.

*Scale: Not important at all---Of little importance---Of average importance---Very important---Absolutely essential*

1. Climate Change
2. Student Loan Debt
3. The Economy
4. Healthcare
5. War in Ukraine
6. Gun Control
7. Voting Rights

### Questions regarding political issues:

Please read the above text tweet in its entirety and indicate your reactions below (the following questions were asked for each of the 6 sample text tweets).

*Scale: Strongly disagree---Disagree---Neither agree nor disagree---Somewhat agree---Strongly agree*

1. This tweet is interesting.
2. This tweet is entertaining.
3. This tweet is informative.
4. This tweet looks like something I might see on Twitter.

Please view the above photo tweet in its entirety and indicate your reactions below (the following questions were asked for each of the 6 sample photo tweets).

*Scale: Strongly disagree---Disagree---Neither agree nor disagree---Somewhat agree---Strongly agree*

1. This tweet is interesting.
2. This tweet is entertaining.
3. This tweet is informative.
4. This tweet looks like something I might see on Twitter.

Please view the above video tweet in its entirety and indicate your reactions below (the following questions were asked for each of the 6 sample video tweets).

*Scale: Strongly disagree---Disagree---Neither agree nor disagree---Somewhat agree---Strongly agree*

1. This tweet is interesting.
2. This tweet is entertaining.
3. This tweet is informative.
4. This tweet looks like something I might see on Twitter.

### Demographic Questions

What is your birth year?

*Available answers ranged from 1981-2002*

How do you describe yourself?

1. Male
2. Female
3. Non-binary/third gender
4. Prefer to self describe
5. Prefer not to say

Choose one or more races that you consider yourself to be

1. White or Caucasian
2. Black or African American
3. American Indian/Native American or Alaska Native
4. Asian
5. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
6. Other
7. Prefer not to say

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

1. Male
2. Female
3. Non-binary/third gender
4. Prefer to self describe
5. Prefer not to say

Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, and Independent, or something else?

1. Republican
2. Democrat
3. Independent
4. Other
5. No preference

Would you call yourself a strong Republican or a not very strong Republican? (*Shown only to those who answered "Republican"*).

1. Strong
2. Not very strong.

Would you call yourself a strong Democrat or a not very strong Democrat? (*Shown only to those who answered "Democrat"*).

1. Strong
2. Not very strong.

Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican or Democratic Party (*Shown only to those who answered neither "Republican" or "Democrat"*).

1. Republican
2. Democrat

Here is a 7-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal (left) to extremely conservative (right). Where would you place yourself on the scale?

1. ←---1---2---3---4---5---6---7---→





## Appendix B: Experimental Survey Items

### Demographic Questions

What is your birth year?

*Available answers ranged from 1981-2002*

How do you describe yourself?

6. Male
7. Female
8. Non-binary/third gender
9. Prefer to self describe
10. Prefer not to say

Choose one or more races that you consider yourself to be

8. White or Caucasian
9. Black or African American
10. American Indian/Native American or Alaska Native
11. Asian
12. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
13. Other
14. Prefer not to say

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

6. Male
7. Female
8. Non-binary/third gender
9. Prefer to self describe
10. Prefer not to say

Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, and Independent, or something else?

6. Republican
7. Democrat
8. Independent
9. Other
10. No preference

Would you call yourself a strong Republican or a not very strong Republican? (*Shown only to those who answered “Republican”*).

3. Strong
4. Not very strong.

Would you call yourself a strong Democrat or a not very strong Democrat? (*Shown only to those who answered “Democrat”*).

3. Strong
4. Not very strong.

Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican or Democratic Party (*Shown only to those who answered neither “Republican” or “Democrat”*).

3. Republican
4. Democrat

Here is a 7-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal (left) to extremely conservative (right). Where would you place yourself on the scale?

2. ←---1---2---3---4---5---6---7---→

Stimuli Evaluation Questions:

Please read the above text tweet in its entirety and indicate your reactions below.

Using a 5 point scale, indicate how likely you are to take the following actions after seeing the above tweet on your feed.

Scale: *Strongly disagree---Disagree---Neither agree nor disagree---Somewhat agree---Strongly agree*

1. I would read/watch the content of this tweet.
2. I would “like” this tweet.
3. I would “retweet” this tweet.
4. I would “reply” to this tweet.
5. I would share this tweet to another platform (i.e. other social media, email, text message, etc.).
6. I would hit “not interested in this tweet” to not see tweets like this on my feed in the future.
7. I would follow the source of this tweet.

8. I would mute the source of this tweet.
9. I would block the source of this tweet.
10. I would report this tweet.
11. I would talk about this tweet offline.

Using a 5 point scale, indicate your reactions to the above tweet.

*Scale: Strongly disagree---Disagree---Neither agree nor disagree---Somewhat agree---Strongly agree*

1. This tweet is fun.
2. This tweet is very boring.
3. This tweet is interesting.
4. Reading this tweet is an enjoyable experience.
5. This tweet is exciting.

Please view the above photo tweet in its entirety and indicate your reactions below.

Using a 5 point scale, indicate how likely you are to take the following actions after seeing the above tweet on your feed.

*Scale: Strongly disagree---Disagree---Neither agree nor disagree---Somewhat agree---Strongly agree*

1. I would read/watch the content of this tweet.
2. I would “like” this tweet.
3. I would “retweet” this tweet.
4. I would “reply” to this tweet.
5. I would share this tweet to another platform (i.e. other social media, email, text message, etc.).
6. I would hit “not interested in this tweet” to not see tweets like this on my feed in the future.
7. I would follow the source of this tweet.
8. I would mute the source of this tweet.
9. I would block the source of this tweet.
10. I would report this tweet.
11. I would talk about this tweet offline.

Using a 5 point scale, indicate your reactions to the above tweet.

*Scale: Strongly disagree---Disagree---Neither agree nor disagree---Somewhat agree---Strongly agree*

1. This tweet is fun.
2. This tweet is very boring.
3. This tweet is interesting.
4. Reading this tweet is an enjoyable experience.
5. This tweet is exciting.

Please view the above video tweet in its entirety and indicate your reactions below.

Using a 5 point scale, indicate how likely you are to take the following actions after seeing the above tweet on your feed.

*Scale: Strongly disagree---Disagree---Neither agree nor disagree---Somewhat agree---Strongly agree*

1. I would read/watch the content of this tweet.
2. I would “like” this tweet.
3. I would “retweet” this tweet.
4. I would “reply” to this tweet.
5. I would share this tweet to another platform (i.e. other social media, email, text message, etc.).
6. I would hit “not interested in this tweet” to not see tweets like this on my feed in the future.
7. I would follow the source of this tweet.
8. I would mute the source of this tweet.
9. I would block the source of this tweet.
10. I would report this tweet.
11. I would talk about this tweet offline.

Using a 5 point scale, indicate your reactions to the above tweet.

*Scale: Strongly disagree---Disagree---Neither agree nor disagree---Somewhat agree---Strongly agree*

1. This tweet is fun.
2. This tweet is very boring.
3. This tweet is interesting.
4. Reading this tweet is an enjoyable experience.
5. This tweet is exciting.

## Appendix C: Experiment Stimuli

Figure 1

### *Experimental Text Stimuli*



The image shows a screenshot of a tweet from the account "Rock the Vote" (@RockTheVote). The tweet text is as follows:

What to know about the Youth Voting Rights Act

- Expands Voter registration at public colleges
- Allows pre-registration to vote before turning 18
- Prohibits durational residency requirement for federal elections
- Student IDs meet voter-identification reqs.
- Gathers data on youth registration & election participation



1:00 PM · Aug 18, 2022 · HeyOrca

9 Retweets 17 Likes


Below the text are four icons: a speech bubble (reply), a circular arrow (retweet), a heart (like), and a square with an upward arrow (share).


Figure 2

*Experimental Photo Stimuli*


 **Rock the Vote**   
@RockTheVote ...

## What you should know about **The Youth Voting Rights Act**







Expand Voter registration at public colleges and universities




Allow young people in every state to pre-register to vote before turning 18



Prohibit durational residency requirements for all federal elections



Guarantee that states accept student IDs to meet voter-identifications requirements



Gather data on youth voter registration and election participation

1:00 PM · Aug 18, 2022 · HeyOrca

---

9 Retweets 17 Likes

---







Figure 3

*Experimental Video Stimuli*



8:45 PM · Sep 27, 2022 · PubHub by BuzzFeed

89 Retweets 12 Quote Tweets 551 Likes





**Figure 3**

*Control Text Stimuli*



**Soren A Eleven Y** 🍷📺❤️  
@uxnotyoux



Them: your pets are spoiled

Me: they are competitively compensated for the user experience they provide

5:17 PM · Jul 7, 2022 · Twitter for iPhone



**16.9K** Retweets   **459** Quote Tweets   **127.2K** Likes



Figure 4

Control Photo Stimuli



9:30 AM · Jul 20, 2022 · Loomly

23.1K Retweets 773 Quote Tweets 137.5K Likes



Figure 4

*Control Photo Stimuli*



## **VITA**

Melanie Stolze was born October 27, 1996, in Los Angeles, California. After graduating from Carroll Senior High School, she attended Tarrant County College for two years before transferring to Texas Christian University to complete her bachelor's degree in Strategic Communication. She graduated in 2019. In 2020, she enrolled in the Master's program at TCU. She has worked as an intern in a law office, AD/PR agencies, and a congressional campaign, as well as in a teaching assistantship at TCU. She is also a member of her local chapter of the League of Women Voters.

Melanie will receive a Master of Science in Strategic Communication in the winter of 2022.

