

A Practice-Based Approach to Online Participation: Young People’s Participatory Habitus as a Source of Diverse Online Engagement

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Based on comparative qualitative research with 14- to 25-year-olds in Italy and the UK, this study draws on Bourdieu’s theory of practice and culturalist perspectives on citizenship, and situates participation as a socially embedded, contingent online/offline practice that is shaped by the interrelation between participatory habitus, differential access to resources, and the political context. Young people’s diversity is manifested in their different vocabularies of participation, which include a vocabulary of (a) citizenship orientations, (b) citizenship practices, and (c) digital engagement. Based on vocabularies of participation, 5 participatory habitus were identified: the legitimate, the critical, the alternative, the radical antagonist, and the excluded. Each participatory habitus is produced by different combinations of resources and political experiences, and in turn shapes how young people participate on- and offline.

Keywords: young people, Internet, participation, social media, participatory habitus

Research into youth political participation has shown that although young people’s involvement in electoral politics is declining, they engage in a more diverse range of participatory practices (Bennett, 2008; Loader, 2007). Consequently, scholars have argued that a paradigm shift has occurred in participation patterns, from conventional political participation toward lifestyle politics (Giddens, 1991; Vromen, Loader, & Xenos, 2015) and an emerging civic style, namely, “actualizing citizenship,” which has replaced the traditional “dutiful” style (Bennett, 2008).

These civic patterns represent two ideal types that are deemed to differ in terms of communication and action repertoires, information styles, and civic skills. Whereas the “dutiful citizen” engages in public life out of a sense of personal duty and through the mediation of organized groups (parties, unions, etc.), the “actualizing citizen” favors a personalized, expressive engagement in lifestyle-related issues, loose modes of affiliation, and repertoires of individualized action (Bennett, 2008, 2012;

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Bennett, Wells, & Freelon, 2011). Moreover, in the dutiful style, becoming informed about public issues and government communications is conceived of as part of being a good citizen. However, a one-way, top-down communication process where information is sourced from authoritative media and political sources, and where interpretation is framed by group belonging, is favored. Conversely, actualizing citizens tend to actively construct "personally and socially curated information networks" (Wells, 2014, p. 625), that is, personalized repertoires of information sources in which mainstream media outlets and alternative media sources are mixed with young citizens' own experiences and the experiences of their peers, as circulated through (mediated) word of mouth. The reliability of such diverse sources of information is not judged primarily based on their authoritativeness. Rather, it is socially accomplished through interactions. Accordingly, actualizing citizens reject a "purely consumerist orientation to information" (Wells, 2014, p. 624) and expect media platforms to encourage users' participation (Wells, 2015). In this light, the communicative affordances of social media facilitate novel, individualized modes of engagement that are commensurate with the patterns of actualizing citizenship.

Therefore, by placing the relationship between communication, media, and participation at the core of citizenship (Dahlgren, 2009), this body of writing contributes to expanding the notion of participation beyond the "minimalist model" (Carpentier, 2011). It also leads to reframing the issue of youth disengagement as a disconnection between the institutions of representative democracy that promote the dutiful paradigm, on the one hand, and the emerging citizenship practices preferred by younger generations, on the other (Loader, Vromen, & Xenos, 2014).

Nonetheless, portraying youth as a uniform generation adhering to the actualizing civic model risks obscuring the differences among young people and the persistence of social and digital inequalities in their participation. Contrary to such an understanding of youth as a homogeneous category, empirical studies point to the coexistence of old and new grammars of political action (O'Toole & Gale, 2010) and the permanence of a dutiful citizenship style, with the majority of young people still favoring a traditional notion of participation centered around voting (Cammaerts, Bruter, Banaji, Harrison, & Anstead, 2014). In addition, these studies emphasize that the ideal "networked young citizen" (Loader et al., 2014) is actually shaped by the lived experiences of young people. Indeed, social inequalities account for differences among disengaged and engaged young people in terms of political skills and citizenship orientations (Bastedo, 2014; Cammaerts et al., 2014; Wood, 2014), and for their unequal voices in society. Whereas actualizing forms of engagement appear to reduce inequalities of participation based on age and gender, they tend to increase inequalities based on education and socioeconomic status (Quintelier, 2008; Sloam, 2014).

The influence of social inequalities on participation is also manifest when looking at young people's "vocabularies of citizenship," that is, the set of resources that individuals and groups mobilize in the process of understanding participation—and their own potentials for political agency (Lister, Smith, Middleton, & Cox, 2003; Lyson, 2014; Thorson, 2012). The broader the vocabulary of citizenship, the wider the repertoires of civic and political practices one has access to. However, vocabularies are unequally distributed: What Thorson (2012) calls "expansive citizenship vocabularies" (p. 81) are indeed linked to higher educational attainment, meaning that more educated youth can count on a wider variety of resources and repertoires to participate in society.

The idea of young people being universally engaged in online participation has also been questioned, as much as the overall association between creative, interactive uses of social media and participation. Recent studies delimit the positive impact of social media use on youth engagement to specific practices. For example, Gil de Zúñiga (2012) concludes that the consumption of news via social media is an important predictor of on- and offline participatory practices, whereas the frequency of social media use *per se* is not related to citizens' participation. Similarly, Ekström, Olsson, and Shehata (2014) consider the Internet and social media as consisting of distinct spaces—and associated practices—having diverse implications for the political socialization of young people. Drawing on longitudinal data, they observed that youth who are active in the online news space are also more likely to be interested in politics and engage in political talk. Conversely, over time, creative and social interaction spaces have a tendency to draw adolescents' attention from social and political issues.

Whether social media use softens or deepens patterns of political inequality has also been a matter of concern. Xenos, Vromen, and Loader (2014) conclude that although there is a persistent and significant relationship between socioeconomic status and political activity, social media use appears to be indirectly related to softening patterns of political inequality. Other studies, instead, suggest that inequalities in online political participation may result not only from traditional stratification factors (i.e., socioeconomic status and political interest) but also from inequalities in digital literacy (Schols & Jansz, 2014).

Consistent with the acknowledgement of the diversity of young people, the emphasis in this article is on youth's everyday lived experience, which informs their on- and offline participatory practices. I draw on Bourdieu's "theory of practice" (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) as a way to account for differential access to resources that explains young people's different positions along the actualizing–dutiful citizenship continuum. I also argue that shared vocabularies of participation correspond to a shared participatory habitus produced by different combinations of resources and experiences. The analysis of young people's vocabularies presented in this article shows how different online participatory practices relate to diverse offline participation repertoires, and how each combination of on- and offline citizenship practices shapes and is shaped by a distinctive participatory habitus along the dutiful–actualizing spectrum.

Bourdieuian Analyses of Youth Participation

Bourdieu's theory of practice is premised on the notions of field, capital, and habitus, and their dynamic interrelationships. According to Bourdieu (1998), society is composed of distinct social spaces or fields, each structured by its own values and rules, in which social agents interact and struggle depending on their respective position, which is defined by the agent's habitus and capital. Although the three main forms of capital—economic, cultural, and social (Bourdieu, 1986)—only exist and function in relation to the field in which they are produced, the relationship between capital and field is not static. The habitus is produced by the conditionings associated with a particular position in the field and is thus the embodiment of social structures that function as schemata of "*perceptions, appreciations, and actions*" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 83; emphasis in original) regulating practices and thoughts. As such, the habitus engenders practices that are both adapted to the field and reproduce social structures. On the other side, the field is

also shaped and transformed by the practices of those who introduce in the field dispositions acquired outside of its boundaries. The field sets the conditions under which capital and habitus are actualized, or not.

Bourdieu's conceptual triad has already been adopted in studies of youth participation. Marsh, O'Toole, and Jones (2007) emphasize that young people's political experiences are shaped by their belonging to groups—and their associated systems of roles, values and norms—and by their differential access to economic, social, and cultural resources.

Wood's (2014) study of citizenship orientations and practices across four school communities in New Zealand similarly shows how actors in the same field "adhered to a shared habitus of participation that reflected the combined and interrelated social, economic and cultural capital, or 'participatory capital' within a school community" (p. 585). The study also shows how different "participatory habitus" are associated with different positions in the power structure of society. The "participatory capital" shared by students and teachers of advantaged schools is more often awarded with legitimacy and turned into symbolic capital. By contrast, members of the working class or the rural school communities in Wood's study lacked the resources and experiences to access this "elite/global participatory capital." In line with Bourdieu, then, Wood analyzes the habitus of different actors and the distribution of capital within the field to map out the structure of power relations between different positions of individuals and groups in the field itself. Moreover, she emphasizes how young people actively participate in the construction of participatory capital rather than being passive recipients of habitus (Holland, 2009).

That the relationship between habitus and participation is not linear is also the conclusion of McFarland and Thomas's (2006) study of the impact of youth volunteering on future political participation. Following Bourdieu, they argue that "the alignment of experiences and resources with certain fields of activity creates a career structure where participants sense a degree of match/mismatch or inclusion/exclusion" (p. 403). Young people from higher educated and wealthier families benefit from resources and experiences that help them lead youth voluntary associations and become politically active once they are adults. However, notable variations in the extent to which individuals activate their own reserves of resources and experiences exist and can be explained by understanding youth associations as sites of political socialization that are "independent of class background" (McFarland & Thomas, 2006, p. 421).

Similarly, Loader, Vromen, Xenos, Steel, and Burgum (2015) examine the role of students' unions in facilitating the development of the "young citizen habitus." They show that student societies provide young people with the opportunity to experientially engage in relevant participatory practices, and with access to forms of social and cultural capital that will shape their future political participation.

Drawing on prior research adopting and adapting Bourdieu's theory of practice to the study of youth political participation, participatory habitus is here understood as the outcome of social practices generated through interactions in specific social contexts rather than the product of top-down political socialization in which young people are positioned as passive recipients.

Method

The qualitative data presented here were collected in 2015 as part of a wider, mixed methods research project that investigated the relationship between political participation and social media in Europe from the viewpoint of both citizens and political actors, using surveys of adult population, interviews with parties' campaign managers, interviews with young people.

The analysis will focus on interviews with forty 14- to 25-year-olds carried out in Italy and the UK. To examine whether and how online and offline participation varied among young people based on their citizenship vocabularies, the participants were selected through a theoretical sampling to include both dutiful and actualizing citizens. Therefore, participants were recruited among the following categories: (a) members of political parties, students' unions, and other formal opportunities for youth participation (youth parliaments, youth councils, etc.); (b) activists in social movements, students' cooperatives, squats, and Italian "social centers"; (c) volunteers in youth organizations and civil society associations; (d) young entrepreneurs. The last two categories included self-defined "disaffected" young people. In line with a theoretical sampling research design, interviews were collected until a "theoretical saturation" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was reached, that is, until it emerged (a) that in each country participants belonging to the same category showed consistent on- and offline practices and attitudes and (b) that clear cross-country similarities and differences could be identified (see the Appendix).

The interviews were conducted in English (UK) and Italian (Italy), and lasted one hour on average. They were transcribed and analyzed through NVivo, using a combination of inductive and theoretical thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Inductively, three main themes emerged, on which regularities and differences were drawn, and different participatory habitus were identified:

1. Citizenship orientations: young people's own understanding of participation, their political knowledge and values, their civic contribution (individual or collective), their self-positioning in the political field.
2. Citizenship practices: the scale and repertoires of participation.
3. Digital engagement: young people's own understanding of the online world and its participatory potential, which enables certain online activities while inhibiting others.

Analysis

The Legitimate Participatory Habitus

This participatory habitus is distinctive of British interviewees who shared a dutiful civic style, centered around voting and party politics, as Andrew (23 years old) well synthesized: "I think being a member of a party is still . . . I mean, it's probably not, but it is what I think of when you say political participation." Dutiful young citizens in the UK also shared similar political socialization patterns, media

habits, and media literacy. Having grown up in high-cultural-capital families (the economic capital, instead, was more varied), they had also acquired or were pursuing significant institutionalized cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). All were socialized into politics at home, in a context where, ~~every day~~, political talk and the practice of keeping up with news were recognized as part of being a "good citizen."

Outside of the family, their experiences of participation were also similar. Typically, these young citizens were affiliated with political parties, have been involved in parties or other formal opportunities for youth participation (e.g., the UK Youth Parliament) since teenagers, and in political students' societies and students' unions (SU) boards at the university. These experiences provided already well-equipped young individuals with further civic competences, and forms of cultural and social capital that reinforced their central position in the political field ("You can change things so easily in the students' union . . . so having the power to actually really influence things is a privilege" said Sarah, age 21).

The legitimate participatory habitus is characterized by an individual orientation toward legitimized political issues and formal political structures, which is expressed through a combination of dutiful and actualizing civic practices. Their understanding of participation is close to the dutiful citizenship model, placing voting and party politics at the core of democratic participation. However, these interviewees differ from the ideal dutiful citizen; they do not participate out of a sense of personal duty but rather out of personal interest and fulfilment and are interested in issue politics (e.g., gender issues). Also, their participatory habitus is differently actualized: Sarah and Thomas are active in formal political structures that grant them full participation in political processes and decision-making. By contrast, Olivia and Andrew are currently "standby citizens" (Amnä & Ekman, 2014), that is, they are politically informed, stay alert, and are ready and willing to take political action if needed.

In terms of their engagement with the news, they rely on trusted, authoritative news sources such as *The Guardian* and the BBC, thus conforming to what could be labeled as "dutiful information style" (Wells, 2015). Nonetheless, their information practices have changed and have adapted to a mobile, ~~active~~ _lifestyle in which mobile devices and social media play the major role. Especially, in their daily social media practices, the online "news space" seemingly overlaps with the "space of social interaction" (Ekström et al., 2014) and the practice of relational maintenance.

Olivia (22): I have the BBC news app on my phone and whenever I have a moment in the office, when I'm not doing something immediately, I'll flick to it. . . . I get a lot of headlines from Facebook cause I follow all of the newspapers on Facebook. . . . I have BBC, NBC, CNN, *The Guardian*, *Times*, *The Economist*, *New Statesman*, I have every obvious one and they pretty much fill my newsfeed, actually, yeah, and whenever I'm sort of scrolling down the newsfeed, looking at stuff by my friends, it's interspersed with news.

Thanks to their experiences within the SU, the UK Youth Parliament, and/or political parties, they master the operational and communicative competencies required to conduct online campaigns, and they recognize the value of social media for facilitating communication between active members: "Now we've made Facebook pages for our causes, and these group chats that we've done for the UK Youth Parliament are very, very good at keeping communication sort of instantaneous" (Thomas, 16).

However, they were very critical of political discussions on social media, and of online participation when not associated with active engagement in political groups.

The Critical Participatory Habitus

Young Italians who were affiliated with political parties were more diverse in terms of their civic and digital practices compared with their British peers. These young "critical" citizens also adhered to a predominantly dutiful citizenship model centered around the institutions of representative democracy. However, they differed from "legitimate" young citizens for their patterns of political socialization and their attitudes toward political parties. First, their political socialization was not initiated in the family context but was rather autonomous and peer driven, starting during high school or college. Second, they shared a more critical view of party politics because of a generational disconnection that inhibits greater participation of young people within their parties (Sofia, Matteo, Marco), or because of the hybrid political parties they belonged to—parties at the intersection of formal political parties and social movements (Alberto, Francesca, Simone).

Therefore, the reasons for two distinctive participatory habitus among equally dutifully oriented young citizens emerged because of the different configurations of the British and Italian political systems. Both are characterized by a marginalization of young voters and signs of blockages in political parties' interactions with society. In the UK, the first-past-the-post electoral system excludes smaller parties, which tend to be more popular among young voters, and provides major parties with little incentives to engage with the issues that many youngsters care about (Sloam, 2014). In Italy, an average aging political class; the emergence of an antipolitical, postideological style of leadership (Bordignon, 2014); and the presence of an antipolitical and antiparty political party in Parliament (Bordignon & Ceccarini, 2015) variously contribute to deepen the disconnection between politicians and young voters.

As a consequence of their more disillusioned participation in party politics, critical youth's vocabularies revolve around the expression of individual identities despite their belonging to institutionalized groups.

Their information practices are varied but center on authoritative and institutional sources: (Online) newspapers are central in the media diet of Sofia, Marco, Alberto and Simone, whereas Francesca prefers TV news and local newspapers, and Matteo combines all news TV channels and institutional websites. Compared with the legitimate habitus, these young citizens are more critical toward the hybridization of news and relational spaces on social media and more reliant on authoritative sources:

Simone (24): Facebook . . . yes, it's an important source of information, but there's everything there, you can find both the most illuminating comment from the public intellectual and the most idiot thing from some weird guy. So you need to discriminate. . . . With newspapers you are not required to do so. They do it for you. Newspapers tell you, "This is a journalist, so it's worth reading."

Like their legitimate peers, however, these interviewees have been variously involved in online campaigning, both through their personal profiles or the party/candidate profile. Their communicative and digital competences are varied, though. For example, at the age of 19, Marco was part of the campaign staff of a party leader during the 2013 national elections and acquired the civic and digital skills that enabled him to produce and share political content on social media, and moderate heated political discussions. Alternatively, because of his prior involvement in the students' movement and the particular party he belongs to, Alberto has developed critical media literacies that are usually distinctive of "radical antagonists." While acknowledging the advantages of social media for organization and for broadcasting information, he is also cognizant of the commercial nature of the social media platform, and the problematic implications of its political uses:

Alberto (23): It is based on what we call the sharing economy, isn't it? That is, [it is based] on the monetization of social relations, on unpaid labor. So, by using Facebook one validates this business model. Merely by using Facebook, with a page or your own profile, you contribute to this economy.

On the contrary, despite their active engagement in political campaigning on Facebook, Simone, Francesca, Matteo, and Sofia are less confident in their digital skills.

The Alternative Participatory Habitus

Young people adhering to the alternative participatory habitus show consistent socialization patterns, civic orientations, and citizenship practices in both countries, though the specific political issues around which they mobilize are varied. They mostly grew up in highly educated, middle class or upper middle class families, where they have been socialized to actualizing citizenship practices and values. Their life trajectories included early experiences of volunteering and engagement in local communities. As a consequence of these early experiences, their civic orientations combine national/global orientations with a strong sense of belonging to a community. In other words, their current participation practices are embedded in the local community but have national or global ambitions. Matthew, Rebecca, and Amy perceive their participation in housing or organic food students' cooperatives as both a way to participate in their local communities and as a way to promote an alternative lifestyle against capitalism and neoliberal ideology. Marta, Luca, and Tommaso are involved in antimafia and anticorruption movements, or associations against (food) poverty that are locally embedded but have a national scope. Moreover, these "alternative" young citizens share vocabularies of participation that revolve around the expression of a collective "we." Paradigmatic in this respect is Matthew, who, in the course of the same interview, shifts from an individualized vocabulary of citizenship when he speaks of his experience within the SU board to a vocabulary centered on a collective "we-ness" when speaking about the housing coop. This is consistent with the findings of prior practice-based approaches to youth participation that show how the habitus shapes and is shaped by the field (e.g., Loader et al., 2015):

Matthew (22): I was on the board of directors for that, I have been elected and I was also involved in the political campaigning for the organization. So that helped me a lot about campaigning business and ways of organizing within organizations. . . . But as the

cooperatives we are very much autonomous . . . one of the coop's principles is autonomy and independence, so we try to do without these organizations.

Whereas research has shown a positive relationship between early volunteering and dutiful participation in adulthood (McFarland & Thomas, 2006), the alternative participatory habitus leans more toward the actualizing citizenship pole. These young citizens engage in protests, political consumerism, petitions, and DIY citizenship (Hartley, 1999; Ratto & Boler, 2014), without completely rejecting dutiful citizen practices or the collaboration with political institutions at the local and/or national level. In spite of a shared distrust in political parties—perceived as not representing young people's interests—they still value voting as a key channel of participation.

The actualizing style also shapes their information practices, characterized by a combination of online mainstream media outlets, Facebook (where they keep up with news from youth organizations and social movements), and blogs (as sources of alternative, issue-specific news). Their media diets, though, are more the by-product of their social networks rather than of strategic choices. Moreover, interviewees vary in their digital skills and attitudes toward the Internet. Most have moderate digital skills—except for Tommaso and his friends, who designed an app to prevent food waste, that connects NGOs and shops/food retailers. All, however, use social media as effective tools for timely coordination and decision-making, as well as for broadcasting information about events or petitions, thus fostering the horizontal, nonhierarchical structure of these groups.

Rebecca (21): For example, we had a little bit of a thing, 'cause we realized that the rice cakes that we were selling had palm oil in them, and we had a meeting and we were like, "Oh, what can we do?" But we were not many of us at the meeting, so we couldn't really decide right there what we wanted to do. . . . So we saw you can ask questions on Facebook, so we asked, "Shall we sell it, or no?" and that is really a good way of getting more people join the debate, because, really, everybody who buys this food is part of the co-op, because it's nice to have the opportunity to participate.

Tommaso (25): I'm a techno-fan. So, I use Google Drive to organize events and I use Doodle. When we need to talk, paradoxically we don't use WhatsApp but a dedicated platform, Podio, that enables effective exchange of information within the group. So, yes, we are very digital oriented.

The Radical-Antagonist Participatory Habitus

Radical antagonists are truly "networked young citizens" (Loader et al., 2014): They reflexively engage in actualizing citizenship practices enacted through social media networks, and their point of reference is represented by the "global information networked capitalism" (Loader et al., 2014, p. 145) responsible for corrupting the democratic system. Therefore, and contrary to the "alternative" habitus, radical antagonists share a strong dissatisfaction with party politics and the institutions of representative democracy. Their anger stems from a perceived disconnection between democracy as a value and the practice of democracy (see also Cammaerts et al., 2014). Consequently, activists exclusively engage in

DIY and radical citizenship practices, including protests, occupations, and hunting sabotage, which provide them with a strong sense of political efficacy and gratification. However, their civic orientation is far from purely individual, being instead shaped by a strong sense of belonging to collective identities.

As much as they resist the power structures of contemporary democracies, from which they feel excluded, they also share a critical attitude toward mainstream media. Radical antagonists have developed robust critical skills and have strategically constructed sophisticated media diets, based on individual interests and trusted networks.

Alicia (25): Mainstream media's a joke, it's corporate and it just makes me angry. So, where do I get my news. . . . Well you know, you kinda hear about shit! I mean, online usually, from like things that aren't mainstream media. There's problems with that, but there's problems with mainstream media, so you just have to be smart about it. . . . I wouldn't look at just one thing, so even some mainstream media outlets, you can look at.

Their critical skills also include awareness of the so-called algorithmic authority (Lupton, 2015; Rogers, 2013). Namely, they understand that search engines do not provide "raw," "truthful" data, and critically view results of online queries as the outcome of power relations. Issues of privacy and digital veillance (Lupton, 2015) are also addressed by radical antagonists, who express concern for their digital footprint and the ways in which relationships and participatory practices are commodified into a "culture of connectivity" (Van Dijck, 2013). Consequently, they enact tactics of resistance against cybersurveillance (Leistert, 2012) by favoring alternative social media and messaging apps that guarantee end-to-end encryption and higher anonymity:

Alicia (25): You can just get a confirmation bias via a feedback loop, so you've got, you know, I mean, Google perpetuates this. Because you know, when you are searching on Google from your IP address or if you logged on, even worse, you know, the kind of things you click on will end up becoming the things more likely to be at the top. So it's just a confirmation bias; you're looking for what you think the truth is and Google tells you that's what the truth is.

Aurora (25): Textsecure and Surespot are two good messaging apps, based on end-to-end cryptography, which means that two people can exchange messages that can only be decoded by the sender and the receiver. . . . Another helpful tool is Obscurecam, an app for photos and videos. Based on facial recognition techniques, it obscures the face with pixels so that in case of demonstrations you can directly share the photo online while protecting someone's anonymity.

Their greater digital literacy is also expressed in the production of communication. Radical antagonists are "social politics curators" (Thorson, 2014), that is, they are actively engaged in sharing political content on social media (Facebook, Twitter, and blogs) for political campaigning. They are also engaged in citizen journalism and other forms of media activism:

Aisha (20): I also worked for some other activists in Germany. They are an alternative media news network, and I do research with them sometimes. . . . It's, like, we just started, it's like a grassroots thing, we started eight months ago, so we had to learn so many things, like how to contact activists and interviewing them and growing because we started out, like, eight to ten people, now we're like 40.

Aurora (25): last year we launched an app that generates automatic chains of retweets, inspired by the Occupy Wall Street "human megaphone," so that if someone sends a message, everyone replicates it. We launched it on occasion of a national demonstration for housing rights in Rome with the aim to give real-time news and fight the dominant frame of mainstream media.

Moreover, among these interviewees, peer relations are seemingly more influential on political socialization than political talk in the family context or a common socioeconomic background. Recent studies also showed that civic talk with peers is a stronger predictor of political interest and political expression than civic talk with parents (Ekström & Östman, 2015). The contribution of peer relations in the development of political interest and democratic values is related to changes in both the media environment and the conditions of childhood and adolescence (Livingstone, 2009; Pasquier, 2005), whereby the influence of peer and media cultures goes to the detriment of parents' and teachers' authoritative roles. Indeed, the Internet and social media provide marginalized youth with the opportunity to actively develop connections with like-minded individuals and move beyond geographic—and symbolic—restrictions (boyd, 2014):

Aisha (20): To be honest, at my school I was the only vegan and the only person with global views on being bisexual, no LGBT community existed, and if I hadn't had the Internet, where I can actively see people talking, sharing, and caring about these things, I just . . . I think I wouldn't go through it the way I just did it. Because I think the Internet can be a good supportive network if you live in a village or conservative environment and you feel like you are the only one, but that's not true.

The Excluded Participatory Habitus

In both countries, "excluded" young people express high degrees of alienation from politics in combination with a low sense of self-efficacy. Interviewees adhering to this habitus tend to belong to ethnic or other minority groups, and most tend to be from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Civic talk in the family context was rarely part of their political socialization, nor was watching the news with their parents. They also share a narrow understanding of political participation, which, consistent with a dutiful civic orientation, is equated with voting, and as such is only actualized closer to elections:

Deepa (22): I have no interest in, like, politics. The only time I'd ever get interested in some kind of political debate is when it comes to elections. So, for example, for us, I think our general elections are coming up soon, I think, I am not entirely sure [laughing]. This is how much I keep up with it. So when it comes close to the time of the

campaigns, they become a little bit more like "Ok, you guys will be voting soon," I'll be interested then, because I'd be more interested to know what they have to say.

A closer look at their citizenship vocabularies, though, shows how "excluded" young citizens do not express boredom for politics and political news because they are indifferent to any political or social issue. Rather, by avoiding political news, they express a profound form of disaffection with the political game and the political discourse, which they perceive as inaccessible (see also Bastedo, 2014). More specifically, those in their 20s complain about politics being distant from the issues young people care for, and about politicians not addressing them. They also lament their lack of the civic skills and literacies that are required to meaningfully engage with the political discourse. Teenagers' feeling of exclusion, instead, is grounded in their narrow understanding of participation and their ineligibility to vote. Consequently, they claim the right to vote at 16 and wish they were taught more about politics in school. For different reasons, then, both teenagers and young people share a sense of political inefficacy for not being heard, and feel ill-equipped to vote:

Deepa (22): Personally, I just find it really boring. I just find it like three grown men just constantly arguing, arguing, arguing!

Monica (25): We grow up on the streets, not in a well-off home among lawyers, barristers, and the like. I have realized that they use a totally different language from mine.

Emily (15): I think vote at 16 will be more effective because young people have . . . a right to know . . . because young people are the new generation. They are gonna be the ones who are around a lot more. Around for a longer period of time. So they deserve the right to have an opinion on what is happening in their community and their nation.

This attitude toward national politics is also reflected in their information practices: They rely on a limited number of mainstream media sources, prefer the short-news format, and delve deeper only in the news they are more interested in, such as local news or issues that affect young people, like mental health and bullying.

Bethany (14): I only watch the news when I see something, they have an event talking about what these politicians are up to. Or I read, do you know those little, those writing parts at the bottom of the screen when there is news on? I read that sometimes, 'cause it talks about, it summarizes it. 'Cause I find that it's easier to understand when it's a bit summarized.

Sara (14): I don't look for news myself, I read what I bump into. I mean, sometimes I read articles on politics, but I am not very interested in it. I read things my friends share, or about actors and singers, who travel around the world. I am a bit fascinated by that.

However, some "excluded" are actively engaged in youth volunteering associations, especially those aimed at promoting youth's well-being and social inclusion. They are also generally engaged in

creative uses of the Internet: They maintain blogs, write fan fiction, and create videos. Together with radical activists, indeed the “excluded” climb up the “ladder of opportunities” (Livingstone & Helsper, 2007). This finding is consistent with quantitative and longitudinal data showing how engagement in the creative space is not necessarily associated with the development of public orientation and interest in politics (Ekström et al., 2014).

Emily (15): The Internet is a very important part of my life. I spend literally . . . like, 60% of my life on the Internet, 'cause I just find it so much more interesting online . . . that you can do so much more online, than . . . yeah . . . I like reading online, 'cause I have like . . . this website where we can read, people can write stories and we can read them, we can share them with each other. And I like obviously looking at photos, at photography, so I can get inspiration for my own photography. I like YouTube, so you can learn more about people online. I have my YouTube channel, stuff like that . . . it is about me, about my friends. We all, like, do videos together.

Deepa (22): I used to blog as well . . . I didn't have like a specific area that I would spoke about, it was just quite literally “I'm thinking of that today, so let me write about it.”

The habitus of exclusion, though, does not necessarily configure a permanent position in the political field. As it emerged from the analysis of the other citizen habitus, the habitus is the dynamic product of social interactions embedded in specific contexts, and it is likely to change when the field and capitals change too. For example, Gabrielle (24) has grown up in a “laid back” family, where “politics was never really spoken about,” but her sexual identity shaped the conditions for her socialization into a legitimate participatory habitus during college, where she became the SU LGBT officer.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study has argued that a practice-based approach to youth participation provides an analytical framework for thinking of the correspondence between attitudes, practices, skills, and knowledge, and one's position in society. Accordingly, in this study, participation is conceptualized as a socially embedded, and contingent online/offline practice that is shaped by the interrelation between participatory habitus (experiences and attitudes), differential access to resources (as determined by social class, education, ethnicity, and gender), and the political context.

The analysis of youth's vocabularies of participation has shown that young people adhere to different participatory habitus, each characterized by distinctive dispositions regarding (a) citizenship orientations, including orientations toward the institutions of representative democracy; (b) citizenship practices; and (c) digital engagement (as shown in Table 1).

Table 1. Participatory Habitus in Summary.

Participatory habitus	Civic orientation	Civic practices	Major source of political socialization	Information style	Digital participatory practices
Legitimate	National Individual	Dutiful	Home	Hybrid	Information Fundraising (Occasionally) online campaigning
Critical	National Individual	Hybrid	Peers/autonomous	Dutiful	Information Online campaigning
Alternative	Local, national, and global Collective	Hybrid	Home	Actualizing (nonstrategic)	Information Online coordination and decision-making Online campaigning Petitions
Radical antagonist	Local, national, and global Collective	Actualizing	Peers/autonomous	Actualizing (strategic)	Information Online campaigning Petitions Citizen journalism Digital activism
Excluded	Local Individual	Dutiful	Consistent disaffection in both home and peer groups	Dutiful	Creative and recreational User Generated Content (UGC)

Against assumptions of a clear-cut paradigm shift in participatory patterns, the findings show a variety of positions along the actualizing/dutiful continuum, with each habitus combining practices and civic styles of both models, as well as individual and collective agency. In addition to this, and contrary to prior studies (McFarland & Thomas, 2006), “legitimate” and “alternative” young citizens show how volunteering can equally result in standby or DIY citizenship, without necessarily leading to dutiful citizenship in adulthood.

Moreover, youth's vocabularies emphasize the dynamic process through which a habitus is acquired and the codetermination of habitus, field, and capital. Whereas participatory habitus are influenced by both parents' and class's habitus—from which young people draw schemes, experiences, and resources—they are not strictly determined by early socialization. Personal life trajectories concur to inform the habitus in various ways. For example, young people may have been socialized into a specific participatory habitus in a durable way but may lack the opportunities and motivations to activate it later in life, as in the case of some "legitimate" interviewees who are now "standby citizens" (Amnä & Ekman, 2014). Others, instead, have been socialized into collective civic identities and participation practices later in life, during adolescence, and through interactions with peers—as radical antagonists show.

Finally, consistent with prior research showing that the relationship between social media use and youth participation is not linear, the findings highlight the diversity of young people's uses of social media. Those still adhering to a dutiful citizenship model tend to create a hybrid social media space in which news and relational spaces overlap; young activists who engage in on- and offline actualizing citizenship make political uses of social media—including forms of citizen journalism and media activism. By contrast, those who are more politically disenfranchised are actually engaged in a variety of creative uses of social media. Additionally, the data show how young citizens combine different social media platforms in their communication repertoires and engage in diverse communicative spaces that are defined by the specific social and technological affordances of each platform (Schmidt, 2014).

The evidence of different issues of concern among young people in Italy and the UK, and possible variations within the same participatory habitus across countries, suggest that a practice-based approach to youth participation provides a valuable analytical tool for understanding young people's engagement within its sociopolitical context. Therefore, a Bourdieusian approach to the practice of participation also helps identify common patterns across the diversity of individual lived experiences, with young people's belonging to a plurality of social worlds (Lahire, 2011). Such an approach could inform further comparative studies of youth's participation on- and offline.

The findings also have implications for the future of democratic engagement in Western democracies. Although many of young citizens' participatory practices challenge traditional modes of political participation and point to disconnections between young people and party politics, the interviews nonetheless highlight youth's desire to be heard and to participate in society. Therefore, although the right to not participate should be respected (Cammaerts et al., 2014), acknowledging that the experiences of citizenship and the opportunities for engagement are diverse and unequal is vital if we want to establish a new connection between young people and democratic life.

However, this study has some clear limitations. First and foremost, the sample is limited in size and diversity of young people's experiences: All the interviewees are or have been socially and politically engaged. Moreover, most are university students. Therefore, given that education has a strong relationship with participation (Sloam, 2014), we can assume that socioeconomic inequalities, and their influence on both online and offline participation are likely to be minimized by interviewees' educational achievements. At the same time, the fact that most interviewees, especially in the UK, are or have been

university students is consistent with prior evidence that actualizing citizenship practices are stratified along the lines of social and educational inequalities (Sloam, 2014).

Moreover, because the aim was to demonstrate the potentialities of a Bourdieusian approach to youth participation and to identify the main features of each participatory habitus, a systematic comparison of the two political fields, and its implications for youth participation, was beyond the scope of the article. However, major differences between the two countries exist, among which two were especially influential on the empirical data collected: First, in 2015 the UK faced both general elections and Labour leadership elections, whereas only a proportion of Italian citizens were involved in regional elections. Second, young people in the UK are offered more institutionalized opportunities for participation, such as SU and youth parliaments.

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Appendix

Table A1. Participants.

Name ²	Age group	Country	Category	Socioeconomic background	Other relevant information	Participatory habitus
Sofia	20–25	Italy	1-local democratic party (PD)	Middle class		Critical
Tommaso	20–25	Italy	3/4-young entrepreneur and volunteer against food poverty	Upper middle class		Alternative
Aurora	20–25	Italy	2-media activist and "social center"	Middle class		Radical antagonist
Sara	14–19	Italy	1-youth local council	Lower middle class		Excluded
Marta	20–25	Italy	3-association against mafia and corruption	Middle class		Alternative
Monica	20–25	Italy	3-association for youth participation in deprived urban areas	Lower class	Unemployed	Excluded
Francesca	20–25	Italy	1-candidate in local elections, regionalist movement	Middle class	Lower educated family, region with high presence of regionalists	Critical
Simone	20–25	Italy	1-regionalist movement	Middle class		Critical
Marco	20–25	Italy	1-former member of UDC (Christian party), member of the European Democrat Students network (Edsnet)	Middle class	Originally from a small village in Southern Italy	Critical
Luca	20–25	Italy	3-volunteer, Catholic association against poverty	Middle class		Alternative
Matteo	14–19	Italy	1-local Forza Italia	Middle class	Lower educated family, region with high	Critical

² To guarantee participants' anonymity, names were chosen based on lists of popular names in Italy and the UK for specific years, and for ethnic minorities.

Alberto	20–25	Italy	1-local counsellor SEL (left-wing party)	Middle class	presence of regionalists	Critical
Zoe	14–19	Italy	2-"social center" and students' movement	Middle class	Ethnic minority	Radical antagonist
Micol	20–25	Italy	3-association for young Jews	Upper middle class	Religious minority, but secular family	Alternative
Giorgia	20–25	Italy	4-young entrepreneur	Middle class		Excluded
Paulo	14–19	Italy	1-project on European citizenship in a vocational school	Middle class	Ethnic minority	Excluded
Giulia	14–19	Italy	1-project on European citizenship in a vocational school	Lower class	Single-parent household	Excluded
Susanna	14–19	Italy	1-project on European citizenship in a vocational school	Lower middle class		Excluded
Carlo	14–19	Italy	1-project on European citizenship in a vocational school	Upper middle class	Father is an entrepreneur	Excluded
Elena	20–25	Italy	2-No Borders activist	Middle class		Radical antagonist
Sarah	20–25	UK	1-general secretary SU	Lower middle class	Family lived on benefits	Legitimate
Matthew	20–25	UK	2-students' cooperative	Middle class		Alternative
Bethany	14–19	UK	3-antibullying ambassador	Working class	Ethnic minority	Excluded
Rebecca	20–25	UK	2-students' cooperative	Upper middle class		Alternative
Amy	20–25	UK	2-students' cooperative	Upper middle class		Alternative
Aisha	20–25	UK	2-media activist and students' cooperative	Lower middle class	Ethnic and religious minority, vegan, and LGBT	Radical antagonist

Gabrielle	20–25	UK	1-LGBT officer	Lower middle class		Excluded
Emily	14–19	UK	3-antibullying ambassador	Lower middle class	Single-parent household	Excluded
Myra	14–19	UK	4-young entrepreneur	Middle class	Ethnic and religious minority	Excluded
Deepa	20–25	UK	3-volunteering counsellor for mental health and antibullying	Lower middle class	Ethnic and religious minority	Excluded
Andrew	20–25	UK	1-Labour Party, SU	Upper-middle class	Parents are journalists	Legitimate
Olivia	20–25	UK	3-Amnesty International	Middle class	Father currently unemployed	Legitimate
Alicia	20–25	UK	2-squatter	Middle class	Now homeless	Radical antagonist
Lyla	14–19	UK	3-Amnesty International	Lower middle class	Ethnic and religious minority. Family lived on benefits	Alternative
Dave	20–25	UK	2-Activist, anticuts movement, animal liberation, No Borders	Lower middle class	Currently unemployed, vegan	Radical antagonist
Thomas	14–19	UK	1-UK Youth Parliament	Middle class	Mother is a mature student and a tutor in a teaching university	Legitimate
Gemma	20–25	UK	3-38 Degrees staff	Middle class	Italian, studying in the UK	Alternative
Jessica	20–25	UK	2-students' movement	Middle class		Radical antagonist
Nicholas	20–25	UK	2-students movement	Middle class	Vegan	Radical antagonist
Duncan	20–25	UK	2-students movement	Middle class		Alternative
