It’s time to check your tech:

Twenty Years of Research on the Internet’s Effects

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Copies of my slides available at: http://academic.macewan.ca/bouliannes/
The Internet in a Democratic System

- The Internet provides...
  - Information
  - Connections
  - New opportunities for input/engagement
Patterns of Engagement

Voter turnout in 2014 was the lowest since WWII


Canadian youth lacking in political knowledge

Core Argument

- The Internet is a mechanism for
  
  ◦ **Information**: Reducing knowledge gaps that explain disengagement

  ◦ **Connections**: Building social ties amongst citizens and between citizens and organizations enabling engagement

  ◦ **Opportunities**: Reducing the costs of providing input to govt and providing new opportunities to engage
A Question of Mobilization

- Does the Internet (with its diverse applications) affect citizens’ engagement in civic and political life?

Image source: www.herbertkikoy.infowp-contentuploads201305image_gallery.jpg

http://i.telegraph.co.uk/multimedia/archive/01290/webfist_1290411f.jpg

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A Question of Mobilization

- How can the Internet increase engagement?
  - **Information:**
    - A wider variety of issues
    - Incidental exposure
    - From trusted sources
    - Monitor politics
    - Reduces the effort required to be informed

https://sites.google.com/site/howdigitalresourcescanhelp/personal-needs/online
A Question of Mobilization

- How can the Internet increase engagement?
  - **Connections:**
    - Larger networks
    - Facebook groups and technologies supporting communities
    - Reduces the effort required to connect

A Question of Mobilization

How can the Internet increase engagement?

- **Opportunities:**
  - Communication with govt
  - Provide input to govt through online deliberation
  - Provides new opportunities for political expression
What is the evidence?

- A meta-analysis is a systematic analysis of all quantitative studies in a field

- Value of a meta-analysis:
  - Overcome limitations of any single research design
  - Gets us closer to “the truth”
What is the evidence?

- 90 studies reporting 540 survey estimates of the relationship between Internet use and engagement in civic and political life.
What is the evidence?

- Most of the effects are positive...
Findings

...use of social networking sites is as likely to produce positive effects as other uses of the Internet, but...
What is the evidence?

- The relationship may depend on the specific application.
Summary of Findings

› Twenty years of research demonstrates that the Internet has a positive role to play in civic and political life by:
  
  ◦ Providing information
  
  ◦ Building connections
  
  ◦ Providing new opportunities for input and engagement
Almost all of the studies are based on single-point-in-time surveys asking respondents to recall their Internet use and their past engagement.

- Recall
- Temporal order
- Attribution

http://www.forbes.com/sites/lydiadishman/2014/03/07/retailers-your-surveys-are-making-customers-suffer/
Improving Research

- Studies should consider supplementing survey data with other data sources
- Survey participants at multiple points in time
- Comparative work may help with attribution

**Pretest**

Political Knowledge, Connectedness, Engagement

Introduce Technology

**Posttest**

Political Knowledge, Connectedness, Engagement
Summary

- In a democratic system, the Internet provides citizens with a mechanism for
  - Providing information
  - Building connections
  - Providing new opportunities for input and engagement