

# Bridging the Generational Culture Gap in Youth Civic Engagement through Social Media: Lessons Learnt from Young Designers in Three Civic Organisations

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## ABSTRACT

Youth civic identities and social media practices are changing rapidly, and civic organisations are struggling to exploit the potential of social media to reach youth. One major challenge concerns the generational culture gap between the networked culture of today's youth and the top-down culture characteristic of many civic organisations. This study presents lessons learnt from three cases where young designers (22–26 years) were engaged to develop social media concepts for civic organisations. Drawing on this experience, we present lessons learnt on how design by youth for youth may help to bridge the generational culture gap concerning civic engagement through social media. It is suggested that design may benefit from not only being informed by youth but also created by them. Through the design cases, we contribute to how civic organisations might innovate in their social media approach to better reflect the fast-changing networked youth culture.

## KEYWORDS:

Youth; Social media; Civic Engagement; Generation gap; Design

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## INTRODUCTION

Civic organisations have traditionally played an important part in civic engagement and democracy (Putnam, 2001). However, youth practices of civic engagement are changing from long-term engagement with formal civic organisations – such as political party membership, membership in humanitarian organisations and subscription to newspapers – to short-term engagement in project-based initiatives, such as protest movements and online campaigns on social media (Flanagan & Levine, 2010). While social media are seen as a promising arena for civic organisations to facilitate youth civic engagement (Brandtzaeg, Haugstveit, Lüders, & Følstad, 2015; de Zuniga, 2015; Wells, 2014), civic organisations are struggling to adapt to the changing networked media and civic cultures of young people (Brandtzaeg et al., 2015; Delli Carpini, 2000; Loader, Vromen, & Xenos, 2014).

Recent studies point towards a generational culture gap (Lüders & Brandtzaeg, 2014) and a digital generation gap (Clark, 2009), where youth use and experience social media differently from older people. Educational institutions are struggling to adapt to the current learning practices of digital natives (e.g. Bennett & Maton, 2010; Prensky,

2001). Yet, there is relatively little research on how civic organisations could approach a generation of networked young people immersed in social media such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and SnapChat.

Civic organisations need to innovate to adapt to contemporary youth culture. However, they find it difficult to devise appropriate strategies for civic engagement that are suited to the networked culture of young people (Brandtzaeg et al., 2015; Loader, et al., 2014). Furthermore, the communicative infrastructure within civic organisations may be ill-suited for adapting to the ways in which new forms of civic engagement are enacted and performed. This underlines the need for technology design that is specifically tailored for civic organisations, which might enable these organisations to better adapt to youth civic practices.

In this study, we attempt to explore how civic organisations can better support and design for youth at the age of 16 to 26 years. First, we present our understanding of civic organisations and youth civic engagement. Second, we explore the generational culture gap facing civic organisations' work towards engaging and involving youth in social media. Third, we discuss how young designers can overcome this generational barrier to create

engagement and involvement for young people. Finally, we present three design cases and associated lessons learnt. In the cases, young designers developed new concepts for three Norwegian civic organisations to help them strengthen youth civic engagement through social media.

## BACKGROUND

### *Civic organisations and youth*

In their review of positions on civic engagement, Adler and Goggin (2005) summarise civic engagement as “the ways in which citizens participate in the life of a community in order to improve conditions for others or to help shape the community's future” (p. 236), including various forms of community service, collective action, political action and engagement for social change. Drawing from this, we understand civic organisations to mean formal organisations that enable, strengthen or channel citizens' civic engagement. As such, we use the term in reference to a heterogenous group of organisations, including political parties, media organisations, humanitarian organisations and charities. Although some of these types of organisations may not have civic engagement as their only

aim, such as media organisations, they play a variety of civic roles that are vital to democratic societies in general and civic engagement in particular. The civic roles that such organisations play might include providing a sense of trust and social inclusion among citizens; offering citizens a space to have their voices heard; and providing a venue for community action and social change. Furthermore, civic society is claimed to be more effective when citizens are connected with the civic organisation or institutions that represent them in the democratic process (Putnam, 2001).

While only a few decades ago, civic engagement was closely related to membership in organisations, such as political parties, labour unions, or community groups, there is currently a trend towards increasing individualisation, supported by new technologies (Wellman, Haase, Witte, & Hampton, 2001), where youth are attentively forming their personal identities through informal social networks rather than formal civic organisations (Wellman et al., 2001: 437). This individualisation may be seen in the increasing uptake of personalised and self-actualising forms of civic engagement (Loader, et al., 2014).

Traditional civic practices such as union membership, newspaper readership, interactions with

political parties and engagement in community projects, have seen a marked decline in the United States over the last few decades (Delli Carpini, 2000; Flanagan & Levine, 2010; Putnam, 2001). Similar trends have been seen in Europe, where youth are found to turn away from traditional political parties and rather engage in project-oriented protest movements (Sloam, 2014). Likewise, media organisations have seen a shift in engagement, where youth move towards social media to access news rather than engaging with news in newspapers (American Press Institute, 2015).

#### The generational culture gap

A striking aspect of youth media practices is that these are no longer restricted in time and place. Equipped with smartphones, youth are connected to their media of choice anytime and everywhere. Time spent on the Internet has subsequently increased dramatically in the last decade, particularly for young people between the ages of 16 and 24 years (Statistics Norway, 2014). These changes in media practices and technologies not only affect how youth relate to each other and to civic organisations (de Zuniga, 2015) but also the way in which youth practice civic engagement (de Zuniga, 2015; Wells, 2014). Xenos, Vromen and Loader (2014)

suggested that social media may lower the threshold for civic engagement, in particular for youth.

Loader and colleagues (2014) argued that citizens in general, and youth in particular, are moving away from traditional engagement with mainstream politics, such as voting and membership in political parties and civic organisations. The youth of today seem to prefer forms of engagement that are short term, issue based, informal in character and organised in non-hierarchical networks (Amnå & Ekman, 2014; Marsh, O'Toole, & Jones, 2007).

Current social movements, utilising social media for communication and coordination, may to a greater degree evolve and operate without the formal coordinating structures upon which established civic organisations depend (see e.g. Juris, 2012). In consequence, established organisations aiming at youth civic engagement face significant challenges.

One obvious challenge is that civic organisations do not fully understand youth perspectives and civic practices in relation to social media. The digital communication platforms of these organisations are often designed and developed by digital immigrants, that is, adults who are socialising differently than younger people and are turning to the Internet second rather than first (Prensky, 2001).

Furthermore, the design of such sites is often hampered by top-down approaches based on rigid and traditional ideas about youth civic engagement practices (Bennett, Wells, & Freelon, 2011), and the established civic organisations often use language and content that do not reflect the interests of youth (Brandtzaeg et al., 2015). In consequence, youth often view the design of the websites of public services and civic organisations as dull, inauthentic and irrelevant (Brandtzaeg et al., 2015; Delli Carpini, 2010). This accentuates the need for social media design that is specifically tailored for the young people targeted by civic organisations; in particular, such design must be adapted to the identities and cultures of the youth and to the specific contexts where civic practices are carried out.

The above discrepancy between the needs and desires of youth concerning social media and civic engagement and formal civic organisations' challenge in understanding and meeting the same needs and desires may be seen as a generational culture gap (Lüders & Brandtzaeg, 2014), that is, a divide between generations with regard to their understanding of and integration within a networked culture (e.g. Prensky, 2001). The concept of a generational culture gap helps us to explore the complex interrelations between youth and civic or-

ganisations, as well as generational differences in media habits and new forms of civic engagement and identity formation.

At the same time, it should be acknowledged that generations are not homogenous groups, and youth in particular ought to be seen as a heterogeneous social group including individuals of varying levels and forms of interest and engagement both in a networked culture and in civic engagement through social media. Young people use social media differently and have different preferences (for critiques of the notion of digital natives see, for example, Bennett & Maton, 2010; Helsper & Eynon, 2010). Yet, there are some common generational characteristics amongst youth in Western countries that might advance our understanding youth civic engagement and use of social media, as today's 16- to 26-year-olds represent a major generational shift in the ways they communicate and network online.

#### Designing for youth civic engagement

The success of strategies and solutions aimed to strengthen youth civic engagement will be affected by how they are designed. Many of these are intended to nudge citizens into changing their civic behaviour. In this regard, well-executed design

may provide citizens with a choice architecture (John, Smith, & Stoker, 2009) that strengthens their incentive or lowers the threshold for civic engagement. Design can be used strategically, for example, to set users' expectations, increase user motivation, provide a sense of self-efficacy and build reputation. Others have discussed the particular importance of designing for user visibility, efficiency of feedback channels and low thresholds for entry, as well as accessibility, usability and privacy (Brandtzaeg & Heim, 2009; Kim, 2000; Kollock, 1998). Moreover, research in the field of online political debate shows that the forms through which civic engagement are expressed may strongly depend on the design of online engagement platforms (Stromer-Galley & Wichowski, 2011). For example, the usefulness of nurturing opposing voices within a discussion space, as well as connecting between different discussion spaces has been highlighted (Følstad, Johannessen, & Lüders, 2014). Ward (2011) pointed out that online solutions for civic engagement need to be conceived as a direct link of interactive communication between the organisation and the citizen, where the citizen is provided a means for responding to the organisation.

While most civic organisations struggle to gain attention from youth in social media, there are also

some civic organisations that succeed with this. One example is Amnesty International's work to involve young people in online petitions, as well as in more in-depth engagements (Brandtzaeg et al., 2015). Another example is the Norwegian newspaper *Avisa Nordland* (<http://an.no>), which won the World Young Reader Prize in 2013 (<http://www.wan-ifra.org/microsites/world-young-reader-prize>) due to its successful involvement of young readers in the newspaper and its ability to open itself up to local community youth.

Loader and Mercea (2011) argued that social media may facilitate innovative civic communication and dialogue due to its malleable character. To support civic organisations in their efforts to strengthen youth civic engagement through social media, Brandtzaeg and colleagues (2012) proposed a set of design guidelines. These were informed by research on the relationship of youth to social media and civic engagement and highlight the importance of designing for connections, user experience, participation and empowerment, as follows:

*Connections:* Connect to the arenas of the youth. Design for easy sharing and social connections among members and to the participants' networks;

*User experience:* Provide environments that are engaging and informal. Prioritise usability and make sure information and communication is easy to understand;

*Participation:* Support individuals' wish to express themselves and be seen. Facilitate bottom-up deliberation, collaboration and mobilisation; and

*Empowerment:* Respond positively to useful contributions. Give the members ownership and leadership.

In addition to design guidelines and motivational factors for civic engagement, we should be aware that youth civic engagement online involves a variety of different activities, such as writing blog posts, voting on causes and liking on Facebook. In this study, we have therefore chosen a rather broad approach to framing civic engagement in social media that might apply to many types of civic organisations. We understand civic engagement in social media as "action in response to societal needs, in the form of supportive, deliberative, and collaborative practices in social media" (Brandtzaeg et al., 2012, p. 67). It is useful to distinguish between different types of civic engagement in social media – including political, informational, humanitarian

and environmental engagement – as these often entail different behaviours or practices (Brandtzaeg, 2015). The particular type of civic activity should be taken into account when carrying out innovation or design to strengthen youth civic engagement.

### Young designers

Design is about the conception of ideas and the development of their form, structure and function in response to users' needs and desires (Beyer & Holtzblatt, 1997). Designing for civic organisations should be informed by an understanding of the user's needs and desires. When designing for civic engagement among youth, the solutions should take into account the changing nature of youth civic identities on the one hand and youth's networked culture as dominated by informal habits for individualisation, socialising, collaboration and interacting with information through social media on the other.

In this study, one way we tried to achieve this was by inviting students who belong to the same age group as the youth whom the organisations were trying to reach to do the design work. In participatory design, research has explored the role of design within the context of participation and

civic engagement in social media (see, for example, Mainsah & Morrison, 2012). In particular, design approaches where users or citizens are directly involved in the design process are increasingly employed in civic or government change projects (Bradwell & Marr, 2008). However, the possibilities offered by using young people as designers in projects concerning youth civic engagement have not been fully explored so far, often due to a lack of acceptance of young people in such processes (Glumac, 2015).

In the cases presented below, we explore what happens when a design process is not only informed by an understanding of youth culture, but also involves youth playing the role of designers of future solutions for civic engagement. Placing young people and civic engagement at the centre of social media design underlines the need to consider new requirements and features that might be absent from tools intended to serve a more general audience of consumers.

## DESIGN CASES

We present three design cases to examine the role that young designers can play in helping civic organisations to develop arenas for civic engagement through social media. The design work was carried out as part of a series of master's and bachelor's courses in interaction design. Two cases are connected to media organisations, where the design work was part of their efforts aimed at informing young people about civic issues in new ways and encouraging them to participate in public discussions. The third case is about a humanitarian organisation seeking to involve youth in both engagement and support for humanitarian causes.

The first two cases were developed by design students of 22–26 years of age, both male and female, as part of a master's course in interaction design. In the third case, the designers were four 22- to 24-year-old female students attending an undergraduate-level course in interaction design. The young designers chose their projects voluntarily as part of a selection of practical projects related to their courses.

There was a strong rationale for using young design students to develop the design concepts. We

worked on the assumption that young people were better suited than older designers to design for other youth, as they would be more familiar with their social media practices and have an intimate understanding of networked culture and the civic practices of their peers.

### CASE 1: A LOCAL NEWSPAPER

The goal for this case was to assist a media company in finding ways of encouraging youth to participate in local newspaper channels, particularly online channels involving the use of social media. One of the main challenges for the media company was the declining number of young readers, considered to be the readers of the future. Their main product was still their daily edition of the paper-based newspaper, but at the same time, they had seen a steady increase in digitalisation of their products and services.

#### The design process

The task was to develop a concept and prototype for digital interaction aimed at the young residents of the area where the newspaper is distributed. The

concept could be applied to other groups as well, but the main target group was youth between the ages of 16 and 26 years.

The concept development started out with a phase of user research, conducted through field studies and analyses of online content. Through field studies, the students found out that the local youth perceived their town as being “boring” and “dead”, with little happening. They also gained some insight into the activities that the youth in the town engaged in and what they posted online.

Following the field studies, the young designers searched popular social networking sites, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, for content with hashtags related to the town to see the level of activity and types of content published online by the local youth. Through this search, they identified large amounts of online content about the area posted by local youth in the form of blog posts, pictures, videos and entries about events and activities. The volume of online content about everyday activities posted by local youth presented a marked contrast to the widespread attitude reported by the local youth about the place not offering many out-of-school activities. The students raised the following questions: Was the problem that youth in the area did not know about all the activities

their peers were participating in? Alternatively, did young people not find these activities interesting or exciting enough?

### The concept and prototype

The results of the user research motivated the student designers to choose a concept that supported easy access to social media content generated by local youth on activities and issues of interest in the community. The idea was to highlight, distribute and profile this social media content in the context of the local newspaper through a mobile application. In particular, the student designers aimed for the design to make the youth into storytellers, presenting to their peers their experiences and reflections of interest in the context of the local community.

To refine the concept, a video prototype was developed. This presented an application for collecting, editing and publishing feeds collected from social media platforms, such as Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube, posted by youth in this local area. Here, local youth could post their content on social media with a specific hashtag, and by doing so, make it easy to pick up for the social content aggregator. The newspaper could control and select the user-generated content for the day, such as the best



Figure 1: Visualisation of the mobile version of the local newspaper application.

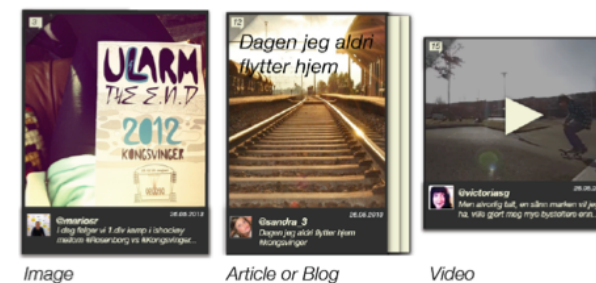


Figure 2: Visualisations of different types of content that could be published on the local newspaper application.

tweets or Instagram feeds. An editorial team comprising youth would carry out the selection process. The selected content would be published in a mobile app and would be featured in a section of the newspaper online. Furthermore, content from the application was designed to enable it to be sharable on Facebook.

### Implications

The user research in the early phase of the design process revealed that youth in the town were already civically engaged to a significant extent. The analysis of their social media presence found that youth in the town area were actively participating in out-of-school recreational activities such as sports and other community-related actions. Therefore, the design concept proposed was not a way to engage youth more but instead a way to make the social media presence of their engagement more visible both to them and to the local community at large. The connection to the newspaper was significant, as this served to move the voices of the local youth from peripheral, semi-private online arenas to the centre of local community news. In this way, combining social media and social networking with local newspapers could extend the social world of youth even in a small local community, as the lo-

cal newspaper constituted a central arena for local civic engagement.

Earlier field studies had revealed that the local youth expressed little interest in reading the local newspaper or posting comments on the newspaper's website, despite an interest in what was going on locally. Youth considered the newspaper to be something their parents read. Introducing an application for aggregating and highlighting social media content produced by youth could help to promote civic engagement in several ways. First, it would enable the youth to produce content in the newspaper that was relevant to them that they had previously captured on their mobile devices and published on social media. This content might not be political in the traditional sense, but it would reflect their interests and perspectives. Second, the proposed concept could make young voices heard and increase the impact of their opinions. Third, the concept could help to attract youth to the newspaper's website to read, watch and comment. From the newspaper's perspective, providing a space for the profiling of social media content produced by youth could be a significant step towards the creation of a new arena for youth civic engagement. The young designers' concept was presented at a national conference for newspapers with young

readers as its main theme; however, it has not been taken further so far.

### CASE 2: A DOCUMENTARY WEBSITE

The second case was related to a website that hosted a youth radio documentary programme. The radio programme in question targets youth as its main audience and covers issues such as youth, music, culture, humour entertainment and health education. The website was designed as a companion to a series of 30-minute documentary podcasts that were previously broadcast on the radio channel. The documentaries consisted of personal stories of young people and were aired on the radio channel every Sunday, after which a podcast of the programme was made available on the website. The editorial team complemented each radio podcast with articles, videos, sound slides and picture galleries published on the site. Each story also had a comments section to foster debate among the users. While the radio channel and website site had 15- to 35-year-old youth as its target audience, the most active visitors to the site were in their early to mid-30s. The challenge defined in the brief to the student designers was to develop concepts to



strengthen the participation of younger people on the website.

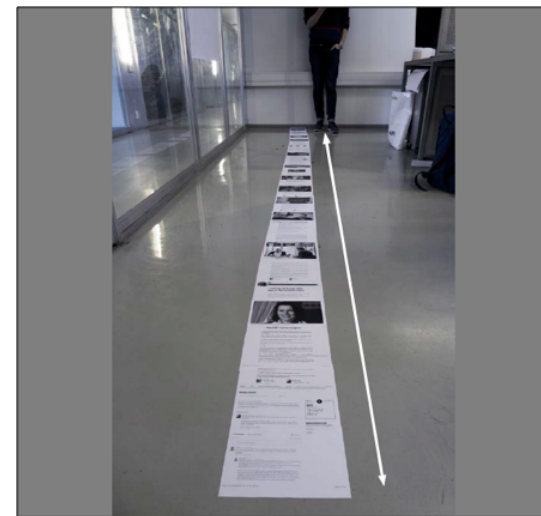
### The design process

Initial user research was conducted through a series of workshops involving youth in the target age group. The workshop participants were all students at the school of architecture and design. One aim for the workshops was to understand why there was low participation among younger people on the radio documentary website. The workshop participants observed that each story on the documentary website included a large amount of content and was structured so that the users had to scroll far down the page to browse all the content and reach the commenting section at the bottom. Moreover, the information architecture of the website made engaging with the content both time consuming and demanding. Another observation the students made was related to the top-down nature of the editorial process of the site. The editorial team had full control over which story would be made into a documentary, and users could only participate through the comments section. A more horizontal process with more power for the users to select and

to decide on the type of content published would have been more in line with how youth wish to participate in social media.

To highlight the observations made by the workshop participants, two informal demonstration activities were performed. First, the participants were asked to read all of the content of the page attached to a documentary podcast while being timed. They found that it took more than 30 minutes to read through all the contents of the page at an average reading pace. Second, all of the contents of the documentary podcast page were printed out. When these printouts were laid out chronologically on the floor, they formed a 4-metre-long paper trail. This printing demonstration, shown in Figure 3, turned out to be a useful performative move to materialise the concept. When presenting the projects to the site editors, this image was very useful in demonstrating the navigation problems of the website.

In addition to the workshops and the demonstration activities, the young designers also used Google Analytics to get an idea of the overall number and demographic breakdown of visitors at the site, and what visitors did while on the site.



*Figure 3:* The website print-out demonstrating the length of each story.

### Design concepts

Drawing on these insights, the young designers could easily imagine how frustrating it could be for the average youth to navigate the site in its current form. Given the observed problems related to the current information architecture of the site, the design students decided to focus on redefining the combined listening and reading experience of the podcasts and the website text and video content. Another important issue observed was that youth rarely posted comments on public discussion sites, such as that of the radio documentary or news websites (Brandtzaeg et al., 2015). Hence, the ambition was to create a richer content experience for the user and to motivate participation in new ways.

To pursue this ambition, a redesign of the whole website was suggested to make it more easily navigable and open up different forms of participation in addition to written comments. The first concept developed, the suggested website redesign, is presented on Figure 4.

This concept proposed a significant restructuring of the information architecture to make it easier to navigate different types of content. The different types of content were clearly labelled to distinguish among the podcast, article, pictures, video and comments section. The concept also aimed to make

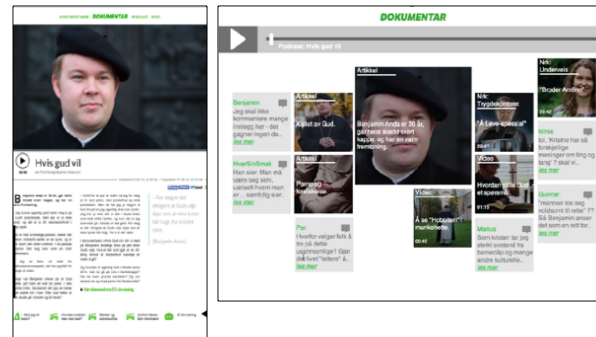


Figure 4: A screen capture from the current version of the website (left) and the concept for a restructured website (right).

the site more visually engaging by restructuring the written text content around the images rather than vice versa.

The second concept aimed at creating new, easier ways for visitors to participate on the site by creating an innovative design for user feedback on the different content elements. The concept's main feature was a rating system where the users could express their opinions by voting using four options, as demonstrated in Figure 5. This rating

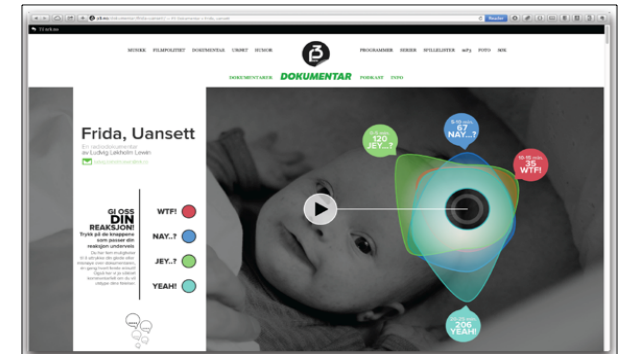


Figure 5: Screen capture from a visual prototype of an innovative integrated rating system. The user can turn on an optional interactive graph that shows the number of votes already registered for each category.

mechanism could be attached to all content on the site to enable rating of the podcasts, videos, articles and comments. The rating options involved an easy one-click rating model. The rating labels were new and playful but at the same time unambiguous for novice users. Such a rating option was also supposed to motivate the site's youth audience to engage in a kind of low-threshold participation, as young people are rarely inclined to post comments on public discussion sites.

### User feedback

These design concepts were presented to both the end-users and to the organisations, and they received positive feedback.

The latter concept was evaluated with a sample of 118 youth recruited through the documentary website. It was found that 18% of participants rated their reaction to the concept as very positive, while 39% stated that it was positive, and 38% reported that they were sceptical. Some of the users reported specifically on how they found the concept fun and engaging, but some also suggested that the concepts might not be something everyone would like to use.

The feedback from the young users indicated that while an innovative concept intended to increase youth engagement may indeed serve its purpose for some, it may at the same time run the risk of being perceived as being only for the selected few by others. Youth are not to be seen as a homogenous group. Rather, needs and preferences may differ widely within the youth segment. This implies that it is necessary to apply a variety of strategies to engage youth through social media, as discussed in the background of this paper.

### CASE 3: A HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATION

The young designers in the third case developed a new concept where social media were used to engage young people in humanitarian causes. Similar to the other cases, the target group was young people aged 16–26 years. The concept was built for Plan Norway, a humanitarian development organisation working to give children a better future.

The main idea, presented in Figure 6, was to develop a mobile app that made it easy for young people to support a humanitarian cause with money now and then and to engage and follow a chosen cause over time. The young designers decided on a mobile app as the main concept because youth use smartphones all the time and because mobile payment and micro-payment systems are a growing trend. According to Statistics Norway (2014), “all” Norwegian youth aged 16–24 years have a smartphone. Thanks to mobiles, micro-moments related to civic engagement can happen anytime, anywhere. In those moments, civic organisations can address their civic needs with real-time relevance. According to Google Consumer studies, such micro-moments are critical touch points (Google,

2016) and may therefore be utilised to enhance and support micro-moments in civic engagement.

### The design process

The design concept was developed in 2015 through a 3-month process of idea generation and development, including user ethnography, a survey, in-depth interviews, and user testing with the target group. The results of this work have been documented in a report (Pettersen, Orsen, Røshol, & Støeng, 2015).

The survey conducted as part of the design process involved 16- to 18-year-old youth ( $N = 66$ ). The participants were recruited through Facebook. Here, 83% reported that they preferred to support charities with small amounts of money now and then rather than larger amounts of money on a more infrequent basis. From this, the design students came up with the idea of facilitating micro-donations in places where young people use money, such as in the canteen at the university.

### The concept

The main features of the mobile app as visualised in Figure 6 consisted of four main categories. These

include the following: statistics, Plan Norway, live feed, and my profile. In Figure 6 the numbers 1-12 have been used to label the different features, steps, and actions that are possible on the app. These are as follows: (1) Pressing the puzzle provides the user with information concerning the current campaign. (2) The puzzle will update itself by adding pieces as donations for the period increase. In statistics, the user can obtain (3) information about the total donations made, (4) an overview of completed campaigns, and (5) a summary of how much the user has donated. The Plan Norway tab contains (6) information about Plan Norway's aims and ways of work, as well as details on how to contact and become a sponsor. (7) In the live feed feature, the user has the ability to monitor the records of the various social media, namely Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and Snapchat. These are presented in a common map where the user can sort according to the individual social media he/she wants to see records from. Records posted are from private individuals who engaged with Plan Norway's cases. These can be added to the map by the person's using the hashtag "Plan Norway" and posts would be visible on a pin based on where the individual was then located. It also published posts directly from Plan Norway's accounts. These are clearly marked with a blue pin on the map. Pushing a pin creates a



“preview” of the post, and if the user wanted to read more, he/she could press further, such that mail would be opened on the medium on which the information was originally posted. Besides the main features, the function labelled under the number (12) refers to a bardrop (a physical item located in the canteen) that is supposed to motivate young people to download the app.

Figure 6: Screenshots of a mobile app prototype where users and supporters of Plan Norway can make micro-donations and engage in humanitarian causes on the fly (Pettersen et al., 2015).

### User feedback

A think-aloud usability test was conducted for feedback on an early version of the design concept; this involved seven potential users in the 20- to 26-year-old age group. The participants were mainly satisfied and motivated to use the app, although some navigation issues were identified and led to updates in the design.

## LESSONS LEARNT

The design concepts reflected several of the guidelines suggested by Brandtzaeg and colleagues (2012) concerning how social media should be designed to support youth civic engagement. This particularly concerned the guidelines that suggested social media spaces should be informal, easy to use and visually appealing, as these characteristics would be more likely to motivate participation among youth.

The first concept proposed a possible redesign of the radio documentary website for simplified navigation and increased engagement (Figure 4). It would do so by radically reducing the ratio of text to images, making the different types of content

and menu functions more clearly distinguishable and eliminating the need to scroll downwards a great deal in order to reach the content. Good visual communication has been shown to be an important approach to motivate youth into civic engagement in social media (Brandtzaeg et al., 2015).

The second concept concerned a new feature for user feedback on editorial content. The proposed feature constituted a low-threshold form of participation compared to written comments. The graphic design elements of the concept, such as the use of colour, images and font, were all creative moves that could contribute to making the interface more visually appealing and inviting to visitors. The types of voting categories (WTF, YEAH, etc.) were drawn from everyday youth expressions. This contrasts with the tone of the original website. The feedback from the user trial (N = 116) also showed that this concept introduced a playful, funny user experience. Hence, these new features could make the website more appealing to youth and generate greater motivation for them to participate. Adding the voting function would widen the options and possibilities of participating in the website beyond writing comments. Features that provide low threshold participation such as this have proven to

be a successful way to involve youth (Brandtzaeg et al., 2015).

The third concept proposed a mobile app system where users could easily contribute and follow a selected humanitarian cause. The concept motivated users to engage in civic micro-moments on the fly. These micro-moments could occur at critical touch points when youth were performing other tasks, such as buying food for themselves at the school canteen. At the same time, youth could participate in humanitarian causes by contributing money through their mobile app for children that need help on the other side of the globe.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This paper investigated how civic organisations can bridge the generational culture gap to support young people for civic engagement in social media through the use of design. Through the presented cases, we showed how organisations motivate the participation of networked young citizens, as outlined by Loader and his colleagues (2014). We consider the approach of having young designers design for youth civic engagement to have produced

promising results. In particular, the familiarity of the designers with the needs and desires of youth is potentially critical for delivering successful design projects and to bridging generational gap.

An important contribution from this research was determining that civic organisations benefit by cooperating with and drawing on the experience of young designers to establish new concepts for communicating with young people. Lessons learnt from such approaches may be incorporated into large organisations.

The concepts developed by the young designers, if applied, could constitute a significant shift in the power relations between youth, editors and website owners in terms of who has control over the content produced in the organisations' spaces for civic engagement. We know from previous research that young people favour co-productivity, while site owners are more hesitant to give more power and control to users (e.g. Xenos & Foot, 2008).

Networked youth are demanding in their choice of social media venues. Following the design guidelines of Brandtzaeg and colleagues (2012), social media needs to support connections, which means reaching out to where youth already are present and supporting easy sharing rather than expecting that youth will turn to specific venues. Furthermore, it

is critical that designs for social media facilitate an engaging and compelling user experience, as youth generally have a low threshold for abandoning social media that they do not find sufficiently rewarding in terms of user experience.

The presented cases highlighted interactivity and participation as key elements to be built on, in line with Ward's (2011) notion of online solutions for civic engagement to be seen as a link of interaction between the individual and the organisation. The developed concepts suggested how both social media and mobile app spaces can be set up in novel ways to facilitate real-time, micro-moment interactivity between young people and their organisations, as well as providing a means for new and conflicting voices to be heard. Such interaction requires website features that endorse co-productive interactivity, where the user has more control. The local newspaper concept illustrated how co-production may transcend single social media services by integrating content from a range of social media services and bringing it to the centre of attention in the local community. Co-productive interactivity works by enabling and curating content or responses from users or allowing users to leave feedback in transparent ways where the user has a high level of content control.

Ward's (2011) call for interactive communication mirrors the design guidelines of Brandtzaeg and colleagues (2012), as they both recommended design for participation and design for empowerment. To engage youth in civic issues online, it is arguably beneficial to leverage individuals' desire for self-expression and interaction with peers. Furthermore, interactive communication, where youth are involved as co-producers of content, is valuable in the sense that it provides a sense of ownership and leadership. In addition, as this study has shown, such an approach takes into account young people's expressive engagement with media as participatory competencies. However, to involve younger users and designers actively in the design process, it is important to create a safe, inclusive and open environment for individual and collective learning, which is also the lesson learnt from similar projects about youth empowerment (Glumac, 2015).

In the case of the local newspaper, the idea of collecting and highlighting online content through an application, such as tweets and Instagram feeds, may represent such an innovative mode of civic communication, contrasting with the traditional deliberative exchange in which the organisations currently engage. Likewise, the idea of introduc-

ing a rating system (Case 2) and mobile payment and micro-moment engagement (Case 3) features are both informal and engaging ways of interacting with young citizens that contrast with how citizenship is traditionally enacted. In both cases, the design propositions facilitated civic self-expression that was better fit to the private and social context of the youth, supported by a variety of text, visual, audio and graphic communication forms. This resonates with Loader and Mercea's (2011) argument that the malleable character of social media strengthens its applicability for innovative communication and dialogue.

### LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The presented study is limited in that the analysis is based only on three design cases. In addition, none of the design concepts developed by the students were fully developed and implemented. This was mainly due to administrative and financial constraints within the case organisations. Nevertheless, the study served to show how social media design processes may establish new concepts for youth civic engagement and motivate civic or-

ganisations to adapt to the emerging mode of civic participation among youth. The study also served to suggest that organisations might benefit from involving young people in designing for other youth to create design that reflects the culture of networked young citizens. Future research is needed both to further explore how youth may be involved in designing social media solutions to strengthen organisations' ability to support youth civic engagement and to explore the civic impact of such designs. However, critical voices might suggest that social media are unlikely to make a difference to young people who are not already civically engaged.

To conclude, we suggest that social media represent an unrealised potential for organisations aiming to promote youth civic engagement. To realise this potential, it is important for organisations to design and frame their relationship to young citizens in a way that is not based on traditional models of dutiful citizenship but rather designed to adapt to the preferences of young networked citizens. Hence, organisations can bridge the generational cultural gap between organisations and younger users by not only involving youth in the design process but also facilitating a safe and open process where young designers design for other youth.

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