



when the going gets tough, millennials and social media get going

by Kristin Ivie on 27 Aug 2009



(<http://www.flickr.com/photos/99029180@N00/218643344>)

Today the [National Conference on Citizenship](http://www.ncoc.net) (<http://www.ncoc.net>) released its [Civic Health Index](http://www.ncoc.net/index.php?tray=content_blog&tid=2kctop2&cid=2gp115) (http://www.ncoc.net/index.php?tray=content_blog&tid=2kctop2&cid=2gp115), gaging the state of civic engagement in America. Overall, the picture isn't pretty. The majority of people (72 percent) said they have cut back their civic participation -which includes volunteering and involvement in their communities. Similarly, 66 percent say they think other people are responding to the economic downturn by looking out for themselves, rather than chipping in and helping each other out.

A bright spot is that the study also suggested that Millennials, with the highest rate of volunteering, at 43 percent, might provide an opportunity to encourage and catalyze civic renewal. [As I discussed on the Case Foundation blog](http://www.casefoundation.org/blog/cncs-releases-findings-volunteerism) (<http://www.casefoundation.org/blog/cncs-releases-findings-volunteerism>), the recently released CNCS [Volunteering in America report](http://www.volunteeringinamerica.gov/index.cfm) (<http://www.volunteeringinamerica.gov/index.cfm>) also suggested that Millennials are leading the charge, with an increase from 7.6 million young volunteers in 2007 to 8.2 million in 2008. It would be a shame not to take advantage of this generation, which is more likely to vote, to volunteer, and to believe they should help people in need than the young people of the last 30 years.

What's more, the report says that social engagement through social networking sites, as well as through church and friends, can have a significant impact in countering the negative effect of the current economic downturn on civic engagement. Millennials, coming from diverse economic and educational backgrounds, who are using social media for civic purposes are more likely to engage offline in their communities as well.

Obviously most Millennials are more familiar with these tools, and have embraced them for their ability to provide quick and constant connections, through which they can organize in ways they see most helpful and meaningful. This seems to refute the arguments that social media is just encouraging slacktivism by allowing people to edit their avatar or join a facebook group without really having engaged. The Civic Health Index shows that with each type of offline engagement - from giving food or money to someone in need to volunteering to joining a public meeting to discuss an issue - those who used social media for civic purposes were always more involved than those who did not.

We know that social citizens can be all ages, so perhaps encouraging the use of social media for good by other generations will improve offline engagement as well. In a time when nonprofits are having to cut budgets and staff, it will be critical that volunteers continue to give back. Even though it will take an investment of time upfront, the civic health of our country could benefit from a sector-wide effort by nonprofits to encourage and facilitate online engagement through social media. So how can Millennials help get all generations more deeply engaged through hard times, as well as good?

For more reflections on the Civic Health Index, check out [Michael Smith's post on the Case Foundation blog](http://www.casefoundation.org/blog/civic-health-index-shows-god-friends-and-facebook-are-critical-tough-times) (<http://www.casefoundation.org/blog/civic-health-index-shows-god-friends-and-facebook-are-critical-tough-times>) or grab a cup of coffee and read the [full report](http://www.ncoc.net/index.php?tray=series&tid=top5&cid=2gp54) (<http://www.ncoc.net/index.php?tray=series&tid=top5&cid=2gp54>).

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Kristin,
Thanks for this post. As a Millennial, I thought this finding particularly

27 Aug 2009
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encouraging and interesting as well. While we cannot conclude that belonging to a social network promotes civic engagement, we did find that Millennials who use social networking for civic purposes are far more likely to perform offline engagement activities in their communities. Also, we are seeing the ability of technology to break down traditional civic divides between socio-economic groups. Hopefully, this really takes a stance on the "Slacktivism" debates and shows the power of these tools to create social change across generations.

A detailed fact sheet on Millennial engagement and the use of social networking in civic participation is available here for any who are interested: <http://ncoc.net/index.php?tray=content&tid=top5&cid=2gp73>
(<http://ncoc.net/index.php?tray=content&tid=top5&cid=2gp73>)

Thanks again for providing this valuable outlet for discussion.

Pretty good post. I just found your site and wanted to say that I have really enjoyed browsing your posts. In any case I'll be subscribing to your blog and I hope you post again soon! [ugg boots \(http://www.howugg.com\)](http://www.howugg.com)

22 Sep 2009
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