Walden University

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Elesia Glover

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Abstract

The Role of Social Media in Millennial Voting and Voter Registration

by

Elesia Glover

MS, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, 2011

BS, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, 2010

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

The millennial generation has become the largest generation in the United States. Yet as more members of this generation reach voting age, their propensity to vote remains stagnant. For instance, in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, less than 50% of eligible millennials voted, in comparison to the 69% of baby boomers and 63% of Generation X. Voting is a civic duty essential to a successful democracy; therefore, it is imperative to find solutions to increase millennial political engagement. As millennials represent the largest proportion of users of social media, the purpose of this quantitative study was to examine the relationships between voter registration and voting rates and social media usage. To provide clarification on the issue of millennial voting and voter registration, a conceptual framework was used to explore whether a connection exists between millennial political participation and social media because existing theory was insufficient to address this issue. Using secondary data from the 2016 Millennial Impact Report, 1,050 millennial survey responses were gathered on millennial social media usage, intent to vote, and voter registration. A 2 proportions z-test was used to conclude that there was no difference in voter registration and voting rates between millennials who posted 1 to 3 times per week and those who posted 4 to 7 times per week on social media. This study may promote social change by informing those who seek solutions to increase millennial voting and voter registration rates for the continuation of the American democratic system.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandmothers, Rose Marie Thomas and Alice Ruth Robinson. It is in their spirit that I know perseverance, excellence, determination, and persistence. In their spirit I found the motivation to create this document to share with the world. I thank the both of you for all you did for my family, laying a strong foundation so my family could in turn do for me. I am inspired by the lives you lived and the people you touched, and I honor your legacy through this dissertation. As I honor my grandmothers who came before me, I realize that their struggles have afforded me the opportunity to be one of the 1% of Americans with a doctoral degree. For the lives you lived and all the sacrifices you made, I say thank you, this dissertation is dedicated to you.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Social media constitutes a growing communications mechanism used in marketing and advertising. The advent of social media has completely changed the way in which people communicate with each other (Cogburn & Espinoza-Vasquez, 2011). There now exists increased opportunity for specific issues related to communications such as political engagement through social media to be explored, as social media represent a highly used method for communication by millennials (ages 18 to 30). These social media communication efforts may lead to increased political participation observed through voting and voter registration among millennials.

News outlets, journalists, and the U.S. federal government now use social media to disseminate information in acknowledgement of the increased popularity of social media websites like Facebook and Twitter (Statista, 2014). Public figures such as actors, musicians, and politicians have active social media accounts. With social media serving as a platform for news on a 24-hour rotation, access to information never ends. This increased access to information presents advantages and disadvantages to the political world, and specifically to millennial voters, who seem to comprise the majority of social media users.

As previous generations have continued to age, the millennial generation has reached the age of voting. The millennial generation, raised with computers, technology, the Internet, and social media, is the most technically aware generation in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2010). This generation presents a unique challenge to the

template of campaigning for political candidates. The millennial generation may not be approached, motivated, or influenced in the ways that worked with their parents' generations. As a result, politicians must go above and beyond to create relationships with this generation, beginning with understanding the issues that are essential to millennials. Research has also shown millennials to be more liberal than generations before them, creating a shift in the political climate (Miller, 2010).

This shift is demonstrated by many millennials who identify as independents, with no particular allegiance to political parties or feeling of responsibility to register to vote or take action to vote (McCutcheon, 2015). Millennials view voting more as an option or a choice than as a duty or obligation. This outlook presents a unique need for social change. Furthermore, this perspective on politics apparently stems from an overall mistrust of the American political system (Miller, 2010). The question for political parties becomes the following: How do we gain the trust of millennials, and how do we motivate and persuade them to vote in our favor?

Social media have also been used as an avenue that has gained millennial support in arenas such as music and entertainment. Social media have been used to garner support for certain celebrities and athletes. For example, on August 14, 2016, San Francisco 49er Colin Kaepernick sat during the national anthem in protest of social injustice (Sandritter, 2016). The video of him sitting went viral on social media and as a result garnered a lot of positive support as well as negative attention from the public. Social media were used as a method to share the video, and people who were not familiar with Kaepernick now know who he is (Sandritter, 2016).

The 2008 presidential election is the election cited as the beginning of social media political activism and campaigning (Cogburn & Espinoza-Vasquez, 2011). Then-presidential candidate Barack Obama and his campaign team used social media in a way that was revolutionary, and that continues to be studied and used as a template for future campaigns. The 2008 election underscored the need to explore the impact of social media on millennial political participation.

Some describe Barack Obama's 2008 campaign as a one-time occurrence in relation to the significant results he received from millennials through social media (Miller, 2010). Others view his campaign as the beginning of a long-term relationship among political candidates, social media, and millennials. It is questioned whether duplicated efforts on social media could create duplicate results. However, social media development during the 2008 presidential election was very different from social media development in the 2016 presidential election. It is important to focus research on millennials, given that they constitute the next wave of adults to join the voting population and have become the majority (Dughi, 2016).

This study explored the relationship between social media, specifically Facebook and Twitter, and millennial political participation through voting and voter registration. The impact of the number of weekly social media postings on millennial voting and voter registration rates was also examined through this study. This chapter focuses on the study's background, problem statement, conceptual framework, nature, research questions, significance, contribution to business practices, implications for social change, definitions of terms, assumptions, and limitations.

Background

By exploring the history of social media and politics, one can gain greater understanding of the evolution of social media and their impact on politics. Social media are the newest forms of media but date back to the creation of the World Wide Web in 1991 (Taprial & Kanwar, 2012). The first social networking sites, classmates.com and sixdegrees.com, derived from instant messaging. After the small success of these sites, developers saw an opportunity to expand with Friendster and MySpace. In 2004, Facebook was launched by creator Mark Zuckerberg for students; it eventually opened to the general public in 2006 (Taprial & Kanwar, 2012).

Since its creation in 2004, Facebook has continued to thrive and reinvent itself with technological updates such as live video, advertising opportunities, and chat options. As developers and tech-savvy industry researchers witnessed the popularity of Facebook, they also noticed that people gravitated toward real-time messaging. As a result, the microblog Twitter was developed as an avenue for real-time messaging and status updates (Boyd, 2011). News outlets flocked to Twitter, providing 150-character summaries and links to their news stories, which proved to be successful in soliciting digital viewers.

Additionally, the need for smartphones and mobile applications derived from social media. With tools such as cell phones and tablets, also known as *fourth screen technology*, users are able to access social media (Shah, 2016). With the success of Facebook, Twitter, and smartphone mobile applications such as Instagram and Snapchat, users have enjoyed multiple options to engage in social media at any time and any

location that has Internet service (Heath, 2017). Creators of social media sites were able to see that mass personal communication was at the core of the attraction to social media. The ability to transmit = interpersonal communication to a mass personal audience inexpensively was attractive to individual users, public figures, and businesses (O'Sullivan, 2017). Moreover, the reach and influence of social media are quite captivating, in that very few other mediums allow for an unfiltered forum of expression or advertisement with the potential to reach millions of users (Taprial & Kanwar, 2012).

The reach of social media has become highly attractive to the political world. Social media continue to be used as a tool for political candidates. Although previously used before 2008, social media and political collaboration gained popularity during the 2008 presidential election. A significant portion of political campaigns use social media as a communication strategy. The rise of social media has elevated communication opportunities for strategists (Lassen & Brown, 2010). Social media have also increased political marketing and popularity measuring of candidates. Facebook provides data collection points of *likes*, *shares*, and *comments*, whereas Twitter provides *retweets* and *replies*. These data collection points help campaigns to monitor their success through social media.

Social media allow candidates to meet a critical need to communicate with the public, and more importantly to convince or persuade them to vote and support their candidacy (Moss, Kennedy, Moshonas, & Birchall, 2015). Again, tracking likes, shares, retweets, and followers is a way that campaigns track their likability factor. Nevertheless, for the presidential election of 2008, it was found that Facebook followers did not

indicate actual voting results (Cogburn & Espionza-Vasquez, 2011). This study focused on social media and voting in relation to a specific generation.

The millennial generation has a history of being the most active social media users and the least politically active generation in terms of voter registration and voting (Marketing Profs Research, 2010). Millennials voted at a rate of less than 50% in comparison to 69% of baby boomers and 63% of Generation X in the 2016 U.S. presidential election (Fry, 2017). Millennials' expression of their feelings on politics via social media is evident, but their actual political participation seems unpredictable at best. The millennial generation is often described as tech savvy, fast paced, self-assured, and connected, and the members of this generation have lived the majority of their lives with social media (Howe & Straus, 2007).

Facebook and Twitter are promoters of, and the foundation for, millennials becoming more connected than previous generations (Personal Money Service, 2017). With the increasingly large number of users on Facebook across multiple generations, millennials continue to make up 90% of the site's active users (Perrin, 2015). Millennials are also the largest population on the Internet (Statista, 2014). As a result, the Internet and social media are ingrained into the millennial foundation and are part of millennials' daily lives.

Interest in voting continues to decline as millennials witness politicians overlooking issues that impact them (Seipel, 2014). If Democrats and Republicans continue to fill their political agendas with matters that do not address well-being and quality of life for young people, millennial participation in voting may continue to

decline (Khalid, 2016). Additionally, millennials feel cynicism toward the government regarding its ability to foster progress and initiate change (Harvard University Institute of Politics, 2011). Harvard's Institute of Politics developed a study that found that 62% of survey participants believed that elected officials were more motivated to serve themselves than the general public and that 58% of millennials felt that elected officials were not aligned with their priorities (Harvard University Institute of Politics, 2011). This survey also revealed lack of trust, faith, and hopefulness in the current political system among millennials.

In the past, the millennial generation was ignored by campaigning politicians because many of its members were not of voting age and those who were old enough to vote were not significant enough in number to make a difference. Thus, political candidates focused on older generations where everyone was of voting age and more likely to vote. Their focus on older generations as a target audience proved to be successful as baby boomers consistently exercised their right to vote (Seipel, 2014). However, the 2008 Barack Obama campaign offered a different perspective and showed that millennials would, in fact, register to vote and show up to vote at the polls (Fisher, 2011). Not only did they vote, but they held enough power in numbers to make a difference and greatly helped to elect the first African American President of the United States. After the 2008 presidential election, political candidates began to focus on the millennial generation with greater interest. Millennials then began to be viewed as an asset to political candidates.

In examining social media political history, it is easy to see why the 2008 Barack Obama presidential campaign was such a monumental moment for politics and social media. In 2008, voting was at an all-time high for millennials at 52%; however, it declined in 2012 to 45%. Millennials have taken control of their issues as they have become more disheartened with the current political system (McCutcheon, 2015). Instead of voting, millennials are starting nonprofit and grassroots organizations to tackle issues they observe one at a time. With a known mistrust of the government, millennials are using grassroots organizations to communicate directly to a community and make a difference locally. According to "Rock the Vote," "the challenge is reaching a generation that's paying attention to politics—but is simultaneously repelled by what they see" (Seipel, 2014, p. 2).

The focus for many researchers has been whether political success on social media translates into success at the voting polls (Skoric, Zhu, Goh, & Pang, 2016). The collected data on social media have been compared to how well candidates do in the polls. Research has shown social media to be a positive advocate for communication and connection between a political candidate and the public, but social media have not consistently proven to be an accurate indicator of voting results (Skoric et al., 2016). The 2008 Obama campaign was able to translate millennial social media activism into on-the-ground support (Cogburn & Espinoza-Vasquez, 2011).

Many millennials consider voting to be an ineffective form of expression when compared to expressing an opinion on social media (Seipel, 2014). As the popularity of social media has increased, millennial political participation seems to be on a decline

(McCutcheon, 2015). Nevertheless, when one examines social media, it seems that millennials might be avid political participants, given the sheer number of comments, tweets, and shared news articles. What millennials consider to be effective is based on the reach of their political opinion (Seipel, 2014). For example, one person's tweet that gets retweeted by hundreds of other users seems more meaningful and impactful to millennials than one vote that may or may not make a difference in the outcome of an election.

Further, millennials may view voting as an inconvenient disturbance to their daily lives. The allocated voting times are not compatible with many work schedules, and absentee ballots have minimal importance among college students (Bennion, 2009). Additionally, millennials' perceptions that political agendas are not conducive to progress and change have given social media the opportunity to become an alternative solution for millennials to express their concerns, rather than acting through voting.

To meet millennials where they are centrally located, political campaigns have flocked to social media. Traditionally, civic duty was defined by registering and voting. Other civic duties included campaigning or becoming a volunteer. Now, there is a civic component to social media. Political organizations have created social media pages that allow users and followers to engage in debates, question-and-answer sessions, and forums on political issues (Pew Research Center, 2013). Many millennials find this to be the preferred method of civic participation. They would rather put time into individual self-expression on social media than the self-expression of voting (Bennett, Wells, & Freelon, 2009). Individual self-expression is important to the millennial generation.

Millennials are less likely to adhere to the traditional norms of long-term party commitments; many identify themselves as independents (Bennett et al., 2009).

Currently, this issue is not gaining much attention, but with the passage of time, this will become a problem that will likely need to be addressed. The millennial generation is the largest generation in the United States and will continue to be the biggest generation for the foreseeable future (McCutcheon, 2015). The democracy of the United States greatly depends on the millennial generation. Exploring the political trends of millennials lent itself to further discovery of the potential harm that could occur in the United States if the political parties do not learn how to engage millennials effectively. As older generations fade away, the civic duty of voting will become more of a fundamental responsibility of the millennial generation to continue democracy in the United States.

Problem Statement

Social media strategies have become a staple for political organizations, politicians, and campaign managers to increase political gain (Shirky, 2011). In spite of that, there is limited information on social media's impact on political participation. There is a significant need for further research on this topic to address the behavior of millennial voters in the United States. Research along these lines may uncover reasons for a decline in voting and voter registration among millennials. Identification of millennial motivation regarding this behavior could change the future of politics in this country.

Studies have proven millennials to be the top users of social media (Forer, 2017). This quantitative quasi-experimental study explored the relationship between social media, millennials, and voting and voter registration. This relationship was analyzed using a validated data based on the U.S. Census Bureau database. The U.S. Census Bureau provided information that demonstrated the lack of millennial political participation in the voting and voter registration process. This study was grounded in a conceptual framework. A conceptual framework allows for a less formal structure when current theory is deficient (Nelzaro, 2012).

Specifically, secondary data were used to demonstrate the statistical difference between the variables. Achieve Agency Millennial Project published data allowing this research to use collected data beneficial to this study. The staff of Achieve Agency are widely known by scholars in market research to be statistical experts on the millennial generation (Scott, 2016). Using Achieve Agency research data, it was possible to compare social media usage, voter registration rates, and voting rates for the 2016 U.S. presidential election. Additionally, social media data broken out by generation published by Keith Queensberry were used to aid in this research study.

Preliminary evidence for this topic included articles specifically relating to social media and their influence on political participation. One literary work reviewed social media's impact on elections (Fisher, 2011). Another relevant source specifically questioned the techniques that allowed the Barack Obama campaign to translate online activity to on-the-ground activism (Cogburn & Espinoza-Vasquez, 2011). Another effort demonstrated the public's ability to influence policy through social media forums. In this

example, a protest commenced in the Philippines with over 1 million people as a result of 7 million messages sent electronically to impeach a national leader (Shirky, 2011). Although there are examples of social media being used to mobilize groups of people with common interest, there is a lack of research and inconclusive research on whether social media usage is an indication of voting and voter registration activity.

<div align="center">**Conceptual Framework**</div>

This study used a conceptual framework because existing theory was deficient in relation to this subject matter. A conceptual framework is an explanation in graphical and narrative form of concepts, variables, and factors (Robson, 2009). This study benefited most from this type of framework in that a conceptual framework "represents a less formal structure and is used for studies in which existing theory is insufficient" (Nalzaro, 2012, p. 8). This research study took the form of a phenomenological study, which describes a concept or phenomenon for a group of individuals (Creswell, 2012).

A quantitative quasi-experimental design and two proportions z-test were used to examine the relationship between social media, specifically Facebook and Twitter, and millennial voting and voter registration rates. A quasi-experimental design tests cause-and-effect relationships with controlled variables (Punch, 2014). A z-test is a hypothesis test used to compare two observed proportions (Stangroom, 2018). Using a two proportions z-test, it was possible to study whether increased postings on social media equated to a higher propensity to vote and register to vote among the sample.

Through the z-test, I was able to see if the sample group that posted 1 to 3 times on social media was any different from the sample that posted 4 to 7 times on social

media, regarding the rate of voting and voter registration. U.S. Census Bureau data provided validated information that served as a basis for the secondary data used in this research. The Achieve Agency 2016 Millennial Impact Report based its quota sample on the U.S. Census Bureau data.

Moreover, this research clarifies the validity of increased social media postings as an indication for millennial voting and voter registration rates. I propose that there was a significant positive impact of social media usage on voter registration and voting among millennials. This conceptual framework focused on social media's direct or indirect connection to voter registration and voting among those 18 to 36 years of age. Facebook is the leading social media site among adults (Shirky, 2011). Specifically, data demonstrated that 71% of adults in 2014 had Facebook accounts (Duggan, Ellison, Lampe, Lenhart, & Madden, 2015).

Twitter is also seen as a key player in the social media realm among adults (Shirky, 2011). Although it has not grasped the numbers of users whom Facebook has captured, Twitter continues to gain a significant number of users each year (Sparks, 2017). Moreover, Twitter's fast-paced news and information reach are essential components that are beneficial to exploring the relationship among social media, millennials, and politics. The *hashtag* feature of Twitter is a simple way to ensure a substantial reach among grouped users of this social media site. Due to the large number of users on Facebook and the growing popularity of Twitter, these two websites were the social media outlets I chose as the focus for this study.

Nature of Study

For this research study, I implemented a quantitative, two proportions *z*-test to explore the relationship between two sample groups from respondents aged 18 to 36 years. As Balkin (2008) explained, "A *z*-test tests for statistically significant differences between a sample group and a population" (p. 3). I examined social media usage, voter registration, and voting rates for both sample groups. The social media usage was broken down by the number of postings in a week (i.e., 1-3 times per week or 4-7 times per week). Voter registration and voting rates were the outcome and dependent variables, while Facebook and Twitter usage were the covariates and independent variables.

Through this analysis, I sought to gain an understanding of Facebook and Twitter as influential vehicles to increase or indicate voting and voter registration rates among millennials. My hypotheses suggested that increased postings on Facebook and Twitter would have a significant positive impact on voter registration and voting rates. To explore this, I used secondary data from the Achieve Agency Millennial Project, the U.S. Census Bureau, and Keith A. Quesenberry of Post Control Marketing.

For the Achieve Agencies Millennial Project, survey responses from 1,050 U.S. millennials aged 18 to 36 years were collected. These surveys were collected from March 2016 to May 2016 and were categorized by various factors, including age, gender, location, education, and income. The Achieve data used nonprobability sampling to collect the same number of surveys each month (Achieve, 2016a). The U.S. Census Bureau also provided a great deal of data. Using U.S. Census Bureau data proved to be beneficial because these data are published and supported by the U.S. government. In

November 2016, the U.S. Census Bureau published voter registration and voting data by age and gender. For these data, 81,944 participants between the ages of 18 and 36 years were surveyed. Furthermore, to ensure validity and reliability, secondary data were used. Achieve Agency Millennial Project collected the same amount of data over a 3-month period to increase the consistency of the data.

Research Questions

I acknowledge that social media can be used for various goals and objectives. Facebook and Twitter are communication mechanisms used to share information, connect with others who have shared interests, and aid in personal expression. Some would suggest that Facebook and Twitter are powerful enough to alter public opinion or to motivate action for a particular outcome. To explore the impact of Facebook and Twitter on millennial voting and voter registration, I developed the following research questions and hypotheses to focus my research study:

RQ1: Is there any significant impact of social media usage on voter registration rates?

H_0: There is no significant impact of social media usage on voter registration.

H_1: There is significant impact of social media usage on voter registration.

RQ2: Is there any significant impact of social media usage on voting rates?

H_0: There is no significant impact of social media usage on voting rates.

H_1: There is significant impact of social media usage on voting rates.

Significance of the Study

Political participation in the form of millennial voting has not surpassed the voting rates of 2008 (Hendrickson & Galston, 2016). From 2012 to 2016, there was a noted 1% increase in voters between the ages of 18 and 29 (Hendrickson & Galston, 2016). With such slow progress in the growth of millennial voters, it seems imperative that new strategies and tactics be used to engage young people in politics. Providing solutions to motivate millennials to vote seems critical to the continuation of democracy in the United States.

Furthermore, given the closeness of recent political races, finding a resolution to this issue could make the difference in a political candidate winning political office or a political party winning a majority in Congress. Millennials should become an active part of the political system to continue the republic in which the people decide who should be elected to create and pass legislation.

The purpose of this quantitative phenomenological study was to examine the relationship between the dependent variables of voter registration and voting rates and the independent variables of Facebook and Twitter usage. The results of this research may aid in providing clarification on this issue and may have a significant impact on the political and business world, potentially leading to significant social change.

Contribution to Business Practice

This research study adds to the literature on the topic of social media influence. Many businesses dedicate staff to taking advantage of the full potential of Facebook and Twitter to increase their bottom-line profits, change public perceptions, or influence

social media users to take particular actions. If this research proved that social media has a significant positive impact on millennial voting registration and voting rates, the very social media outlets themselves could use this research to strengthen their social media partnerships with political candidates, organizations, and news outlets during election periods. There is great opportunity for businesses involved in social media to benefit from exploring this research topic.

Implications for Social Change

There are many advantages to understanding the issues and possible resolutions derived from this study. The results of this study could lead to positive social change through the development of strategies to increase political participation, which could have implications for political and nongovernmental organizations alike. Ultimately, this research study could create positive social change through increased democratic political participation.

I considered that the millennial generation should no longer be counted as insignificant on Election Day. As this generation has aged, its members have become increasingly important to the continuation of adult civic duties, which include registering to vote and voting. Now that this generation has the attention of political parties and candidates, I seek ways to consider how to engage, motivate, and persuade millennials to vote. This research may not only encourage political officials, organizations, and campaign teams to focus on millennial voters, but may also demonstrate whether social media are effective tools to increase political participation among this generation.

Definition of Terms

Millennials: The generation of people born between 1982 and 2000, also known as *Generation Y* or the children of the Baby Boomer generation (Main, 2013).

Social media: Forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (Pew Research Center, 2018).

Facebook: An online social networking website where people can create profiles, share information such as photos and quotes about themselves, and respond or link to the information posted by others ("Facebook," 2017).

Twitter: A social networking site that allows users to write short posts, known as *tweets* (Twitter, 2017).

Correlation study: A quantitative method of research in which there are two or more quantitative variables from the same group of participants and the researcher seeks to determine if there is a relationship (or covariation) between the variables (Waters, 2017).

Regression analysis: A statistical technique used to show how one dependent variable is affected by other variables, which are independent. Regression analysis measures how correlated the dependent and independent variables are ("Regression Analysis," n.d.)

Conceptual framework: A visual or written product that "explains, either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied—the key factors, concepts, or variables—and the presumed relationships among them" (Robson, 2009, p. 39).

Voter registration: The requirement in some democracies for citizens and residents to check in with some central registry to be allowed to vote in elections ("Definitions for Voter Registration," n.d.).

Vote: A choice that is made by counting the number of people in favor of each alternative ("Definitions for Vote," n.d.).

Popular vote: The number of actual individual votes for a candidate or an issue, in contrast to the number of electoral college votes in a presidential election.

Uses and gratification theory: Assumes that members of the audience are not passive but take an active role in interpreting and integrating media into their own lives. The theory also holds that audiences are responsible for choosing media to meet their needs. The approach suggests that people use the media to seek specific gratifications (Lorenz, 2011).

Political party: A political organization whose members subscribe to a certain ideology and seek to attain political power through representation in government ("Political Party," 2017).

U.S. Census Bureau: A part of the U.S. Department of Commerce overseen by the Economics and Statistics Administration (ESA) to serve as the leading source of quality data about the nation's people and economy (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017).

Assumptions

The basis for this research topic was a result of assumptions about the millennial generation, voting habits, and social media. This assumption prompted curiosity, which led me to further develop these thoughts into a research study. Primarily, I assumed that

social media represent a much more valuable tool for millennials than what many other generations understand it to be. I also assumed that social media could be used as a positive tool to reconcile the voting issue among the millennial generation. This assumption reflects my understanding that millennials are the largest and most active group of users of social media. Through personal experience, I assumed that social media could be used to distribute information as well as to persuade millennials to take action on various issues. My observation that many social media users may express public opinions on political matters but then decline to vote sparked my interest in this topic, as I sought to understand potentially detrimental effects of this trend in the foreseeable future.

I assumed that secondary data from a research company focusing on millennials would be the best data available. By using the Achieve Agency Millennial Project data, I gained access to data from 1,050 millennial survey participants aged 18 to 36 years. These data proved to be optimal for this research study. I assumed that using U.S. Census Bureau data for foundational and background knowledge would also provide a broad overview on lack of millennial voter participation. Additionally, the U.S. Census Bureau eliminated my concerns on validity and accuracy of data.

Limitations

For this research study, social media platforms were limited to two sites. Facebook and Twitter were used as the social media networks of interest because they have the largest number of active users. In 2009, 85% of college students had Facebook accounts (Pempek & Yermolayeva, 2009). Millennials are more likely to use Twitter over

older generations (Xinhua News Agency, n.d.). Other social media sites such as Instagram and Snapchat were not explored in this study. The use of secondary data from the 2016 Millennial Impact Report helped to alleviate any chance of bias, given that the data had already been collected and published.

A key limitation of this study was the fast pace and advancing nature of technology. Technology is never stagnant. As technologies, social media are in "constant update" status. This study focused solely on Facebook and Twitter without regard for other social media sites, and it could quickly become outdated if these platforms do not have lasting success. Although Facebook has served as the model for social media, future social media sites and applications may not have the same features. As such, the results of this study may not apply to other forms of social media with varying features and abilities. Nevertheless, constant change occurs in all technology, and using the two most popular forms of social media presented the best option to address the possible limitation of evolving technology and social media, in that Facebook and Twitter seemed more likely to remain relevant than other social media sites.

Conclusion

It will become increasingly important to engage millennials in politics as the baby boomer generation continues to decline in number and Generation X continues to age. Out of these three generations, millennials are the least politically active, with the height of their civic participation occurring during the 2008 presidential election. Millennials have a difficult time agreeing on the notion of voting due to their mistrust of the

American political system. This distrust and lack of political participation must be addressed and resolved if increased political participation remains a goal.

In 2008, over 50% of eligible millennials voted. There was a decline in voting during the 2012 elections and an increase of 1.1% during the 2016 presidential election (Pearsons & Dinan, 2017). Between 2008 and 2016, the millennial vote remained relatively stagnant. Although more millennials voted in 2016, the election demonstrated the significant impact of the Electoral College (Pearsons & Dinan, 2017). Presidential candidate Hillary Clinton won the popular vote, while her opponent Donald Trump became President of the United States (Wells et al., 2016). Given this possible outcome, the challenge becomes determining how to influence the members of a generation to fulfill their civic responsibility to select the leader of their country.

The motivating question becomes the following: How is it possible to keep millennials engaged in a system they do not believe in or trust? Social media may be a means to bridge the gap. Social media may offer a way to create excitement, energy, and positivity around voting among its users—primarily millennials. In this research, I dove further into the millennial generation, social media, and voting and voter registration rates to search for insight on this matter.

Chapter 2: A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

Introduction

I began this literature review by using a multitude of electronic databases to collect peer-reviewed articles. These electronic databases included Academic Search Complete, ProQuest Central, ABI/INFORM Complete, Business Source Complete, ERIC, Google Scholar, Sage Premier, and Political Science Complete. Key search terms included (a) *social media*, (b) *Facebook and politics*, (c) *Twitter and politics*, (d) *millennial political participation*, (e) *millennial social media activity*, (f) *millennial voting and voter registration*, (g) *voting and voter registration*, (h) *political campaigns,* and (i) *effects of social media politics*. Initial searches for peer-reviewed scholarly journals were limited to works published in the last 5 years.

Because topics related to social media are relatively new to academia, it was necessary to conduct subsequent searches of nonscholarly sources dating back to 1991. These nonscholarly sources included but were not limited to professional, governmental, and nongovernmental reports. At the conclusion of this study, I had examined 157 sources. Among these, 150 were peer-reviewed sources, which represented 95% of the total sources used in this literary review. Additionally, 121 sources had been produced in the last 5 years, representing 77% of the total sources used in this study.

This literature review was valuable because the analysis supplied the constructs examined for this study on the role of social media in millennial voting and voter registration rates. Millennial social media usage was reviewed, along with social media's connection to politics, the changing nature of political campaigning to include social

media, and social media's connection to political activity through voting and voter registration. Numerous studies have concluded that millennials are the primary users of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (Pew Research Center, 2018). As millennials have crossed the threshold into adulthood, they now have the opportunity to vote. As such, it has become progressively important for political candidates and their teams to meet millennials within their social media platforms. Additionally, social media have increased the public's overall access to information. At the touch of a button, and often in 140 characters or less, the world is informed of up-to-the-minute news. Expanded access to information and the pace at which information is now shared and viewed by others underscored the need for this study.

Social Media

Social media's impact on the online community has been vast. In fact, 90% of Internet users are active on social media (Taprial & Kanwar, 2012). Many people perceive social media as a narrow construct centered on social networking sites, but *social media* is a generic term that encompasses a variety of online platforms such as blogs, networking sites, podcasts, micro blogs, Internet forums, and content communities (Taprial & Kanwar, 2012). *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary* defines *social media* as "forms of electronic communication through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content" (as cited in Taprial & Kanwar, 2012, p. 8).

Users have become influencers through social media. As a result, industry researchers have become captivated by the reach and influence of social media (Boyd &

Ellison, 2007). Whether in supporting a product, a place, or even a political candidate, people have the ability to influence others through social media. Many researchers have caught on to social media as a way to create social change. People now can share their thoughts and opinions on social change that they believe should take place by using social media as a tool for self-expression (Haythornthwaite, 2005).

Social media, although relatively new, date back to the advent of the World Wide Web in August 1991. After the creation of the World Wide Web came the development of the instant messaging system ICQ in 1996 and, later, Instant Messenger (Taprial & Kanwar, 2012). The first social networking sites, classmates.com and sixdegrees.com, derived from instant messaging. After the small success of these sites, developers saw an opportunity to expand with Friendster and MySpace, which both became hugely popular. In 2004, Facebook was launched by creator Mark Zuckerberg to students at Harvard University. It was eventually expanded to Boston-area Ivy League institutions and, in 2006, to the general public. Facebook was the culmination of everything that came before it.

Launch Dates of Major
Social Network Sites

'97 — Six Degrees.com

'98

AsianAvenue — '99 — LiveJournal
— BlackPlanet

LunarStorm (SNS relaunch) —

'00 — MiGente

(SixDegrees closes) —

Ryze — '01 — Cyworld

Fotolog — '02 — Friendster

Skyblog —
LinkedIn — — Couchsurfing
Tribe.net, Open BC/Xing — '03 — MySpace
— Last.FM
Orkut, Dogster — — Hi5
Multiply, aSmallWorld — — Flickr, Piczo, Mixi, Facebook (Harvard-only)
— Dodgeball, Care2 (SNS relaunch)
Catster — '04
— Hyves

Yahoo! 360 — — YouTube, Xanga (SNS relaunch)
Cyworld (China) — '05 — Bebo (SNS relaunch)
— Facebook (high school networks)
Ning — — AsianAvenue, BlackPlanet (relaunch)
QQ (relaunch) — — Facebook (corporate networks)
Windows Live Spaces — '06 — Cyworld (U.S.)
Twitter — — MyChurch, Facebook (everyone)

Figure 1. Launch dates of major social network sites. From "Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship," by D. Boyd & N. B. Ellison, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *13*(1), p. 212.

The platform included messaging, friends, common interests, and profiles. Social media entrepreneurs were able to see the advantage in pairing people with shared interests, which increased interest in applications (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). As developers and tech-savvy industry researchers saw Facebook grow, they noticed that people gravitated toward real-time messaging. As such, the microblog Twitter was developed as an avenue for real-time messaging and status updates.

Compared to the more traditional media outlets, social media provide some unique advantages. The first advantage is low barriers to entry. Social media are free, accessible, and user friendly, and they connect users to other users (King, 2015). Second,

the speed of social media allows users to publish information to others instantly with the click of a button.

Next, interactivity opens up two-way communication for people to ask questions, respond, and comment. Lastly, the reach of social media is by far one of its greatest assets. Grassroots organizations are now connected to national and international organizations (Haythornthwaite, 2005). Through a tweet and a hashtag, one Twitter user can reach hundreds, thousands, or millions of people. With so many people connected with access to people all over the world, researchers have become more inclined to explore the impacts of social media.

The data that can be collected through social media have transformed from who and how many people are signing on to what people are doing when they sign on and what impact this activity has on their lives when they sign off (Haythornthwaite, 2005). It is important to have not only an understanding of the implications of having access to such information, but also the resources necessary to understand the information. However, there is a lack of research on the actions influenced and perhaps caused through social media.

Social media have been categorized into six types: collaborative projects, microblogs, content communities, social networking sites, virtual game worlds, and virtual social worlds (Taprial & Kanwar, 2012). For example, Wikipedia is a collaborative project, Twitter is a micro blog, YouTube is a content community, and Facebook is a social networking site. They all fall under the guise of social media but can be broken out into distinctive groups. For the purposes of this study, Facebook was

selected as a leader of social media. Studies have shown that news-related stories shared via Facebook are 20 times more likely to be shared than news-related stories on Twitter (Almgren & Olsson, 2016).

Social media have continued to pique the interest of many due to their multiplatformed options (Kumar, Novak, & Tomkins, 2006). *Fourth-screen technology* (i.e., smartphones and tablets) has allowed social media to expand and to give users the opportunity to take social media with them where ever they go (Shah, 2016). Social media applications such as Instagram and Snapchat were developed through the smartphone phenomenon (Neilson, 2011). All of these advances in social media have given the public more access to information than ever before (Wohn, Lampe, Vitaka, & Ellison, (2011). It is important to understand that the success of social media is based not on access to information, but on access to other people and interactions based on the provided content (Carr & Hayes, 2015).

Masspersonal communication is at the center of social media. Masspersonal communication allows for interpersonal communication to a masspersonal audience. For example, Facebook and Twitter allow a user to make a mass personal message to an interpersonal group of people linked to one another based on a commonality (O'Sullivan, 2017).

<div align="center">**Social Media and Politics**</div>

Social media and politics have become key components of political success. Campaign strategists have taken note and are proceeding according to this trend. The communication strategies for campaigns have become multifaceted, using social media as

another avenue to connect with voters (Lassen & Brown, 2010). Social media have become essential to politics, despite the fact that they are relatively new forms of media. For instance, the President of the United States has a very active Twitter account. This interesting phenomenon continues to intrigue researchers, prompting exploration of the relationship between social media and political marketing (Cwalina, Falkowski, & Newman, 2015).

Research suggests that social media have created positive relationships through social capital, civic engagement, and political participation (Skoric et al., 2016). Researchers continue to ask the question of whether winning the social media game translates to winning in the political world—or, more specifically, whether there are neglected indicators in social media that lead to election results, or whether social media and election results are completely unrelated to one another.

In the past, researchers collected data to ascertain whether *likes* and *followers* on social media had a positive correlation to election success rates (Towner & Dulio, 2012). In New Zealand, a study was conducted to investigate Facebook and Twitter accounts of political candidates to determine whether there was a link between the two. It was concluded that social media presence did show a positive relationship between social media accounts and election results, but only by a small margin (Cameron, Barrett, & Stewardson, 2014). In the United States, many point to the Obama presidential campaigns of 2008 and 2012, where online activity was said to translate to "on the ground" activism (Smith, 2013). This has caused researchers to question whether this was

a single occurrence or a tool that can be used going forward in the political realm (Cogburn & Espinoza-Vasquez, 2011).

Does social media information translate to mobilization? In prior research, this question was explored for the presidential election of 2008. It was found that Facebook followers did not indicate actual voting results (Cogburn & Espionza-Vasquez, 2011). This question has also been explored on a local level. Two city councils' social media communications in the United Kingdom were examined (Vromen, Loader, Xenos, & Bailo, 2016). It was found that through social media, the council could gather information on public opinion, which substantially transformed public engagement (Moss, Kennedy, Moshonas, & Birchall, 2015). There are various perspectives to be explored relating to social media and politics. Outside of examining social media as a predictor of voting results, researchers have investigated social media as a way to persuade the public before voting. People may be influenced by a news source or someone they *follow* or *like* on social media.

Often, people's political ideologies are very much dependent on the views of others they know (Diehl, Weeks, & Gil de Zuniga, 2016). It has also been discovered that social media activity can lead to the creation of diverse networks that may expose a social media user to opposing views and ultimately could change the user's political affiliation (Johnson, Sprague, & Huckfeldt 2004). Additionally, those exposed to opposing views may become more tolerant of alternative political views, even if their personal views do not change (Levitan & Visser, 2009).

Research has shown that when people are confronted with many opposing views, they are more likely to seek additional information and to reflect on their opinions (Mutz, 2002). Although it has been suggested that social media can be used as tools of persuasion, research has not been conducted to address this persuasion in detail (Wojcieszak & Mutz, 2009). More research is needed because the conclusions of the research thus far have been inconclusive and inconsistent. One researcher may provide data that show a positive correlation between political engagement and social media, whereas another may be unable to arrive at a clear consensus (Ellison, Lampe, & Steinfield, 2009).

Facebook and Politics

Facebook has become a welcomed vehicle to connect candidates to voters for electoral purposes. Through this social networking site (SNS), two-way communication became available to both political candidates and voters (Vraga, Bode, Smithson, & Troller-Renfree, 2016). With the options to *like*, *comment*, or *share* content, the Facebook user has the power to influence votes (Gerodimos & Justinussen, 2015). More importantly, likes, comments, and shares give researchers access to quantitative and qualitative data. Ultimately, researchers are able to study the implications of Facebook while campaign strategists use these same metrics to target voters and create social media engagement plans for their respective candidates.

A shift has occurred whereby the public now accesses social media for political news over traditional new sources (Rainie & Smith, 2012). Media outlets and politicians have taken note of this change in the way that information is disseminated. The 2008

presidential election is known as the first Facebook election (Carlisle & Patton, 2009). In 2008, Facebook's leaders decided that the site would actively participate in the arena of politics by cosponsoring the January 5, 2008 presidential debate with ABC News (Facebook, 2008). Facebook users were able to give live feedback and join groups about the debate (Facebook, 2008). At that moment, Facebook firmly planted itself in the political realm. Facebook continued this trend of being a political player in 2012, when 9 million Facebook users voted, proving the value and access that the social networking site offered (Facebook, 2012). As politicians have gravitated toward Facebook, so have researchers and scholars. Researchers have been fascinated by the relationship between the Internet and the user since the creation of the Internet (Chadwick & Howard, 2010). That relationship has now transcended the narrow field of social networking sites and their users.

Three rules of engagement have come to light from studies conducted on social media and political participation. The first suggests that SNSs such Facebook promote political participation by increasing access to information and engagement with other politically invested users (De Zuniga, Copeland, & Bimber, 2013). The second cites Facebook as a political distraction removing users from traditional forms of engagement (Nisbet & Scheufele, 2004). Finally, some scholars believe that Facebook only creates engagement among those who are already politically engaged.

Across the many studies and great deal of literature produced about Facebook and political participation, the results and conclusions have been inconsistent, due to the differing components of each study. Bode (2012) found that the specific activities that

users engage in on Facebook provide more meaningful data than measuring time spent on Facebook. However, users must log on to engage in activity; thus, the fact that 52% of Facebook users log on daily appears only to be supportive information (Meyer, 2016).

Public opinion and political commentary are not new phenomena. Families gathered around the television or dating back to families gathered around the radio to watch or listen to presidential debates led to profound discussions, comedic relief, and engagement with one another. Facebook and Twitter have taken this tradition in many family households and given it a national and international platform. Now viewers are able to comment to the world in real time during debates (Edgerly, Thorson, & Hannah, 2016). Journalists, activists, and everyday people are using the same platform to voice their opinions.

With the opportunity to comment in real time, users also understand self-expression and public opinion are just that, public, which will be archived and recorded. As Facebook is relatively young in the grand scheme of media the impact and implications of such recordings and archives are unko (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). The Facebook mobile application was announced in 2007 to further the reach of Facebook and daily access to its users, (Lee, 2016). Through this defining asset to the social networking site user activity increased. Over the next two years Facebook gained sixty-five million mobile users (Goggin, 2014).

Twitter and Politics

Twitter, the 140-character space for public opinion, has become a reporting tool for journalist and political figures alike (Klinger & Svensson, 2014). The microblogging

site has served as a repository for major political campaigns, cultural, and social movements (Rutkin, 2015). The repository of Twitter is critical to the accurate accounting of history. In the past television and print media were the gatekeepers of information distributed to the public. These "gatekeepers" were to decide what information the public received. In 1984 George Orwell stated "those who control the present control the past, and those who control the past, control the future" (Orwell, 1984). This quote was accurate in the age of the media gatekeepers. New age media like Twitter provides an unfiltered account of history from a first-person point of view (Momoc, 2012).

Representatives and Senators are able to set their own messaging via Twitter. By 2013, every Senator had a Twitter account and 398 Representatives were tweeting (Straus, Shogan, & Glassman, 2016). Twitter has many positive uses including its use for public relations purposes. Research has shown members of Congress tweet about local appearances, television appearances, policy developments, and good news stories (Staus, Shogan, & Glassman, 2014). Additionally, because Twitter is free, the political public relations campaign is never ending. An environment is created that encourages a permanent and constant campaign strategy (Momoc, 2012). An open platform of this magnitude can influence public opinion to improve political reputation. Political candidates are able to engage their voting base on a large scale.

The common uses of Twitter for political purposes from the user and candidate perspective are consistent across various literary works. The established uses of Twitter are daily chatter, news updates, dissemination of information, and conversations (Small,

2011). There is one development in Twitter that made the microblog a greater asset to politics, the hashtag (Parmelee & Bichard, 2013). A hashtag allows a phrase or group of words to be categorized where it is easily searchable (Small, 2011). Examples of hashtags are #OccupyWallStreet, #BlackLivesMatter, and #MAGA which stands for Make America Great Again. Not only do hashtags help to organize tweets into categories, but they also facilitate sending one tweet to a wider audience. This audience expands beyond Twitter now that hashtags are searchable via Google.com.

Theory has shown the public's view of politics is based on the information they have access to (Gainous & Wagner, 2013). This theory increases the value of Twitter to politics. Traditional popular media includes television and print media, although much of print media has transitioned to digital media. Depending on the information put out by traditional media social media may be used as an avenue to respond to the public as it relates to the information the traditional media has distributed (Gainous & Wagner, 2013). Research has shown candidates that have used Twitter to conduct damage control on information put out by other forms of media have garnered votes (Gainous & Wagner, 2013). Thus, as Twitter has developed methods to communicate with the public politicians must follow suit if they would like to use it to their best advantage (Bode & Dalrgmple, 2016).

There has already been proof of this political adaptation by members of Congress. Members of Congress are known for being very formal, however, they have started to use more informal language on Twitter adapting to the shorthand culture (Straus, Shogan, & Glassman, 2016). Their presence on Twitter is also constant as the microblog is never

ending. Momoc found that being consistent and constant on Twitter creates a public view of seriousness and authenticity (Momoc, 2012). What was once thought to be a trend or fad, now has Congress dedicating specialized staff to their social media presence (Klinger & Svensson, 2014).

There have been studies conducted to explore whether Twitter mentions mirror election results. The findings across these studies vary. In a study of the 2009 German federal election, Twitter mentions of political parties accurately mirrored election results (Tumasjan, Sprenger, Sandner & Welpe, 2011). There have also been studies that have confirmed when the public is exposed via social media to opposing political views it helps them to become more tolerant, while other studies have confirmed exposure to opposing views results in demobilization (Bode & Dalrymple, 2016). As such, the public's exposure to opposing political views outcome appears varied. Researchers have tried to study social media and politics from various perspectives.

Another study focused on discovering the type of Twitter activity that produced the most action among users. Call to action, humor, and personal relevance were three ways noted to provoke action among Twitter users (Conzma). Even with all the traditional ways of communicating with the public, over 70% of congressional staffers believe social media allows their member to reach people they had not communicated with using the traditional avenues (Bode & Dalrymple, 2016). Twitter has created a stronger democracy through bridging the gap between public opinion and elected official (Gokce, Hatipoglu & Saygin, 2014). The microblog has carved a unique place in

communication where political events, natural disasters, and tragedies are communicated to the world in a matter of moments.

Millennial Social Media Activity

When many people think about millennials, they think about social media. This is a generation often described as self-assured, fast-paced, connected, team oriented, and tech savvy (Howe & Straus, 2000). All of these are descriptions deriving from access to social media. This is also a generation that equates time spent on social media to be just as meaningful as time spent in person (Euro RSCG Worldwide Knowledge Exchange, 2010). Technology has shaped the millennial generation as they were born into technological advances and have spent much of their lives with the internet, Facebook, smart phones, texting, and blogs (Gasson, Agosto, & Rozaklis, 2008). Additionally, many millennials grew up with a computer (Bolton, Parasuraman, Hoefnagels, Migchels, Kabadayi, Solnet, 2013).

Due to the internet at millennial fingertips this generation has grown up with a global mindset, easily connecting to the world around them near far via Skype, Facebook, and social media (Gasson, Agosto, & Rozaklis, 2008). Millennials have become accustomed to technology being a part of their everyday lives. With close to 90 million millennials being born since 1980, it appears increasingly important to study this generation and the way they communicate, mobilize, and engage in political activities (Pinto & Mansfield, 2013).

With the creation of Facebook in 2004, the social networking site blossomed right around the time millennials were able to gain access and grow up alongside Facebook

developments such as the mobile application, messaging, pokes, and Facebook live (Facebook, 2012). The millennial generation has the highest usage of Facebook (Marketing Profs Research , 2010). In 2009, 85% of college students had Facebook accounts (Pempek & Yermolayeva, 2009). Research has also shown users of Twitter are younger and more racially diverse in comparison to America as a whole (Quinton, 2009).

Not surprisingly, millennials are more likely to use Twitter over older generations (Xinhua News Agency, n.d.). There are many other social media sites millennials, also known as generation y, take advantage of like Instagram, Snapchat, LinkedIn, and Pinterest (Adams & Pate, 2015). Facebook and Twitter are only the beginning. Millennials spend a great deal of their day on social media networking sites with access to so many social media options. (Jones, Johnson-Yale, & Millermaier, 2009). Scholars have shown generation y spends one to four hours daily on social media sites and remains to be the largest population on the internet (Statista, 2014). Even with a large number of Facebook users of various ages, 90% of Facebook users are millennials (Perrin, 2015).

Researchers cannot help but to delve further into social media engagement while looking at the steady increase of millennial social media usage. Accordingly, scholars want to know more about how millennials social media use for online political engagement (Douglas et al., 2015). The methods for how millennials incorporate social media into their respective political organizations have been observed (Vromen, Xenos, & Loader, 2015). Researchers believe millennial social media usage for political engagement is a growing practice that should be further explored (Vronmen, Xenos, & Loader, 2015). Generation y has gravitated toward social media to access new

information and broadcast information (Harvard University of Institute of Politics, 2011). Some millennials feel more fulfilled through social media than through traditional civic means. Nevertheless, there is a civic component to social media (Harvard University of Institute of Politics, 2011).

There are many political organizations with active social media pages, forums, and discussions (Pew Research Center, 2013). These group pages on Facebook may also create event pages to inform people of upcoming events (Perrin, 2015). Although meetings are not conducted on Facebook and Twitter, they are vehicles to keep their audience informed (Donghee, Lampe, Vitak & Ellison, 2011). Researchers debate the notion that millennials favor personalized, self-actualized expression over voting (Bennett et al., 2009). This perspective has yet to be explored yet will be examined in this dissertation. As voting has traditionally been one's duty and responsibility with the advent of social media this notion may be taking a shift in another direction. Another observation of generation y is an individualist attitude toward politics over a long-term party commitment. Millennials would rather mobilize with peers than adhere to a hierarchical system of politics and political parties (Bennett et al., 2009)

With all of the research that has been conducted, the question remains whether social media creates political participation through voting and or voter registration. The internet provides a space for self-expression, but what action derives from self-expression, I am unsure (Loader, Livingstone, Couldry, Markham, & Tim, 2007). It is also known that millennials are the most common users of social media, making the sites

a common platform and a valuable place to reach millennials (Lee, Smith, Schlozman, & Brady, 2012).

Millennial Political Participation

The study of millennial political participation is critical to the continued democracy of the United States of America. As the country's largest generation, exceeding the baby boomers, millennials have the potential to change the political landscape (McCutcheon, 2015). Millennials are projected to grow to 36.5% of the U.S. population by 2020 (Douglas, Raine, Maruyama, Semaan, Robertson, Zhang, & Gil-Garcia, 2015). Millennials were key to Barack Obama's success in the 2008 Presidential election. To his advantage, he was able to grasp a larger portion of millennial support than his predecessor, John Kerry in 2004 (Fisher, 2011).

Political participation can be defined by various activities. Traditionally, registering to vote, voting, and assisting in political campaigns were seen as forms of political participation (Bode, 2012). However, in addition to these actions many millennials believe in the importance of online political participation through discussions and online forums. Some millennials believe online political participation to be more impactful than offline political participation (Harvard University Institute of Politics, 2011). It is conceivable many college-aged millennials are active in online political activity as 85% of college students having a Facebook page (Bode, 2012). Studies have found online political groups and pages to be positive advocates for offline or traditional political participation (Conroy & Guerrero, 2012).

If online political participation does indeed translate into offline political participation for millennials, it is no wonder the 2008 U.S. presidential election took advantage of electronic platforms such as Facebook and YouTube to reach these new voters (Vitak, Zube, Smock, Carr, Ellison & Lampe, 2011). During the 2008 election both the Democratic and Republican candidates hosted Facebook pages to connect to voters (Vitak et al., 2011).

Nevertheless, Barack Obama is known as the candidate who tapped into the millennial generation during his campaign. Researchers site his success with millennials not only for his active social media campaign, but also due to the growing number of Democratic millennials (Fisher, 2011). The American National Election Studies (ANES) finds the millennial generation to be significantly more liberal than other generations (Fisher, 2011). Further aligning with the liberal narrative, millennials are also seen as civic minded and a generation focused on social change (Strauss, William, & Neil, 1991).

As the generation that grew up in the time of war, Columbine, the Virginia Tech shootings, and September 11th, the mistrust found among members of the millennial generation and politics are evident (Miller, 2010). There is a great concern regarding political corruption among millennials (Hill, Kokkat, Hansen, 2016). As such, the character of a political candidate is essential to the evaluation and analysis of candidates to do the job for which they are running (Douglas et al., 2015). As social media provides 24-hour access to candidates, their daily lives and character decisions made in the past and currently are up for debate, especially among young voters. Two-thirds of young voters 18 to 24 years old have engaged in online political activities via social media

(Douglas et al., 2015). This trend in character evaluation started with the advent of the television during the Kennedy and Nixon debate (Douglas et al., 2015).

Scholars recognize millennials evaluate political candidates based on issues, personality, and community information, all of which are broadcasted online (Douglas et al., 2015). It also seems that access to online political participation increases political knowledge. A young voter will be exposed to more information than previously available through traditional avenues due to interactions with other politically knowledgeable users and candidate social media pages. (Douglas et al., 2015). Millennials also have a number of ways to get involved online through making donations and engaging in discussions. Interestingly, studies have shown that millennial voters may be more influenced by the comments of others on political candidates than their own developed opinion (Douglas et al., 2015).

The importance of focusing on the millennial voter will likely increase as the generation ages. Perhaps due to the discontent many millennials have for politics, many millennials are joining the independent party. Prior to the 2016 presidential election, 40% of voters under the age 30 considered themselves to be independent (McCutcheon, 2015). Political candidates understand the growing weight the millennial generation carries and as a result are more inclined to champion their concerns on student debt, education, and entrepreneurship (McCutcheon, 2015). They also understand the millennial generation is the most educated generation that has lived with the most access to information via the internet (Pew Research Center, 2010). As such, this generation cannot be approached like generation x or baby boomers.

There is a generational gap between millennials and older generations when it comes to voting. The millennial generation views voting as a choice, while older generations view voting as an obligation and responsibility (Matto & Martin, 2011). The millennial propensity to vote can be detrimental to American society. Without citizens willing to engage in traditional civic activities, the Democracy has no consent to move forward (Matto, 2012). Even with the height of millennial voting during the 2008 presidential election, millennials voted at 51.1% lagging 17% behind voters over the age of 30 (Matto, 2012). In researching the voting tendencies of millennials, the variation in voting among different ethnic backgrounds also shows a trend that specific ethnicities vote at a higher rate among millennials. Latino and African American millennials are more likely to view voting as a responsibility rather than a choice (Matto & Martin, 2011). Social pressure from peers also works to increase voter turnout among millennials (Panagopoulos, Larimer, & Condon, 2012).

Nevertheless, the civic responsibility for generation y has shifted from traditional political engagement to volunteering with social issues (Campbell, 2007). The sense of responsibility carried out by older generations manifested itself into the civic duty of voting while this same responsibility manifests itself in helping those in need for millennials (Kiesa, Orlowski, Levine, Both, Kirby, & Lopez, 2007). This notion also explains why community involvement and engagement is a critical evaluation factor for political candidates among millennials (Douglass et al., 2015). Thus far, the study of the millennial vote and political perspective has demonstrated a shift from the traditional views of other generations. Millennials view job creation, taxes, social programs, student

debt, and unemployment differently than their parents. This shocking revelation may be critical going forward as political candidates will also have to shift if they would like the majority millennial vote (Young voters and the 2012 election, The top 3 things to know, 2012).

Additional factors should be considered that contribute to low voter turnout. Frequent movers, fist time voters, and a disinterest or distrust in politics decrease ones' propensity to vote (Bennion, 2009). The culmination of these factors greatly impact millennials as college students may be a frequent mover, a first-time voter, and have a disinterest or distrust in politics. Other factors include limited poll times and voting work arrangements as many millennials are in the beginning stages of their careers and may not be able to take time from work to vote. To address this concern some local governments have pushed to keep polls open to 9 pm and require employers to give their employees time to vote (Wolfinger, Highton, & Mullin, 2002).

Political Campaigns

The way political campaigns organize and target their audience has transformed over the years. Social media has played an increasingly larger role since the 2008 presidential elections (Lilleker & Jackson, 2011). In 2012, Facebook had nine million users voting in the election. With a sizeable voting base Facebook has been a tool used by political campaigns to reach voters (Carlisle & Patton, 2013). Campaign strategists use a number of tactics much like a marketing strategist to influence their audience. Political advertising, social endorsements, and emotional appeals are various avenues strategists may use to engage voters (Borah, 2016).

Emotional appeals may be in the form of humor, defending a policy perspective, or attacking another opponent's difference in opinion. In 2008 John McCain and Mitt Romney used emotional appeal to attack their opponent while Barack Obama used humor as his emotional appeal to voters (Borah, 2016). There is little research or evidence to prove online campaigning has replaced traditional campaign mediums, however, research does support using social media in addition to other forms of campaigning to reach all demographics (Calenda & Meijer, 2009).

News sources have also followed the social media trend, serving as an advocate for political information. Research shows the best form of political influence to change voter's opinion stems from social media news sources (Diehl et al., 2016). However, the social media user must follow the news source in order to be influenced or follow a user that will share the information via their social media site. The notion that a user must follow a news source shows they are already politically engaged. Studies conducted in the United States, Italy, and the United Kingdom implies those who are politically active are the most likely to use Facebook for political information, news, and sharing (Casterlrione, 2016).

One of the most effective ways to campaign is to use direct "calls to action." In 2008, the Obama campaign used personalized messaging directly to voters charging them to vote (Gerodimos & Justinussen, 2015). The campaign team also hosted a Twitter question and answer session where they were able to directly engage and respond to voters (Gerodimos & Justinussen, 2015). Using social media as a 24-hour campaign tool, the Obama campaign was able to gather a large social media following. During the 2012

presidential election Barack Obama had 27,006,226 Facebook fans, while Ron Paul had 993,209, and Mitt Romney had 1,883,895 (Shen, 2012).

To accomplish a following of this size, the Obama campaign team had strategic social media goals to capture their targeted audience. Staffers during the Obama 2012 campaign admitted to using Twitter to influence the agenda of professional journalists (Kreiss, 2016). Interestingly, professional journalists were once the gatekeepers of information distributed to the public and now campaign staffers are able to change the tide of professional journalism through social media.

Mobile applications were another component to social media that political campaigns rarely explored (Nielson, 2011). The Obama campaign was the first presidential campaign to develop a strategy around mobile application usage (Pew Research Center, 2010a). The campaign team realized they had a sizeable millennial voting base, which did not have home phone numbers but had cellular devices (Scherer, 2012). The Obama campaign launched their own mobile application to further engage their millennial audience (Matto, 2012). This gave Obama's staff access that other candidates did not have. With over 1 million voters signed up for the Obama mobile application, the campaign also gained access to the 1 million application users Facebook friend lists (Scherer, 2012). Now, the campaign could reach millennials to which they otherwise had no access.

It was said that 85% of their target audience that did not have a listed phone number were accessible through the *friend lists* of the users from the Obama mobile application (Scherer, 2012). The campaign used the voters active on their application to

send targeted direct messaging to people included in their friend lists, creating an atmosphere of familiarity versus spam mail (Carlisle & Patton, 2013). Studies conclude people are more likely to be influenced by other people who are familiar to them over a public figure (Spierings & Jacobs, 2013). For example, during the 2010 midterm elections, people were more likely to vote after they saw a picture of a friend voting or with an "I Voted" sticker (Matto, 2012). The campaign staffers and strategists referred to this plan as *targeted sharing* (Scherer, 2012). It proved to be successful as 600,000 Obama supporters contacted over 5 million friends to vote for Barack Obama, donate to the campaign, or watch a campaign video (Scherer, 2012).

The importance of social media to political campaigns runs deeply through all levels of government. The 2008 Senate race in Louisiana between Senator Mary Landrieu, Representative Bill Cassidy, and Colonel Rob Maness demonstrates the use of social media outside of presidential elections (Teten, 2016). Each candidate used Facebook for a dominating purpose. Senator Landrieu used Facebook to motivate people to vote. Representative Cassidy used Facebook to bring attention to Senator Landrieu's broken policies and building a voter base. Colonel Maness also used Facebook to encourage people to vote (Teten, 2016). When the votes were tallied, Representative Cassidy won the race (Teten, 2016). In evaluating the campaign messaging researchers concluded the negative messages Cassidy used towards Landrieu were impactful, thus giving him the most votes and the Senate seat (Teten, 2016).

Another key component to political campaigns is data forecasting and predictions. There are jobs that exist to solely track data to predict elections. Research has been

conducted to explore whether Facebook is a valuable and valid data forecasting tool for political campaign purposes. Some studies have shown Facebook to accurately predict the winners of elections through tracking fan participation and mobilization (MacWilliams, 2015). Nevertheless, there are limitations and challenges to pulling data from Facebook, which has resulted in prior studies being inconclusive on using Facebook as a political forecasting tool (Campbell, 2014).

Since the Obama campaigns of 2008 and 2012, there has been one other candidate to tackle social media with more zeal than his counterparts. It is the current president of the United States, Donald Trump. His team was able to do just what the Obama team achieved, which was to control the professional journalism narrative through social media (Wells et al., 2016). The Trump campaign was able to sway negative news into a positive light during his campaign. He coined much of the media as *fake news*, wearing the negative feedback from the media as a badge of honor (Wells et al., 2016). During his campaign, President Trump was very present in the media taking many interviews, hosting rallies, and calling into news shows (Wells et al., 2016). Nevertheless, he is most known for his active Twitter account used to respond directly to accusations and opinions of others (Karpf, 2016).

<div align="center">**Effects of Social Media on Politics**</div>

The effects of social media on politics have been transformative. For many, social media has revitalized their political interest (Vaccari & Valeriani, 2016). Social media has become a platform to organize and mobilize common interests. During the Occupy Wall Street movement Facebook played a significant role in organizing the protests

throughout cities all over the United States (Rawal & Nixon, 2012). Political candidates have dedicated staff to social media campaigning. The goal for the social media staffers is to persuade users and followers of the candidate to interact with posts by liking, commenting, and or sharing information (Tanase, 2015). If users are able to share posts on to their page increasing visibility with their followers, commentary between the user sharing the information and their social media friends may ensue, resulting in the friend becoming more interested in the political candidate (Tanase, 2015).

Social media has also heightened political consumerism. Political consumerism constitutes purchasing decisions influenced by political matters (Stolle, Hooghe, Micheletti, 2005). When people participate in political consumerism, they use their monetary power to show preference or disdain about a particular company related to a political candidate (Ward & De Vreese, 2011). Some groups may mobilize or organize boycotts of products or companies connected to a candidate or a movement with shared interests of a candidate. President Donald Trump is a businessman owning many hospitality businesses and golf clubs. For example, membership fees have increased in his golf clubs as interest has spiked, perhaps due to his political affiliation.

There was a Chick-Fil-A fast food restaurant where the employees wore Blue Lives Matter shirts as a sign of solidarity and support to law enforcement. Many people that disagreed associated the action with former political candidate Donald Trump and used political consumerism to boycott the Chick Fila. The Blue Lives Matter Chick-Fil-A incident was broadcast over Facebook and Twitter eventually hitting traditional media.

Again, social media served as a mobilization and organization tool for political consumerism (De Zuniga, Copeland, & Bimber, 2014).

To the opposite side of the spectrum, social media may also create feelings of angst among users towards politics. Research showed social media increased stress levels among adults during the 2016 U.S. presidential elections (American Psychological Association , 2016). For instance, social media enhances users access to political information and yet that same access to information may induce stress, as it is difficult to escape political information leading up to an election period. This overwhelming amount of information on social media lends itself to data collection and analysis by many researchers. The link between social media and politics has caused reason for scholars to explore and analyze data collected through social media (Bond & Messing, 2015). Variables such as age, gender, education, political affiliation, and race can be derived from social media to address various research questions not limited to politics (Bond & Messing, 2015).

Also, social media and politics have joined together resulting in what scholars' reference as *weaponized* social media (Ghitis, 2016). Russia's alleged involvement in the 2016 U.S. presidential election was due to the development of weaponized social media (Ghitis, 2016). Through social media other foreign players may involve themselves in politics of another country without ever being physically present. Now that the United States understands the threat of weaponized social media, a defense mechanism to counter balance such weaponry must be developed (Ghitis, 2016).

Lastly, social media effects on politics have introduced the I-reporter and policy tweeter. Due to social media and mobile devices, everyone can become a reporter. News outlets search Facebook and Twitter for the latest and first-person accounts of events, making every day people journalist. Now everyone can act as policy commentators. This is one of social media's greatest impacts, as the information cannot be controlled. There are no gatekeepers in the political arena. This also creates a challenge for journalist and political candidates, as there is no review or checks and balances to information put on social media (Auer, 2011).

Conclusion

In conclusion, numerous research efforts have demonstrated that social media plays a critical role in politics. The capacity in which social media impacts voters and social media users' has yet to be confirmed. Americans spend more time on Facebook than any other website (Nielson, 2011). Thus, as political candidates and news outlets have become more active on Facebook, the rate at which users are exposed to political information has increased. Researchers have found millennials are more likely to come across online political information indirectly than directly searching for the information on social media (Douglas et al., 2015). Even with the growing literature and scholarly research on this topic, scholars are unclear of the degree to which social media influences voters (Douglas et al., 2015).

With each study broadly exploring social media and politics, the variables differ from one research study to another. Some research specifies a specific election to study or the effects of continuous campaigning on social media, while others focus on the

political candidates' themselves or the political differences between generations on social media (Larsson, 2014). The context in which each study is conducted has fluctuated and addresses varying perspectives. Many studies use cross sectional data producing a result incomparable to others (Theocharis & Lowe, 2016). The political implications of social media during specific elections have been addressed, but the implication of social media on voting regarding millennials remains untapped subject matter.

The millennial generation should be further explored regarding social media and political participation. This first generation of the new millennium uses social media for self-expression, mobilization, and the sharing of information (Pew Research Center, 2010a). As the millennial generation continues to age, carrying an increasingly heavier weight in the voting realm, it will be pivotal to understand how to not only reach this generation, but motivate them to become politically active through voting as the democracy of the United States of America will greatly depend on the civic participation of millennials. As a generation with overall negative views of government and 20 % with immigrant parents, political candidates will need more research to understand how to address this generation (Lopez & Marcelo, 2006). Tactics and strategies used on baby boomers and generation x will not apply to the millennial generation.

Mobilization of the millennial vote currently presents a challenge to political candidates and political parties (Rapport, 2014). This study will contribute to literature on social media and politics from a broad point of view, but also whether social media is an effective tool to increase political participation through voting and voting registration

among millennials. Chapter 3 will discuss the research design and research methodology

to conduct this study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

As previously mentioned, there is increased opportunity for specific issues related to communication such as political engagement through social media to be explored, in that social media have become a highly used method for communication among millennials (ages 18 to 36). This study explored the relationship between social media, specifically Facebook and Twitter, and millennial political participation through voting and voter registration. This chapter is divided into several sections to further expand into the methodology of this research study. These sections cover research design, sampling methods, variables, instruments, research questions, and ethical concerns.

Quantifiable Research

Mixed, qualitative, and quantitative research methods were considered for this research. In considering the qualitative analysis approach as a viable research method, various designs were explored. Although initially attracted to narrative study, I noted that narratives focus on personal accounts of individual experiences (Lichtman, 2010). Collecting data through stories was not going to be of value to this research study. Among ethnography, narrative, phenomenological, grounded theory, and case study, I found phenomenological study to be most applicable.

As Creswell (2012), explained, "A phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon" (p. 57). In this case, the *lived experience* was going through an election cycle in the age of social media, and the phenomenon was social media having an impact on political

participation. However, after further consideration of conducting a small number of interviews and qualitative coding, I noted that the qualitative approach did not prove to be most useful. Qualitative research is most beneficial to understand a social interaction in which subjective interviewee responses are common and expected (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Neither of these characteristics aligned with this study. In seeking to understand how social media impact voting and voter registration, a detailed subjective response is not necessary or beneficial. Objective responses in quantitative form are best to show statistical relevance. Coding qualitative responses in search of commonalities and themes in interview responses best fits a small sample. A greater sample gathered through a large number of surveys would be more representative and increase the validity and value of this research.

A quantitative research method was ultimately selected, whereby it was necessary to gather a large amount of data to arrive at an accurate sample. Quantitative research methods highlight measurement and statistical analysis of data collected through polls and questionnaires (Babbie, 2010). The characteristics of quantitative research were a good fit for this research topic. Quantitative research has specific variables that are studied, identifies statistical relationships, and is based on validated data collection instruments (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). This research considers particular variables and identifies statistical cause-and-effect relationships based on secondary data from published sources.

Descriptive, correlational, quasi-experimental, and experimental designs are the four approaches to quantitative research. The descriptive design is observational, and the

hypothesis develops after the research is conducted (Punch, 2014). For this study, I began with the hypothesis, which was used to guide the development of the study. The quasi-experimental and experimental designs both test cause-and-effect relationships with controlled variables (Punch, 2014). Controlled variables can be beneficial to research because they can be used to measure or estimate an association or trend between variables (Salkind, 2010). As such, control variables were used for this research. After I had explored all approaches, the quasi-experimental design presented the best option. A quasi-experimental design uses two or more variables to explore a cause-and-effect relationship without manipulation of the independent variable (Punch, 2014).

Furthermore, a quantitative quasi-experimental design and two proportion z-test seemed the most fitting and appropriate analysis method for this study. The aim of a two proportions z-test is to test a hypothesis and whether two populations or groups differ significantly on some single characteristic" (Stangroom, 2018). A quasi-experimental model allowed me to examine the difference between two sample groups that post 1 to 3 or 4 to 7 times a week on social media in terms of their voter registration and voting rates. As such, I developed the following research questions and hypotheses for this research study:

RQ1: Is there any significant impact of social media usage on voter registration rates?

H0: There is no significant impact of social media usage on voter registration.

H1:   There is significant impact of social media usage on voter

registration.

RQ2:   Is there any significant impact of social media usage on voting rates?

H0:   There is no significant impact of social media usage on voting

rates.

H1:   There is significant impact of social media usage on voting rates.

Data were gathered from many sources to address the research question. The U.S.

Census Bureau provided validated information for this research. Data from this federal

government source was reliable and in quantitative form. The U.S. Census Bureau

collects data on voting rates broken out into categorical groups such as race, age,

geographic location, and sex. The U.S. Census Bureau also gathers voter registration

information by age, which applied to this research study. The data from the U.S. Census

Bureau were used to demonstrate overall trends in voting and voter registration among

millennials 18 to 36 years of age.

Secondary data from Achieve Agency Millennial Project were used for this

research. An analysis of these data allowed me to compare Achieve social media usage

data, voting registration rates, and voting intentions for the 2016 U.S. presidential

election. This data included geographic location, age, and sex, which were used as

control variables for this study. Scott (2016) of *Forbes Magazine* stated, "when it comes

to insights about millennials, our most populous generation, the annual Millennial Impact

Report never disappoints" (para. 1). The Achieve Agency Millennial Project has

collected data from over 100,000 millennials since 2009 (Millennial Impact, 2017).

Additionally, social media and advertising expert Quesenberry of Post Control Marketing published social media usage information by generation, which was used to aid in this research study. Social media usage data were published for ages 13 to 19, 20 to 35, 36 to 49, and 50 to 65 (Forer, 2017).

Sample Populations

Millennials are defined as individuals born between 1982 and 2004 (Rouse, 2015). Millennials 18 to 36 years old served as the target population for this research study. The Achieve Agency 2016 Millennial Impact Report collected 1,050 survey responses from individuals aged 18-36 from March 2016 to May 2016 based on a quota sample using data from the U.S. Census Bureau. Of the 1,050 participants, 26% were aged 18 to 24, 34% were 25 to 30 years old, and 39% were 31 to 36 years old. Forty-nine percent of the participants were female, 50% were male, and 1% were transgender (Achieve, 2017a). The largest group in terms of educational attainment was composed of participants with a bachelor's degree (32%), followed by those with some (21%) and high school graduates (16%; Achieve, 2017a). The sample population was 67% Caucasian, 10% African American, and 12% Hispanic (Achieve, 2017a).

The secondary data used for this research study were pulled from Wave 1 of the 2016 Millennial Impact research report, which was taken over a 3-month period. As noted in Figure 2, Wave 1 of survey administration took place between March and May 2016, with 350 surveys collected each month (Achieve, 2016c).
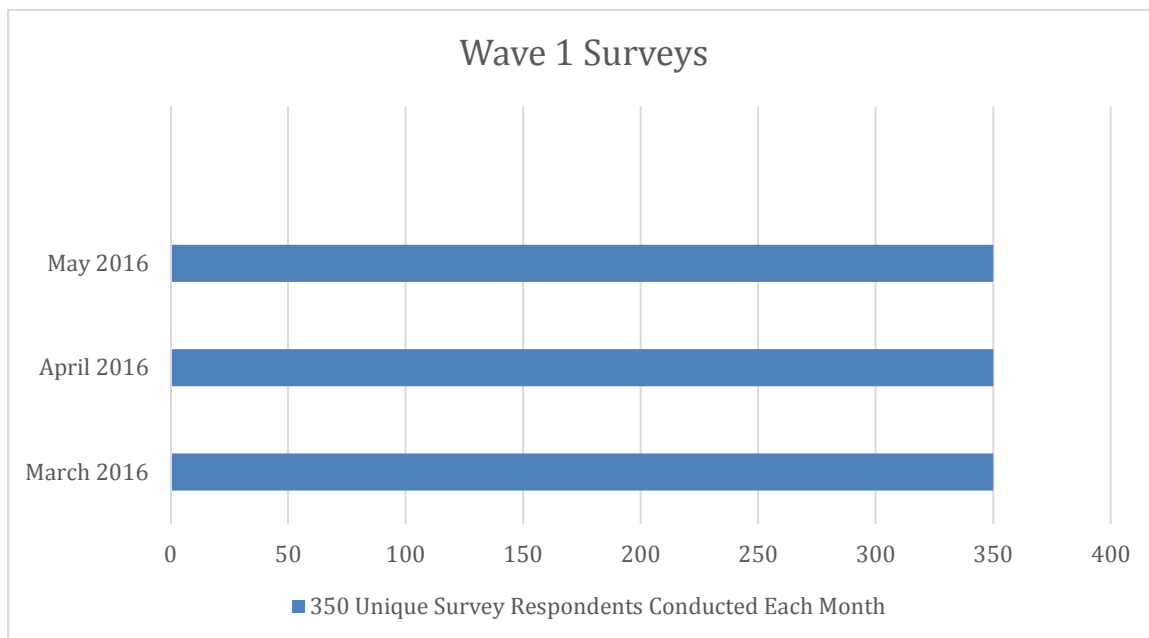
Figure 2. 2016 Millennial Impact Report Wave 1. From *The 2016 Millennial Impact Report: Wave 3 Trends and Post-Election Survey* (p. 5), by Achieve, 2016 (http://www.themillennialimpact.com/sites/default/files/reports/WAVE3_MIR2016_0111 17_0.pdf).

Nonprobability sampling was used to collect the same number of surveys each month to allow for generalized estimations that could be applied to the greater millennial generation (Achieve, 2016b). Obtaining the same quantity of samples over a period of time helped with the validity of the findings, as well as in identifying any trends or correlations that developed. The Millennial Impact Report research sample was drawn from a Lightspeed GMI online opt-in panel (Achieve, 2016c). Founded in 1996, Lightspeed provides digital data collection with tested sampling methodologies and understanding of consumer opinions and behavior (Lightspeed, 2014). Each of the 1,050 survey participants was unique, with unrepeated respondents (Achieve, 2016c).

Instrumentation

The data obtained for the sample were retrieved from the public website for The Millennial Impact Report. Permission to use the data was granted by Dr. Amy Thayer, the Director of Research for the Millennial Impact Report, in addition to access to an interactive data website. The interactive website allowed me to manipulate and view the data by variables such as age and education.

The 2016 Millennial Impact Report for Wave 1 included quantitative data on political ideology, voter registration, intent to vote, social issues of interest, government trust, and social media usage (Achieve, 2016a). The data included numbers, graphs, and scale level data. The data were initially collected to study the level of millennial social cause engagement. For purpose of this research study, I used secondary data to explore voter registration, intent to vote, and social media usage.

Justification of the Method

Secondary data, or data and information from another source applied for an alternative purpose, were used for this research (Sloboda, 2016). The use of data from the Millennial Impact Report, which sampled a large number of respondents over time, was an advantage in this quantitative research study. Achieve was also able to provide analysis of the data by age, gender, education, location, and income. The interpretation of the data has been completed to use in various research forms. Most importantly, in using secondary data, I was able to eliminate using my interpretation, which might have lent itself toward personal bias.

The U.S. Census Bureau is a known validated source backed by the U.S. federal government. The Census Bureau collects a great deal of information every year on numerous topics. The data provided by the Census Bureau can be of aid and benefit to researchers studying many topics. Thus, the reach and resourcefulness of the Census Bureau in relation to academic research is vast.

Using secondary data involves repurposing data for one research study in order to use it for another. It was essential to use data that were clearly applicable and beneficial to a thorough analysis of my study. Fortunately, the data collected for the 2016 Millennial Impact Report addressed various research questions, given the multiple forms of data collected through the report. Although the 2016 Millennial Impact Report was published, permission to use the data was granted by Amy Thayer, Director of Research for Achieve Research Agency.

Variables

For this study, I focused on selecting a quantitative research methodology to correlate the variables and test the hypotheses and assumed outcomes. In research studies, the independent variable is assumed to affect the dependent variable (Willis, 2017). Social media usage was the independent variable for this study. According to the secondary data, social media usage was defined by posting on social media in the past week, including writing one's own post or engaging in another's post about issues of interest (Achieve, 2017b). I further clarified social media usage as posting 1 to 3 times a week or posting 4 to 7 times a week. Although the Millennial Impact Report focused on

multiple social media platforms, for this study I focused on Facebook and Twitter, which show the most participation in the data.

The dependent variable was political participation. Political participation was defined as voter registration and voting rates. The secondary data in the 2016 Millennial Impact Report reflected voter registration information from the respondents. As the data were collected prior to the 2016 U.S. presidential election, the voting intentions of the respondents were noted. The rate at which the respondents were registered to vote and intended to vote were compared against the frequency of social media postings in a week. The U.S. Census Bureau data were used to reference the overall trend of millennial voting and voter registration rates. I hypothesized that social media positively impact millennials' likelihood to register to vote and vote.

Statistical Methods

A two proportions z-test was used to complete the data analysis. There are many online applications that allow researchers to calculate z-tests. For the purposes of this study, MathCracker.com was used to aid in the calculation of the z-tests. MathCracker is an online resource used for math and statistical tutorials and calculations. As explained on the site, "A z-test for two proportions is a hypothesis test that attempts to make a claim about the population proportions p_1 and p_2" (Mathcracker.com, 2018, para. 2). I tested the claim that those who posted 1 to 3 times a week on social media would differ from those that posted 4 to 7 times a week on social media regarding voting and voter registration. A z-test helped me decipher whether p_1 was equal to p_2. In addition to the alpha level, the null and alternative hypotheses are essential to a z-test. A null hypothesis states that there

is no significant difference between populations, and the alternative hypothesis states that there is a significant difference between populations (Pennsylvania State University, 2018). Given the secondary data, variables, research questions, and hypotheses, conducting a two proportions *z*-test was most appropriate.

The secondary data used for this research study were already in numeric values. Most of the data were published in percentages, which were converted based on the total number of surveys. The numeric values were used to produce scale-level data to identify any differences in populations. The statistical significance was set with an alpha of .05 as Cronbach's alpha was applied (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). With a significance of .05, there was a 5% risk that a sampling error could occur and 95% likelihood that the results would be duplicative (Frost, 2015).

This type of parametric test demonstrates whether populations differ from one another. A parametric test assumes that the population will follow a specific distribution (Frost, 2015). In my first research question, the independent variable was social media usage, and the dependent variable was voter registration rates. It was predicted that there would be a significant positive impact of social media usage on voter registration. In my second research question, the dependent variable was voting rates. It was anticipated that there would be a significant positive impact of social media usage on voting rates. *z*-test for two proportions was conducted to determine whether a difference existed between the two groups posting on social media.

Both two-tailed and one-tailed hypotheses were considered. A two-tailed hypothesis tests the possibility of a relationship in both directions, whereas a one-tailed

hypothesis tests the possibility of a relationship in only one direction (University of California, Los Angeles, n.d.). To get an overall view of any impact and difference between these two groups, I used two-tailed tests as the foundation for my hypotheses, which tests for statistical differences, either high or low (McDonald, 2014).

This research study's focus was exploring whether social media postings have a significant impact on voting and voter registration. The calculations from the z-test for two proportions corresponded with a two-tailed test. The alternative hypothesis was most reliant on being two tailed because if the alternative hypothesis were true, the z-test would determine if there was a greater or smaller significant difference.

Ethical Considerations

Understanding ethical guidelines are imperative in conducting a research study. When focusing on ethics, it is critical to acknowledge and understand how honesty, objectivity, integrity, openness, confidentiality, competence, and legality apply to ethics (Resnik, 2015).

One way to enhance the protection of study participants is to guarantee the confidentiality of participants. In doing so, the researcher helps to minimize physical or psychological risks that could develop after study results are published. Not only did this study provide confidentiality for participants, but it also provided anonymity. Anonymity applies when neither the researcher, nor anyone else, has access to the identity of the respondents (Trochim, 2006). As such, no names were collected for this study to ensure privacy and reduce the overall risks to participants.

The secondary data for this survey will be kept at a minimum of 5 years on the hard drive of one computer and an external flash drive. The computer in which the data is stored contains antivirus software to help prevent the hacking or manipulation of data. When the time arrives to dispose of the data, a Department of Defense 5220.22 data sanitization method will be used to clear the computer and flash drive of the data.

Ethical considerations must be given throughout the research to include data analysis and data interpretation in addition to data collection (Panter & Sterba, 2012). With quantitative data analysis, the researcher stays within ethical guidelines to eliminate and prevent any chance of data manipulation or data falsification. Moreover, when using secondary data, the examination of the data has already been completed by an outside source further working to prevent any data falsification errors. Permission was also given by Amy Thayer from the Achieve Research Agency to use the data although already published online. Additionally, Institutional Review Boards were created to ensure the proper procedures were followed in research studies. A proposal for this research study was submitted to the Walden University's Institutional Review Board to make sure there were no ethical concerns.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are used to enhance the accuracy of research studies (Creswell, 2014, p. 201). Reliability refers to the stability and consistency of results (Twycross and Shields, 2004, p. 36). Thatcher (2010) published that validity explores whether the instrument measures what the researcher intends to measure. When focusing on reliability alone, a researcher must address stability and homogeneity. Stability is

present when the researcher arrives at the same result running the same test multiple times (Creswell, 2014). Homogeneity is the measure of the internal consistency of the scales (Thatcher, 2010).

For this study, I focused on *construct validity*. Construct validity explores the measurement of the hypothesis and theoretical concepts (Thatcher, 2010). It is "the extent to which a particular measure relates to other measures consistent with theoretically derived hypotheses concerning the concepts that are being measured" (Carmines and Zeller, 1979).

Also, using secondary data increases reliability and validity. The way the 2016 Millennial Impact Report collected data over three months helped to also ensure the reliability and consistency of the data over time. Collecting data in this manner helps to validate the final results.

Conclusion

Chapter 3 provided the specific methodology used for this quantitative research study. This chapter focused on the research question, variables, and statistical methods. The combination of these vital factors was used to align this research study. As such, this study was a quasi-experimental design based on secondary data used to explore the impact of social media on millennial voting and voter registration. The goal is to show whether there is significant positive impact on social media usage, voting, and voter registration for people 18 to 36. A *z*-test for two proportions was conducted using secondary data. In the following chapter the results of this research are discussed.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between the dependent variables, voter registration and voting rates, and the independent variable of social media usage through Facebook and Twitter posts. The results of this research may aid in providing clarification on the strength and effect of social media in relation to voting and voter registration. It may also have a significant impact on the political and business world strategies that may also result in substantial social change. This chapter explains the data collection and analysis methods for this research. This study was designed to answer the following research questions and hypotheses.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

RQ1:   Is there a significant impact of social media usage on voter registration rates?

    H0:   There is no significant impact of social media usage on voter registration.

    H1:   There is significant impact of social media usage on voter registration.

RQ2:   Is there a significant impact of social media usage on voting rates?

    H0:   There is no significant impact of social media usage on voting rates.

    H1:   There is significant positive impact of social media usage on voting rates.

Data Collection

Following IRB approval, the secondary data were retrieved from the public website for the Millennial Impact Report. IRB approval was confirmed with an approval number of 05-15-18-03252561. Permission to use the data was granted by Dr. Amy Thayer, Director of Research for the Millennial Impact Report, along with access to an interactive data website. The Achieve Agency's "Wave 1" 2016 Millennial Impact Report collected 1,050 survey responses for ages 18-36 from March 2016 to May 2016, based on a quota sample using data from the U.S. Census Bureau. Achieve Agency collected 350 surveys each month. The survey collection dates were March 22-24, April 11, and May 9 -13.

As explained in Figure 3, nonprobability sampling was used to collect the same number of surveys each month to allow for generalized estimations that could be applied to the larger millennial generation (Achieve, 2016c). The 2016 Millennial Impact Report research sample was drawn from a Lightspeed GMI online opt-in panel (Achieve, 2016b). Wave 1 of the report included quantitative data on political ideology, voter registration, intent to vote, and social issues of interest. Wave 1 also addressed activism, government trust, and social media usage (Achieve, 2016a). The data included numbers, graphs, and scale-level data.

Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3
n = 1050	n = 1050	n = 1050
unique & unrepeated respondents	unique & unrepeated respondents	unique & unrepeated respondents
•March Survey Group #1 •N = 350 •April Survey Group #2 •N = 350 •May Survey Group #3 •N = 350	•June Survey Group #4 •N = 350 •July Survey Group #5 •N = 350 •August Survey Group #6 •N = 350	•September Survey Group #7 •N = 350 •October Survey Group #8 •N = 350 •November Survey Group #9 •N = 350

Figure 3. Millennial Impact Report research phases. From *The 2016 Millennial Impact Report: Wave 3 Trends and Post-Election Survey* (p. 4), by Achieve, 2016 (http://www.themillennialimpact.com/sites/default/files/reports/WAVE3_MIR2016_0111 17_0.pdf).

Characteristics of the Sample

The data for this research study focused on the millennial generation. *Millennials* are defined as individuals born between 1982 and 2004 (Rouse, 2015). For the purpose of this research study, millennials were 18 to 36 years old. A summary of additional sample (*N* = 1,050) characteristics is presented in Figure 4. Of the 1,050 participants from the 2016 Millennial Impact Report, 273 were aged 18 to 24 years, 357 were 25 to 30 years old, and 410 were 31 to 36 years old. There were 515 female participants, 525 male participants, and 10 transgender participants (Achieve, 2017a). Of the 1,050 survey respondents, 55% were employed full time, 11% were employed half-time, 4% were self-employed, 11% were students, and 9% were homemakers (Achieve, 2017a). The largest group in terms of educational attainment was composed of participants with a bachelor's degree (32%), followed by those with some college (21%) and high school graduates

(16%; Achieve, 2017a). The sample population was 67% Caucasian, 12% Hispanic, and
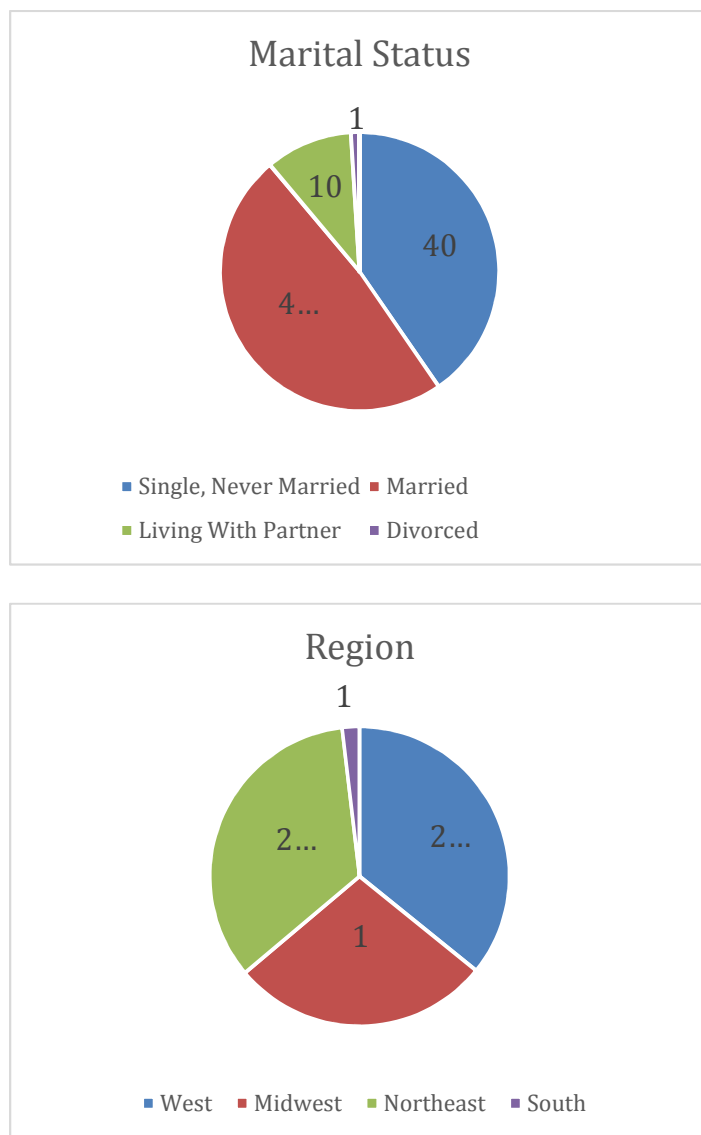
10% African American (Achieve, 2017a).

Marital Status

40

4...

10

1

- Single, Never Married ■ Married
- Living With Partner ■ Divorced

Region

1

2...

2...

1

- West ■ Midwest ■ Northeast ■ South

Figure 4. Millennial Impact Report sample characteristics. From *The 2016 Millennial Impact Report: Wave 1 Trends* (p. 8), by Achieve, 2016 (http://www.themillennialimpact.com/sites/default/files/reports/MIR2016-061616-WEB.pdf).

Assumptions

For this research, I can positively assume that the samples are random. I also have two normally distributed samples of $N = 325$ and $N = 189$ that are greater than 30. Based on my distributed samples, I could assume I had reached normality (Statistics How To, 2017). As a result of my sample being greater than 30, central limit theorems tells me that my sampling distribution is approximately normal (Leon-Guerrero, 2015). The central limit theorem indicates "that the sampling distribution of the sampling means approaches a normal distribution as the sample size gets larger, no matter what the shape of the population distribution for sample sizes over 30" (Statistics How To, 2018). I concluded that my samples were large enough to use normal approximation. All of the data collected were also unique in that data did not repeat and were independent of one another.

Data Analysis

To test the research questions and hypotheses regarding social media, voting, and voter registration, two z-tests for two proportions were conducted. To test these hypotheses, I completed the necessary steps. First, I set up two competing hypotheses to represent two-tailed tests. I also set the level of significance, computed the test statistic, calculated the p-value, evaluated the null hypothesis, and lastly stated the overall conclusion (Pennsylvania State University, 2018). My sample included 1,050 surveys from Wave 1 of the 2016 Millennial Impact Report.

I began by separating the data into two groups focused on the number of social media posts in a week. The first group included 325 participants who posted to social

media 1 to 3 times in a week. The second group included 189 participants who posted 4 to 7 times in a week. I also divided the two groups categorized by the number of weekly postings into two additional groups categorized by those who were registered to vote and planned on voting in the 2016 U.S. presidential election. Of the 325 participants who posted on social media 1 to 3 times in a week, 276 of the survey respondents were registered to vote, and 263 planned to vote in the 2016 U.S. presidential election. Of the 189 participants who posted on social media 4 to 7 times in a week, 160 were registered to vote, and 157 planned to vote in the 2016 U.S. presidential election (Achieve, 2017a).

To get an overall view of any impact and difference between these two groups, I used two-tailed tests as the foundation for my hypotheses, which tests for statistical differences, either high or low. z-tests for two proportions were used to determine whether the group whose members posted 1 to 3 times in a week on social media was any different from the group whose members posted 4 to 7 times in a week on social media. Next, I set the alpha to 0.05 or 5% error level and calculated the test statistics. For both of the statistical tests conducted, my null hypothesis (Ho) was not rejected. The null hypothesis is often referred to as the *no difference exists* hypothesis. As such, there was not enough statistical evidence to claim a difference in the populations at the .05 significance level. Furthermore, I could not be 95% sure that there was a statistical difference between social media users who posted 1 to 3 times a week and those who posted 4 to 7 times a week on intent to vote or being registered to vote.

As shown in Figure 5, the first statistical test compared those who posted 1 to 3 times a week on social media to those who posted 4 to 7 a week to compare only voter

registration. This statistical test allowed me to examine whether there was a positive or negative difference between the groups as it pertained to voter registration. As shown in Figure 6, the second statistical test compared those who posted 1 to 3 posts a week to those who posted 4 to 7 times a week to compare only voting rates. This statistical test allowed me to explore whether there was a positive or negative difference between the groups regarding their intent to vote in the 2016 U.S. presidential election.

The goal of this study was to explore whether posting on social media increases millennials' likelihood to register to vote and vote. I was able to examine this by looking at the frequency of posting on social media, voting, and voter registration. After analyzing the secondary data, I categorized groups based on the number of weekly social media postings, voter registration, and voting intentions. With this information, I was able to compare the 1-3 a week posters to the 4-7 a week posters in terms of voter registration and voting intention numbers. Ultimately, the goal was to determine whether there was a positive or negative difference between the two groups. With a positive difference between the groups, I could have assumed that there was a high statistical significance to the relationship whereby social media increased political action.

With my data analysis, this study explored whether there is a significant difference between posting on social media 1 to 3 times or 4 to 7 times per week and intent to vote. This study explored whether there was a significance difference between posting on social media 1 to 3 times or 4 to 7 times per week and voter registration rates as well. The results showed that there was no difference between the 1-3 times per week and 4-7 times per week posting groups in terms of voting and voter registration rates.

Thus, I can assume that the null hypothesis—that there is no difference between groups—remains true.

After analyzing the statistical data, I can assume that there is no statistically significant impact of social media on voting and voter registration. The *p*-value for the voter registration *Z* test was 0.9352. Because this *p*-value was larger than 0.05, it was concluded that the null hypothesis was not rejected. The *p*-value for the intent to vote data *Z* test was 0.544. It was also concluded that the null hypothesis was not rejected. The actual analysis is included in Figures 5 and 6.

For sample 1, we have that the sample size is $N_1 = 325$, the number of favorable cases is $X_1 = 276$, so then the sample proportion is $\hat{p}_1 = \frac{X_1}{N_1} = \frac{276}{325} = 0.8492$

For sample 2, we have that the sample size is $N_2 = 189$, the number of favorable cases is $X_2 = 160$, so then the sample proportion is $\hat{p}_2 = \frac{X_2}{N_2} = \frac{160}{189} = 0.8466$

The value of the pooled proportion is computed as
$\bar{p} = \frac{X_1 + X_2}{N_1 + N_2} = \frac{276+160}{325+189} = 0.8482$

Also, the given significance level is $\alpha = .05$.

(1) _Null and Alternative Hypotheses_

The following null and alternative hypotheses need to be tested:

$Ho : p_1 = p_2$

$Ha : p_1 \neq p_2$

This corresponds to a two-tailed test, for which a z-test for two population proportions needs to be conducted.

Ho: p_1 [= ▾] p_2

Ha: p_1 [≠ ▾] p_2

➤ Sample Size (n_1) =   325   ➤ Sample Size (n_2) =   189

➤ Favorable cases (X_1) =   276   ➤ Favorable cases (X_2) =   160

➤ Significance Level (α) =   .05

(2) _Rejection Region_

Based on the information provided, the significance level is $\alpha = .05$, and the critical value for a two-tailed test is $z_c = 1.96$.

The rejection region for this two-tailed test is $R = \{z : |z| > 1.96\}$

(3) _Test Statistics_

The z-statistic is computed as follows:

$$z = \frac{\hat{p}_1 - \hat{p}_2}{\sqrt{\bar{p}(1-\bar{p})(1/n_1 + 1/n_2)}} = \frac{0.8492 - 0.8466}{\sqrt{0.8482 \cdot (1 - 0.8482)(1/325 + 1/189)}} = 0.081$$

(4) _Decision about the null hypothesis_

Since it is observed that $|z| = 0.081 \leq z_c = 1.96$, it is then concluded that _the null hypothesis is not rejected._

Using the P-value approach: The p-value is $p = 0.9352$, and since $p = 0.9352 \geq .05$, it is concluded that the null hypothesis is not rejected.

(5) _Conclusion_

It is concluded that the null hypothesis Ho is _not rejected._ Therefore, there is not enough evidence to claim that the population proportion p_1 is different than p_2, at the .05 significance level.

Graphically

Z-test for Two Proportions, z = 0.081, p = 0.9352
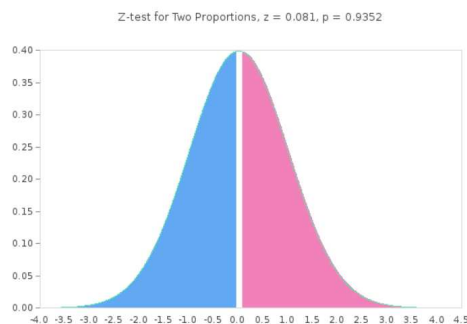
	P 1	P 2	Test	Findings
	Posts 1 to 3 times a week	Posts 4 to 7 times a week	P1 = P2	P-value 0.9352
Total	325	189		
	Registered to vote	Registered to vote	P1 ≠ P2	P1 = P2
Total	276	160		

Figure 5. Voting registration rates for millennials posting 1-3 versus 4-7 times per week on social media.

Ho: p_1 [=] p_2

Ha: p_1 [≠] p_2

➤ Sample Size (n_1) = [325] ➤ Sample Size (n_2) = [189]

➤ Favorable cases (X_1) = [263] ➤ Favorable cases (X_2) = [157]

➤ Significance Level (α) = [.05]

For sample 1, we have that the sample size is $N_1 = 325$, the number of favorable cases is $X_1 = 263$, so then the sample proportion is $\hat{p}_1 = \frac{X_1}{N_1} = \frac{263}{325} = 0.8092$

For sample 2, we have that the sample size is $N_2 = 189$, the number of favorable cases is $X_2 = 157$, so then the sample proportion is $\hat{p}_2 = \frac{X_2}{N_2} = \frac{157}{189} = 0.8307$

The value of the pooled proportion is computed as
$\bar{p} = \frac{X_1 + X_2}{N_1 + N_2} = \frac{263 + 157}{325 + 189} = 0.8171$

Also, the given significance level is $\alpha = .05$.

(1) *Null and Alternative Hypotheses*

The following null and alternative hypotheses need to be tested:

$Ho : p_1 = p_2$

$Ha : p_1 \neq p_2$

This corresponds to a two-tailed test, for which a z-test for two population proportions needs to be conducted.

(2) *Rejection Region*

Based on the information provided, the significance level is $\alpha = .05$, and the critical value for a two-tailed test is $z_c = 1.96$.

The rejection region for this two-tailed test is $R = \{z : |z| > 1.96\}$

(3) *Test Statistics*

The z-statistic is computed as follows:

$$z = \frac{\hat{p}_1 - \hat{p}_2}{\sqrt{\bar{p}(1 - \bar{p})(1/n_1 + 1/n_2)}} = \frac{0.8092 - 0.8307}{\sqrt{0.8171 \cdot (1 - 0.8171)(1/325 + 1/189)}} = -0.607$$

(4) *Decision about the null hypothesis*

Since it is observed that $|z| = 0.607 \leq z_c = 1.96$, it is then concluded that *the null hypothesis is not rejected.*

Using the P-value approach: The p-value is $p = 0.544$, and since $p = 0.544 \geq .05$, it is concluded that the null hypothesis is not rejected.

(5) *Conclusion*

It is concluded that the null hypothesis Ho is *not rejected.* Therefore, there is not enough evidence to claim that the population proportion p_1 is different than p_2, at the .05 significance level.

Graphically

Z-test for Two Proportions, z = -0.607, p = 0.544
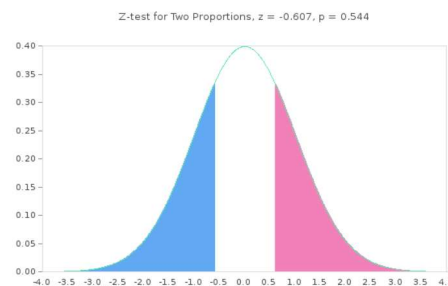
	P 1	P 2	Test	Findings
	Posts 1 to 3 times a week	Posts 4 to 7 times a week	P1 = P2	P-value 0.5444
Total	325	189		
	Intend to Vote	Intend to Vote	P1 ≠ P2	P1 = P2
Total	263	157		

Figure 6. Voting rates for millennials posting 1-3 versus 4-7 times per week on social media.

Conclusion

The findings from conducting two *z*-tests for two proportions reveal that I cannot reject the null hypotheses ($p = .93$). With a *p*-value of .93, I can assume that there is a great deal of overlap and agreement between the two groups being compared. This analysis of secondary data demonstrates that there is no statistical difference in the relationship between the 1 to 3 and 4 to 7 times per week social media posters in terms of their voting and voter registration rates. However, examination of the data reveals that further research may aid in the development of this subject matter in exploring various age groups to compare to millennials. In Chapter 5, I offer suggestions and recommendations regarding the findings. Concluding thoughts and limitations are also addressed.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

Social media strategies have become a staple for political organizations, politicians, and campaign managers seeking political gains (Shirky, 2011). Despite that, there exists limited information to indicate social media's impact on political participation. There is a significant need for further research on this topic to address how the political behavior of millennial voters might be affected through their use of social media in the United States. There is increased interest in specific issues related to political communication strategies through social media to be explored because social media represent a highly used method for communication by millennials (ages 18 to 30). The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine the relationship between the dependent variables, voter registration and voting rates, and the independent variable of social media usage through variable rates of social media postings.

Understanding how millennial social media usage relates to political participation through voting and voter registration could help inform an investigation of how to improve millennial voting and voter registration participation overall. Secondary data from the Achieve Agency 2016 Millennial Impact Report were used to compare the number of weekly social media postings against voter registration and voting intent data. From the comparisons using two-proportion statistical z-tests, I found that there was no statistical difference between the groups that posted less frequently and more frequently. The two groups were in fact very similar and revealed that the null hypotheses could not be rejected.

Interpretation of Findings

In Chapter 2, I explored the lack of literature regarding social media's impact on millennial political participation. It was evident from existing literature that the voter registration and voting rates of millennials were concerning, in that they had not surpassed millennial voting rates in the 2008 U.S. presidential election (Fisher, 2011). Ten years after the 2008 election, the percentage of millennials registering to vote and voting has not grown to reflect the increase of millennials becoming eligible to vote and becoming the largest generation in the United States (McCutcheon, 2015). The hypothesis that increased usage of social media leads to increased levels of voting or voter registration has yet to be statistically demonstrated. Even with the growing literature and scholarly research on this topic, scholars are unclear as to the degree that social media influences voters (Douglas et al., 2015).

Findings of this study revealed that there was no significant difference between survey respondents who posted 1 to 3 times versus 4 to 7 times in a week on social media concerning voter registration and intent to vote. Thus, I could assume that posting more on social media does not increase one's propensity to register to vote or vote. Based on the findings, I could assume further that the null hypothesis was true and there was no significant impact of social media usage on voter registration or intent to vote.

The results of this study suggest that posting on social media is not an indication of voter registration or intent to vote. The findings serve to argue against the sentiment that increased social media postings equate to increased political participation through voter registration and voting. Perhaps millennials believe that posting on social media is

their political participation; if this is the case, posting on social media may have no implications for their inclination to vote. This thought was further examined in Chapter 2. A Harvard study noted that some millennials believe online political participation to be more impactful than offline political participation (Harvard University Institute of Politics, 2011). Although this study did not confirm that increased social media postings create increased voter registration and intent to vote, it did further knowledge and exploration on this topic. It is necessary to have research that expands knowledge on an issue as researchers work to find a resolution. I can confirm their findings that thus far, social media usage shows no effect on voting and registration.

This study was developed using a conceptual framework because existing theory was lacking on the subject matter. The conceptual framework focused on the impact of increased social media usage on voter registration and voting. The phenomenological study approach allowed me to ascertain whether a phenomenon existed involving number of social media postings, voter registration, and voting rates. The p-values of the statistical analyses were .935 and .544, indicating that such a phenomenon did not exist.

Limitations of the Study

External Validity

The data used in the research study were from a published secondary source. As such, all of the survey participants were selected via Achieve Research Agency for the 2016 Millennial Impact Report. From the data, I know that the same number of surveys was collected each month. For the purposes of this study, I used Wave 1 of the Millennial

Impact Report, in which 350 surveys were collected each month for 3 months, totaling 1,050 survey respondents.

I also know that all respondents were between 18 to 36 years old and were dispersed geographically throughout the United States. Twenty-three percent of the respondents lived in the West, 18% were from the Midwest, 22% were from the Northeast, and 37% were from the South (Achieve, 2016a). There was close to an even split between male and female participants, with transgender participants representing 1% of the respondents. Understanding the characteristics and demographics of the sample allows the study to be more generalizable regardless of gender but specific to age.

Internal Validity

Any possibility of internal invalidity would come from bias in participant survey responses. Social desirability is the pressure that survey participants may feel to respond to questions in accordance with what they believe will be perceived as favorable regardless of their true answer (Lavrakas, 2008). This bias may develop when respondents want to protect their image and avoid any negative judgments. To combat possible social desirability bias, the surveys were made anonymous. With anonymous surveys, respondents should not feel the need to protect themselves against any unwanted outcomes and should feel free to be candid and honest.

<div align="center">Recommendations</div>

There is a great deal of room for continual and further research regarding millennials, social media, and political participation. As social media are relatively new forms of media when compared to print and television, researchers have just begun to

conduct research on topics related to social media. This was the first study to compare and conflate social media postings, millennials, and voter registration and voting. Future studies might conduct this research with older generations to determine whether a difference exists between 18- to 36-year-olds and 37- to 64-year-olds. It would also be interesting to compare the millennial generation to Generation Z to explore whether a generation younger than millennials has a greater proclivity to be influenced by social media to register to vote and to vote.

Future studies should delve further into this subject area and investigate the role of gender for millennials in relation to social media usage and political participation. It would be fascinating to learn whether men and women respond differently to social media or are influenced differently by social media. Exploring whether there is a difference between men and women could lead to solutions or discussions on whether millennial men and women should be targeted differently in an effort to increase political participation among the millennial generation.

Implications

Although no significant difference was found between the 1-3 and 4-7 posting groups, the results of this study contribute to knowledge on millennials, social media, and political participation. This research adds to the growing literature on this subject matter. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Cogburn and Espionza-Vasquez (2011) conducted a study on the 2008 presidential election in which they found that Facebook followers of all ages did not indicate actual voting results. From this research study, I now know that the frequency of political postings on social media by millennials does not indicate

probability to vote or register to vote. This research extends the literature not only on millennials, voting, and social media, but also on the larger topic of social media and voting. I hope that the results of this study will encourage more in-depth studies on this issue to develop a solution to stagnant millennial voter registration and voting rates.

In 2008, millennial voting was at an all-time high for millennials at 52%, but this figure declined in 2012 to 45%. In the 2016 U.S. presidential election, 49% of millennials voted (Pew Research Center, 2017). Although there was an increase in voter participation from 2012 to 2016, the 2016 voter turnout for millennials did not surpass millennial turnout for the 2008 U.S. presidential election. As such, it seems crucial to continue to examine this subject matter to provide greater knowledge on millennial political engagement and participation.

Social Change

Chapter 2 highlighted the existing literature on millennials as the largest users of social media. Chapter 2 also highlighted the stagnant voting rates among millennials. As the millennial generation continues to age, more of this generation becomes essential to the voting population and an active democracy in the United States. The millennial generation is now the largest generation and the least active voting generation. Trying to find solutions to the lack of millennial political participation through voter registration and voting is imperative.

The results of this research may contribute to societal and political change. These findings may also impact the business world, given that social media companies are private businesses. Governmental and nongovernmental organizations may benefit from

the findings of this study as they move forward to develop and identify strategies that work to increase millennial voting and voter registration. This study concluded that social media postings are not a valid way to determine voter registration and voting likelihood among millennials. Further research should be conducted to develop strategies to increase millennial political participation. The civic duty of voting and registering to vote remains essential to democracy in the United States.

Although this study did not develop a strategy to increase political participation among millennials, it did rule out the notion that millennials who post more on social media are more likely to vote and register to vote, which was shown to be false. When addressing a problem or issue, it is not only important to develop and confirm new strategies; it is equally important to rule out other notions in the process of finding a solution. This research has helped to rule out one notion, getting researchers one step closer to a solution that, ultimately, may create social change.

The millennial generation is becoming increasingly important in relation to the civic duties of voter registration and voting. The way in which millennials are engaged in the political process is a social issue. Millennials' participation in voting and the voter registration process is also a social issue. As such, research that aids in extending knowledge on this subject matter works to increase social change, break down barriers, and offer approaches that may alter policy in the future.

Conclusion

Although the results of this research study did not support increased social media postings as an indication for millennial voting and voter registration likelihood, important

contributions were confirmed and made. These insights may further the existing literature on this subject and can be used a foundation and platform for future studies. I hope that the limitations and recommendations discussed can serve as a springboard for further studies.

The lack of literature on this issue served as the inspiration for this study. I hope that the findings of this study motivate others to continue exploring possible solutions and indications related to millennial political behavior. How to increase millennial voting and voter registration is a question critical to the continuation of the American democratic system. Continued research is needed to find solutions to this issue. This research study explored one perspective on this problem.

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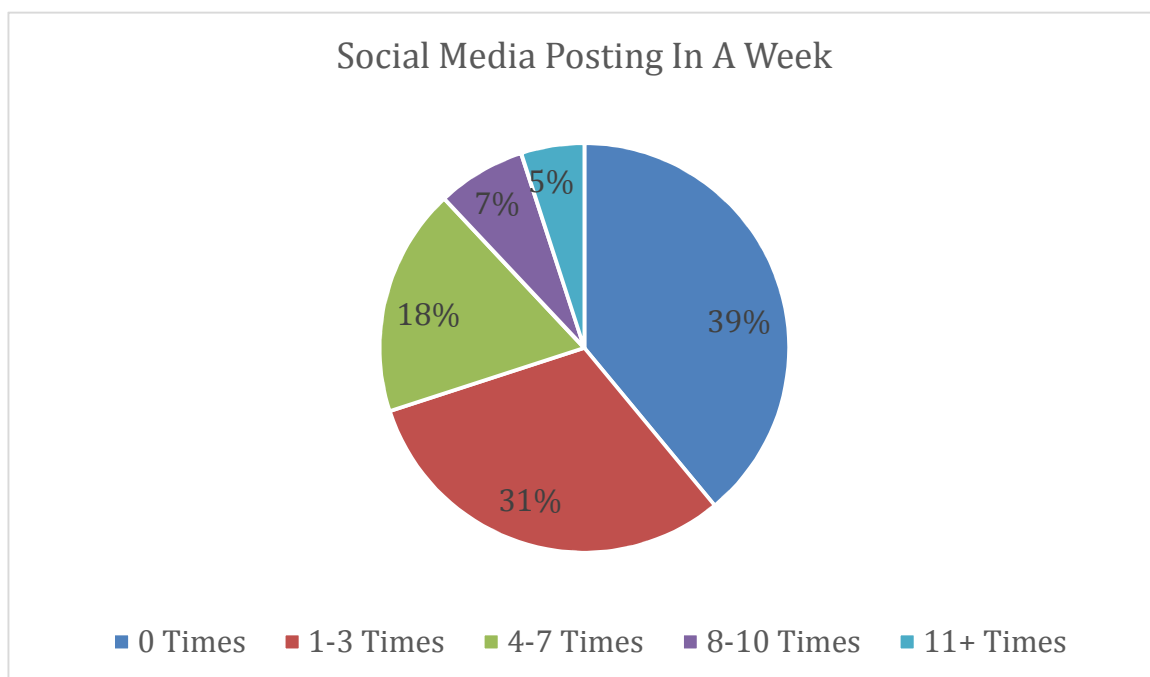search.proquest.com.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/docview/1705544690?accountid=14

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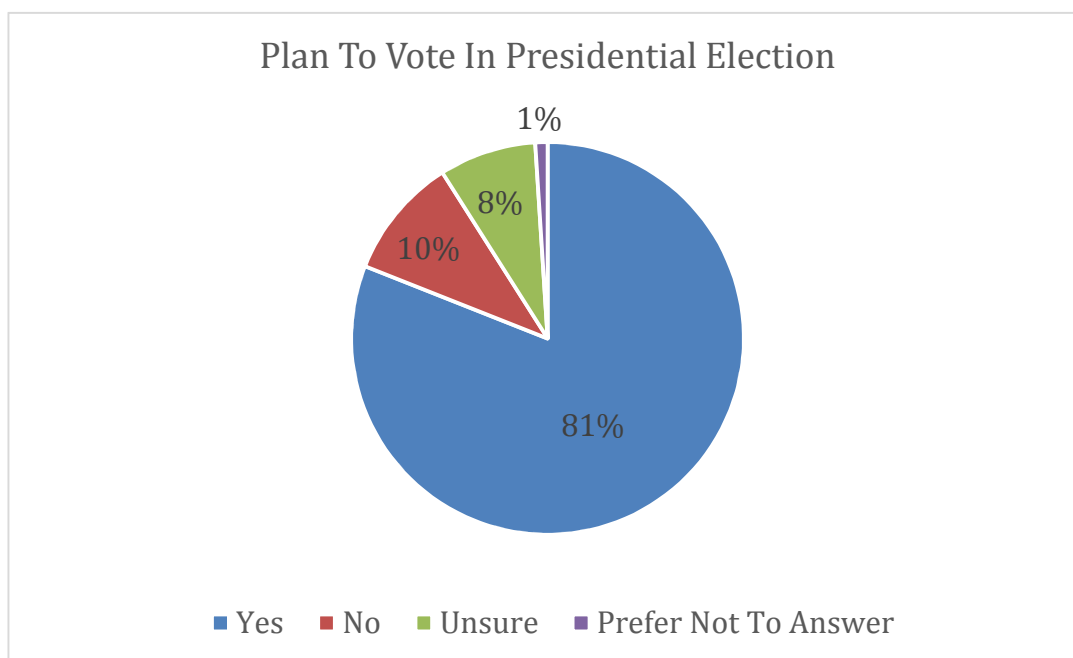http://ezp.waldenulibrary.org/login?url=https://search–proquest–
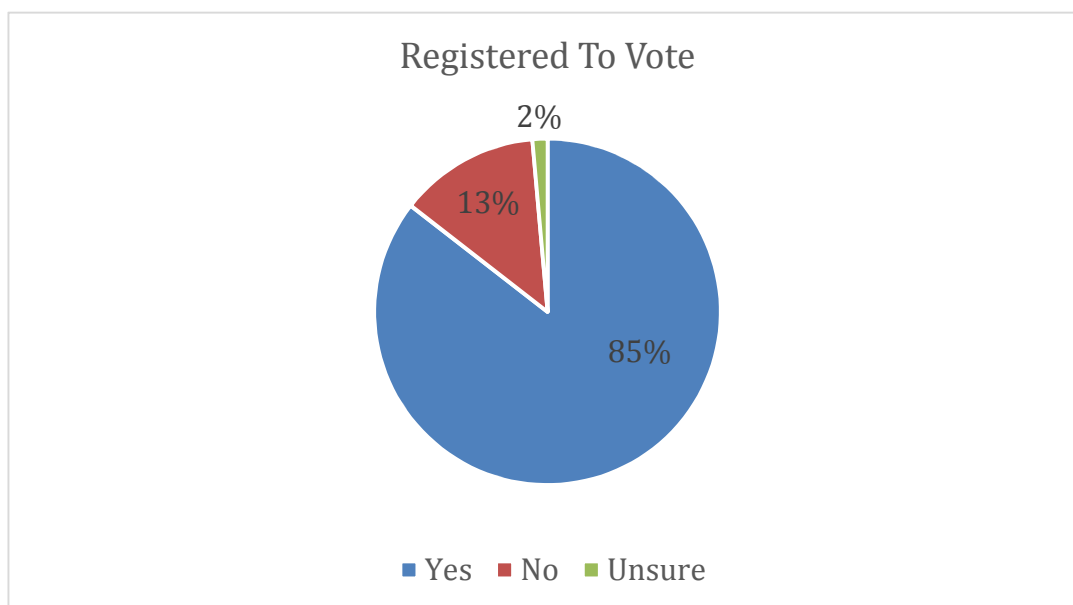
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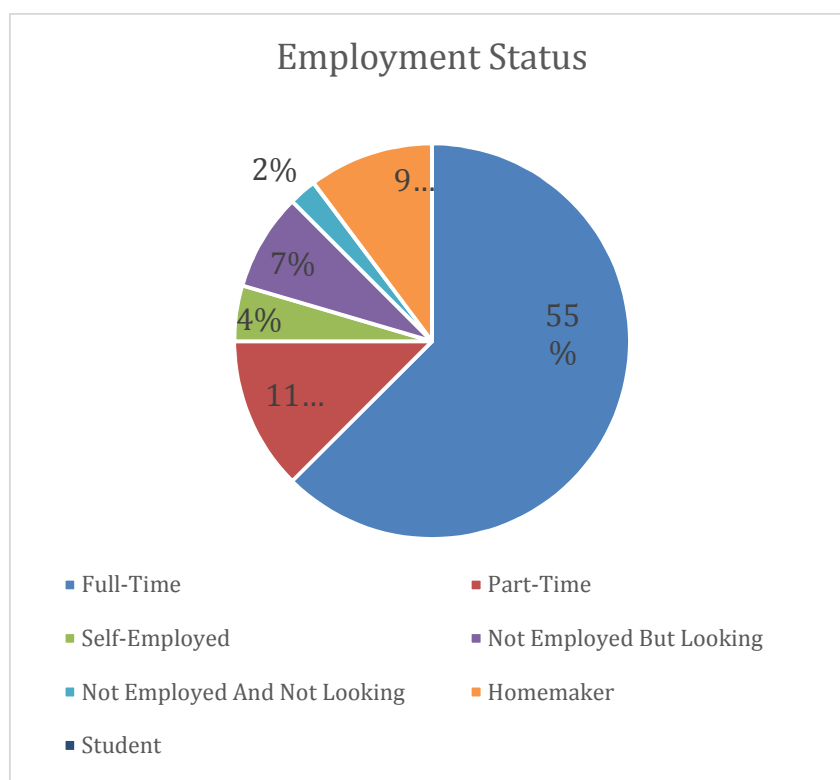
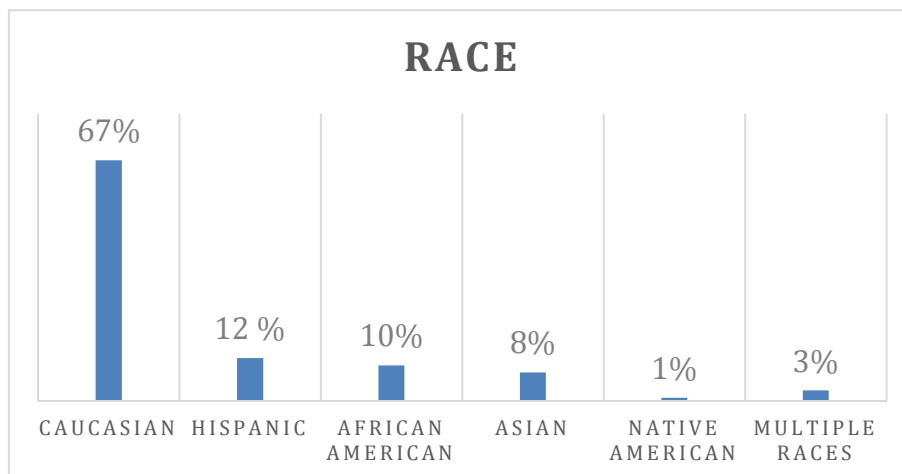Appendix A: Secondary Data—Social Media Usage

Appendix B. Millennial Impact Report social media usage. From *The 2016 Millennial Impact Report: Wave 1 Trends* (p. 20), by Achieve, 2016 (http://www.themillennialimpact.com/sites/default/files/reports/MIR2016-061616-WEB.pdf).

Appendix B: Voter Registration and Voting Intent

Registered To Vote

2%

13%

85%

■ Yes ■ No ■ Unsure

Plan To Vote In Presidential Election

1%

8%

10%

81%

■ Yes ■ No ■ Unsure ■ Prefer Not To Answer

Appendix C. Millennial Impact Report voter registration and voting intent. From *The 2016 Millennial Impact Report: Wave 1 Trends* (p. 8), by Achieve, 2016 (http://www.themillennialimpact.com/sites/default/files/reports/MIR2016-061616-WEB.pdf).

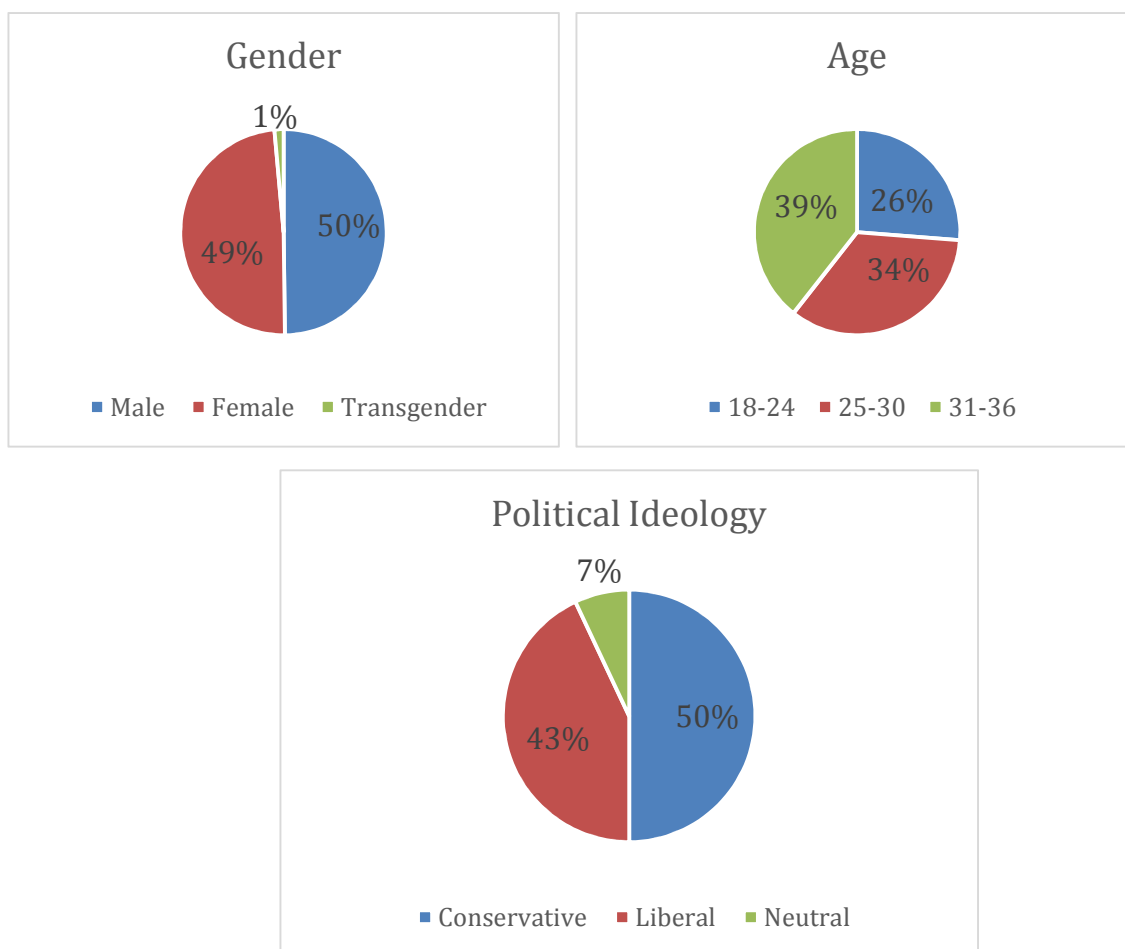Appendix C: Additional Survey Respondent Characteristics

RACE

- CAUCASIAN 67%
- HISPANIC 12 %
- AFRICAN AMERICAN 10%
- ASIAN 8%
- NATIVE AMERICAN 1%
- MULTIPLE RACES 3%

Employment Status

55%
2%
7%
4%
11...
9...

- Full-Time
- Part-Time
- Self-Employed
- Not Employed But Looking
- Not Employed And Not Looking
- Homemaker
- Student

Gender

1%

50%

49%

■ Male ■ Female ■ Transgender

Age

26%

34%

39%

■ 18-24 ■ 25-30 ■ 31-36

Political Ideology

7%

50%

43%

■ Conservative ■ Liberal ■ Neutral

Appendix B. Millennial Impact Report social media usage. From *The 2016 Millennial Impact Report: Wave 1 Trends* (p. 8), by Achieve, 2016 (http://www.themillennialimpact.com/sites/default/files/reports/MIR2016-061616-B.pdf).