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Social Media and Youth Activism

Monica Pauls



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Use it Wisely

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Monica Pauls' book "Use It Wisely" unpacks and critiques stereotypes regarding youth and digital activism (e.g., as 'slacktivism') through a meticulously designed, multi-method research project which centers the voices of youth involved in both gun control and climate change social movements. The book explores core issues such as how authenticity is understood by activists who skillfully navigate the constraints and structure of digital environments to render social change. It provides an invaluable contribution to knowledge in this area.

Prof. Dr. Michael Adorjan

Department of Sociology
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About the author

Monica Pauls is an Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Child Studies and Social Work at Mount Royal University in Calgary, Alberta. Her research focuses on youth, technology, and digital practice, with particular attention to social media use and youth activism. She teaches in the Bachelor of Child Studies, primarily in the areas of program design and evaluation, research methods, systems and social policy, and child and youth care practice. Her teaching emphasizes the integration of theory and practice through participatory learning, partnerships with community organizations, and opportunities for applied learning. Prior to her academic career, Monica worked as Coordinator for Alberta-based research projects at the Canadian Research Institute for Law and the Family and as a Policy Analyst with the United Way of Calgary and Area. She also spent several years working directly with at-risk youth in schools, community programs, and residential settings. Monica holds a PhD in Sociology from the University of Calgary. Her doctoral research, which forms the foundation of this book, examined the role of social media in youth activism.

Summary

Young people's lives are increasingly shaped by digital media, yet public and academic debates about youth, social media and well-being are often dominated by fear-based narratives that frame online spaces as inherently harmful. Against a backdrop of rising concerns about youth mental health and widespread anxieties about social media use, this book offers a critical and timely intervention into how we understand young people's political and civic engagement in the digital age. Drawing on in-depth interviews with youth activists involved in the international climate change movement and the American gun control movement, alongside analysis of their social media practices, the book challenges binary distinctions between online and real-world activism. Rather than treating digital participation as superficial or ineffective, it foregrounds young people's own perspectives on activism, demonstrating how digital platforms function as meaningful spaces for connection, organizing and political expression. Situated at the intersection of youth studies, sociology, media studies and political engagement, the book builds on and extends existing literature on digital activism by centring youth voices and lived experience. It offers a counter-narrative to the persistent "slacktivism" critique, arguing that such framings not only misunderstand contemporary activism but risk delegitimizing young people's contributions to civic life. Written in an accessible style while grounded in rigorous social research, this book will be of interest to scholars, post-secondary students and practitioners working in education, youth work, child and youth care, social services and community organizing. It is suitable for classroom adoption, scholarly reference and professional reflection, and provides valuable insights for anyone seeking to better understand how young people are reshaping political participation in a digitally networked world.

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