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Online communities, Gen Y and civic engagement –
An investigation of youth leadership development potential
in the context of social and democratic issues.

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Abstract

Leadership is an extensively discussed and researched concept in scholarship. A vast amount of literature focuses on adult leadership, especially in a political and organizational context. Adult leadership places emphasis on the role of individual leaders, whilst youth leadership takes a participatory approach. Leadership scholars indicate that this participatory approach to youth leadership, involves young people addressing community concerns and at a civic level, engaging in planning and decision-making.

Social participation traits and civic identity are developed during adolescence yet very little research has been undertaken in this area since the 1960s. This suggests that youth leadership is an overlooked research stream. Current studies on Gen Y indicate that this demographic are technologically proficient especially with regard to Web 2.0 tools, but also disengaged from their community. This research project examines the use of online communities to influence the leadership skills of a Gen Y cohort in the context of social participation and civic engagement.

In this study a focus group and an online wiki were used to investigate how Gen Y teenagers in Wellington, New Zealand used online communities to develop and exercise their leadership skills through civic and social action endeavours.

Results from the study indicate that youth leadership, in an online context, centres on the role of organisers who foster civic participation through online community networks. Thus youth leadership is strengthened through participation in civic and community issues using online communities. Adult perceptions of youth and the low credibility of online communities, as perceived by youth, were found to act as barriers to online youth leadership. The findings highlight the importance of adults acknowledging youth in social participation and civic endeavours. This study extends research in the youth leadership stream and enhances our understanding of Gen Y and their use of online communities.

Keywords: Online communities, Gen Y, youth leadership, civic engagement and social participation

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Dedication

To God, “a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path”; without his divine grace and blessing this project would not have been accomplished. (Psalm 119:105 KJV)

To my father, Professor G.M.O. Maloiy, who instilled in me from an early age a love of knowledge and the ardent pursuit of education.

To my mother, Josephine Kainta Maloiy, brothers Lemmie Maloiy and Kepamet Maloiy, who shared in the peaks and troughs of this Masters research project.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the purpose and significance of this study in three sections. The first section frames the research questions and scope of the study. The second section discusses the significance of the research in terms of theory and practice of youth leadership development and civic engagement. The final section contextualizes the research by defining key terms shaping the research.

Statement of the problem

Youth development and civic engagement research identifies adolescence as an influential and timely period for leadership development (Hoyt & Kennedy, 2008). It is at this stage that young people begin to develop a social consciousness. Youniss, McLellan and Yates (1997) describe this process as the development of a ‘civic identity’ which includes envisioning oneself as an active participant in civic matters.

Despite the common understanding that adolescence is an important period for youth civic engagement and leadership development, there has been minimal research in youth development and civic engagement since the 1960s and 1970s, leaving a substantial gap in scholarly research (Campbell, 2008). Research conducted by Schussman and Earl (2004) found that the bulk of leadership literature focuses on the recruitment of leaders and leadership within an organizational structure. Schussman and Earl (2004) also noticed that there is a gap in scholarly research with regard to leadership and internet activism. According to McNae (2010) the last five years have seen an increase in youth leadership development programmes with an emphasis on tertiary students. The author adds that despite this recent development, there is limited research regarding youth leadership in secondary schools. Bosworth (2002) found that leadership skills are rarely covered in schools. This can also be seen in a New Zealand context as the “New Zealand curriculum 2010” has placed an emphasis on students acquiring values and key competencies such as managing of self and participating and contributing to the community. Despite these statements youth leadership “fails to meet the needs of young people and is tokenistic.” (McNae, 2010, p. 678). Ultimately there is a significant lack of empirical research regarding youth leadership development (Teasley, Tyson and House, 2007).

Studies indicate that leadership behaviour is inherent in young people and this behavior needs to be fostered. For example, research undertaken by Robinson (1996)

of 14 African-American women community college leaders, found the women had displayed recognizable leadership qualities to friends and classmates since early childhood. Bryson (2002), in her research findings, suggests that youth have different leadership requirements in comparison to adults. These findings reinforce the importance of providing young people with leadership opportunities that suit their unique requirements.

Significance of this project

Youth aged between 14-17 years old represent an apt demographic for leadership development. As research indicates, between the ages of 14 and 25 identity development and social awareness occurs (Santrock, 2001). Santrock also found a link between identity and vocation. It is at this stage that young people begin to develop a social consciousness. Findings by Campbell (2006) and Plutzer (2002) also indicate that adolescence is a critical stage of development in which social participation habits are formed.

Youth leadership development is critical for empowering young people. Larson and Hansen (2005) investigated a community-centered youth action programme that resulted in youth empowerment and new modes of thinking. Most importantly, the students learned long-term action strategies and realised that, despite being young, they could have a positive impact their communities. Scheer (1997) also believes that leadership skills are important for young people to feel a sense of satisfaction and belonging to society.

According to Masters, Macintosh and Smith (2004) young people want to be engaged in political decision making but they cannot relate to traditional means of communicating with the electorate. Therefore, adolescents are often relegated to operating on the “fringes” of adult society (Schlegel & Barry, 1991). As a result youth feel that adults have all the power while they are just listeners and onlookers in society (Camino, 2000).

Research has suggested that using the internet and other ICT tools helps engage Generation Ys (Masters, Macintosh & Smith, 2004). Coleman, Griffiths and Simmons (2002) suggest that online communities provide spaces for young people to actively participate in communities of democratic practice thus enabling them to engage with social and democratic issues. Therefore, this study seeks to extend research in the youth leadership development stream by investigating the use of online

communities by Generation Y (Gen Y) with a focus on how this technology can positively influence youth leadership skills and assist social participation among New Zealand secondary school students. The following overarching question guides the investigation:

How do online communities strengthen youth voice and leadership in the context of social and democratic issues?

- a. How are Gen Ys using online communities in the context of social and democratic issues?
- b. What are the facilitators and barriers to Gen Y leadership in the context of online communities?

Definitions

Online communities, Gen Y, leadership and leadership development are key terms that structure this research. Definitions of these key terms are given below:

Online communities

Online communities can be defined as the formation of virtual groups around a common interest. Preece (2000) describes online communities as groups of internet users with common interests communicating and sharing resources with one another. Many of these communities are formed on social networking sites. Huffaker (2009) also notes that online communities are visible on social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace. The author adds that these groups share information at a high rate and members are able to keep informed on recent developments in their interest groups. These online communities may cater to interests ranging from political groups to entertainment topics such as fashion and movies. Online communities form networks based on common goals, beliefs and characteristics; for example MyChurch, BlackPlanet and Couchsurfing. At the same time these networks essentially draw people with similar personal views and access to online communities is often based on these commonalities.

Generation Y

Generation Y consists of young adults born over two decades, from the early 1980s through to 2000; (Goldgehn, 2004; McCrindle, 2002; Tapscott, 1998). These young people have grown up in the 'information age'. This affects the way that

Generation Y acquires new skills and knowledge. Generation Ys are seen as comfortable in a fully-digital world. Prensky (2001) refers to them as “digital natives”. He notes that Generation Y members have grown up interacting with and using various technologies. Web 2.0 and visual communication modes are tools that are significant for this demographic. Generation Y are characterised as being proactive, ready to apply multi-tasking and collaboration as a means of problem solving (Tapscott, 2008). Generation Y values family and friends, they are also motivated by finding a sense of purpose and social justice (Goldgehn, 2004). The literature on Gen Y suggests that they differ from other generations due to their familiarity with technology, in particular the internet (Tapscott, 1998; Dulin, 2005).

Leadership

In attempting to define leadership, a large body of scholarly literature has emerged. Despite this accumulation of knowledge, scholars have not decided on an agreed definition of leadership. Bennis (1989) equates leadership with beauty, hard to describe, but once observed instantly recognizable. Kouzes and Posner (1990) refer to leadership as an art of mobilizing followers towards shared goals. And Kress (2006) defines leadership as “having influence”. For the purposes of this research project the definition of leadership is influence among followers, and a steadfast pursuit of a goal for the development of a community.

Youth leadership

Recent research on adolescent leadership focuses on the need for youth to take social action (Hoyt & Kennedy, 2008). Scholars of adolescent development indicate that youth leadership is based on social participation and civic engagement (Flanagan & Sherrod, 1998; Metz, McLellan & Youniss, 2003). Kress (2006) describes youth leadership as youth being involved in responsible activities that meet community needs and give opportunities for planning and decision making. Thus youth leadership can be surmised as influence, social participation and civic engagement on a national and community level.

Leadership development

There is acknowledgement in the literature that leadership development is a crucial factor for the success of various industries (Darling, 2007). Leadership development builds cognitive, socio-emotional and behavioral skills (Degeling &

Carr, 2004). Van Linden and Fertman (1998) posit that adolescent leadership development involves the observation of others and the inclusion of life experiences. Kress (2006) describes the key tools of leadership as communication, decision-making and self-discipline. Youth leadership development occurs when adolescents are given opportunities or experiences to develop and acquire self-discipline, decision-making and communication skills through civic engagement.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to review literature from two major areas, youth leadership development and online communities. Youth leadership literature is focused on youth development and civic engagement and these fundamental concepts are explored. The literature review also explores online communities as they pertain to Gen Y. Key theories of interest within youth leadership development are examined to derive a contextual framework for this study.

Gen Y adolescent influences

The previous chapter highlighted adolescence as an important stage in identity development and social consciousness. Adolescence is also a time when young people are influenced by key figures or role models. This section reviews briefly key influences on Gen Y and the impact of identity on leadership development.

Gen Y members are motivated by key adults and compassion. Research on the influences of adolescents towards career aspirations are limited (Martin & Bush, 2000). However, there is an increasing volume of studies focusing on influencing Gen Y consumer behavior. These studies suggest that popular culture, especially celebrity figures, are influential in the lives of Gen Y youth. Athletes in America are seen as major influencers of teenagers (Bush, Martin and Bush, 2004). Martin and Bush (2000) also believe that key adults like teachers, celebrities and professional athletes are viewed as role models by teenagers and subsequently influence adolescent career aspirations. While research by Martin and Bush is mainly focused on America, the idea of athletes as key influencers of young people is relevant in the New Zealand. The All Blacks, in particular, are viewed as positive role models for young New Zealanders.

Tapscott (2008) believes that Gen Ys are motivated by integrity and consideration for others. Gen Ys are a generation of volunteers, Twenge (2006) reports that Gen Y volunteer numbers have risen in the last decade. This rise in volunteer numbers indicates that Gen Y are an empathic generation. To try and resolve global issues, Gen Y use online communities such as TakingITGlobal, where they liaise and collaborate with other social activists (Tapscott, 2008). In summary,

Gen Ys are motivated by key adult figures and a passion for tackling global issues. Thus Gen Y have taken an inclusive and participatory approach to leadership

Research undertaken on youth civic engagement

There is an increasing volume of academic and popular culture literature written on Gen Y, starting with Don Tapscott's 1998 book *Growing up Digital*. The emerging body of literature on Gen Y adds that contemporary teens have been early adopters of technology, using it to inform themselves on a range of topics relevant to them (Lenhart, Rainie, & Lewis, 2001). At the same time studies on Gen Y herald them as the "Me Generation", a generation whose members have been taught to put themselves first (Twenge, 2006). Twenge (2006) suggests that Gen Y have lost the essence of basic humanity, the stability of close relationships and a sense of community. Tapscott (2008) believes that this view of Gen Y is a stereotype. Nevertheless this stereotype is perpetuated among adults. Research undertaken by Zeldin and Topitzes (2002) of 700 adults in America indicate that half of the adults surveyed had no confidence in youth representation at a community and city council level. Gen Ys are considered to be less respectful of authority and as having shorter attention spans (Finn & Rock, 1997; Modell & Elder, 2002).

The challenge lies in engaging Gen Y in leadership and social issues in a way that appeals to them. Gen Y feels alienated from formal politics but use the internet to keep informed. Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign epitomises Gen Y's appreciation of the use of social media to communicate with the electorate. Tapscott (2008) credits the use of social networking by Gen Y as a crucial factor in the election of Barack Obama. The use of these tools was significant in gaining the attention of the previously unresponsive American young adult population. Online communities, therefore, have been proposed as a platform for Gen Y to build up their leadership skills (Cassell, Huffaker, Tversky & Ferriman, 2006).

Online communities, youth leadership and civic engagement

Boyd (2008) states that because youth do not have equal rights in the public sphere, which is dominated by adult leadership, online communities offer youth a space where they can 'hang out' with friends without adult interference. Research undertaken by Campbell (2008) indicates that by discussing and debating social and political issues, youth come to understand that civic engagement is real and

accessible. It is vital for youth leadership development to offer a space in which youth can have discussions on social and political issues. Cassell and colleagues (2006) posit that online communities such as Junior Summit provide young people with the opportunity to exercise leadership skills and develop leadership identities free from public expectations.

Boyd (2008) adds that social networks are now constructed around personal networks, where valued content is shared within the network. Ellison and colleagues (2007) state that social networking sites are a means of supporting both existing social ties and are capable of forging new connections. These online network services have the capability of forming and maintaining these social links cheaply and easily (Donath & Boyd, 2004). From a social participation and leadership standpoint, these sort of social ties are invaluable.

Emergent leadership literature proposes the idea that leaders often initiate communication and play a key role in starting projects (Misiolek & Heckman, 2005). This form of emergent leadership is suitable for Gen Y as it allows youth to organise and collaborate on various projects. Bryson (2002) suggests that youth need to be involved in real projects that enable them to communicate their vision. Rost (1991) describes leadership as an influential relationship between leaders and followers based on mutual purposes. In current leadership research, followers are being acknowledged as an important part of leadership development. Kellerman (2007) believes that followers who are actively engaged can make a significant difference to leaders and their organizations. The author cites the case of McDonalds and Burger King where followers' requests for socially and ecologically responsible food products via emails and websites subsequently influenced these corporations to create guidelines for their suppliers. These concepts of leadership are significant for Gen Y as this generation take an inclusive approach to problem solving.

Researchers in the field of leadership development find it beneficial for youth to be given opportunities to air their opinions and take part in decision making (Des Marais, Yang & Farzanehkia, 2000; McLaughlin, 2000). Engagement in civic concerns gives youth an opportunity to develop their leadership identity. This is consistent with studies undertaken by Waechter (2006) among American and Austrian teenagers who used online communities for identity development. Not only does online participation give young people a sense of identity development, it also

provides young people with a sense of empowerment within their community. Youth leadership studies also indicate that successful youth leadership endeavours involve partnerships between youth and adults (Camino, 2000; Hart, 1992).

Although many researchers have indicated the benefits of youth being involved in social and civic issues, adults are reluctant to allow youth to be actively involved in the community, as indicated in a previous section with the adults surveyed in America by Zeldin and Topitzes (2002). Society dictates hierarchical power structures whereby adults are the leaders and hold all the power over adolescents and children. Young people experience powerlessness as adults do not value their opinions and do not include youth in community decision-making.

The use of online communities can help change old concepts of leadership and the constructs of adult-child relationships in society. Online communities allow people to communicate instantly from any location on the globe. Promptness and accessibility make online communities an appealing mode of communication which can have various applications in social participation and civic issues. Baker and Green (2008) suggest in their popular *Business Week* article, that social networking sites have the possibility of changing the dynamics of power.

Online communities can alter hierarchical power structures through youth collaboration with their peers and adults, thus eliminating some of the limitations that are brought about by traditional concepts of leadership.

Key theories of interest

The purpose of this section is to explore key theories of youth leadership development. Reviewing these theories is warranted in order to provide a contextual framework for the interpretation and analysis of data. Three key frameworks are considered: two are from the youth leadership development field and one from an online gaming stream.

Youth leadership development researchers Van Linden and Fertman (1998), suggest a three-stage model for youth leadership development. Firstly, young people go from knowing very little about leadership into a stage of awareness. This is followed by an interaction stage where the young people begin to reflect on their leadership potential. In the third stage they enter into a mastery phase where they actively seek opportunities to improve their leadership skills.

Conner and Strobel (2007) propose a conceptual framework for youth leadership development that is bi-directional, based on the premise that youth leadership development will have an effect on projects and communities in which youth are involved. Consequently, those communities and projects will influence youth leadership development.

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Fig 1. (Conner and Strobel , 2007)

Siitonen (2009) researched the leadership experiences of online gaming groups and proposes a three dimensional approach for leadership in dispersed groups based online. He explored the leader as a *primus modus*, taking an active role in an online context. This led to the necessity of authority in online groups and to the discovery of leadership as work. Siitonen (2009) suggests that these findings are relevant for dispersed online based social groups. Since research on youth leadership in an online context is limited at present, these theories provide a tentative working foundation for the discussion of findings in later chapters of this study.

Summary

The literature review provides an overview of online communities and the influences and civic engagement tendencies of Gen Y as well as key theories pertaining to youth leadership development. Examining these aspects of the literature provides a rich contextual landscape for the discussion and interpretation of findings.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

This chapter presents the basis for the research design, beginning with the rationale for undertaking qualitative case research. Data collection strategies are explained and justified with regard to research questions and adolescent participants. The chapter concludes with an overview of the data analysis process, ethical considerations and limitations of the study.

Research design

Qualitative case research was employed in order to answer the questions raised by this study. Creswell (2003) believes that qualitative research provides an interpretive and naturalistic approach to a study. Punch (2005) defines qualitative data as information about the world not gathered using measurement or numbers. Qualitative data gathering is about watching, enquiring and examining (Wolcott, 1992). A qualitative method is seen as most suitable when dealing with small sample sizes (Yin, 1994). Thus a qualitative methodology is relevant to this study, as the total number of participants for this study is a relatively small population from Wellington high schools.

The use of qualitative methods is useful for measuring subject reactions, which is an important part of leadership research and for understanding process and meaning (Conger, 1998; Dulin, 2005; Creswell, 2003). This research focuses on investigating how youth are using online communities, therefore a qualitative approach is suitable for obtaining responses regarding this process.

The study follows the lead of many other researchers who employed qualitative methods while exploring issues in youth leadership (Bryson, 2002; Dulin, 2005; Fisser, 2005). According to scholarly literature, the study of leadership requires rich data that qualitative methods provide (Parry, 1998). Consequently, this study used qualitative methods to contribute rich data to the youth leadership development research stream.

Rationale for Case research strategy

A case research method was employed, as schools in the Wellington area were mentioned for their innovative use of technology in Don Tapscott's book *Grown up*

Digital. Tapscott (2008) mentions a programme called Tech Angels where students gave teachers assistance with technology. The young people involved felt empowered because they were able to teach and support adults. This youth empowerment extended to other areas of their lives and as a result youth relationships with adults improved (Tapscott, 2008). Based on Tapscott's observations, the researcher felt a case research method regarding online youth leadership in the Wellington area would be pertinent.

This study relies on a single case research method, the participants are secondary students from the Wellington area. The single case design is suitable as it enables the researcher to undertake the project using focus groups on a sample of Gen Y youth, resulting in rich and robust findings (Cavaye, 1996).

Case research is also appropriate when the researcher has little control over events and would like to take an exploratory approach involving 'what and how' questions (Yin, 1994). Studying the natural use of online communities among youth is something that would be difficult to control or monitor, as measuring the use of online communities by Gen Y participants is not feasible. Case research provided a suitable method to study a phenomenon as it naturally occurs in one of many sites (Cavaye, 1996). A case research approach relates study findings to generalised theory (Cavaye, 1996). This method was deemed suitable for the present research project because no widely recognized theory has yet been identified for youth leadership and civic engagement in online communities.

A description of participants and ethical considerations

Participants in this study ranged in age from 14 to 18 years and were from New Zealand-European and Asian ethnic backgrounds. The participants included three girls from a Wellington single-sex school in the first focus group; and the second focus group consisted of three boys and a girl who also belonged to a youth organization in Wellington. The mix of gender, ethnicity and age was employed to reflect the Gen Y demographic.

In line with the Human Ethics Review process, a letter of informed consent was given to all participants and their parents/guardians for their signature. An explanation of the voluntary nature of this research was provided, as was formal advice to participants that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions regarding the research before

and after the focus group sessions. Participants were also assured of confidentiality and that no comments would be attributed to specific individuals. The relevant documentation can be found in the Appendix A section of this report.

Once recruited, the participants were provided with:

- an information sheet for both the young person and a guardian, giving details about the researcher and the purpose for the study
- a parental consent form and a young person consent form – as the participants were under 18 and required consent from a parent or guardian
- a letter or email with the date, time and location of the focus groups.

Researcher as an instrument for data collection and analysis

Zeni (1998), as an educator, views qualitative research as focusing on human experience instead of dealing with numbers of random samples. Her approach is also in accordance with qualitative research which uses the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam & Simpson, 1995). The author explains her approach of working as an “insider” among young people instead of merely peering in. Zeni’s approach informed the present research strategy and dealings with young people.

The researcher was prepared with the knowledge and experience to conduct this study. As a New Zealand-trained and fully registered educator, with five years experience, the researcher had a working knowledge of young people aged between 14 and 18 years old. Therefore, young people are a central part of the researcher’s life and as a result she has developed a keen interest in investigating the leadership development potential of young people. On the one hand the researcher has an insider perspective having worked closely with young people, while on the other, as a researcher and an adult, there is some distance between the researcher and participants. These two perspectives provide the researcher with sound knowledge and skills to collect and analyse data for this study.

Data collection

This study used focus groups for the initial data collection followed by the use of an online wiki to verify and test emerging findings. Researchers Christian, Pearce, Roberson and Rothwell (2009) suggest focus groups as a sound method of data

collection among children and adolescents. Focus groups are also employed when a researcher wants to hear from participants regarding a topic of interest (Morgan & Krueger, 1993). Focus groups also offer an insight into the source and motivation of certain behavior and offer participants a chance to discuss and give an explanation over a given issue (Krueger, 1994; Field, 2000). In youth leadership research, focus groups were used for data collection most notably among the Gen Y cohort (Bryson, 2002; Dulin, 2005; McNae, 2010). These researchers used focus groups to allow participants to give their opinion about an issue.

Krueger and Casey (2000) found that in contrast to interviews, focus groups allow participants to discuss and co-create themes. Likewise McNae (2010) conducted focus groups with young women in New Zealand to allow participant voices to be heard and to co-construct a leadership programme with the researcher. Similarly, Sofaer (1999) suggests that the use of focus groups instead of interviews is useful when interactions between members are just as important as individual statements. Discussion and collaboration on knowledge is important in youth leadership research and is in keeping with how youth like to learn and share knowledge. It also assists in building an accurate picture of youth opinions on a given topic. Bearing in mind youth preferences with regard to interaction and knowledge building, focus groups seemed a suitable method for collecting evidence for this study. The interaction offered by group participation is valuable for Gen Ys as they enjoy collaborating as a means of problem solving. Focus group sessions also serve to replicate discussions that take place in online communities; therefore this seemed a more suitable means of data collection than individual interviews.

The focus group sessions were conducted during the July school holiday break. Each session were 50-60 minutes long to allow for adolescent attention time spans in accordance with research findings by Christian, Pearce, Roberson and Rothwell (2009). Each focus group consisted of 3 to 4 participants as a way of keeping the discussion manageable (McClelland, 1994).

A semi-structured, questioning approach was used for the focus group. Semi-structured questions allowed the researcher to draw out important issues and elicit examples. Research by Sofaer (1999) also indicates that a semi-structured interview approach allows the researcher to follow the lead of interviewees on topics that pertain to the research and later return to the interview script.

As advised by Peterson-Sweeney (2005), a set of 12 unambiguous questions was used to elicit participant experiences and comments. Each focus group session commenced with an introductory question that served as an “ice-breaker,” a way for participants to feel at ease with each other, the researcher and the situation of being interviewed. Krueger (1998) suggests the use of such preliminary questions to introduce the topic to participants. This was followed by key questions related to the study, then concluding questions and comments which summarise and lead to the end of the session. The researcher followed Krueger’s approach, ensuring that sessions remained semi-informal to ascertain that participants felt comfortable enough to contribute to the discussion. This is in keeping with research by Kitzinger (1995) who suggests that focus group settings should be relaxed and comfortable. A relaxed atmosphere is vital for Gen Y participants who are at their best when they are in a “fun –filled,” collaborative atmosphere.

Focus groups facilitators are encouraged to initially take the role of “structured eavesdropper” before moving into an interventionist’s strategy by encouraging participants to discuss and debate matters among themselves (Kitzinger, 1995, p. 311). A facilitator’s role is multi-faceted in order to elicit and collect rich and robust data. Consequently the role of the facilitator involves:

- listening , observing participants, asking questions and clarifying comments (Brotherson, 1994)
- relating back comments to participants in their own words (Winton, 1988)
- adopting a sensitive non-judgmental disposition (Brotherson, 1994).

These guidelines were employed by the researcher to build a rapport with participants. The use of these guidelines is important to ensure that young people’s opinions are heard and make a valuable contribution towards the study.

A combination of an online wiki and email was used as a means of verifying emerging findings. A wiki is a web-page that allows selected members of a group to contribute to a discussion (Harris & Rea, 2009).Wikis are used in education to produce student-generated content (Raman, Ryan & Olfman, 2005).Therefore; the researcher believed that a wiki would be an appropriate channel for confirming the results of this study. The wiki contained clear guidelines for the conduct of respondents. The researcher posted questions that required clarification and although initially participants were slow to respond they soon began to do so in detail.

Data analysis

Both focus group sessions were recorded using a digital audio recorder. The recorded focus group sessions were transcribed by the researcher. The researcher also took notes at the end of each session as the participants continued to discuss various youth issues once the session was over. Such field notes are recommended as they facilitate data analysis (Morgan, 1988).

To analyse collected data the researcher used a framework proposed by Miles and Huberman (1984). Data reduction involved the researcher reading through the transcripts for common trends and keywords. According to Miles and Huberman analysis begins with data reduction by simplifying and selecting data from the focus group transcripts and field notes. The following step is data display, where information is organised in a format that allows the drawing of conclusions. Afterwards the key themes and words were placed into a table. Corresponding quotes from the transcripts were positioned besides these emerging themes. This form of data display was very useful in identifying emerging themes and recognising themes that need further verification from participants. The themes that needed further verification were restated as questions and posted on the wiki and subsequently emailed to participants by the researcher. According to Harris and Rea (2009) using a wiki for research is appropriate as wikis :

- are available for participants at all times
- have previously been used for tracking research groups
- assist with problem solving, especially with open-ended questioning.

As a secondary data collection method, the wiki proved to be an effective means of obtaining verification of preliminary results. It is an especially valuable method as participants were at school, making it difficult to organise a second focus group. Additionally, an online wiki resonated with Gen Y and enabled them to verify the interim research findings, using a mode that they are familiar with. This finding is consistent with Fox, Morris and Rumsey (2007) who suggest that online tools should be employed in research methodology to engage young people. The analysis of the focus group sessions and subsequent wiki participation presented the following key themes regarding online youth leadership:

1) leadership in an online context is seen as participatory;

- 2) leaders in an online context are seen as initiators and organisers;
- 3) there is a need for moderation in an online context.

Validation of Findings

Krueger (1994) reports that focus groups have high validity, as the results more readily achieve what they set out to measure. To increase the validity of the data, at the end of each focus group session the researcher summarised the key points that came from the discussion with participants. In addition, preliminary findings were presented to participants via the online wiki and these comments were used in the final research report.

The online wiki is a secure space where only the participants had access. There has been some scholarly debate regarding the ethical risks involved by using online means for conducting research, but the risks, according to researchers, seem to be the same as when using conventional means (Fox, Morris & Rumsey, 2007; Pittenger, 2003). To address ethical risk, the researcher monitored the wiki closely and also posted guidelines for participant discussion and conduct on the wiki.

Limitations

The principal limitation of this research was in recruiting youth to participate in the study. While 17 young people indicated interest in participating in the study only seven attended the focus group sessions. This confirms a similar result in an online gaming and leadership study undertaken by Siitonen (2009), where 15 players were approached for an email interview but only 6 players elected to participate. The challenge of recruitment can be attributed to the many activities that young people are involved in during school holiday breaks. Additionally, the challenges of undertaking research with adolescents have not been addressed specifically in research textbooks and are yet to be fully investigated (Yarcheski & Mahon, 2007).

Chapter 4 - Summary of Results

The purpose of this study is to gain a comprehensive understanding of how online communities strengthen youth voice and leadership, in the context of social democratic issues. In this chapter the researcher presents the investigation findings. The main findings of the study indicate that online youth leadership is participatory and two dimensional. Facilitators and barriers of online youth leadership are presented by the researcher.

Gen Y and leadership

“Kids are good for more than just attending school all day everyday” (Student 3)

Participants in the first focus group found it difficult to define leadership. However, participants in the second focus group described youth leadership as taking a participatory role within the community, that is, organising and communicating with other young people regarding youth events.

“I think that young people today define leadership as taking an active role in running things - be it a drama thing at school or organising a trip away, leadership is about organisation and communication.”
(Student 1, online wiki comment)

Participants acknowledged that in online communities leadership was less straightforward since everyone was equal and could express their opinion. Youth in both focus groups noted that in online communities, leaders took on a moderator and initiator role.

“When you have a Facebook group there is a creator of the Facebook group and they are like the leader.” (Student 2)

Participants in both focus groups identified the need for moderation in online communities. Moderation was seen as necessary to monitor and clarify comments, to reduce the risk of discussions in online communities getting off track. The young

people in the second focus group saw this online moderator role as a leadership development opportunity for youth.

“I think the online thing ... kind of like shows who the leaders are, like some people will join it, but some people will actually start the group. It kind of gives people opportunity to try and be leaders.” (Student 4)

From the focus group sessions, online youth leadership is seen as two-dimensional. On one level it is characterised through the role of moderator and on a second level by the role of initiator / organiser of communication regarding events. These reports by youth indicate their maturity and ability to recognise they require leadership and organization to create a productive online community environment. This maturity is inconsistent with adult perceptions of Gen Y who see this demographic as immature and resistant to authority. Overall participants expressed strong beliefs that youth at all levels of secondary school exhibited leadership skills and should be allowed to exercise these skills.

The model on the next page summarises these findings by displaying the different dimensions of online youth leadership mentioned by participants. The overarching role of leadership in online communities is social participation. The two subsidiary dimensions of online youth leadership are (i) leader as moderator and (ii) leader as initiator and organiser of communication.

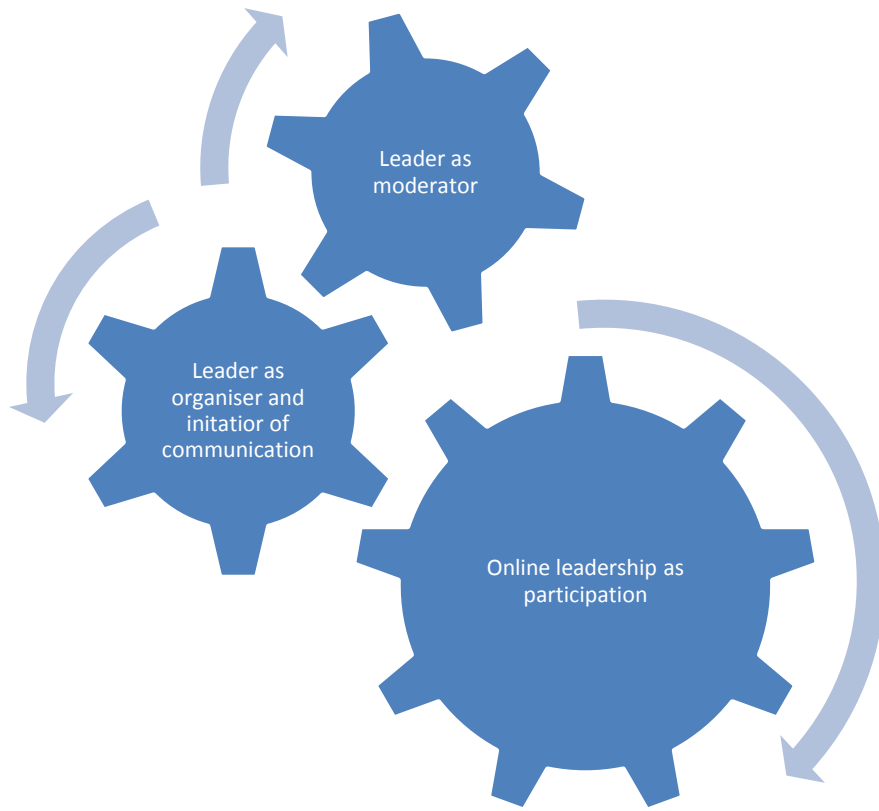


Figure 1 Dimensions of Online leadership

Sub Question 1a : How are Gen Ys using online communities in the context of social and democratic issues?

Online communities were used by youth in the context of social and democratic issues in four main ways, most importantly as a communication tool among youth groups. Secondly, young people also used online communities as a means of organising youth events. Thirdly, online communities were also used to show support for an individual and for community activities or causes. Lastly young people used online communities as a way of promoting youth-oriented causes and community events.

Gen Y access and use of online communities

The majority of the focus group accessed online communities from home, due to security settings on school computers as well as the resultant lack of interaction with other young people during school hours of 9am – 3pm.

“The few people who do go on Facebook at school are pretty much online by themselves, which kind of defeats the whole purpose.” (Student 1 wiki comment)

All the participants in both focus groups had accounts with social networking sites like Facebook. Youth belonged to different types of online communities in these networking sites, ranging from Korean boy bands through to youth adventure groups. Online communities were seen as a natural part of the participant’s lives.

“There are people who actually do call up every person if they need to contact the whole unit, they haven’t thought of using email or Facebook or txting; it’s strange because it seems so natural to us.” (Student 1)

Participants from both focus groups indicated that they used online communities to show support for an individual, activity or cause. The majority of the participants supported local community concerns and activities. These concerns ranged from the Wellington Save Manners Mall campaign, to the Wellington rubbish bag recycling

campaign and supporting a local Wellington athlete to get to the Commonwealth 2010 games.

“[We are] Just trying to let other people know this is an issue and not something that can be ignored, especially like the Save Manners Mall campaign.” (Student 1)

From the focus group discussion the most commonly supported form of civic engagement is World Vision’s 40 Hour Famine activities. Both focus groups mentioned that they had been involved in various activities for the 40 Hour Famine campaign, which ranged from filmmaking to building a slum. Youth involvement in 40hr Famine is primarily due to the fact that World Vision targets youth and includes ‘fun’ activities as part of their fundraising. Youth being motivated by fun and competition aligns closely with Gen Y values and work ethic. This finding also reinforces youth perceptions of leadership as participation in community events.

Sub Question 1b: What are the facilitators and barriers to Gen Y leadership in the context of online communities?

This section of the research project examines the key facilitators and barriers of Gen Y leadership in the context of online communities. Facilitating factors have been divided into two sections (i) technological factors and (ii) social factors.

Technology related enablers of youth leadership

“It sounds kinda geeky but the features of the computer, like how everything is set up and how everything is so easy to use and how the technology has evolved.” (Student 5)

Online leadership is about taking a participatory role and being able to communicate these ideas to other youth. The Gen Y cohort strongly believe that online communities provide a medium to effectively communicate with other youth and thus enabling their leadership voice and strengthening leadership skills. Participants used online communities to pass information about various social action endeavors like 40 Hour Famine and to gain support for sporting endeavours like “*Get Gabe to the Games*”. Throughout the discussions the ease of communication that online communities provided

was emphasised by youth. Youth recognised the importance of communicating messages in leadership.

“Leadership is about organisation and communication.” (Student 1).

According to participants the main reason for joining online communities was due to the individual features they provide. These features include instant messaging, wall posts and status reports. Participants’ responses indicated that these features offered wide reach, ease of use and perceived anonymity.

Participants used these features for communicating messages quickly through their network of friends. One participant in particular explained how he used the status feature on Facebook to update his friends on upcoming events occurring in the youth group they belonged to:

“If you are friends with, like, 200 people it comes up on their things [statuses], everyone has got that comment there.” (Student 4)

Individual features assist in relaying messages to other members of online communities, providing a simple and effective means of communication. The status feature serves to enable online youth leadership, in particular the role of leader as initiator and organiser of communication.

Convenience and Cost

Youth reported that online communities were a convenient way of showing support for a cause. One participant explained that online communities were familiar and easily accessed by youth and they were more likely to make a stand using such means:

“They are in the world of Facebook and they are on that most days anyway, then that’s going to be the medium through which they make their protests and more young people are involved in Facebook than they are with the City council.” (Student 3)

In turn, participants expressed problems relating to the use of traditional methods of communication used by adults, such as phone calls and letters. These methods were not the most convenient or preferred means of communication for youth, mainly because writing and posting letters or making phone calls is a time consuming and costly exercise for young people. Cost effectiveness is a crucial factor for online youth leadership as participants are students and thus reliant on their parents for income. Online communities offer a cheap and easy way of sending messages regarding social action. Opening a Facebook account is relatively cheaper than writing letters and distributing pamphlets regarding a civic concern.

“It’s more work to go up and sign and write letters [compared with] if you just post it and get people to join.” (Student 2)

Youth explained that using online communities was a natural process in their day-to-day lives and offered a convenient and cheap way of communicating with youth organization members. Youth preference for electronic communication, confirms Prensky’s (2001) description of Gen Y as ‘digital natives’. Thus, government needs to recognise that online communities should be the preferred means for engaging youth in leadership and civic participation.

Broad scope and Timeliness

Online communities have an international reach, meaning the ability to communicate messages on a global scale. This broad reach positively influenced youth leadership communication concepts.

“When you ‘Facebook it’ you say it out [to] a bigger audience so you get more people to respond even if they are in another country you can still talk to them.” (Student 2)

Participants went on to cite the example of Iranian citizens who used online communities and social media to protest against the outcome of the 2009 elections and the injustices taking place in the country.

“I suppose the ultimate example of online mediums being used for protest is in Iran where they used Twitter to organise those mass protests, it obviously worked really, really well” (Student 1)

Online communities were also reported as a timely mode of communication. Timeliness enhances online leadership skills as it provides a quick means of communicating key messages and influencing others to join groups or support causes. Circulating important messages in a timely fashion is a core part of online youth leadership.

“Those online communities are just a great way of communicating like, especially if some planning for [youth group name omitted] has come down to the wire, it’s the last minute and you’re trying to let everyone know what’s going on you will go on to Facebook and send out a couple of statuses and then you will go onto Skype and you will post up a couple of comments.” (Student 3)

From a leadership perspective the ability to communicate key messages quickly and to a wide audience is important. Consequently, the broad reach of online communities is an enabler of youth leadership voice as communication can reach an intended audience quickly and create an impact.

Identification

Youth in the second focus group felt that online communities were not widely used by adults. These reports suggest that youth perceived online communities as a “youth space” which strengthened their leadership voice.

“Because when you post something people respond. They can like it or they can comment. You feel a part of it” (Student 2)

The cohort saw online communities as a means of voicing opinion and identifying with a cause but did not see online communities as having an impact within government. Participants believed government process and protocol were at fault for unsuccessful online community protest.

“It just proves that the government doesn’t take the internet seriously and they won’t understand the people who voice out their important opinions.” (Student 5)

“The failings of the bureaucratic system are [getting] all caught up in protocol and you have to do this, this and this. And because you didn’t do this little thing it gets completely null and void.” (Student 1)

The Manners Mall case was referred to several times as an example of government overlooking online community protest. Manners Mall is a popular hangout among teenagers in Wellington City centre. The Wellington City Council proposed that Manners Mall be demolished to make way for a bus route that would lessen traffic in the central business area. This created trepidation among store owners and young people who frequent the area. A Facebook online community was created to protest against the demolition of this area. Shops in the Manners Mall area, displayed posters of the Facebook group on their shop windows. The posters urged customers to show their displeasure at the demolition by joining the Facebook group. Nevertheless the Save Manners Mall campaign was unsuccessful and the council went ahead with the demolition of the area. Consequently, participants felt that formal submissions via written or face-to-face interaction are viewed more favourably than online submissions.

“If you go down to the city council and talk to the city councilors you will find out that they are an awful lot of older people who have an awful lot of time on their hands and who do seemingly nothing but come and talk to the council, write

submissions come to their public information meetings and complain about this that and the other thing. So they get a lot of representation in the formal processes and younger people don't get that much formal representation and when they do want to make a stand they do it through means that those formal bodies don't recognise like Facebook. They don't take submissions through Facebook at the city council.” (Student 1)

The failure of the online campaign disheartened Gen Y and made them feel powerless. The underlying reason for young people's discouragement is that they identified with a cause and voiced their opinion but it was overlooked in the City council decision making process. Consequently, youth call for government to consider online communities as part of the civic decision-making process.

“You kind of need reform [to] make all these bureaucratic processes less rigid and more flexible able to be kind of accessed more easily.” (Student 1)

Equity

The issue of adult perception of youth was one that participants spoke about frequently during the course of both focus group sessions. The frequency of these reports, indicates that this is a significant issue for youth. Therefore, participants felt compelled to use online communities in order to voice their opinion. In this way online communities provided a space for youth leadership voice to be heard. This is in contrast to a face-to-face situation where youth may not be taken seriously by adults if they voiced their opinions. Thus online communities give youth equal footing with adults:

“Because when you're online there is less chance of discrimination based on, [appearance], it is more like equal.” (Student 2)

Many of the participants felt that it was easier to engage in leadership activities online as they were not judged by their age, gender or ethnicity.

“People just take you for you not by what your appearance is but by the way you chat.” (Student 5)

All participants agreed that adults had a great deal of credibility and power in society, while youth had none. In fact as one participant observed, local city council hearings were conducted at periods in the day that only adults could attend, that is between the hours of 11am and 3pm. These are times that youth are at school. According to the cohort this further indicated the influence of adults and the powerlessness of youth. In contrast, online communities could be readily accessed by youth and offered equity and a balance of power for leadership activities and civic engagement.

Social Facilitating factors influencing online youth leadership

The following section outlines the factors influencing youth engagement in leadership activities. Firstly, it considers passion and empathy, the key figures of influence and finally the perceived anonymity of online communities.

Passion and Empathy

Passion about an issue greatly influences youth. Participants reported that if they felt strongly about an issue they would participate, even if the issue does not directly affect them. Youth seemed to exhibit a strong sense of social justice. Both focus groups followed and cited the injustice in Iran and were excited when citizens chose to expose oppression and protest against it.

“If you feel strongly about something you are more inclined to do something about it.”(Student 6)

In particular if the issue affected young people in their age group overseas, participants stated that they wanted to get involved in assisting them.

“It’s something fun to do and also because it’s people our age overseas who are being affected.” (Student 4)

One participant stated that they were more drawn to social actions that were aimed at youth;

“I think that one of World Vision’s target audience is youth.”(Student 4)

The responses from the focus groups were in line Tapscott’s (2008) views on the empathetic nature of Gen Y youth. It became evident through the focus group discussions that this Gen Y cohort is driven by a strong sense of social justice and identification with young people around the world.

Key figures of influence

Key figures of influence acted as a facilitating factor towards leadership roles among Gen Y. Celebrities and pop culture icons appeared to motivate the younger members of the focus group. One interviewee was especially motivated by Barack Obama’s successful bid for president of the United States of America and felt inspired to seek a political leadership role in the future.

“Barack Obama, the first black president of America, it was really special because it inspired others, he motivated them, you never know the next time the first Asian president of America.” (Student 5)

Two participants in the second focus group were influenced by youth organization adult leaders:

“They have influenced me to stand up and volunteer for things (such as this research project for example). Without them, I would be too content to just sit down and stay removed from everything, but with their leadership skills, and their desire to pass their skills onto us, it's really helped to develop us as people.” (Student 1, online wiki comment).

A central point conveyed by these examples is that adults play a significant role in youth leadership development. These responses suggest that adults need to seek online and offline modes of partnering with youth to strengthen youth leadership abilities.

Peer perception also could be seen as an influence in online communities. One participant in the first focus group stated that she chose to support “cool” groups on her Facebook account so that her friends would not think she was “weird”. This consideration to thoughts of peers was prominent among the younger members of the group. However the second focus group was not strongly influenced by their peers, when choosing online communities groups to support. In fact they used their peer influence in a positive manner to mentor the younger members of their youth group. The older members of the youth group offered advice and informal mentorship to younger members regarding youth group matters. This informal mentorship enabled the younger participants to take over youth group leadership when the older members left.

These responses indicate the critical role that positive figures of influence play in the lives of youth; it also points out the need for mentoring by adults and older peers, this mentoring is significant for Gen Y leadership development.

Perceived anonymity in online communities

Participants in both focus groups felt that online communities provided a platform for youth to voice their opinions on different issues. The cohort believed that online communities allowed them to express their thoughts without any of the impediments entailed in face-to face communication.

“I find easier it to post things for people who aren’t easier speaking face to face you can just post things you still get a response.” (Student 2)

There were frequent reports from the first focus group about being judged according to their appearance, perhaps due to being from non-European backgrounds. Youth from this first group appreciated the perceived anonymity they experienced in online communities. Participants from both focus groups reported that in online communities you were not a real person:

“I do agree that the internet is a great deal more anonymous, you’re not a person, you’re just a little picture with a name. So maybe you’d be more empowered to say more controversial things.” (Student 1).

Perceived anonymity provided youth with a sense of empowerment and strengthened their leadership skills, as youth were able to contribute to discussions and feel like part of a community or cause. It is through perceived anonymity that youth are able to obtain a balance of power with adults because of the perceived anonymity that online communities provide.

Barriers to the use of online communities for youth leadership

Youth identified two major barriers towards the use of online communities for youth leadership. They were (i) the lack of credibility surrounding online communities, and (ii) adults’ poor perception of youth.

Authenticity and Credibility

Authenticity was a recurring thread in the discussion of online communities. Participants believed that credibility prevented online communities being used by government. Firstly the lack of credibility stemmed from the fluidity of information presented on the internet. Secondly, it was due to the fact that identities cannot be verified easily in online communities. Participants explained that online information could be changed at anytime and by anyone thus contributing to the lack of credibility.

“When you write something down it is there, whereas on the internet you think something can easily be deleted because it’s just on the internet.” (Student 2)

Another participant observed that:

“The internet changes so quickly, it’s just so fluid you cannot really set anything in concrete. I mean things like Wikipedia things change, anybody can change them, so you can’t really regard them as complete fact. It is harder to get it set in stone.” (Student 1)

According to the participants, changeable online information negatively impacts on government decisions to adopt the use of online submissions in civic decision-making. The second concern for participants is the setting up of false online accounts and identities for the purposes of online protest.

“You can just make fake accounts and just go on, there is [sic] unlimited amounts of accounts that you can make.” (Student 5)

False online identities result in distrust, especially regarding the motives of online communities’ contributors, subsequently creating a barrier for online youth leadership.

“The challenges with having something solely online is that it’s difficult to attain the authenticity to verify everything that’s being said and all the people who are behind it, are actually behind it and that they’re not either all fake or wackos.” (Student 1)

In the opinion of youth, adults are not involved in online communities, and this lack of involvement affects the credibility of communities. Adults have significant standing and credibility with society and by adults not being involved in online communities, it prevents online submissions being taken seriously. Therefore both cohorts agreed that credibility created a significant barrier towards online communities being incorporated by government into civic decision making. Finally the cohort believed that online communities were a potentially viable tool but needed time for the government to accept and adopt this new medium as a channel of social action.

Adult Perceptions

Both focus groups cited adult perceptions of youth as the main barrier for youth leadership and online communities. Participants felt that adults did not take youth seriously:

“A lot of people don’t take the opinions of youth that seriously; it’s a very difficult area to address.” (Student 3)

Youth also felt that adults judge them due to their appearance in school uniform. According to one participant if they looked older then they would be taken seriously. Participants also felt that adults displayed a “*superior attitude*” in their dealings with youth and often told them “*you will know when you’re older*”. These attitudes about young people’s outward, superficial appearances and naïveté made youth feel as if their ideas and efforts were underestimated and undermined by adults. According to the cohort, this attitude was displayed even in various youth-based environments which young people felt defeated the purpose of such organizations.

“Even people who believe that young people have something to say and deserve to be heard still have this sub-conscious mentality of knowing more when you’re older, they are being superior you know.” (Student 3)

Even though participants had identified that adult perceptions were a barrier towards youth leadership, the cohort did not envision or suggest any way to resolve this barrier. The cohort had a resigned attitude towards adult perception and could not envision ways to change it. This resignation is contrary to the characteristics of Gen Y, which include being outspoken, proactive and passionate about many causes as indicated by Tapscott (2008).

Summary

The unsuccessful online protest of Manners Mall seemed to this Gen Y cohort to confirm the power of adults in decision making and further served to emphasise young people’s powerlessness. Participants expressed the need for reform on the part of government to include online communities as a way of identifying public opinion regarding civic concerns. Even though both focus groups mentioned several features and advantages of online communities the majority of the participants believed that relying on online communities alone could not make a positive impact on the government decision making process. Most participants felt that online communities encourage or develop awareness of youth leadership skills; but offline youth groups and organizations would help young people consolidate these skills and thus get into a “mastery” stage as proposed by Van

Linden and Fertman (1998). This is also consistent with the literature which views online communities as facilitators of youth civic engagement and provides youth with tools, information and people to organise events with (Raynes-Goldie & Walker, 2007).

These findings provide valuable insight regarding Gen Y's use of online communities in the context of social and democratic issues. The focus group discussions also highlighted the facilitators as well as the barriers of online youth leadership.

The next chapter of this study focuses on further examination of these key aspects of online youth leadership. It provides an interpretation of findings and implications for parties involved with Gen Y and makes recommendations for future research directions.

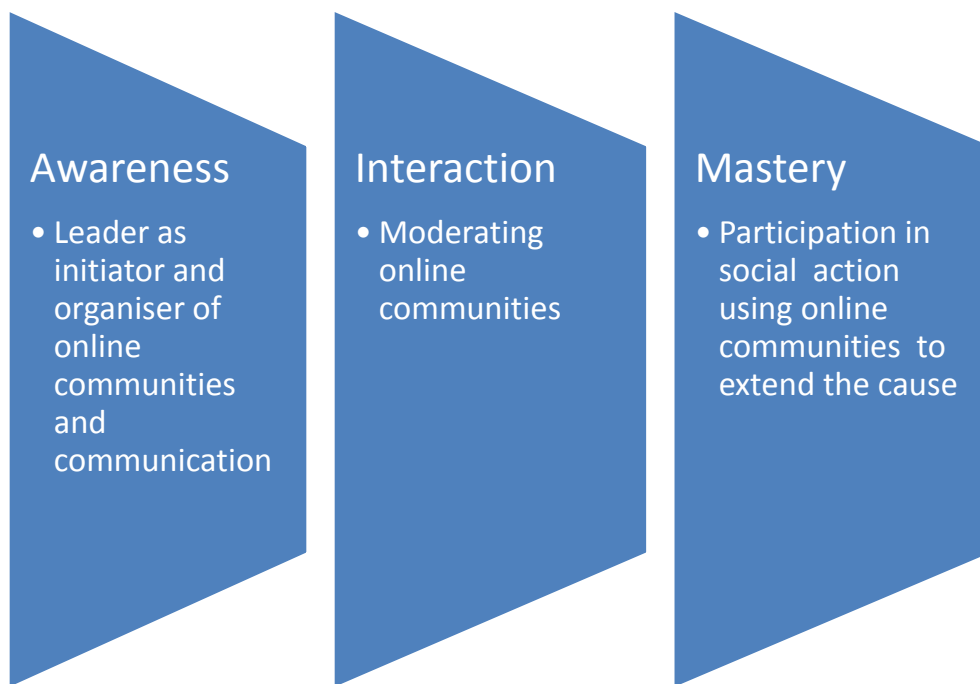


Figure 2: Online youth leadership model adapted from Van Linden and Fertman (1998)

The model above is based on the youth leadership framework proposed by Van Linden and Fertman (1998), where youth proceed through three key stages of youth leadership development. The framework starts off with awareness, progresses to interaction and finally the mastery stage. In an online communities context, the awareness stage of leadership development is evident when online youth leaders initiate and

communicate information regarding social participation events. In the interaction stage online youth leaders moderate and clarify comments. In the last stage, that of mastery, youth actively look for ways to extend their leadership skills and use online communities as tools to extend the civic issues that they are engaged in.

In the next page, the main findings of this research are summarised and displayed in a table.

Research Question	Response	Theme(s)
How are Gen Ys using online communities in the context of social and democratic issues?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a communication tool among youth groups • To organise youth events for youth groups • To identify and show support for an individual, an activity or a cause • To promote youth oriented social causes and community events 	Leader as an initiator and organiser
How do online communities strengthen youth leadership in the context of social and democratic issues?	<p>Technological features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • broad reach for communication of information • convenience and low cost to use <p>Social factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • empowerment through perceived anonymity • equity and a balance of power among adults 	Leadership as participation
What are facilitators and barriers to Gen Y leadership in the context of online communities?	<p>Facilitators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passion and empathy • Equality and perceived anonymity <p>Barriers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult perceptions • Authenticity and credibility 	<p>Leadership as participation</p> <p>Necessity for moderation and authentication in online communities</p>

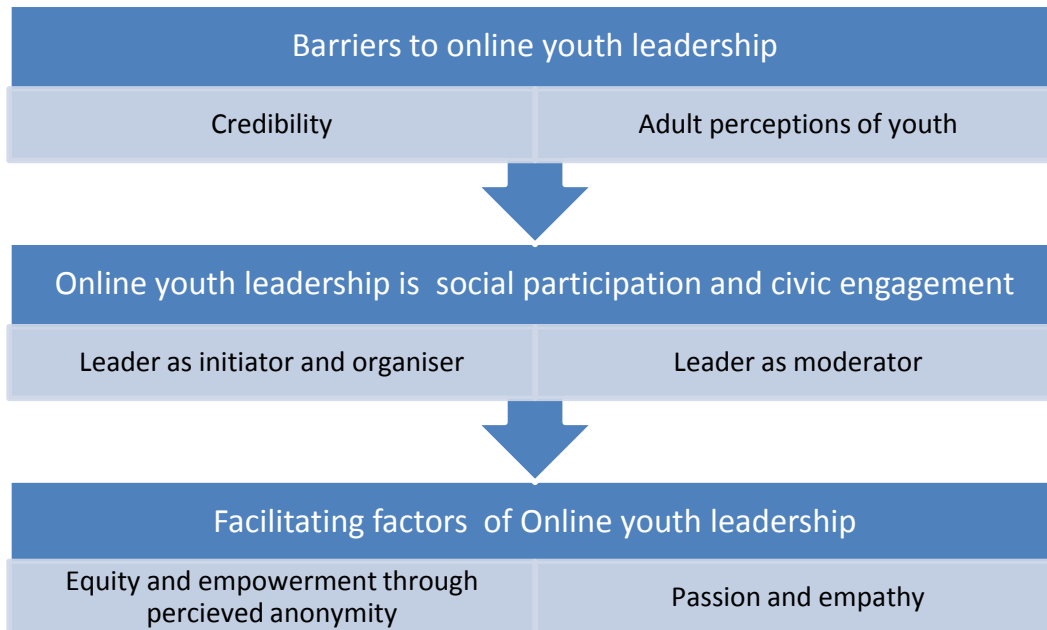


Figure 3: Overview of results of online youth leadership (adapted from Siitonen, 2009)

Key findings from this study are summarised above. First, online youth leadership is characterised by youth civic engagement and social participation. The second finding reveals that online youth leaders have two-dimensional roles as moderators and organisers / initiators of communication.

Furthermore, two main barriers of online youth leadership were identified as (i) credibility and (ii) adult perceptions of youth. These two factors impact significantly on online youth leadership. Two main facilitating factors of online youth leadership are identified as empathy and passion for a cause as well as equity and perceived anonymity.

Chapter 5 - Study Conclusion

Discussion of Results

One of the main themes that emerged from this study was that youth saw leaders in online communities as organisers / initiators of communication and youth events. Youth envisioned leadership in an online context as taking a participatory role. Focus group participants identified the key enablers of youth leadership in online communities as empowerment through perceived anonymity and being on equal footing with adults. Participants also identified the major barriers towards online youth leadership as adult perceptions of youth and the lack of credibility associated with online communities.

Gen Y use of online communities

“It sounds kinda [sic] geeky but [we like] the features of the computer how everything is set up and how everything is so easy to use and how the technology has evolved.”

(Student 5)

The literature on Gen Y acknowledges that the internet is an important part of their lives (Tapscott, 1998; Prensky, 2001). However, there is a gap in knowledge regarding Gen Y interaction and use of online communities (Subrahmanyam, Reich, Waechter & Espinoza, 2008). This research project assists with providing information regarding the use of online communities by Gen Y cohort in Wellington in the context of social democratic issues. The Gen Y cohort used online communities to:

- communicate with their peers and with other members of their youth group
- organise events for their youth group
- identify and show support for an individual , activity or cause.
- promote youth oriented social causes and community events.

This particular use of online communities by youth supports the concept that in online communities leaders are seen as the initiators of communication and organisers of events. This finding provides a new development in the area of online youth leadership as researchers have found the concept of youth leadership unclear without one primary

definition (Conner and Strobel, 2007). Scholars agree that competency in communication and interpersonal skills is an integral part of youth leadership (Zeldin & Camino, 1999; Van Linden & Fertman, 1998). Online communities offer youth an opportunity to interact with others and a space to master communication and organisational skills which are important for effective leaders. It is a similar process to Van Linden and Fertman's model of youth leadership development. Findings in this study confirm that online communities provide a means of youth leadership development. There is a strong implication here for youth organizations and leadership development practitioners to incorporate online communities in youth leadership programmes, especially as a means of enhancing communication skills among youth.

Online communities strengthen youth voice and leadership skills

“On Facebook there will be, like, Save Manners Mall and you just click and it's like showing your support for it; you don't have to do anything but you can still voice your opinion.” (Student 4)

The results from this study indicate that online communities strengthen youth voice as young people are given a space where they can show their support for a cause or an individual. Online communities also offer a space where youth feel empowered to communicate and influence their peers free from adult judgment. This finding is consistent with research regarding online communities, which suggests that it provides a space for youth to socialise with peers and a forum for their voices to be heard in comparison to the physical world (Turkle, 1996; Thomas, 2007; Boyd, 2008).

Further examination of findings indicated that youth believed online communities were a youth domain and this led to a sense of youth ownership. These findings are consistent with those of Peachey, Gillen and Ferguson (2008) which indicate youth are empowered by their familiarity with the online environment and the lack of an online hierarchical structure. For youth organizations, it implies considering online communities as means of building youth leadership potential. As online communities provide youth with a space to take ownership of their activities and a channel to communicate and promote social participation.

Youth online leadership as participation

“Leadership is about organisation and communication.” (Student 1).

Results from this study indicate that online youth leadership consists of organisers who engage in social participation through electronic networks. The finding aligns with studies into online communities by Huffaker (2009). The author views online leaders as individuals who create and influence topics of discussion. Focus group participants agreed that leadership in online communities took on more of a participatory role in supporting existing community causes. Cassell and colleagues (2006) suggest that the internet has become a community building tool and a means of civic engagement and political participation among young Americans.

Participants strongly believed that leadership potential exists in youth and their age should not exclude them in participating in leadership projects and decision making. Wong (2009) echoes this point by suggesting that in order to promote youth leadership young people need to participate in community decision making. The responses of participants in this study show that youth begin to develop a participatory leadership role through the use of online communities, by engaging in the promotion and communication of youth events and by identifying with local community concerns.

Online communities provide a forum for ‘leadership as participation’ to take place as youth have an opportunity to discuss community concerns and government policies using tools they are familiar with as “digital natives”. This is evident in respondents’ engagement with the Save Manners Mall campaign.

Youth engagement with the Manners Mall case is inconsistent with the literature which states that youth are disengaged from community and civic concerns (Masters, Macintosh and Smith, 2004; Twenge, 2006). In fact, the findings indicate quite the opposite: that youth are keen to engage in civic and community issues and want their opinions to be taken seriously by adults. This research project indicates that there is a tension between adult views of youth engagement with civic issues and youth perceptions of the opportunities available to engage in civic issues. It is therefore important for government to recognise that youth want to engage in civic decision-making. For government to facilitate youth engagement in civic issues, online communities should be considered in the civic decision-making process.

Facilitators and barriers of youth leadership in an online context

“Kids are good for more than just attending school all day everyday” (Student 3)

An examination of the responses from the focus group participants identified technological features and social factors of online communities that both strengthened and inhibited youth leadership. The most influential factors were the anonymity associated with online communities and the empathy that youth felt for certain issues. In turn, the most significant barriers towards online youth leadership were adult perceptions of youth and the lack of credibility of online communities.

Equity from perceived anonymity

“People just take you for you, not by what your appearance is but by the way you chat.” (Student 5)

The literature on youth development acknowledges that youth lack a legitimate voice or influence in community development and decision making. According to Boyd (2008) youth do not have equal rights in the public sphere. The lack of equality leaves youth feeling powerless, as indicated by the findings of this research project. Researchers have suggested that the anonymity provided by online interaction gives teenagers a sense of empowerment to discuss topics that would be too difficult to discuss in a face to face situation (Suzuki & Calzo, 2004). These findings are supported by the majority of participants who felt that online communities provided a space in which young people could assert their opinions. Youth felt a sense of ownership regarding online communities, perceiving them as a “youth space” belonging to young people. Knowing that online communities are a youth space empowers young people and enables them to build their leadership skills through organising youth events and identifying with community concerns.

Passion and empathy

“If you feel strongly about something you are more inclined to do something about it.”

(Student 6)

Passion and empathy are important influencing factors for youth leadership as they motivate youth to engage in civic and social issues. Engagement in social participation is an important part of leadership development. However, the literature on Gen Y perceives them as “self-absorbed” consumers who are not engaged with civic issues (Twenge, 2006). The findings of this research do not support this perception. Participants interviewed are indeed empathetic, especially towards youth overseas. Youth participants showed this empathy through their involvement in World Vision fundraising events. Empathy and passion for social action is also supported through participants’ engagement with the ‘Save Manners Mall’ campaign. The results of this study are in alignment with Tapscott’s (2008) view that Gen Y youth are influenced by integrity and consideration for others. The idea that youth lack empathy seems to be an adult perception of youth.

Adult Perceptions

“A lot of people don’t take the opinions of youth that seriously, it’s a very difficult area to address.” (Student 3)

The results from this study align with scholarly literature regarding adult perceptions of youth and technology, offering a significant barrier towards youth leadership and social action. In the focus group, the issue of adult perception was a significant and recurring thread in the discussion, as youth felt that adults did not take them seriously. Research undertaken by Vick (1993) found that adults often take a controlling and directing view towards youth and do not offer them any significant roles and responsibilities. Adults regard Gen Y youth as incapable of leadership (Des Marais, et al., 2000). Buckingham (2000, p. 19) echoes the findings of the previous authors and states that young people are seen as “pre-social” and not fully part of society. This view acts as a barrier for youth who are not seen as citizens and thus cannot fully participate in civic and social participation endeavours.

Kress (2006) believes that society has made youth powerless and provides them with no meaningful roles other than ‘consumers’. Vick (1993) also found that youth were marginalised in youth-based environments, like schools, where they had little representation and input in the decision making process. Vick’s research is echoed by the participants in the study undertaken. They felt that in schools representatives like the student council were nominal roles without substantial voice or power. Focus group participants believed that the issue of youth leadership and strengthening of their voice was a difficult issue to address. This resignation and sense of powerlessness is in contrast to the characterization of Gen Y as assertive and pro-active.

Adult negative perception of youth creates a significant barrier for young people. Studies indicate that such perception restricts youth by making them doubt their abilities and hinders them from forming positive relationships with adults (Guzman, Lipman, Moore & O’Hare , 2003; Klindera, Menderweld & Norman, 2001; Zeldin &Topitzes, 2002). Researchers conclude that poor perceptions of youth by adults limit the engagement of young people in the community (Camino, 2000; Klindera, Menderweld & Norman , 2001; Zeldin & Topitzes , 2002).

Camino and Zeldin (2002) assert that adults prefer to view youth as the “embodiment of the storm and stress rather than as individuals who also have the motivation and skill to contribute to others” (2002, p. 215). Youth identified adult poor perceptions of youth as the most significant barrier for youth leadership potential. The young people in this study also felt that the issue of adult perceptions of youth is difficult to resolve. There is strong recommendation here that adults should begin to view young people in a positive light and seek online and offline channels to partner with youth in community building.

Credibility and Authenticity

“The challenges with having something solely online is that it’s difficult to attain the authenticity to verify everything that’s being said, and all the people who are behind it, are actually behind it and that they’re not either all fake or wackos.” (Student 1)

Credibility and authenticity present a significant barrier to online youth leadership. Credibility is critical from a leadership perspective for individuals to gain status and influence in a group (Weimann, 1994). Trustworthiness is especially important for online leaders (Huffaker, 2009). It is important that online communities and their members are viewed as credible. The findings from this research indicate that the majority of authenticity issues stem from the lack of verification of identities in online communities. Scholarly literature stipulates that trust is a critical element of credibility and authentication in online environments (Tapscott, 1998; Huffaker, 2009). Credibility is therefore sought and gained through individuals presenting accurate information, consistent identity online and by engaging in regular communication to members of the online communities (Tapscott, 1998). Huffaker (2009) suggests that credibility can be enhanced by ‘tenure’, that is, ensuring an individual has been part of an online community for a while. Tenure and consistent identity are suitable ways of enhancing the credibility of online communities. To facilitate credibility, government especially local government as suggested in this research, needs to be involved in online communities and perhaps partner with youth moderators to create simple guidelines around online discussions and submissions.

Implications and suggestions for various parties involved with Gen Y are summarised in the table below:

Parties involved with Gen Y	Implications and suggestions
Government	<p>Government need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recognise that youth want to be involved in civic decision-making • identify means for youth to collaborate with government in civic concerns • acknowledge the online opinions of youth regarding civic concerns • provide meaningful leadership roles and representation for youth in local government • consider using online communities and other social media in the civic decision-making process
<p>Youth Organisations</p> <p>Youth leadership practitioners</p> <p>NGOs and Fundraising bodies</p>	<p>These parties need to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • collaborating with youth when creating youth leadership development programmes • allowing youth to take ownership and leadership of youth organisational activities • using online communities to communicate with youth • targeting youth by incorporating “fun” activities and competitions in fundraising events
<p>Parents & Educators</p>	<p>Parents and Educators should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • avoid forming negative perceptions of youth • collaborate with youth in community building activities • provide genuine leadership roles for youth in schools and in the community • incorporate online mediums when communicating to young people

Limitations

Three main limitations were faced by the researcher: time, the challenge of recruiting young people for the study, and a relatively small sample of the population under study. The most significant limitation was time, as the research was bound by a six-month period. This limited the opportunities to conduct more focus groups sessions and to engage in supplementary discussion on the online wiki. It is therefore acknowledged and recommended that further longitudinal research and evaluation will be necessary to create further robust literature in this research stream.

Adopting a case study approach limited the participants to the Wellington region thus contributing to a relatively small population of adolescents. The inclusion of young people from across New Zealand would produce further valuable data regarding Gen Y online community usage and online youth leadership activities.

The challenge of recruiting young people to take part in this study was also a considerable limitation. Gen Y youth are involved in many activities after school and during school breaks, making it difficult for them to attend focus group sessions. The researcher also found substantial gaps around the research methodology for working with adolescents. Consequently, working with adolescents was “uncharted waters” and only further validation and reporting will form part of a foundation for suitable recruitment procedures when investigating topics in the youth leadership stream.

Recommendations

This section makes recommendations based on the key findings of this study.

Recommendations are as follows:

1. Further longitudinal research should be conducted with Gen Y throughout New Zealand to create more robust findings regarding the use of online communities in a social and democratic context. Secondary school students are often overlooked in leadership studies therefore more research on this demographic is desirable (McNae, 2010).
2. Government should be made aware of youth requests for the inclusion of online discussion and submissions in civic decision-making. Researchers suggest that the

use of new technologies in government decision making is important, as it gives society a chance to be able to contribute and take part in civic decision making (Aidemark, 2003).

3. Further research with youth is advisable, on how their online and offline leadership skills are strengthened through involvement with government in civic decision-making. Researchers recommend further research on various types of youth participation and developing strategies that incorporate youth-adult partnerships to strengthen youth leadership potential (Kress, 2006).
4. Few studies exist on how adults altered their poor perceptions of youth (Camino, 2000). Only additional research can provide strategies for changing adults' poor perceptions of youth.
5. Additional research is required regarding the provision of online and offline channels for adult-youth partnerships. Scholarly literature is sparse regarding how adults can create a balance between supporting youth while fostering meaningful leadership opportunities for them (Mitra, 2005; McLaughlin, 2000; National Research Council, 2002).
6. Finally, further investigation is required regarding the challenges and appropriate strategies when undertaking research with adolescents. The adolescent research stream is underserved in research textbooks (Yarcheski & Mahon, 2007). Only additional studies with adolescents can extend this research stream. Perhaps, these studies should be conducted in collaboration with secondary school teachers as relationships are important when it comes to recruiting youth to take part in research.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate how online communities strengthen youth voice and leadership in the context of social and democratic issues. Through focus groups with a Gen Y cohort in Wellington the researcher found that online youth leadership is seen as participation and takes on a two-dimensional position. The key facilitators and barriers of online youth were identified and discussed with implications and future research directions suggested. This study provides an insight into youth

leadership potential in an online context. In consequence, it extends research regarding youth leadership development and online communities research.

Epilogue

Among the Maasai of East Africa there is a folk tale that encourages elders to listen to the advice of the young. The researcher would like to conclude this study with a folktale entitled *Konyek and his Father* adapted from Hollis (1905).

At the beginning of the story, Menye Konyek (Konyek's father) kills Konyek's aunt, leaving behind twin boys. Konyek's mother secretly nurtures her nephews and seeks revenge for her sister's death. Konyek a smart boy, notices little footsteps around the family manyatta (homestead) and tells his father. Menye Konyek ignores Konyek's warning; consequently the twins grow up into strong young warriors.

One day Konyek's mother asks for weapons to defend herself from cattle thieves. Konyek questions this request, stating that he has never before heard of a woman who wanted men's weapons. Menye Konyek ignores Konyek's protests and obtains weapons for his wife. Evening falls and after a hearty meal, Konyek and his father fall asleep in front of the fire. After ensuring the pair are fast asleep, Konyek's mother calls her nephews from their hiding place and gives them her weapons. The young men rush to attack the sleeping pair. As Konyek is struggling he says to his father "I warned you, but did you listen?" The story ends with the twins killing Konyek and his father.

The moral of the story is; adults should heed the words of the younger generation.

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Appendix A - Human Ethics Documentation

Participant Information Sheet

Proposed Project title: Online communities , Gen Y and civic engagement

Researcher: Lanoi Maloiy, School of Information Management (SIM), Victoria University of Wellington

Dear _____ ,

Thank you for wanting to take part in this focus group, which looks at online communities and youth leadership. Taking part in this study is entirely voluntary (meaning it is your choice whether you take part or not). I am currently studying towards a Masters degree in Information Management at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.

Research Goal

This research project looks at how youth are using online communities to take part in social issues like World Vision, 40hr Famine and develop their leadership skills. The outcome of this focus group will be used to inform my final research report.

I will record the focus group discussion on a digital recorder, and this discussion will last about 1hour and half. The focus group discussion will take place between July and September 2010. Since the focus group involves 4 to 8 teenagers, each young person will be asked to write down when he/she is available for the focus group session. Then I will organise a time that will suit. You will be invited with an email including the date and place closer to the time of the focus group session.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality* means not discussing what we talk about in the focus group with anyone else.

It is important that what we discuss, will be treated as confidential by everyone taking part in the focus group. In turn I will also keep details of the project confidential, that means I will keep all information safely protected with a password or kept in a locked file. All this information will be destroyed 2 years after the study is finished. Focus group discussions will only be seen by me and my supervisor (Dr Jocelyn Cranefield). The discussion will be summarised and will be used in my final research report and in articles published in academic journals or presentations at conferences. A copy of “Online communities, Gen Y and Civic engagement” research project will also be kept at the Victoria University of Wellington Library, and may be available electronically. Youth taking part in the focus group will not be named and any comments made will not be traced back to a particular individual.

You have the right to withdraw from the study at any stage up to the start of the focus group session or during the focus group session, but the discussion comments up to this point cannot be removed. If you have any questions about this study or anything on this sheet please contact me and I will explain it to you.

This sheet has been looked at by the SIM Human Ethics Committee and approval has been given.

If you wish to receive an a draft copy of my report please let me know. You can reach me by TxT 021 xxxxxxx or email maloiylano@myvuw.ac.nz. You can also contact my supervisor Dr Jocelyn Cranefield via email: Jocelyn.Cranefield@vuw.ac.nz or landline 04 463 xxxx.

Regards,

Lanoi Maloiy

**PARENTAL/GUARDIAN APPROVAL FOR PARTICIPATION IN A FOCUS GROUP :
INFORMATION SHEET**

<Date>

Dear ,

This letter follows up our recent conversation/email in which I expressed an interest in having your child participate in a focus group about how online communities influence youth leadership skills. Prior to conducting the proposed focus group, Victoria University of Wellington requires that I obtain your written informed consent.

Purpose of Research

The purpose of the research is to identify how youth are using online communities to engage in social issues and to strengthen their leadership skills. The research is also being undertaken for the purposes of completing a degree of Masters in Information Management. Participation in this focus group is voluntary and it is your child's choice whether to participate or not.

Confidentiality

All raw data will be kept confidential. The collected, collated and analysed data may be published in case studies, academic journals and/or presented at conferences. Any information and opinions that your child provides will not be attributed to them, and they will not be identified in any way. There will be an opportunity for you to review any written notes or transcripts of recorded sessions that result from the interviews. Throughout the project, hard copies of data and interview tapes will be kept in a locked file cabinet. Electronic files will be stored in password protected files, with access being restricted to myself my Masters supervisor Dr Jocelyn Cranefield. The data will be destroyed two years after the conclusion of the project.

Please feel free to contact Dr Jocelyn Cranefield via email Jocelyn.Cranefield@vuw.ac.nz telephone 04 463 xxxx or myself Lanoi Maloiy maloiyvano@myvuw.ac.nz or 021 xxx xxxx if you require further information about the informed consent requirement.

The consent form is attached. It includes a request for permission to tape-record interviews. The interview will last 60-90 minutes. Please could you and your child complete the form, sign it and return it to me in the enclosed stamped and addressed envelope by _____ 2010. Please contact me if you have any questions.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

Lanoi Maloiy (Masters Student)
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VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

Te Whare Wānanga o te Ūpoko o te Ika a Māui



SCHOOL OF INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

Consent to Participation in Research:

Online Communities and youth leadership

[Please mark each box with a tick to indicate agreement, then sign and date this form]

1. I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research and the confidentiality conditions.

2. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

3. I agree to be interviewed and audio-recorded by Lanoi Maloiy for the purposes of this research and I consent to the use of my perceptions, experiences, opinions and information in this research providing they are not attributed to me.

4. I understand that I have the right to withdraw from this study at any point up to the start of the focus group session or during the focus group session. Any data collected up to this point cannot be removed.

5. I agree to keep any information confidential that is discussed within the focus group session.

6. I agree that the information discussed within the focus group may be used for this thesis and may be presented at academic conferences or published in journal articles.

7. I would like to receive an electronic copy of an interim research report summarising the findings of the focus group sessions. Please send it to the below mentioned email

Email: _____

8. I understand that all the data collected will be destroyed 2 years after the conclusion of the study.

9. For Student: I agree to take part in this research

Student's name:

Signed:

Date:

10. For Parent/Guardian: I agree that _____ , who is under my guardianship, may take part in this research

Parent/Guardian's name:

Signed:

Date:

Focus Group Protocol

1. Introduction:

- Welcome the research participants and thank them for their participation
- Brief introduction to the research study
- Explain the purpose of the focus groups and clarify the central role of youth for the overall study
- Explain the research aims to *understand how leadership skills are influenced or strengthened when students engage with social issues in online communities.*

2. Study specific discussion

3. Other comments / concerns

Focus group Questions

Introductory Questions

1. What online communities and social networking sites do you belong to? (Please list/describe them: both formal and informal communities)
2. How often do you log onto these online communities and what do you use them for?
3. What content do you find useful within these online communities?

Leadership development

I'm interested in understanding how leadership skills are influenced or strengthened when students engage with social issues in online communities.

4. What encourages you to voice your opinion or participate in a social issue? What part do online communities play in this?

5. Please think of an example of a social action that you've picked up from an online community. What part did online communities play in helping you in joining this cause?
6. Did any other offline factor contribute to play a part in this?
7. Do you pass on your own ideas for social action in online communities? (Please give an example)
8. Thinking of the social action that you mentioned before; what are the advantages and disadvantages of being involved with this issue online?
9. Do you think that online communities play a part in building leadership skills? How does this happen? (Can you give an example?)
10. Do you think that online communities help to create social change in the community? How does this happen? (Please give an example)
11. What do you think are challenges with this sort of involvement?
12. When it comes to young people, what motivates /influences them to get involved in leadership and social issues?
13. Do you have any further comments or concerns related to online communities or youth leadership that have not been addressed yet?

'Wrap up' of the findings / discussion :

Thank you very much for your time and please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor in case of further questions.

Appendix B – Data Display Table

Research Question	Response	Supporting Literature
<p>How are Gen Ys using online communities in the context of social and democratic issues ?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● As a communication tool among youth groups ● To organise youth events ● To identify and show support for an individual, activity or cause. ● To promote youth oriented social causes and community events 	<p>Boyd (2008) adds that social networks are now constructed around personal networks, if content is valued it is shared within the network.</p> <p>Cassell and colleagues (2006) suggest that the internet has become a community building tool and a means of civic engagement and political participation among young Americans.</p> <p>In online communities topics of interest are promoted quickly and widely by influential members (Huffaker, 2009)</p>
<p>How do online communities strengthen youth voice and leadership in the context of social and democratic issues?</p>	<p>Technological features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Broad reach and convenience for communication of information ● Timeliness and low cost <p>Social factors :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Empowerment through perceived anonymity ● Equity and a balance of power among adults 	<p>Online communities have the capability of forming and maintaining social links cheaply and easily (Donath and Boyd, 2004).</p> <p>Tapscott (2008) credits the use of social networking by Gen Y as a crucial factor in the election of Barack Obama.</p> <p>Huffaker (2009) online leadership emerges in leaderless groups and makes a positive impact on behavior and attitudes of these online groups.</p> <p>Internet communities have been proposed as a platform for this demographic to build up their leadership skills (Cassell, et al., 2006).</p>

		<p>The leader as a primus modus taking an active role in an online atmosphere (Siitonen, 2009).</p> <p>A young person goes into a stage of mastery where they actively seek opportunities to improve their leadership skills (Van Linden and Fertman, 1998).</p>
<p>What are facilitators and barriers to Gen Y leadership in the context of online communities?</p>	<p>Facilitators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passion and Empathy • Equality and Perceived anonymity <p>Barriers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult perceptions • Authenticity and credibility 	<p>Cassell and colleagues (2006) online communities provide young people with the opportunity to exercise leadership skills and develop leadership identities free from public expectations.</p> <p>Boyd (2008) states that youth do not have equal rights in the public sphere whereas online communities offer youth a space where they can ‘hang out’ with friends without adult interference.</p> <p>Adults regard Gen Y youth as not capable of being leaders (Des Marais, et al., 2000)</p> <p>Vick (1993) found that adults often take a controlling and directing view towards youth and do not offer them any significant roles and responsibilities.</p> <p>There is a need for authority in online groups Sittonen (2009).</p>