Political Participation of the Young Generation in the Age of Social Media
— The Brexit Case —

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I. Introduction

23 June, 2016, is the date many citizens of the United Kingdom will not soon forget due to a great impact they had experienced regardless of their political preferences. The United Kingdom European Union Membership Referendum, also known as the EU Referendum or Brexit Referendum, took place in the United Kingdom and Gibraltar, to ask its electoral citizens whether the UK should continue or withdraw its membership from the European Union, under the provisions of the European Union Referendum Act 2015 and the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000.

According to the Electoral Commission in the UK, which provides official statistics, the national total of electorate was 46,500,001, in which 17,410,742 votes were casted to exit the European Union while 16,141,241 votes were to remain in the status quo, with 25,359 rejected ballots. (Electoral Commission, 2016) The result was a win for the Brexit voters (51.89%) over Remainers (48.11%), with a voter turnout of 72.21%. Despite the prediction before the referendum that the majority would vote for the UK to remain in the European Union, the result of the 2016 EU Referendum was a victory by a slight margin for those demanding an exit from a long standing
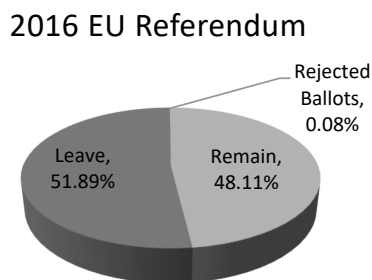
2016 EU Referendum

Fig.1　Result of the 2016 EU Referendum

Source: "Results and turnout at the EU referendum." The Electoral Commission. https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/who-we-are-and-what-we-do/elections-and-referendums/past-elections-and-referendums/eu-referendum/results-and-turnout-eu-referendum

union to reinstate the independent United Kingdom.

The Brexit Referendum was an interesting case in various dimensions. The future of the United Kingdom was decided by a direct electoral participation, and it reflected a vast discrepancy in political preferences for different generations. Plus, the generational differences exposed dissimilar forms of political engagement, both before and after the referendum. The use of the Internet and the social media in political campaigning amplified, and the impact this may have on influencing the voter conversion became a stimulating topic of research for many scholars. Furthermore, the Brexit Referendum displayed how the young generation participates and deals with political matters and the future of their country in the age of social media use.

II. Social Media in Political Campaigning

Social media and the Internet have transformed the way we handle communication considerably, and the ways in which we connect through those platforms have brought a radical change in how we access, collect, spread, share, and engage with information. As the Internet technologies advanced and affordable portable devices became more available, the social media has grown to be a major source of everyday information. Politics is no exception, and the use of the social media brought a new means and variations of communication and political participation. The advantage of social media use in politics is that politicians, political parties and organizations are capable of reaching out to the people directly in their own words, instead of getting mediated by journalists or press organizations in the traditional forms of media. Though social media has also been regarded as a channel for deliberately, carelessly, or mistakenly delivering misinformation, or so-called "fake news," the number of users does not seem to diminish.

Many researchers have turned to follow the active use of the Internet and the social media during the electoral campaigns to establish a causal relationship between political participation of the youth and their activities in the digital arena. Due to its diffusive nature, the influence of social media on politics has been the target of analyses, especially immediately before, during, and after major elections and referenda. EU Referendum was no exception. The role of social media in terms of persuading political preferences, manipulating

public images, and its contribution to motivating formal political participation have been questioned. Specifically with the younger generation, the impact that the social media has on their political decision making process has been the subject of query, since they are the heaviest users of the Internet and the social media in the United Kingdom.

Political campaigns using the digital network had been present in the United Kingdom since the general election of 1997, but have become very active since the election for the House of Representatives in 2010. It became more prominent that the use of the Internet had intensified, and especially the use of social media of popular platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram saw an upsurge. (Sato, 2013) Since then, numerous researches have been examining the role of social media during the political campaigning period, to analyze their impact on the voters, and whether it was a powerful tool to convince and mobilize the users both for and against Brexit. Additionally, considering that the social media is increasingly becoming an important source for information, some researches have been conducted with an attempt to help explain the political behaviors in the digital sphere which possibly increased the formal political participation of the young people. It has been reported that of the six most popular social media platforms, Facebook is most likely the largest, and UK alone has approximately 42 million users, followed by YouTube, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Instagram with 35.6 million, 21 million, 16 million, 14 million active users in the UK respectively. (LSE, 2017)

III. Political Participation

Political participation is relevant for any political system, but it is an essential feature of democracy. Participation in democratic decision making provides the citizens an opportunity to disclose their interests, preferences, and concerns, and the results reflect the will of the citizenry. Hence, public interest can be recognized through the processes of utterance, information, and deliberation, and transformed into collective decisions, which are deemed to be legitimate. (Dalton, 2007) It is understood that more participation there is in decisions, more democratic the outcome, and there is little democracy if few were to take part in decision making. Therefore, the degree of political participation is very important, because it is a criterion for assessing the quality of democracy, and it

is vital for democracy that all participants are actively involved in decision making processes.

In the recent years, trends show that people are increasingly abstain from participating in electoral activities. A general low voter turnout has been seen in parliamentary, national and other elections, and citizens are increasingly disconnected from formal political engagements and democratic institutions. The voter turnout rates among the youngest generation have been dramatically lower than their older counterparts, and the youth political participation in general are in rapider decline compared to the older contemporaries. The younger generation feel more disinterest and alienation from the political process, however, this does not suggest that the youth are disengaged from all forms of political activities. (Henn, 2012)

Postnote by the House of Parliament classifies political participation into two categories; formal and informal. Formal participation in official assemblies and processes refers to the traditional activities of political engagement, such as voting for representatives in elections, casting ballots in referenda, becoming a member of political parties, and attending public meetings. Informal participation means other forms of partaking outside of political institutions, such as joining demonstrations, protests, or strikes, purchasing or boycotting products for political reasons, signing an online petition, and any other political activities taking place in the private sphere. (House of Parliament, 2015)

Young people in general tend to have a low level of formal participation, however, they are more eager to engage in informal participation, especially for single issue causes. They are more likely to distance themselves from institutionalized forms of political engagement, and react to social issues through non-conventional method of gathering. Henn and Foard argues that in Great Britain, the access to new media and technologies facilitate youth participation in informal political engagement, and the digital sphere provides a new media culture, which influences the political identity formation of the young people who are moving away from the traditional channels for expressing their political views. (Henn, 2012)

IV. The Generation of "Digital Natives"

The younger generation of voters of the EU Referendum is considered to be

the first generation of Digital-Natives. Marc Prensky was the first to introduce the word, "Digital Natives," and he explains that the Digital Natives are the generation who were born into the environment where digital technologies, such as the Internet, computers, video games, and mobile devices, such as smartphones and tablets, have already been widespread, adopted, and integrated into their lives from day one. (Prensky, 2001) The exposure to digital technology from early days is believed to provide the Digital Natives a greater familiarity and advantage in the digital sphere, and they have a greater level of comfort in using such technologies.

As oppose to the Digital Natives, those who were born before the digital era and adopted the use of the new digital technologies later in their lives are referred to as the "Digital Immigrants." (Ibid.) According to Prensky, the fundamental difference between the Digital Natives and Digital Immigrants is that although most of the users of digital technology speak the same "language," Digital Natives are the native speakers of the digital language, as opposed to the Digital Immigrants who have learned the same language as a foreign language. This fundamental difference is similar to what has been apparent in the learning of a linguistically foreign language. To the Digital Natives, it is their natural mother tongue which they had acquired without any conscious effort. However, to the Digital Immigrants, it is an adapted language, and the levels of comprehension vary, depending on the individuals. Many of the Digital Immigrants have accomplished to familiarize themselves with the new technology and become accustomed to incorporating those technologies in their daily lives, some are as good as Digital Natives, but they always maintain the experience of their lives before the digital age and make recollections to the past. Hence, the Digital Immigrants are inclined to make digital contents not their primary source of information but to rely on the traditional media, such as printed newspapers, magazines, television, and radio. On the other hand, the Digital Natives generally acknowledge that the Internet is their main source of information, have higher levels of comfort in using such media, and feel less objection in making digital contents to be their primary news provider. (Ibid.)

With Prensky's conceptualization of Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants, and digital language (which refers to the knowledge and the use of digital technology) in mind, we can have a better understanding of correlations between the increase of Internet use and socio-demographic characteristics as

seen in the data produced by the Office for National Statistics in the UK for the Internet usage in 2017. In the report, "Internet users in the UK: 2017," the Office for National Statistics states that Internet usage amongst adults in the UK is as high as 89%, which has seen an increase by one point compared to the previous year. Furthermore, 99% of the adults of ages 16 to 24 and 25 to 34 were reported to be the recent users of the Internet, and albeit the internet use among women of ages 75 and above had trebled since 2011, the overall percentage of the oldest age group (ages 75 and above) is at 41%.

V. Youth Political Attitudes and Changing Political Participation

Younger generation in the United Kingdom, just as their counterparts in the USA, Australia, and in Europe, has been characterized as being disengaged from traditional forms of political participation for a couple of decades. (Collin, 2015) Recent decrease in youth electoral participation has been generating anxiety that the British young citizens are becoming gradually apathetic and disengaged from political processes and democratic values. Existing researches insinuate that the contemporary young people in general feel alienation and dissatisfaction in the political processes, have relatively lower amount of political knowledge in comparison to the older generations, maintain less interest in political parties and organizations, and lack of attentiveness and commitment towards political engagements. (Henn, 2011) However, younger generation's reluctance in traditional political engagement does not equate to their lack of political interest or participation.

Social media and the new technologies provide a new arena for the participation in different political activities other than formal political engagement. Political identities and forms of expression of the younger generation have been alienated from the traditional means and transferred to the new culture produced by the new digital media. Through the new media, young people's political identity are influenced by blogs, websites, and social media, and the new participatory technologies allow them to actively express their political opinion by signing online petitions, taking part in single issue online groups, and producing digital media clips to post on YouTube and alike. (Henn, 2011)

Disengagement from electoral participation of youth may be produced by a

lack of confidence in understanding British politics and knowledge of government, as well as a distrust in political parties and politicians at the individual level. Although citizenship classes have been offered, more than half of the recipients felt that their awareness and comprehension had not been increased. (Ibid.) Additionally, young people in particular do not trust the government or the politicians because of scandals, negative media representations, and unrealistic expectations standards of behavior in public life. (House of Parliament, 2015) With such low political efficacy and a low level of trust, young people feel that they cannot influence any political processes, and they are not confident enough to participate in formal decision-making procedures.

Regardless of their low political efficacy, about half of British youth population believe and have confidence and attachment in the democratic process. Henn and Foard discovered that close to 50% of the British young generation acknowledge that they are satisfied with the way democracy works, yet more than half of them expressed that the elections provide opportunities to express political opinions but nothing gets changed. This implies that young people are not apathetic to politics, however, they are pessimistic observers of the electoral process. (Ibid.)

Evidence collected from many previous researches suggest that young population in the United Kingdom is not politically apathetic but interested in political affairs, especially through civic orientation and informal political participation. Ongoing example of this are the continuing Anti-Brexit marches, such as March for Europe, Unite for Europe, People's Vote March, Put It To The People March, and other local Stop Brexit marches, held in London and throughout the United Kingdom, aiming for a chance for the second referendum. It has been reported that hundred thousands of protesters took part in those marches, and the organization for such walks was made possible, facilitated, and expedited by the use of webpages and social media. In this sense, Internet and social media influence and participation engaging in informal politics have a correlation since the they promote political mobilization.

VI. Brexit and The Young Voters

Immediately after the referendum results revealed, numerous young voters

exposed a wide range of emotions towards Brexit, composed of a mixture of panic, sorrow, disappointment, anxiety, anger, fear, underrepresentation, deprivation, betrayal, and other negative sentiments, as they were commonly expressed in interviews, surveys, videos, and other forms of media, which made their dissatisfaction very apparent and public. Some even blamed the older generation for robbing them of their future. (BBC, 2016; Cresci, 2016; Joyce, 2016) Despite their expression of deep disappointment, what triggered a controversy was the low voter turnout of the younger generation (ages 18-34), which was initially reported to be around 36%. (Dunford, 2016; Kelly, 2016; Sky Data 2016) It is a well-known trend that the younger generations in liberal democracies tend to engage far less than the older generations in conventional political participation (Collin, 2015), however, critics began to speculate if more voters of the young generation casted their ballots at the referendum, they could have overturned the result in favor of Remain.

Whilst the young generation was criticized and blamed for political apathy and irresponsibility, Professor Michael Bruter and Dr. Sarah Harrison of the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) presented reversing findings. It has been very apparent from previous data that young people have the tendency to vote considerably less than older generations. (Bruter, 2016; Henn, 2011) However, the percentage originally circulated by Sky Data via Twitter was based on the survey that was collected after the 2015 general election. Moreover, the data was based on the calculations of those voters who
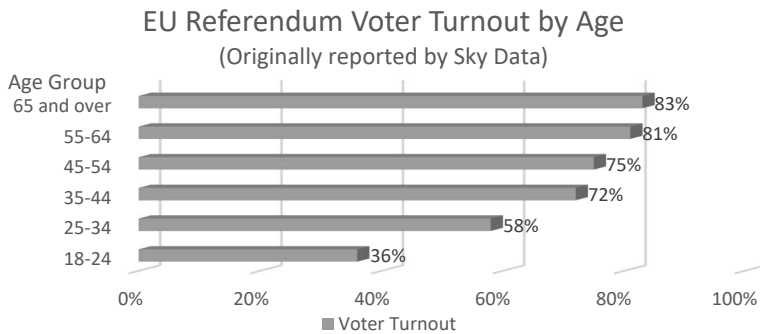

Fig. 2   Voter Turnout at the EU Referendum by Age Groups

Source: Sky Data Official Twitter Account. "% who got through our final #EUref poll turnout filter by age group:" https://twitter.com/skydata/status/746700869656256512

claimed that they never miss a chance to take part in elections. Hence, according to Bruter and Harrison, 36% voter turnout for the young generation was an outdated projection and not an accurate reflection of the 2016 EU referendum. The 36% suggested a probability of how much voter turnout there might have been if the young people behaved in the way they typically do on the very day of the EU referendum. Same was applicable to all age groups which were presented in the original estimates of Sky Data, and the probability indicated only the likelihood of the voter turnout based on the 2015 general election.

The ECREP electoral psychology initiative at the LSE and Opinium worked in a collaboration in order to acquire a better estimate of the youth participation in the 2016 Referendum. From one panel and one ad hoc studies of 3,008 and 2,008 respondents respectively, their findings evoked a differing result, which suggested 70% and 64% voter turnout for ages 18 to 24, and 67% and 65% for 25 to 39 year olds. (Bruter, 2016) Although these numbers are approximations, it is clear that the voter turnout for the young generation seems to have been much higher than originally predicted, only slightly lower than the national average.

Compared to the previous low voter turnout at the general elections one year ago, the young generation at the EU Referendum demonstrated a higher level of electoral participation of approximately 64%, which is assumed to be about
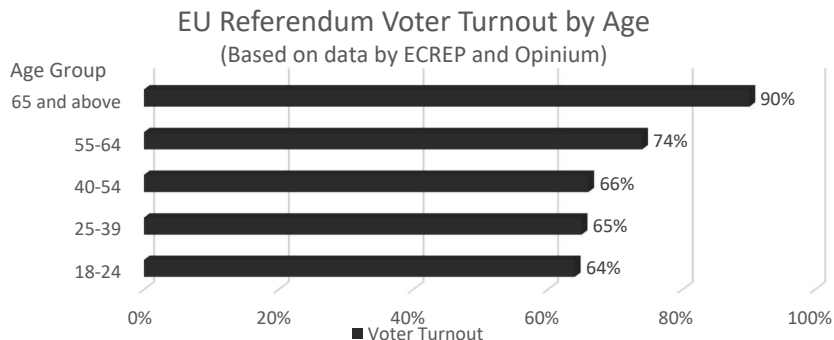

Fig. 3   Voter Turnout at the EU Referendum, based on data provided by ECREP and Opinium.

Source: "EU referendum: breaking indifference. How age affected voting." LSE.   http://www.lse.ac.uk/about-lse/connect/connect-2017/eu-referendum-breaking-indifference.

double the original estimate. (Yeung, 2016) What has made the change in only one year? What was the key factor to mobilize the young people for the referendum? Was this increase caused by more use of the Internet and the social media in political campaigning? In order to understand the motivation in political mobilization of the young generation, we will need to investigate where their political attitudes and values come from, what factors shape or alter them, and assess the influence of those factors and values on their political behavior.

VII. Brexit: Statistical Analysis of Social Media and Political Preference

Max Hänska and Stefan Bauchowitz analyzed 7.5 million Tweets in the EU Referendum campaign in order to study the influence of social media on politics. According to Hänska and Bauchowitz's research, social media has become the second most important online news source after the exclusive news websites, and around 43% of those who pick up news online use social media. For the younger generation of ages 16 to 24, 61% of them receive news online through social media, and 16% amongst them depend on the social media as their exclusive news source. However, social media does not only serve as a news deliverer, but they also provide opportunities for the users to post, repost, share, and comment on the news topics. Moreover, the social media allows direct communication between the users and politicians or journalists, and they can connect unobstructedly with each other. Reciprocally, politicians, political parties, journalists, and news organizations use this advantage of social media to directly engage with their constituency.

Twitter is particularly popular for sharing updates, especially when the topic is current, hence many politicians are using this platform to dispatch their latest messages or "Tweets." In fact, 87% of the members of the UK Parliament own Twitter accounts, and since it does not require any mediation like in the traditional media, it has become one of the powerful channels for them to reach the audience directly. (Hänska and Bauchowitz, 2017) Not only with Twitter but also in most popular social media platforms, users are free to follow the accounts of their choice, and tailor their source of information to their tastes. Furthermore, the integrated algorithm mechanism amplifies the users' preferences by automatically calculating and feeding the contents which are

similar to what the users had chosen manually, optimizing the social feeds with the contents which the users presumably find pleasant and agreeable.

In the month prior to the EU Referendum, Hänska and Bauchowitz had examined over 7.5 million Tweets to investigate the four key possibilities; 1) a relationship between the actual voting preference and Twitter activity, 2) types of shared information on Twitter, 3) whether the users were circumscribed to their own echo chambers which constantly displayed the contents that the users felt congenial, and 4) if the Brexiters and Remainers got directly involved with each other. In their findings, Brexiters outnumbered the Remainers in their account numbers as well as the number of Tweets by the ratio of 1.75 to 2.3. (Ibid.) Additionally, those Brexiters who were active Twitters had a high tendency to vote for Leave, hence the voting preference was correlated to activities on Twitter. However, Hänska and Bauchowitz make a remark that this correlation cannot predict the outcome of the referendum for the margin of the Brexiters overwhelming the Remainers was much larger on Twitter than the cleavage displayed by the actual referendum votes. Moreover, Brexiters displayed less openness and higher homophily on Twitter, which indicates a characteristic of an echo-chamber. On the other hand, Remain voters presented more versatility in their activities by engaging in communication not only with their cohorts but also Brexiters. In conclusion, Hänska and Bauchowitz noted that the Brexiters on Twitter were highly enthusiastic and much more cause oriented compared to the Remainers.

In their extensive study, Michael Bossetta, Anamaria Dutceac Segesten, and Hans-Jörg Trenz followed the comments of close to two million Facebook users who were either receiving political news or involved in referendum campaign posts. Their aim was to investigate whether there is a relationship between the users' subscription to political news by the mainstream media on Facebook, their participation in partisan campaign postings, and divergence in their opinion concerning EU membership. Initial stages of the study anticipated that 1) political interests to have an effect on the levels of political participation on online discussions, 2) exposure to the mainstream political news is less effective than online participation at the campaign sites, and 3) divergence in opinion is toughened by active campaign page users who tend to select more opinionated media.

Over 18 months of analysis, Bossetta et al note that a positive relationship

between being engaged with mainstream political news and active commenting on referendum campaign posts can be identified only for cases of cross-posters, but not the entire sample population. Additionally, the study investigated if the online political posting activity, cross-posting in particular, signifies behavioral patterns unique to political polarization. Their findings suggest that although there is an indication that mobilization by the campaign pages on Facebook result in fortification of political preferences, Leave campaigners were inconsistent and crossed into the Remainers' ideological online territory recurrently and make intensive comments on the pro-EU main stream media, such as The Guardian. Additionally, the study notes that "the (posting) activities that we do find point to the classic patterns of opposition mobilization against the status-quo." (Bossetta, 2017) In the case of EU referendum, status-quo was the membership in the European Union, and the Leave voters were challengers to the defenders of the status-quo, and extra motivation to reach the undecided voters lead to more intensity for the Leave voters, as seen in many election cases where the incumbents are faced by challengers. As for the Remain voters, their win was thought to be assuring that campaigning did not seem to intensify.

Vyacheslav Polonski at the Oxford Internet Institute had conducted a similar study. As a part of the EU Referendum Analysis, a large-scale social media data analysis was conducted, and akin to the other researches, Leave supporters had stronger, expressive messages, and had more efficient use of the social media. (Polonski, 2016) Their data collection of over 18,000 users and 30,000 posts on Instagram showed that there were double the number of Brexiters compared to Remainers, and the Remain supporters were five times less active than the pro-Brexit users. Similarly on Twitter, the ratio of Brexiters to Remainers was reported to be 7 to 1, and three most popular hashtags were all from the Brexit campaign; #Brexit, #Beleave, and #VoteLeave. (Ibid.)

VIII. Influence of Social Media and Political Participation during the Brexit Referendum

Taking the above research analyses into consideration, it is rather rational to suspect that social media had a great influence on Brexiters and their political participation. However, approaching the EU Referendum results from a demographical dimension raises a question of contradiction. Ipsos-Mori, an UK-based market research company which has been observing and analyzing general elections since 1979, provided five key findings to explain the voting patterns of the EU Referendum. The detections included 1) a remarkable difference in voting preferences based on age, class, educational level and ethnicity, 2) age and class had an impact on the voters' opinions, 3) clear gender difference in voting patterns, 4) employment, occupational status, and real-estate ownership signaled differences, and 5) those voters who chose not to participate in the 2015 general election had turned out to take part in the referendum. (Ipsos-Mori, 2016)

Generational difference was one of the major characteristics, which was exposed as the voting patterns were revealed after the EU Referendum results were in. Statistical estimates consolidated by YouGov disclosed that approximately 71% of the youngest age group (ages 18-24) voted for Remain while 29% favored Leave. On the contrary, only 36% of the voters chose to Remain while 64% voted for Brexit for the oldest age group (65 years old and
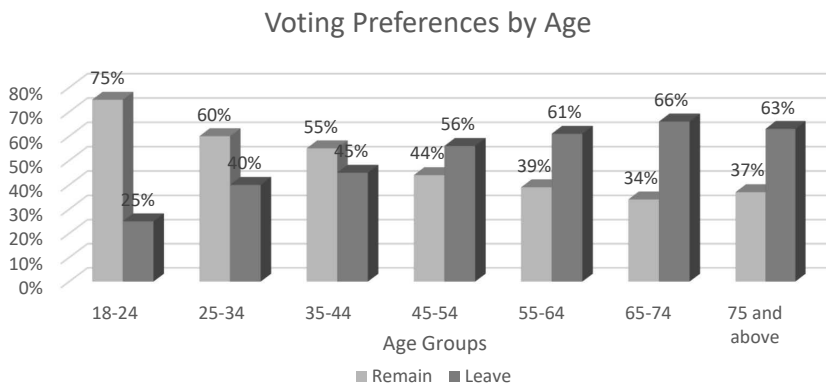

Voting Preferences by Age

Fig.4　Remain versus Brexit votes by different age groups.

Source: Ipsos-Mori, "How Britain voted in the 2016 EU referendum." https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/how-britain-voted-2016-eu-referendum.

above). (YouGov, 2016) Ipsos-Mori presented a further breakdown in age groups, which displayed a similar pattern. Notably, youngest of the voters had a higher percentage of choosing to Remain than the second youngest group, and for ages 65 and above, older the age of the voter, there seems to be a trend that they are likely to vote for Brexit.

The generational breakdown analyses of the voting preferences uniformly expose that the older voters had a higher tendency to support Brexit, whereas approximately three quarters of the youngest age group were in favor of Remain. Suppose the strong presence of the pro-Leave contents and feeds on social media played a significant role in convincing the undecided voters to support Brexit or swaying the voters towards withdrawal, the most persuaded age group must be over 55 years of age. Conversely, a statistical research on the social media usage by age group displays incompatible numbers. The result by Ofcom shows the frequency of social media use on a weekly basis, and users of ages 55 and above show a decline in usage whereas for ages 16 to 24, the weekly reach is 99%. (Elder, 2016) Based on this data, almost all social media users of ages 16 to 24 access their social networking platforms more than once a week, whilst only one in less than five users of ages 65 and above use social media every week. Correspondingly, Flint has presented similar findings in social media usage by age factors, and the trend coincides with Ofcom data.

Additional statistical data which challenges the establishment of correlations between the use of social media and influence on electoral behavior is the source of news. Rasmus Kleis Nielsen at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, University of Oxford, explains the importance of news source, both online and offline, as essential information for politics and public affairs. (Nielsen, 2016) Television in the recent years has been the most heavily dependent source for news, until the Internet took over after 2015. However, generational differences exist in the choice of main news source. For
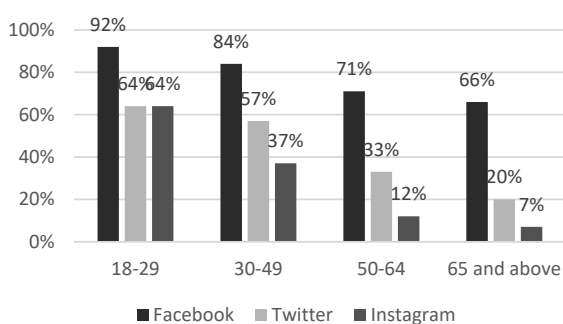
Social Media Usage by Age Group 2016

Age Group	Weekly Reach
16-24	99%
25-34	84%
35-44	77%
45-54	64%
55-64	51%
65 and above	24%

Fig. 5: Weekly Social Media Usage by Age

Source: Business Insider. https://www.businessinsider.com/99-of-young-british-people-use-social-media-every-week-2016-8

ages 45 and over, television and printed media (such as newspapers) are still the primary sources of information, whereas online sources including social media are preeminent for those under 25 years old.

Polonski emphasized that the greater presence of persuasive pro-Brexit contents in the social media triggered grassroots level activism and mending of political preference to withdrawal, appealing to many more voters to Leave. (Polonski, 2016) Given the fact that high percentage of Brexit supporters were over 55

Social Media Usage of Popular Platforms in UK (2016)

Platform / Age Group	Facebook	Twitter	Instagram
18-29	92%	64%	64%
30-49	84%	57%	37%
50-64	71%	33%	12%
65 and above	66%	20%	7%

Fig. 6   Usage of popular social media platforms by age in UK.

Source: Flint.   https://weareflint.co.uk/uk-social-media-demographics-2016-main-findings

Primary Source of News by Age
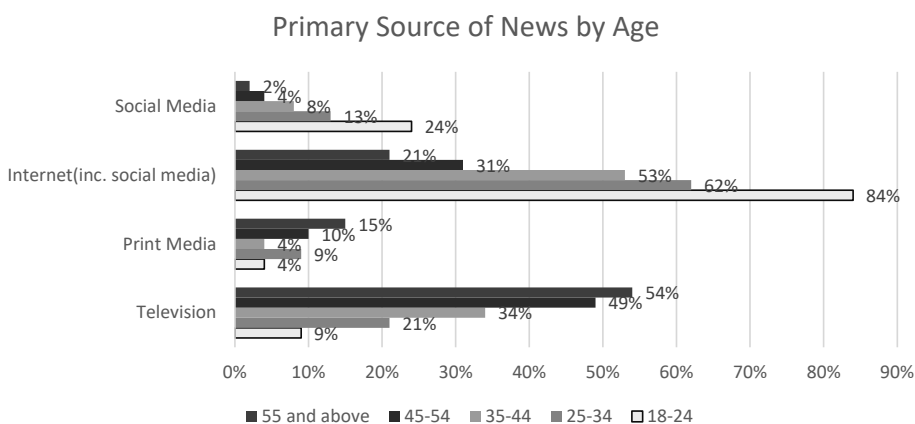
Fig. 7   Primary source of news by different age groups.

Source: Medium.com (Oxford University)   https://medium.com/oxford-university/where-do-people-get-their-news-8e850a0dea03

years of age, the same age group has a low percentage of social media usage, and media other than the Internet and the social media are their primary sources of news information, present evidence may not be enough to establish a relationship between social media use and influence on political preference. Polonski's assumption would have had a higher credibility if Remain supporters were the ones with stronger presence in the social media as majority of the Remainers are young, heavy social media users whose main source of news is the Internet, and only in this scenario the social media could have had a convincing influence on political mobilization of the young people.

IX. Conclusion

The case of young generation in the EU Referendum exposed a problem of confusion of statistics. Although ECREP and Opinium presented a differing statistics which indicated higher voter turnout for the young generation, and it is widely recognized by the British media that this result might be closer to the actual turnout than Sky Data, we must not forget that these statistics are approximates. Voting ballots do not have age or demographics written on them. This is not to undervalue the achievements of electoral studies and their research, and these statistics facilitate the perception of how people understand the situation and political trends of the society. However, it is difficult to know how the youth thinks from numbers, and we need another spectrum to find out how the young people actually feel towards politics. We need a different approach to understand the youth better in order to comprehend their higher involvement in informal political participation than formal political engagement, and what role the Internet and the social media play.

The conclusion that we may draw from these findings is that since the proliferation of the Internet and the social media, the way in which citizens express themselves politically has been changing, and there appears to be a decline in formal political engagement in exchange of increasing informal political participation. As the PostNote summarizes, factors that activate the changes in political expression are growing Internet use, levels of higher education, development of consumerism, and an inclination towards "self" or placement of individuals over collective action and cooperative decision-making. The case of predominantly pro-Remain young generation in the EU Referendum

has clarified that despite the strong presence of polarized contents in the social media, majority of the young people were not convinced or swayed to vote for Leave. Hence, the low political mobilization reflects the influence of social media on youth formal political participation to be very minimal. On the other hand, informal political participation with a single-cause, such as the cases of anti-Brexit marches endeavoring for a second opportunity for a referendum, was highly mobilized by the Internet and the social media, which attests that social media can influence political mobilization on non-traditional political engagements. Therefore, the correlations between social media use and youth political participation may be difficult to establish in the case study of the Brexit Referendum. Nevertheless, why the young people are highly politically mobilized for informal political engagements and inversely for conventional political participation may be an interesting exploration for further research on the relationship between the social media use and the youth political participation.

As of 2019, the chasm of the Remainers and the Brexiters as well as in between the generations continues to exit, and we still cannot procure a common denominator towards a united future for the United Kingdom. However, as Bruter noted, it is evident that young people were politically mobilized to vote for the referendum with a limited influence of the social media, because they realized the critical significance of the EU referendum in their future and the direction of where their country is headed. (Bruter, 2016) The influential power of the social media and the Internet is still incalculable, and the continuous expansion of the digital sphere and the digital world developing into a non-virtual place may develop political attitudes and new means of political participation that are far from what we can imagine today. Digital Natives continue to grow their population, and they will outnumber and overwhelm the Digital Immigrants in less than half a century. It will be interesting to continue the observation of such generation becoming the majority, and to see their political views become the public opinion as they will be the mainstream political participants in the near future.

Endnotes

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Abstract

Political Participation of the Young Generation in the Age of Social Media
― The Brexit Case ―

The development of political attitudes has been the subject of research for many scholars, especially during the times of crucial political decision making, such as national referendums and elections. With the advancement of the Internet technology and the proliferation of social media, the research has been evolving to a new phase to include the analysis of the relationship between the Internet usage in political campaigns and the formation or alteration of political attitudes.

This article analyzes the case of the young voters and their political participation during the 2016 United Kingdom European Union Membership Referendum in relations to their usage of social media. Despite the fact that many researchers are paying more attention to the Internet's contribution to political mobilization, these young adults, who are the most active users of the Internet, displayed a low voter turn-out for the Brexit Referendum. This article tries to elucidate the relationship between the young generation's attitude towards the social media and their level of political participation in formal and informal engagements, and explain the role of the online political campaigning in the development of young people's political attitudes. It will present that the correlation between the use of the social media and political participation of the young people differs, depending on the different forms of political engagements.