

# Social CITIZENS

BETA

EDIT

Individuals who are **energetic and passionate** about social causes; brimming with new approaches and ideas for problem-solving; disposed toward sharing the responsibilities and rewards of affecting **change in the world**; and equipped with the **digital tools and people power** to make it happen.

connect  
community

authentic

change



## About the Author

Allison Fine is a social entrepreneur and writer dedicated to helping grassroots organizations and activists successfully implement social change efforts. She authored the book “Momentum: Igniting Social Change in the Connected Age” (Jossey-Bass/Wiley, 2006), which won the Alliance for Nonprofit Management’s Terry McAdam Book Award and an Axiom Business Book Award.

As a Senior Fellow on the Democracy Team at Demos: A Network for Ideas & Action in New York City, Allison researches and writes about the future of social change and civic engagement in the digital age.

Her articles have been published in *The Boston Globe*, the *San Jose Mercury News*, and the *San Francisco Chronicle*. She is also a frequent contributor to the *Personal Democracy Forum* and *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*.

Allison served as the CEO of the E-Volve Foundation in 2004-2005, and was the

founder and Executive Director of Innovation Network, Inc., from 1992-2004.

She currently serves on the board of directors of Just Vision, a nonprofit organization that increases awareness about Palestinian and Israeli non-violent, civilian-led efforts to build a base for peace in the Middle East; and OneWebDay, an annual celebration of the Internet.

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*“Many have challenged the fitness of our generation to take the reins. This is our chance to prove we are up to the task.”*

*—Joe Green, born 1983, CEO of Causes on Facebook.*

**Dear Social Citizen,**

**T**hank you for reading our latest publication—Social Citizens <sup>BETA</sup>, by Allison Fine, author of *Momentum: Igniting Social Change in the Connected Age*, an award-winning book about using the Internet to build activist networks, pool information, and create lasting solutions to social challenges, both in the U.S. and around the globe.

Social Citizens <sup>BETA</sup> addresses the unique characteristics of Millennials, a new generation who came of age at the turn of this century. They've grown up in a digital era, and are equipped with innovative tools and ideas for bringing about change.


The paper raises more questions than it answers, and for good reason. We intend to launch a larger conversation with these “social citizens,” and give them a place to share new ideas and challenge perceptions about their approaches to being engaged.

We also hope you'll join the dialogue about the changing meaning of civic engagement. Please visit [SocialCitizens.org](http://SocialCitizens.org) to learn more about this idea, and share the paper with friends and colleagues.

And stay tuned—in the next phase of learning, we'll be inviting you to help us identify ways to foster cross-generational partnerships, and strengthen ties between the groups.

We look forward to hearing your thoughts, as we deepen the conversation about the evolution of social change.

Sincerely,



**Jean Case**  
CEO, The Case Foundation

## Forward

Apathy. Ambivalence. Passivity. These have become popular explanations for our nation's declining civic health. But are they accurate? Not according to the Millennial Generation, and the many impassioned voices within it who are committed to turning the tide—myself among them.

We came of age at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which in many ways has made us uniquely positioned in today's civic landscape. Early exposure to the Internet and a quick progression from wired to wireless technology have introduced us to a global audience, a world many of us are now eager to explore.

What's more, our technological aptitude, communications savvy, and overall interconnectedness inform the myriad ways we live, work, play, and engage in issues we're passionate about.

The result is a powerful array of communities and causes that operate on a scale many believe is unprecedented. Indeed, as Millennials we are working collaboratively, interactively, and entrepreneurially to effect positive change in our local communities, across the country, and around the world.

For all the excitement around these changes, however, the impact of Millennials' online engagement—and its offline corollary—have yet to be fully quantified or understood. This begs the question: Can social networks and virtual communities truly revolutionize how we give our time, talent, and treasure?

The Case Foundation sees this paper as a catalyst for conversations that can draw us closer to an answer. The research is not conclusive, but open-ended, providing an opportunity for Millennials to respond and for others to listen. After all, what better way to understand my generation, relate to it, and discover its motivations, than to look within?

That's why in the coming months the Foundation will host a series of discussions—online and off—to capture a unique insight into this generation's passions and ideas, and develop corresponding initiatives. In this way, we hope to enable Millennials and those who believe in their power to showcase new ideas, and ultimately determine how to transform their thinking into meaningful action and lasting solutions.

So it's with great excitement that we kick off this dialogue, and dig deeper into my



generation's role in our society and our impact on civic engagement. For the moment, let's forget apathetic, ambivalent, and passive, and instead consider active, energized, and connected—a powerful combination for future success, and one the Case Foundation is committed to supporting.

### **Kari Dunn Saratovsky**

Director, Social Investment  
The Case Foundation





**1**

## **Starting More than a Conversation**



**A**dilene Flores woke up on the morning of March 25, 2006, to find several new messages from friends on her MySpace page. She wondered who could have sent her so many messages between midnight and six in the morning. The messages were all from classmates finalizing plans for the student walk-out that day at Belmont High School in downtown Los Angeles. Adilene and more than 200 of her fellow students marched that morning, and again later in the spring, to protest what they believed to be punitive immigration legislation pending in the U.S. Congress.<sup>1</sup>

In total, 60,000 high school students marched for immigrant rights that day in L.A.<sup>2</sup> They were matched by tens of thousands of young people across the country who organized themselves by word of mouth, chalk messages on campus sidewalks, flyers, social networking sites, text messages, instant messaging, and email to celebrate the diversity of American life.

As activists and organizers, Adilene and her peers have become something far more impressive than exceptional. They have become almost commonplace—in the U.S. and around the world. Yet, as communications technology and social media enables and inspires people—particularly youth—to in-

crease interaction, much of this behavior has gone unrecognized. And worse, it has gone unappreciated.

In October 2007, Thomas Friedman wrote in *The New York Times* that young people are members of Generation Q.<sup>3</sup> He meant “Q” for quiet, and inactive, on the important social questions of the day. The celebrated American globalist could not have been more wrong. This generation is making noise, whether adults can hear it or not. If people like Friedman don’t know where to look and how to hear it, that doesn’t mean youth today aren’t active citizens. Millennials are loud, fractious, and passionate, and their activist efforts are changing the world in important and profound ways.

Nearly 6,000 students gathered in Washington, D.C., in the fall of 2007 for a demonstration about climate change organized by a coalition of environmental and youth groups called Power Shift 2007, an online youth organization forum.

Tens of thousands of Nigerian teenagers are learning about sexuality and the spread of AIDS by text messaging for free with the Learning about Living program.

Although generational generalities are inherently difficult to make—since not all people of a certain age have exactly the same characteristics or experiences—there are patterns of behavior that shape the narrative of today’s youth. They are fascinating and important for what they are growing up with (digital technology); how they work (collaboratively); what they believe (that they can make the world a better place to live); and how they are living their lives (green, connected, passionately, idealistically).

Some scholars believe that behavioral patterns begin to repeat every three generations. In this way, Millennials are tied to the Greatest Generation of World War II, with whom they share a sense of common purpose and idealism. But unlike earlier generations, how Millennials express their feelings, and how widely, are fundamentally different because of the digital times in which they live. They are

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The concepts and trends captured in this paper are based on interviews with nearly 30 thought leaders and activists, and a review of the current literature about activism, technology, and young people. It is not intended to be a comprehensive picture of an entire generation, but rather a snapshot of the emerging concept of Social Citizens. This is the beginning of a larger conversation that needs to include young people, professional activists, and those who fund social causes. It will likely—hopefully—modify and improve the concept of Social Citizens as it is practiced, shared, and taught.





# 2

## More to Millennials than Meets the Eye

There is a popular picture of young people today: bike helmets and seat belt, firmly strapped in place; a pampered and protected generation that has been overfed, oversexed, and overindulged. This is partly true, but it's far from the whole story.



**T**here are many varying definitions of exactly where Generation X ends and Generation Y—or the Millennial Generation—begins. But for the purposes of this paper, Millennials are defined as people born between 1978 and 1993, or individuals who are currently 15 to 29 years old. Viewed through a statistician’s lens, Millennials are a big and diverse group of people. They are the largest living generation, outnumbering living Baby Boomers 77.6 million to 74.1 million.<sup>4</sup>

They are also the most racially diverse generation in American history. According to the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE) at the University of Maryland, “between 1968 and 2006, the percentage of young residents who are white has fallen from 88 percent in 1968 to 62 percent in 2006. During the same period, the percentage of young people who are African American or Hispanic has grown by 2.3 and 10.6 percentage points respectively.”<sup>5</sup>

The worldview of Millennials is often complicated and even contradictory. They are the first generation born into social media—connective, digital tools like email and mobile phones that are accessible and easy to use. However, they are also often disconnected from their physical communities because their parents are more likely to have moved around the country than their grandparents. They are very comfortable thinking of themselves as part of a global social and economic system, though they often feel powerless to participate in or affect national and international events.

The internal conflicts of young people extend to how they live their own lives. They are barraged daily by thousands of advertising messages and believe that the news media “cannot be trusted to present the

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news fairly”; yet, they are large consumers of online news.<sup>6</sup> They have witnessed frightening, cataclysmic events, such as the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the shootings at Columbine High School in 1999, and the bombing in Oklahoma City in 1995. Yet they are idealistic and generally trusting of the good intentions of others. They are open to people of different backgrounds and races, yet attend schools that are largely segregated by income or are re-segregated by race, and therefore have very few real opportunities to experience those differences themselves.

Despite coming of age during an unprecedented era of economic prosperity, Millennials still exhibit signs of significant stress and distress in their lives. CIRCLE researchers Mark Hugo Lopez and Karlo Barrios Marcelo conducted a study on youth demographics in 2006 which found that young adults today are less likely to be married and more likely to be unemployed than previous generations.<sup>7</sup> Whether one survives the struggle to gain admission to college, or is a part of the large number of young people who do not attend, almost all young people face the twin issues of crushing debt and the real possibility that they will never achieve the standard of living of their parents.

This overriding economic uncertainty and concern contributes to their sense of pragmatism; they literally cannot afford to be impractical. According to Adrian Talbot, the founder of Generation Engage, many college students live in a “bubble” of protection and isolation, while their working peers are directly and profoundly affected by issues like predatory lending and living wages.<sup>8</sup>

When taken together, these characteristics illustrate a vibrant and diverse group of young people, united by a generational shift initiated by a new technological age.

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# 3

## **A Generation that Embraces the “Social Citizen”**

Millennials are hands-on “experience seekers” who don’t trust the reporting of others.<sup>9</sup> They want to experience change, to touch and feel it, and they want a menu of options for acting now and seeing results in real time for real people.<sup>10</sup>



**N**ina Rappaport always remembers having social causes in her life. Her parents volunteered at her school and the local hospital. At Horace Greeley High School in the suburbs of New York City, she has vivid memories of helping solicit donations and giving out pink ribbons during National Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

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Her school and volunteer activities further blurred in college at Florida State University. Causes came and went quickly, just as classes did, but she always made time to give blood at the annual blood drive. Now 20 years old, Nina is thinking of going to graduate school to become certified as a high school guidance counselor.

“I want a job that makes me feel selfless, and makes me feel like I’m doing some good in the world,” she said. She continues to give blood and support breast cancer awareness, but, like many of her friends, Nina isn’t registered to vote. “The system is so corrupt my vote isn’t going to change it,” she says. “Nothing is going to ever change politically.”

What’s remarkable is that this story is not unique; versions of it were commonly repeated by Millennials interviewed for this paper. This is because Nina represents a burgeoning activist archetype called the Social Citizen.<sup>11</sup>

Social Citizens are energetic and passionate about social causes; brimming with new approaches and ideas for problem-solving; disposed toward sharing the responsibilities and rewards of affecting change in the world; and equipped with the digital tools

and people power to make it happen. Social Citizens are unique in comparison to older generations of activists, not only because of the way they work but because of the ends they are trying to achieve. With a passion for community building and

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democracy, Social Citizens use their zeal for change in a variety of settings. These include traditional activism areas, like environmentalism and health causes. But their energies also extend to the creation and shaping of their own entertainment culture, and increasingly for political campaigns—although generally not for government or policy efforts. The context of the activism, which is largely conducted online, matters far less than the process and the results realized by collective efforts. It’s important to remember, however, that not all Millennials are Social Citizens, and

not all Social Citizens are Millennials. But there are many overlapping characteristics that shape Social Citizen activism as practiced by Millennials. The following are open-ended, still-evolving aspects of the Millennial Generation that will help better guide an understanding of them.





# 4

## Living Immersed in Technology

For young people, digital connectedness is as natural to their way of being as telephones and rock music were to their parents. More than 20 million teenagers use the Internet daily. Eighty percent of teens have mobile phones. Three-quarters of them read news online, and more than half have accounts on social networking sites.<sup>12</sup>



**M**illennials are not considered to be as rebellious in their beliefs and attitudes as their Baby Boomer parents were. Neil Howe and William Strauss, authors of “Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation,” write of Millennials that “more than 90 percent of teens now say they ‘get along’ with their parents, and nearly 80 percent say they get along ‘very well’ or ‘extremely well.’”<sup>13</sup> Still, a significant generation gap exists due to digital technology.

Millennials cast a big, wide-open net across their lives, pinging and poking friends on social networking sites, instant messaging and emailing, blogging and posting, uploading and downloading—all instantly and incessantly. They are the children of the Connected Age, native to and immersed in technology.

The constant connectedness of Millennials to their gadgets and networks of friends is confounding and concerning for parents. For young people, it provides a sense of power over their elders, who are often skittish with digital media and can lack fluency with the new toolset.<sup>14</sup> With any new means of communication, however, there are legitimate concerns, which include such dangers as personal intrusions and cyber bullying.

Although such costs of immersive living should not be overlooked, the potential inherent in marrying social media to the activist passion of young people is too great to diminish or dismiss because of risk. As Ivan Boothe of the Genocide Intervention Network (GI-Net) says, “social media allows you to claim your own part in the movement.”<sup>15</sup> And that’s exactly what Millennials are doing.

Beyond using social media to connect with individuals and share information, Millennials are prolific content creators. Everyone is an Oscar-winner-to-be in the Connected Age. A study by the Finnish mobile phone maker Nokia in December 2007 predicts an entertainment future in which “up to a quarter of the entertainment consumed by people in five years time will have been created, edited, and shared within their peer circle rather than coming out of traditional media groups.”<sup>16</sup>

With a mouse-click, Millennials are mashing-up and sharing music, videos, and personal opinions, creating “a new kind of ‘folk culture’ that stands in sharp contrast to the highly choreographed cultural production system of the industrial information economy.” The lines between real and virtual lives are blurred in this new mode called “immersive living.”<sup>17</sup> The blending of what used to be private and public lives is puzzling to older

people, but comes very naturally to young people who are living in a fishbowl described as “microcelebrity.”<sup>18</sup>

Entertainment culture is a critical element of immersive living. Often chided for their rabid interest in entertainment, Millennials are more than active consumers and content creators, they are actually “entertainment citizens,” using the levers and switches of power to protest corporate decisions that affect their favorite shows and pop stars. American life, from entertainment to activism, has become immersed in movement-language and democracy tools.

Researchers Jennifer Earl and Alan Schussman point out, “If young people are growing up in movement societies, where scripts and practices from social movements have become part of everyday thinking, and where producing online protest actions have become extremely inexpensive, then we should expect that young people will begin to use online protest organizing tools to mount protests about issues they care about.”

Blogging is this century’s pamphleteering. Petitions have moved online, and millions of people vote by text message for their favorite idols or dance couples. Millennials are using these same tools inside and outside of the entertainment context to protest the blocking of social networking sites from school or the presence of military recruiters on high school campuses.





# 5

## Interconnecting All the Time

Online social networks are the superglue of Millennial activism. One leading marketing expert says, “We think that the single largest differentiator in this generation from previous generations is the social network that is people’s lives, the part of it that technology enables.”<sup>19</sup>

Social networks aren't new. Humans have always nestled within familiar social boundaries, but new technologies have made such interconnections more visible, accessible, and widely distributed. Millennials use social networking websites to link to news articles, songs, and videos. They go online to announce events and organize people of-line—across town, in another state, even on the other side of the world.

Little of this, however, is considered a plea for personal attention. It is an expression of self. Trabian Shorters at the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation asserts that the transparency associated with online social networks allows young people to “acknowledge their own existence.”<sup>20</sup>

This idea is echoed by Duke University student Julia Torti in the University's newspaper: “Posting on Facebook is not an appeal to authority; rather, it circumvents anyone in a position of power. We're speaking directly to our peers, oftentimes not pushing a specific political agenda but instead sharing information that we think is important.”<sup>21</sup>

Millennials are drawn to online social communities because they are shut out of public life in many ways. As a result, online social networks are popping up across all segments

of society, geography, causes, and ideologies, and they basically divide into two types. There are general social networking sites, such as Facebook and MySpace, where participants use their everyday networks to share information about causes in the same way that they share information about their love lives, school, and parents. And there are social networking sites exclusively focused on activism, such as Change.org and Razoo. None of these sites are the absolute purview of Millennials any longer, but each has within it the culture of transparency and connectedness initiated by young people.





One example of Millennials' online activism is Causes on Facebook. In the spring of 2007, Project Agape posted its "Causes" application on Facebook. Within six months, more than 30,000 Causes were created on the social networking site, supporting over 12,000 existing nonprofit organizations.

A brief survey of Causes on Facebook reveals an array of mainstream, apple-pie efforts, typical of Millennial activism. They are more practical than poetic, more passionate and less ideological in their activism efforts. Few could argue with the worthiness of helping orphans in China, trying to find a cure for AIDS and ALS, eradicating breast cancer, and helping underprivileged children learn to read.

However, the Causes application is different from traditional approaches because users are drawn to the cause first, then the institution (or group of volunteers if no formal institution exists). Joe Green, CEO of Causes on Facebook, describes the network interaction for causes this way: "There could be 1,000 causes aiming to help SaveDarfur.org with lots of different leaders and networks and lots of people reaching out in many ways."





# 6

## Living the Cause Lifestyle

It would be challenging to find one Millennial who has not been exposed to causes early and often in schools, congregations, stores, and through mass media. Cause-related activities and products have swirled around Millennials their entire lives, and the impact shows.

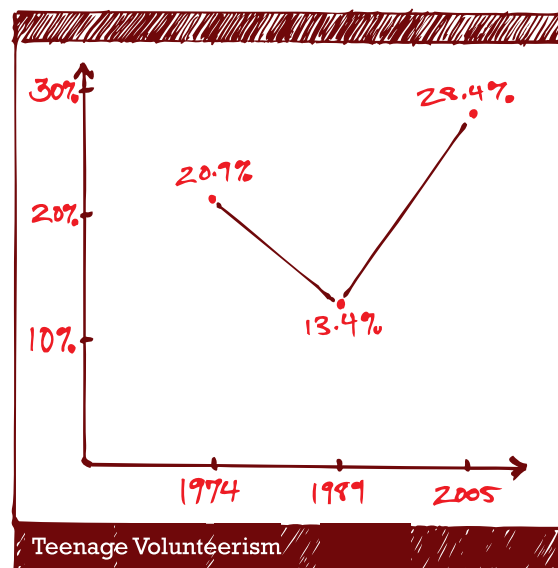
Social researcher Cynthia Gibson writes that service is “a deeply embedded value in American culture, based on the country’s strong religious and spiritual traditions that encourage ‘giving back,’ its vibrant nonprofit sector, and its consistently high levels of charitable giving and volunteering in comparison to other nations.”<sup>22</sup>

We walk, run, shop, click, give, barter, solicit, and eat in support of an ever-increasing variety of heartfelt efforts. According to the National Center for Charitable Statistics, the number of operating public charities almost doubled between 1989 and 2004. This led to corresponding increases in the ways to give money, time, and attention to various causes. Cause affiliation has become de rigueur not just for students, but for retirees, celebrities, politicians, and for-profit companies.

The rising demand of causes intersected with the increased supply of student volunteers in the 1990s, when service-learning requirements became the norm in 83 percent of public high schools and 77 percent of middle schools. According to the Corporation for National and Community Service, teenage volunteerism declined between 1974 and 1989 (20.9 percent and 13.4 percent, respectively), but more than doubled between 1989 and 2005 (from 13.4 percent to 28.4 percent). In ad-

dition, there has been a 20 percent increase in the number of college students volunteering between 2002 and 2005, meaning that volunteerism is sustained beyond high school.<sup>23</sup>

Obligatory volunteering could have backfired and created a resentful group of young people. Instead, Millennials are set apart from other generations by their cause lifestyle—a youth that is infused with giving and volunteering, eventually complemented by careers dedicated to causes. They are a generation defined by the fervent belief they can change the world one donation, one voluntary activity, or one purchase at a time. They are less interested in and adept at interacting with government agencies and shaping public policy, and more interested in hands-on ways of improving the lives of people domestically and internationally.



Millennials raise awareness and money for causes, bring causes to their corporate workplaces, start socially responsible businesses, eat sustainable foods, and buy green products. And they do all of these things by embracing—not rejecting—the overarching capitalist system as many of their parents might have done as part of the radical movements of the 1960s and 1970s.

The supersizing of philanthropy has also caught the attention and imagination of young people. We are living in an era of philanthropy, with leading entrepreneurs endowing foundations earlier and with much larger amounts than many of their predecessors.

With a projected endowment of more than \$76 billion, and with the addition of Warren Buffet’s donations, the Gates Foundation will be larger than the gross domestic product of 56 out of 177 countries, according to 2005 World Bank statistics. The new philanthropists are a “who’s who” of tech legends from Google, eBay, Dell, AOL, and Intel. Corporations are just as philanthropically visible and active, giving an estimated \$1.3 billion through their cause partnerships with nonprofits in 2006.<sup>24</sup> This does not include an additional \$4.2 billion given by corporate foundations that same year.<sup>25</sup>

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Overall, young people today have the incentive, the capabilities, and the models in place to be involved. In many ways, it has never been easier.



# 7

## Being Mobile and Connected

Social Citizen activism doesn't happen in one place, on one channel, or in one medium. Millennials are using all of the digital tools at their fingertips to share pictures, sounds, feelings, and information about their causes with their social networks.



**A**s mobile phones have become less expensive and smarter with advanced applications, they have also become the go-to device of youth connectedness and activism. Young people from Korea to the Philippines to the United States have been using text messages to significantly increase the youth vote. A dedicated website, MobileActive.org, has even emerged to chronicle this type of usage. This is a grass-roots movement more easily conceived and carried out than any letter-writing campaign, and driven by an authentic desire to participate.

Mobile phones are not the beginning and end of connectivity, however. Social Citizens use the full contingent of social media tools in support of their causes. In 2003, Jason Russell, Bobby Bailey, and Laren Poole, three young filmmakers from San Diego, went to northern Uganda to capture the untold story of children of war. The film, *Invisible Children: Rough Cut*, was released shortly after. The filmmakers subsequently started Invisible Children, a nonprofit organization, with the mission to share their message and raise funds to support the building of schools in northern Uganda. They describe themselves on their website in a way that applies to many Millennials: “We are storytellers. We are visionaries, humanitarians,

artists, and entrepreneurs. We are individuals—part of a generation eager for change and willing to pursue it.”

The Invisible Children group started by a high school student on Facebook has over 400,000 friends. Related yet independent student blogs share news and information about the cause. Invisible Children student clubs have raised money online through websites such as DoSomething.org. There are trailers for the film online; a video by a singer/songwriter supporter on YouTube

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highlighting the problem and all the different ways that people have become involved in the effort; and another video by students at Berry College on why they support the

cause. In an amalgamation of entertainment, capitalism, and activism, a fan site for the pop singer Avril Lavigne encourages visitors to fill out three surveys for a marketing company. In return, users receive a bracelet, and a \$25 donation to Invisible Children is made.



### That was then...

Getting news through the paper or TV

Socializing and shopping at the mall

Spreading the word by mail or phone

Pamphleteering

Mobilizing through rallies and petitions

Achieving goals through public policy

Boycott

Hierarchical leadership

Nationalism

Embracing causes as a political act

Writing an annual check to charity

Researching by using an encyclopedia

Trusting the opinions of the experts

### This is now...

Getting news through the Internet

Socializing and shopping online

Spreading the word by email and text message

Blogging

Mobilizing through online social networks

Achieving goals through social connections

Buycott

"Side-by-side" leadership

Internationalism

Embracing causes as a moral imperative

Giving 10 bucks online

Researching by surfing Wikipedia

Trusting the opinion of friends



# 8

## Leadership through Partnership

Millennials are generally opposed to hierarchical structures. They work collaboratively in groups, and find their fluency in social media naturally leads to sharing information and connections across institutional (and even international) lines. The result is a side-by-side style of leadership.

**T**his approach has become a boon for causes that cut across institutional and country borders, but a challenge to older, more hierarchical organizations trying to absorb Millennials as employees and activists. It is not a trivial fact that many young people believe that traditional nonprofit organizations can “suck the life right out of a movement.”<sup>26</sup> So, many causes are adopting new approaches.

Ivan Boothe, for example, says his organization’s goal is to “involve people who are active and educated about the issue who become leaders as members. Our members are not just a mailing list. GI-Net is all about giving up control ... Organizations need more than a membership card. We are creating a permanent anti-genocide constituency.”<sup>27</sup>

Network leadership necessarily looks and feels significantly different from hierarchical forms of leadership. Community builders Valdes Krebs and June Holley write, “Without active leaders who take responsibility for building a network, spontaneous connections between groups emerge very slowly, or not at all. We call this active leader a network weaver.”<sup>28</sup>

The result of the work of successful network weavers is that “this culture of collaboration

creates a state of emergence, where the outcome—a healthy community—is more than the sum of the many collaborations. The local interactions create a global outcome that no one could accomplish alone.”<sup>29</sup>

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## What's in Web 2.0

**Blogs** (short for Web logs) are online journals or diaries hosted on a website and often distributed to other sites or readers using RSS (see below).

**Collective intelligence** refers to any system that attempts to tap the expertise of a group rather than an individual to make decisions. Technologies that contribute to collective intelligence include collaborative publishing and common databases for sharing knowledge.

**Mash-ups** are aggregations of content from different online sources to create a new service. An example would be a program that pulls apartment listings from one site and displays them on a Google map to show where the apartments are located.

**Peer-to-peer networking** (sometimes called P2P) is a technique for efficiently sharing files (music, videos, or text) either over the Internet or within a closed set of users. Unlike the traditional method of storing a file on one machine—which can become a bottleneck if many people try to access it at once—P2P distributes files across many machines, often those of the users themselves. Some systems retrieve files by gathering and assembling pieces of them from many machines.

**Podcasts** are audio or video recordings—a multimedia form of a blog or other content. They are often distributed through an aggregator, such as iTunes.

**RSS** (Really Simple Syndication) allows people to subscribe to online distributions of news, blogs, podcasts, or other information.

**Social networking** refers to systems that allow members of a specific site to learn about other members' skills, talents, knowledge, or preferences. Commercial examples include Facebook and LinkedIn. Some companies use these systems internally to help identify experts.

**Web services** are software systems that make it easier for different systems to communicate with one another automatically in order to pass information or conduct transactions. For example, a retailer and supplier might use Web services to communicate over the Internet and automatically update each other's inventory systems.

**Wikis**, such as Wikipedia, are systems for collaborative publishing. They allow many authors to contribute to an online document or discussion.

*From "How businesses are using Web 2.0: A McKinsey Global Survey",  
March 2007, originally published in The McKinsey Quarterly,  
[www.mckinseyquarterly.com](http://www.mckinseyquarterly.com).*





# 9

## **Blending Worlds ... and Financial Models**

Millennials are merging the lines between for-profit and nonprofit structures and concepts. Social activism has become a new marketplace, where goods and services are exchanged not just for money and profit, but also for good social outcomes.



“I want to know where my money is going and what my individual impact is,” says Change.org founder Ben Rattray. This type of sentiment has driven the growth of organizations with new orientations. Micro-lender Kiva enables small givers to become financial backers of small enterprises halfway around the world, and it is a nonprofit organization; whereas, the social networking sites Change.org and Razoo are for-profit companies. Combined with the fact that Millennials have voracious consumer habits, such a shift is necessary.

A recent study of the buying habits of 18-30 year olds found they spend \$182 billion annually on consumer goods. The study reported that “33 percent of respondents prefer brands that give back to the community, are environmentally safe, or are connected to a cause.”<sup>30</sup> They are more than purchasers of goods, however. They are shapers of corporate behavior.

They are drawn to brands with strong socially responsible cultures, such as Patagonia, Nau, Trader Joe’s, Whole Foods, and Ben & Jerry’s. They are attracted not just by the products these companies sell, but by the activist campaigns they spearhead.

One result of corporate benevolence and the government’s perceived failures during events such as Hurricane Katrina, is that young people report a higher degree of confidence in corporations than in nonprofit institutions. They want and expect to see direct, concrete actions taken by corporations to address social ills. According to a study by Cone, Inc. that examined youth trends, “an overwhelming 74 percent surveyed indicated that they are more likely to pay attention to a company’s overall messages when they see that the company has a deep commitment to a cause.”<sup>31</sup>



As a result, philanthropy, which for decades was the purview of slow-moving, risk-averse institutions, has become faster, flatter, more creative, and democratic. Millennials give small amounts online to schools in low-income neighborhoods; at the supermarket to help feed victims of natural disasters; and to political candidates through their websites. How, why, and how much to give is being redefined day by day, cause to cause by Millennials.

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# 10

## 20/20 Moral Clarity

Millennials gravitate towards causes with moral clarity. For example, the situation in the Middle East is not easily grasped; its history, motivations, and the intended outcomes are murky. The genocide in Darfur, conversely, is crystal clear; people are being slaughtered solely because of their ethnicity, and something needs to be done to stop it now.





**D**arfur was a little-known, easily overlooked issue five years ago. Fueled by the energy and outreach of America's college students, ending the genocide in Darfur has become a leading cause on campuses led by organizations such as STAND: A Stu-

dent Anti-Genocide Coalition; GI-Net; and the Save Darfur Coalition.<sup>32</sup> More than 500 groups on Facebook, millions of dollars in donations, and thousands of hours of volunteer time are now dedicated to this important cause.

“ Clarity and passion for causes also come from proximity. Young people, like people in general, are moved to action for causes that first affect them personally, and then those that affect people they know. ”



According to Thaddeus Ferber, chair of the Youth Policy Action Center, the highest traffic areas on his website address the topics of reducing student debt and reforming drug laws to make students convicted of such crimes eligible for student loans. On YouthNoise, an online community of youth focused on causes, issues of great interest include female body image and future employment.<sup>33</sup>





# 11

## So What Does All of This Add Up To?

“Do you need to march or can you YouTube?” Marnie Webb, co-CEO at CompuMentor, asked this question, striking at the heart of the issue of youth and activism in the Connected Age. What, if anything, does all of the clicking, blogging, and “friending” add up to in the end?





**J**oshua Levy, the Associate Editor of the Personal Democracy Forum, says, “The language of change is changing. There are literally hundreds of thousands of voices online, on blogs, for and against issues as large as the war in Iraq that would have never been heard before.”<sup>34</sup>

But is it more or less effective than the old models of advocacy and activism? In part the question is unfair, because social media tools and mechanisms are so new it is difficult to assess their impact. However, there are clear indications that the way young people define the process and goals of activism is profoundly different from earlier generations.

For example, in the 1960s, the nonprofit advocacy community began to emerge as institutional alternatives and pressure points for policies and policymaking by government institutions. The model was linear: raise awareness of an issue, engage people in activities to support the cause, and influence

or change public policy. Within this framework, civil rights proponents in the early 1960s marched to move the federal government to pass legislation to protect the rights of all Americans. Environmental advocates pressed local governments to create recycling programs in the 1970s. The 1980s ushered in a new era of medical advocacy, with causes from eradicating AIDS to a push for federal research dollars.

**“ Ivan Boothe describes the new model of change this way: ‘...If you just need bodies at a rally, names on a petition, or donations in your coffers, mobilizing through traditional means will work great. But if you need an active, educated, and effective movement, organizing through social webs has the potential to create much more lasting change.’ ”**

An interest in policy change still exists within some Millennial activist efforts. GI-Net worked hard to help pass the Sudan Accountability and Divestment Act. Similarly, Power Shift 2007 wants to influence the agenda of candi-

dates for the presidency in 2008, and try to ensure that they will commit to policy goals to alleviate the climate crisis.

Nevertheless, specific policy outcomes are not a significant component for most Millennial activist efforts. Social capital is the new commerce and the end result of many cause-related efforts spearheaded by young people. Social connections are the vehicle through which funds are raised, awareness of issues is built, and mobilization, such as letter writing and marches, occurs.

Ivan Boothe describes the new model of change this way: “What it all comes down to is that we’re focusing on organizing people ... and much of that happens in a decentralized, self-organized sort of way, rather than simply mobilizing people for a particular event or campaign and then sending them home. If you just need bodies at a rally, names on a petition, or donations in your coffers, mobilizing through traditional means will work great. But if you need an active, educated, and effective movement, organizing through social webs has the potential to create much more lasting change.” Or, as Joshua Levy says, “success is building a snowball of participation.”

Some argue this model is lacking, and that focusing so heavily on online activism and

excluding policy change from the activist equation is insufficient for societal challenges that might not be popular or affect marginalized communities of people. In answer to her own question, Marnie Webb says, “It’s hard to make lasting change without getting Congress involved in some way. At some point you need to push on those structures.” And Thaddeus Ferber offers this caution: “There is a drawback to online activism alone; it is missing a personal connection and social bond, essential elements to organizing that can be lost for mass mobilizing.”<sup>35</sup>





Nonetheless, there is a new model of activism taking hold among millions of young people that cannot be ignored or dismissed. A random look at a few causes and their intended results on Facebook illustrate the shift:



Pumpkin carving registration: \$10  
(1-5 people/team)  
Raffle ticket: \$1  
Fun: ~priceless~  
Sign-up for the pumpkin carving contest and buy raffle tickets on the plaza (11:30 - 3:00) to support kesem! Thanks :)

Camp Kesem NC, a free one-week summer camp for children of parents who have or had cancer. CKNC is the biggest Camp Kesem in the nation; last year's camp had 101 campers and 47 counselors from Duke & UNC. Help support us as we look to hold our sixth camp in August!

This group was created as a venue for advocacy, not just to achieve a certain number of people for a couple of days, and the more support that can be gathered the better. CONTINUE TO INVITE YOUR FRIENDS AND SHOW YOUR SUPPORT. We will be continuing to provide actions you can take.

In these examples and others on various websites organized and energized by young people, the end goal is to raise money, increase awareness by sharing information with a friend, or demonstrate public alignment with a cause. By and large, Millennials are not interested in or focused on the creation of new government policies as solutions for the issues they care about. They are focused primarily on taking action and seeing results.



On September 20, 2007 Mychael Bell will be sentenced. Raw Talent is asking you to join us as we wear the color green this day to protest the injustice of this decision. We believe through wearing the color green we as a people are symbolizing growth and the surpassing of hate.

PLEASE JOIN US AND MAKE A DIFFERENCE!!!!  
TELL A FRIEND AND TELL A FRIEND TO TELL A FRIEND!!!!  
GREEN= GROWTH & SURPASSING HATE!!!!



# 12

## Telling the Rest of the Story

There are a number of important, unanswered questions about Millennials and how they operate as Social Citizens that deserve further exploration and understanding for both practitioners and philanthropic supporters.





## Is Access Granted or Taken?

A generation of young people accustomed to immediate, open access in most areas has been effectively shut out of public decision making on issues and policies that affect their lives. Can older people and organizations rectify this situation, or do young people simply need to stop waiting to be asked to the dance?

“There is a chasm between general interests in causes and particular things we can do as individuals,” says Ben Rattray. “People want to feel that they are part of a critical mass of people dedicated to one overriding cause.” David Smith, founder of Mobilize.org, continues: “There is an opportunity cost for young people of when and where to dedicate their time. They don’t know how to get started; they didn’t even know that public officials would meet with them. They keep doing service after high school, but because they don’t teach civic education and teachers are scared of political

involvement, they don’t know how to access the political arena.”<sup>36</sup>

The themes Rattray and Smith raise were echoed often in the interviews conducted for this paper. Young people feel they have no access to decision makers and decision making, particularly with regard to public policy. This too often and too easily stops them from participating in policy-related discussions and efforts. Ginger Thomson, the CEO of YouthNoise, echoed other respondents when she said, “Young people need more training, guidance, and supportive places to build a constituency for their causes.”<sup>37</sup>

## Are “Bubble Cultures”

### Inescapable?

Marnie Webb says, “Social networks are like the Pandora site where you put in a song you like and they match it to similar artists. But, how do we expand our tastes in ways that we never thought of?”<sup>38</sup>

Most social networking sites are relatively safe and unfettered places to create a sense of self in relation to one’s peers. What these sites are not good at yet, and might never be, is presenting two sides of an argument. Says danah boyd, a doctoral candidate in the

School of Information at the University of California-Berkeley and a Fellow at the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard Law School, “We live in homogenous networks, and self-organizing magnifies cliques.”<sup>39</sup> To be successful, social change efforts need broad, open networks that cross everyday boundaries to include people who are *not* just like us.

Otherwise, the views of young people are likely to be shaped almost entirely by their closest relations and friends. There is very little chance that they will come to fresh, unfettered opinions about issues on their own within these boundaries.

“Volunteering is certainly widespread and in that sense it is an ethos, but it’s an ethos that is also an echo,” says Harry Boyte, co-director of the Center for Democracy and Citizenship. “It’s like a clump of trees left standing in a once vast forest that has mostly disappeared. It may be expanding, but it is usually marked by a kind of ‘bubble culture’ pattern that is part of the problem ... Even though people live in bubble cultures, however, most also want a culture shift or culture change (this is especially true among young people). The problem is that there isn’t much language of culture change—that ‘breaks the silence’ about how to talk about the alienation many feel to mention how to do it, without some practice.”<sup>40</sup>

Social networks are ineffective for activists when they are too tight and become cliques. They can’t be too loose either, or they lose their sense of identity and purpose. Like Goldilocks and the porridge, they have to be just right to be effective. How to create and manage networks of participants that will broaden and not narrow policy and issue discussions must be better understood.

### Does Government Really Matter?

We are witnessing “a generational shift in which young citizens tend to express areas of interest and concern, but often see those interests as unconnected, or even negatively related to government.”<sup>41</sup> How has this impacted how policymaking incorporates the perspective of young people?





According to “Renewed Engagements: Building on America’s Civic Core,” published in 2007 by the National Conference on Citizenship, “... young people express the least distrust for government. They are least likely to say that it wastes money, is run by special interests, or is full of crooks. On the

**“ While Millennials are pragmatic and not prone to extreme ideologies, they are left without an overarching political philosophy to guide their interest in or opinion of government affairs. They have a sense of futility about political involvement, particularly with regard to changing policy—the kinds of strategies tried by their parents with little or no societal impact.”<sup>48</sup> ”**

other hand, they are also the least likely to think that their own vote counts or that people like themselves have a say. In short, they feel relatively little power but also relatively little anger about the performance of the government.”<sup>42</sup>

Now consider research from “The 2004 Youth Vote: A Comprehensive Guide,” which reported that 47 percent of 18- to 24-year-old citizens voted in the 2004 national election, an increase from 36 percent in 2000. There has been an even greater surge of youth participation in the early primaries for the 2008 presidential election. In the New Hampshire primary, 43 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds voted in the primary election, compared with 18 percent four years ago.

We need to be cautious about celebrating these increases. Peter Levine of CIRCLE says the increased numbers of young people voting is misleading for two reasons. First, there are simply a lot of young people coming of voting age right now, and that naturally increases the total number of voters. Second, the increase is reflective of patterns of local culture.

For example, larger numbers of young people have voted in Minnesota (long a hotbed of local political participation) than Mississippi (historically a low voter turnout state). As Levine says, “the political get more political.”<sup>43</sup> Even for those young people who are voting, their feelings about their vote are tinged with skepticism as they “view it more as a ‘symbolic gesture’ than a means of creating change.”<sup>44</sup> According to Benjamin Quinto, founder and Ex-Officio Executive Director of the Global

Youth Action Network, “politics fails in every possible way to engage young people.”<sup>45</sup>

It is important to note that Millennials are not opposed to efforts by the government to address social ills; they are simply unaware of the role that government could or should, or can’t and shouldn’t, play in this arena. They trust government more than Gen Xers and Boomers do, but are uninitiated in the history or possibilities of government working—or not working.

A report of focus groups with college students stated: “The Millennials appear to be much more comfortable and experienced with direct service than with politics, yet their feelings toward government, politicians, and the media are complex. They do not want to write off politics, despite their many criticisms; instead, they seek ways to engage politically.”<sup>46</sup> The report goes on: “Yet, many students are not able to articulate how those policies are put into place, and what levels of government have authority in a given area.”<sup>47</sup>

While Millennials are pragmatic and not prone to extreme ideologies, they are left without an overarching political philosophy to guide their interest in or opinion of government affairs. They have a sense of futility about political involvement, particularly with regard to chang-

ing policy—the kinds of strategies tried by their parents with little or no societal impact.<sup>48</sup>

Social action is a safe place to express a personal identity, and is much safer and easier than in the political arena with its inherent conflict and most often less-than-lofty outcomes. danah boyd explains, “We are living in a time of the elongation of childhood where kids are kept out of public life and only glimpse it through the mass media. Their lives are so heavily regulated and controlled, they don’t see a public world outside of the celebrityization of political candidates.”<sup>49</sup>

An opportunity exists to engage young people in non-prescriptive discussions about the role of government in society and the ramifications of more or less government involvement in social issues. In this way, the experience of



political participation can and should be more meaningful than political campaigns, such as the possibility of careers in public service and policymaking, including serving on committees and task forces for local government efforts.

“Telling young people to participate in bad institutions is mere propaganda,” writes the University of Washington’s Lance Bennett, Professor of Political Science and Ruddick C. Lawrence Professor of Communication. “On the other hand, young people need to be taught and encouraged to take part in reform efforts and other aspects of politics. Political participation does not come naturally, nor do powerful institutions have incentives to encourage it. In short, we must prepare citizens for politics, but also improve politics for citizens.”<sup>50</sup>

A major cautionary note for anyone interested in engaging young people in conversations about the role of government and policy issues is that these conversations must be authentic and spin-free, or youth will quickly tune out.<sup>51</sup> There needs to be active, facilitated dialogue that introduces young people on- and off-line to different points of view, and that openly and honestly challenges their assumptions and positions.

## Can Institutions Survive? Should They Survive?

In their professional lives, Millennials are wary of institutions, even when they run them. They crave genuine relations, and can instinctively sense when they aren’t there.<sup>52</sup> How will this influence the current and future development of institutions?

The rise of fantasy sports teams is a fitting analogy for the challenge that Millennials have working within traditional, hierarchical institutional structures. As much fluidity as there is in today’s professional sports leagues, the Yankees at least play for their team during a game, and the Red Sox play for theirs. However, young people have been the driving force behind fantasy sports leagues where individual performances are tracked and trump those of their teams. Lance Bennett writes, “Many scholars have discovered a shift in value patterns in postindustrial democracies in which people (particularly younger citizens) are more inclined to become interested in personally meaningful, lifestyle-related political issues, rather than party or ideological programs.”<sup>53</sup>

Millennials value peer relationships over institutional loyalty. This has profound implications for activist organizations

accustomed to support from their donors over long periods of time. Young people are unlikely to be lifelong donors to their local United Way or Sierra Club. They will engage enthusiastically in specific campaigns about which they feel passionate, but their institutional support is likely to vanish once that campaign ends.

**“ Millennials can be instrumental in questioning and assessing when and why institutions are needed to address causes, and when a protest campaign or a blog will do. The larger issue of how institutions will be structured and organized in the Connected Age is an ongoing process. ”**

Institutions are necessary to offer expertise, focus efforts, provide institutional memory for communities, and lead issues. But they will need to look, feel, and actually be quite different to successfully engage Millennials. That said, simply changing how they operate does not provide carte blanche for institutions to outlive their usefulness.

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### So What?

How we used to define successful activism no longer works. Online networks have surpassed traditional methods, not only in effectively reaching people, but in being able to motivate them to create change in new and interesting ways. There's no question about that.

However, while we know who is connected to whom, we don't yet know how to best grow these networks for positive activist outcomes, or what value—if any—the networks have beyond the immediate need and cause. New thinking and tools are necessary to understand Social Citizens better, assess the impact of their activist efforts, and improve institutions to better serve them.



**13**

**The End is Just the  
Beginning ...**





**I**t is impossible to absolutely quantify the amount of youth activism taking place. It is also impossible to miss the scale and power of youth engagement. With so many opportunities to contribute in various ways to such a wide variety of causes, young people will

**“ In this respect, the ending now serves as a beginning, an opportunity to open up a conversation on- and offline about the ultimate impact of Social Citizens. The question isn’t whether Social Citizens exist or are important—they do and they are. Rather, it’s about the role that Millennials will play in their evolution, as they shape the face of activism in a digital age. ”**

continuously and constantly put their Social Citizen skills into practice.

Indeed, the digital landscape is filled with an array of tools for young people drawn to the promise and fulfillment of activism. It offers instant information and immediate gratification, encouraging exploration and entrepreneurial adventures. The best and brightest idealists of another generation, in another time, might have entered public service. Today, these Social Citizens are dedicating themselves to activist causes using social media and online social networks. People like Ben Rattray of Change.org, Ivan Boothe and Mark Hannis of GI-Net, Matt and Jessica Flannery of Kiva, and Joe Green and Mark Zuckerberg at Facebook are using social media to improve the world, and in the process are changing the very definition of change itself.

It is too soon to tell exactly where the new model of change will lead us. But, if nothing else, it is making us think differently about change and its components. For a time, we will be living in a transitional period that consists of traditional activists and Social Citizens. A key to understanding Social Citizens is not to determine a right or a wrong, a good or bad, but simply to reflect upon what is. Specifically, Millennials, activists, and those

who fund social causes need to engage each other, and discuss the role of policy change in current activist efforts. This discourse then needs to focus on ways to motivate larger circles of young people beyond their normal networks. And it all must be done in a meaningful way, so that we can define or at least measure the successful change that is generated.

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# 14

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## About the Case Foundation

The Case Foundation was created by Steve and Jean Case in 1997. The Foundation invests in individuals, nonprofits, and social enterprises aiming to connect people, increase giving, and catalyze civic action. For more information, visit [CaseFoundation.org](http://CaseFoundation.org).

