BOOK REVIEW

Loader, Brian D. (ed). 2007. Young Citizens in the Digital Age: Political Engagement, Young People and New Media. London and New York: Routledge. 213 pp.

Manuel Enverga III

One of the trends that have been noted in the realm of electoral politics, particularly in developed countries has been the decrease in the electoral participation of young people. This lack of participation has been attributed to their supposed loss of interest in electoral politics. This supposed political apathy of youth is sometimes attributed to increased immersion in technology, such as the Internet. What is revealed in Loader's book, however, is that these are misconceptions about the youth towards politics. On the contrary, the book argues that young people actually have very strong attitudes regarding political issues. Furthermore, the book discusses how technology is actually a medium, rather than a hindrance, to young people's participation in the political sphere.

Young people's supposed apathy towards politics is often due to thinking of politics solely in terms of activities with regard to elections or political parties. The decreasing participation of young people in political party activities and elections is what has led to the conclusion that young people are not involved in political issues. This is not just due to the actions of young people, however, as the authors in this collection show that politicians and political parties do not try to reach out to issues that young people are interested in, thereby making them appear irrelevant to young people. This creates a gap between politicians and the youth. In order to bridge this gap, the book calls for a restructuring of the liberal democratic institutions, upon which political systems in developing countries rely.

Moving away from political activity as defined by elections and political party participation, however, it is clear in Loader's book that young people in developed countries are clearly involved in political issues. However, the difference is that young people's political interests fall outside the realm of traditional party and electoral politics. This is a consequence of the trend in present-day societies towards the weakening of institutions that once provided collective political meaning, symbols and authority for young people, such as families, voluntary organizations, churches and employment organizations. Instead, young people's political identities

are more closely associated with the development of individual preferences related to lifestyle and consumerism.

Consequently, the political topics that the youth presently find significant are issues such as environmental degradation, poverty in developing countries and unscrupulous behavior associated with large multinational corporations. The political field that young people in the developed countries examined in the book is more global than the interests of traditional politicians. Addressing these issues therefore require that young people move beyond the relatively confined political spaces of electoral and party politics, which is why the book discusses how young people use new information and communications technologies to engage in political issues they are interested in.

Given the fact that technology is presently used in the political realm, the question that then comes to mind is: in what ways and for what purposes are young people using technology for political action? Loader's book describes a number of ways that politics and technology intersect with one another in varying geographic locations. The conclusions that may be drawn from the book are mixed, although there are a number of general ideas that may be drawn. First of all, on the question of whether or not young people use the Internet to engage in political issues, it was found that young people who engaged in online political activity only did so as an extension of their offline political interests. The Internet by itself,

therefore, cannot make young people engage in politics unless they were already inclined to do so offline.

Another conclusion that may be drawn from the book is the fact that politicians and political parties need to harness new information and communication technologies in order to reach young people. In a number of studies discussed, it was found that the reason why politicians and political party representatives in developing countries appear irrelevant is due to the fact that the media that candidates and parties use, particularly websites, do not try to address young people enough.

Other discussions in the book revolve around the potential of ICTs in the political socialization of young people in response to the observed trend regarding the youth's lack of participation in national politics. This discussion particularly revolved around the implications of using ICTs in citizenship courses in various national school curricula, particularly those of Great Britain and Ireland. The conclusion of the studies with regard to ICTs as a tool for political socialization, indicate that ICTs do have potential as platforms for young people to engage in the political arena. It was noticed that they have enabled young people to discuss issues with politicians, as well as to engage positively with co-citizens in areas with deep cultural tensions and divisions, such as Ireland. The authors who discuss this, however, concede that although there are small-scale successes of ICTs, more still needs to be done in order for the field of ICTs

and the Internet to become effective as a tool of political socialization. This is a point that could be applied in the Philippines, with its deep ethnic, religious and class divisions. So far only the computerization of elections has drawn significant interest instead of the much broader issues of communication technology and political consciousness.

In general, therefore, Loader's book stands as a highly informative resource regarding the intersection between ICTs and young people's political participation. Its insights would be useful in a variety of fields. What Loader's work could benefit from, however, is a look at the trends observed in developing countries and comparing them with other contexts. Despite the choice of locations studied being mainly developed countries; however, it is still important in a global context that is increasingly relying on ICTs for various cultural practices. Furthermore, it is one way to understand, and perhaps reframe, the so-called lack of political participation that is increasingly observed among young people, even in the Philippines.

Ling, Rich. 2008. *New Tech, New Ties – How Mobile Communication is Reshaping Social Cohesion.* London: MIT Press. xiii – 224, Hard Cover.

Raul Pertierra

I enjoyed Rich Ling's book very much. It is the first time that a book connects classical sociological theorists such as Durkheim, his later interpreters like Goffman and Collins, to the very contemporary phenomena of mobiles. A major deficiency of the literature dealing with mobiles is its generally non-theoretical nature - most studies are mainly descriptive and lack any attempt to theorize beyond simple narratives. This is partly because the mobile has been taken up so quickly and has penetrated so many aspects of everyday life that theorists can barely catch up with its effects, let alone reflect on its significance.

As others have noted, the mobile has resulted in an explosion of banality, as people send greetings and other ordinary messages to relatives and friends. This banality has blinded us to the more profound changes accompany these messages. Rich Ling has correctly identified these banalities of everyday life provided by mobiles as an attempt (not always successful) to recuperate earlier intimacies, traditionally provided by ritual expressions and actions.

Interestingly, Ling draws on Durkheim's The Elementary Forms of Religious Life, a text better known to anthropologists than sociologists because