



# EMERGING ADULTS & PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOUR ON- AND OFFLINE

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## INTRODUCTION

### Emerging Adults, Social Media, and Public Prosociality

- In media and research, emerging adults are depicted negatively - e.g., engage in 'slacktivism,' token prosocial gestures (such as sharing images) that raise status among peers but have little benefit to others (e.g., Kristofferson et al., 2014)
- Slacktivism is linked to *public*, approval-oriented *prosocial behaviour* - which is negatively associated with higher levels of moral reasoning (see e.g., Carlo & Randall, 2002; Carlo et al., 2003).

### Social Media, Genuine Prosocial Behaviours, and Traditional Participation

- Although social media is often seen as vehicle for negative traits, media it is also used for entertainment, communication, and friendships
- Some may engage in and express prosociality online through less traditional actions and behaviours (e.g., Caron, 2014)
- Some engage in traditional forms of participation and service alongside social media usage

### Research Questions

- Do youth participate in forums and communities, petitions, and advocacy?
- What views of prosociality do youth who engage in both traditional service and social media use hold?

## METHOD

The data was collected as part of a larger study on volunteering and community service at a large public university.

### Participants:

- 97 students from undergraduate psychology classes

### Materials:

#### Social media usage

- Estimated **weekly social media usage** (e.g., Facebook) in hours
- Use of **Internet forums** such as Reddit
- Use of **Internet for service and volunteering**

#### Participation and service

- Volunteering** on- and off-campus and **weekly hours**

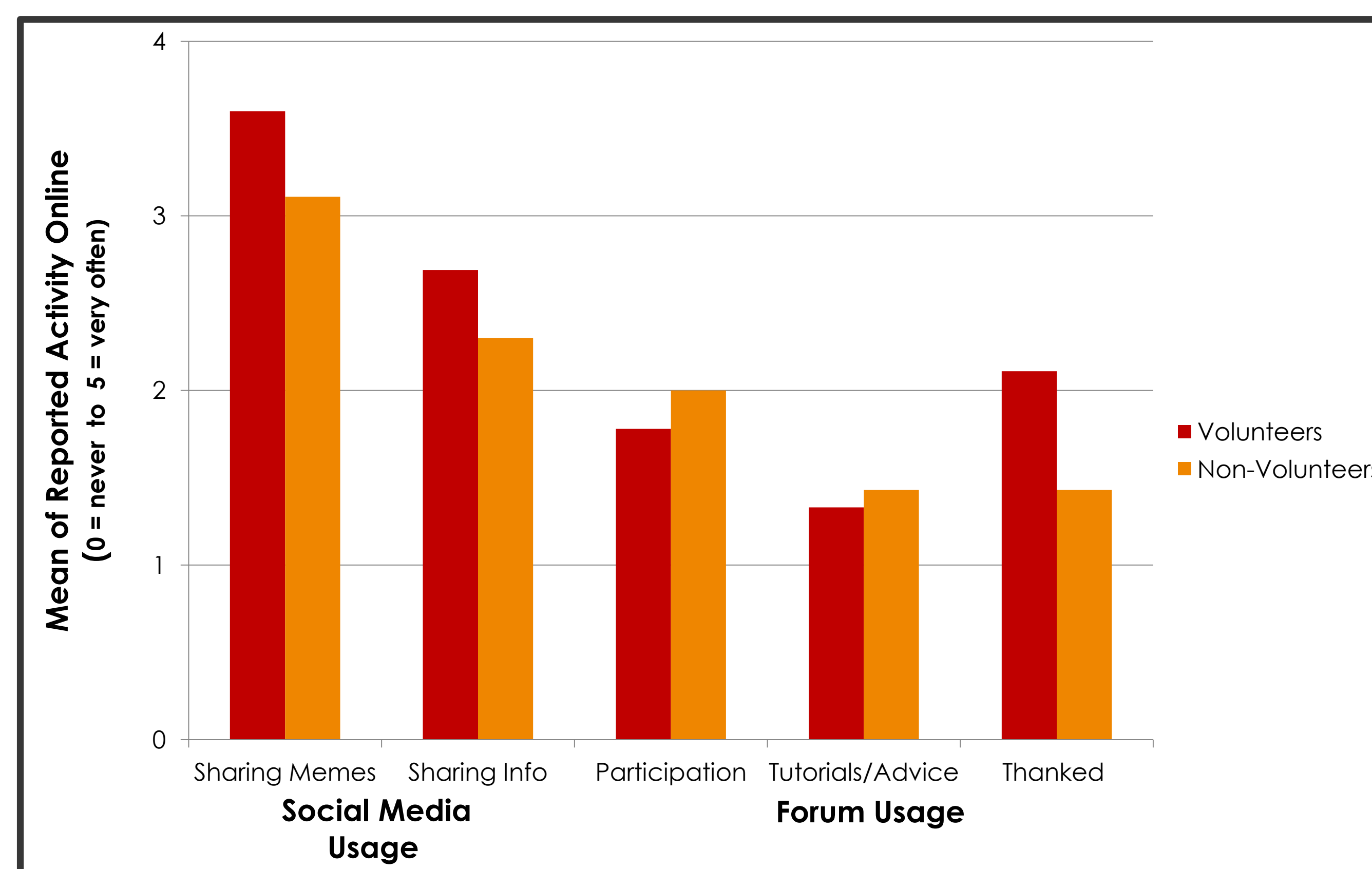
#### Prosocial values

- Prosocial Tendencies Measure (PTM)** (Carlo & Randall, 2002)
  - 6 subscales - altruism [concern], anonymous, compliant [requested], dire [emergency], emotional [distress], public
  - Social media literature is linked to **public** subscale - adherence to prosociality that is observed by others (e.g., "When other people are around, it is easier for me to help others in need")

## RESULTS

### Social Media Usage

- All participants reported use of social media, ranging between 1 and 90 hours/week ( $M_{\text{socmedhours}} = 20.39$ ;  $SD = 17.28$ )
- Volunteers ( $M_{\text{socmedVOL}} = 21.46$ ;  $SD = 17.03$ ) and non-volunteers ( $M_{\text{socmedNONVOL}} = 19.09$ ;  $SD = 17.70$ ) did not differ in social media usage
- Only a small number of participants reported using Internet forums ( $n = 16$ ), and of these, only a further subset were active in posting content ( $n = 9$ )
- Of the participants who volunteer, a small subset reported using Social Media as part of their volunteering ( $n = 9$ )



### Participation and Service

- Over half of the sample engaged in some form of volunteering ( $n = 56$ )
- Typical volunteers completed approximately 5 hours and 45 minutes of volunteering per week, most often off-campus at a hospital

### Prosocial Values

- In full sample, use of social media was correlated with public prosocial subscale,  $r(88) = .35^{**}$ 
  - This relation was maintained in non-volunteers,  $r(38) = .59^{**}$ , however, it disappeared in volunteers  $r(48) = .12$
- Furthermore for non-volunteers,
  - PTM-Altruism was negatively correlated with hours spent using social media,  $r(38) = -.47^{**}$
  - PTM-Public was positively correlated with posting tutorials/advice on forums,  $r(3) = .92^*$
- For volunteers,
  - PTM-Anonymous was negatively correlated with using social media as part of the volunteering,  $r(37) = -.38^*$
  - PTM-Compliant was positively correlated with posting tutorials/advice on forums,  $r(6) = .70^*$

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

## DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

### Social Media Usage and Volunteering

- Most emerging adults use social media, and overall, social media usage is related to more shallow, public displays of prosociality
- However, this relation only holds for *non-volunteers* - **suggesting that social media alone is not at the root of slacktivism**
- Some emerging adults engaged in posting on forums, sharing advice with others - which could be construed as prosocial
- Non-volunteers' social media forum usage related to more superficial motives
- Volunteers' forum use showed a preference for helping anonymously and to requests for aid

### Future Directions

- Future studies could further explore forum usage
  - What types of content (tutorials, advice, info sharing) are volunteers and non-volunteers posting?
  - Depending on the content posted, it may be the case, that non-volunteers are in fact volunteering, but simply via non-traditional means.

### Moral Reasoning & Slacktivism

- Explore relationships between moral reasoning abilities and engagement in prosocial/slacktivist behaviours online
- Develop profiles of the social media activist and the social media slacktivist (i.e. on what dimensions do these individuals differ)

### Traditional versus Non-Traditional Prosocial Participation

- Conduct focus groups or semi-structured interviews to gain an understanding of how Emerging Adults use social media platforms to help others, including:
  - platforms used
  - methods of involvement (i.e. information sharing, volunteer recruitment, monetary donations, posting tutorials/answering forum questions, etc ...)
  - perceived sense of efficacy of actions

"Liking, sharing links, sharing news articles about my volunteering"  
21, female, off campus volunteer

"...communicating with executive members [of the organization]"  
21, female, on & off campus volunteer

"Sharing some volunteer reminders"  
19, female, on campus volunteer

"Sharing information and promotion of the organization"  
21, male, off campus volunteer

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