

# Civil Identity in the Digital Age:

## An investigation into the civic experiences of American youth

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### MOTIVATION FOR RESEARCH



Contemporary society is characterized by digitally mediated interactions and activities, especially through social media. **Teenagers are the most frequent users of the Internet**, and are at a **critical stage** in developing their identity as individuals and citizens.



Literature reveals the **lack of an adequate framework for understanding how young people come to develop their civic identity in contemporary society**. The aim of this study is to understand how civic identity is developed and how civic engagement activities are experienced among young people growing up in today's digital era.



Results from this study introduce a **new framework for understanding civic identity in young people** and recommends a **reinvigoration of civic education** to foster young people's sense of efficacy in contemporary society.



### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

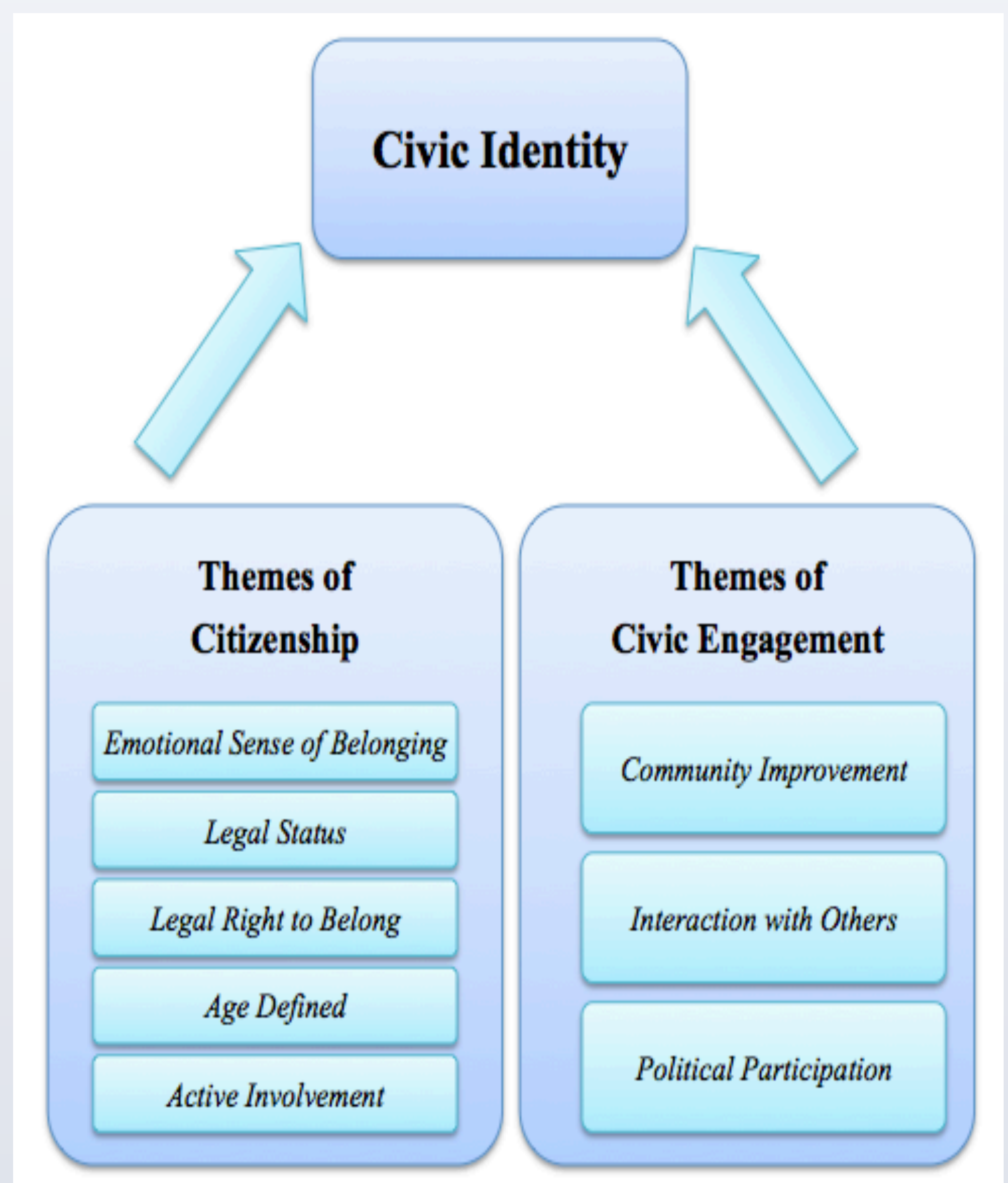
- 1) In what ways do young people, aged 14 to 17, present themselves to others in contemporary society?
- 2) What are the mechanisms through which young people form their civic identity in this digital era, and how do young people understand citizenship and civic engagement?
- 3) What are the means through which young people engage in the political world, and what factors contribute to this engagement?

### QUALITATIVE RESEARCH DESIGN

- **In-depth interviews** with **46** young people, ages 14 - 17, in **Boston, USA**.
- Analysed transcripts of each audio-recorded interview using **NVivo** and methods of analysis through writing participant vignettes.

### FINDINGS

- Young people **present themselves to others in digitally mediated ways** and are faced with the challenge of deciding which aspects of themselves to keep private, and which to share with others.
- Young people **experience citizenship and civic engagement in digitally mediated ways** (i.e, seeing anti-immigration Tweets that informs their views of citizenship), introducing a **new framework of civic identity that is informed by experiences of citizenship and civic engagement** (illustrated below).



- **Despite the pervasiveness of technology** and opportunity to use social media as a tool to make their voices heard, **young people still have a low sense of efficacy** in making social change.
- **Social structures and expectations of young people** have contributed to **civic identity** and of **low efficacy**.

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