SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES AND YOUTH ONLINE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF NIGERIA AND MALAYSIA

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Abstract

Researches indicate youth online political participation on Social Networking Sites is the norm in contemporary society. Thus, we compare this phenomenon among youth in two second wave democracies; Nigeria and Malaysia. These countries may not have been focus of much comparative studies of this nature considering their distance geographically, however politically, their similarities are quite significant. Consequently, this gap in comparative research was addressed by the present study. To this end, a survey was conducted on 476 samples in both countries and analysis was carried out using the Partial Least Squares – Multi Group Analysis (PLS-MGA). Accordingly, we find that there is no significant difference between youth in Nigeria and Malaysia in terms of the relationship between Access to Political Information on Facebook and Twitter (APIFT) and Online Political Participation on Facebook and Twitter (OPPFT). However, there is significant difference between Political Interest (PI) and Policy Satisfaction (PS) with youth online political participation on Facebook and Twitter in both countries. Therefore, findings of this present study suggests that despite their national peculiarities there is no difference between the youth in Nigeria and Malaysia in relation to the association between their access to information and online political participation on Facebook and Twitter.

Keywords: Online political participation, Social Networking Sites (SNSs), Facebook, Twitter, cognitive engagement, access to information, political interest, policy satisfaction.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

For over a decade, cross-national research have rapidly gained relevance in the social sciences, yet there is still scarcity of comparative studies (Azarian, 2011) especially in the area of political participation (Casteltrione, 2014). This type of scientific research focuses on comparison and goes beyond the borders of one country by examining the associations between two or more variables. It have been used significantly in the past and is still used today because of its numerous merits. Ironically, despite the advantages comparative political studies could offer researches, this area of research is dominated by nationally oriented investigations (Casteltrione, 2014). Although a number of comparative studies (Hyun, 2012; Sheppard, 2012; Tecscher, Mykkanen & Moring, 2012; Valeriani & Vaccari, 2015; Saldana, McGregor &

Gil De Zuniga , 2015; Melo & Stockener, 2014; Xenos, Vromen & Loader, 2014) have been conducted in advanced democracies like United States, United Kingdom, Canada, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Australia, Italy, Spain, France and Germany, while others have been carried out in industrial and emerging nations like China, Japan, Mexico and Russia (Engesser & Franzetti, 2011), not much have been done in non-advanced democracies (Engesser & Franzetti, 2011; Potgieter, 2013; Tworzecki & Semetko, 2012) like Nigeria and Malaysia. Valenzuela (2013) corroborates this claim by affirming that related studies have been done in advanced democracies leaving aside second wave democratic countries. Hitherto, the few comparative studies on political participation conducted in second wave democracies include countries like Ghana and Tanzania (Ocran, 2014), Chile, South Africa, South Korea and Poland (Potgieter, 2013) and also Czech Republic and Hungary (Tworzecki & Semetko, 2012). Evidently, most studies are in advanced democracies, and a few in new democracies, and much less on a cross-national perspective (Boulianne, 2015). Thus, scholars have advocated for further research in the area of political participation on a cross-national level (Gustafsson, 2012) as well as a need to work towards a more sophisticated theoretical and empirical modeling of participation in the online environment.

Seemingly comparative studies investigating online political participation as a whole in Nigeria and Malaysia are rare. Therefore, this study seeks to address an identified gap in studies in this area by putting into consideration not only cross-national commonalities and national peculiarities but also the democratizing effect of SNSs. By gathering data in different context and making comparisons, this study will help achieve a deeper understanding of the relationship between social media and online political participation. Thus, the relationship between Access to Political Information on Facebook and Twitter (APIFT), Political Interest (PI) and Policy Satisfaction (PS) with youth Online Political Participation on Facebook and Twitter (OPPFT) will be analyzed from the perspective of a cross-national comparative.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Nigeria and Malaysia may not have long been a focus of much comparative study. The foremost explanation for this could be the logic of studying 'most similar systems' in comparative researches. However, politically the similarities between the two countries are quite significant. The roots of these similarities stem from their shared history as British colonies and members of Commonwealth nations; a heritage which has led to some similarities regardless of their differences. Equally, both countries belong to the category of nations in the 'second wave of democracy' (Huntington, 1991). 'Waves of democracy' represents the rise in global levels of democracy or periods of transition to democracy. A wave is a move from non-democratic to democratic regimes within a certain period (Weinberg, 2013). Thus, second wave democracies describe countries whose democratic structures are not as strong as those of western industrialized nations that belong to the first wave. Consequently, African and Asian countries in the second wave of democracy are trying to strengthen their political systems especially as democracy is the most preferred system of government globally (Olabamiji, 2014). Accordingly, like most post-colonial multi-ethnic countries, Nigeria and Malaysia belong to countries aiming for democratic consolidation. Democratic consolidation can principally be achieved through political participation which is a key feature of a true democracy (Casteltrione, 2015; Ojebuyi & Salawu, 2015).

Additionally, the basis for comparing these two countries is that the level of their citizens Facebook and Twitter use is quite significant. More so, political participation by youths on these Social Networking Sites (SNSs) has featured prominently in both countries (Kasmani, Sabran & Ramle, 2014; Olabamiji, 2014; Salman & Saad, 2015). Seemingly, this presents a unique opportunity for a study of this nature in comparative perspective. Also, the theory generation capacity of comparative studies and convenience led to the choice of both countries. Nigeria and Malaysia are most familiar to the researcher, hence this substantive knowledge is an advantage practically and methodologically.

To this end, this research embraced a unique opportunity to conduct a comparative analysis on this phenomena in both countries from the framework of the cognitive engagement theory. Cognitive engagement comprises of factors that propels citizens to participate in politics (Inglehart, 1977). Specifically, these factors are Access to information, political interest and policy satisfaction. Historically, cognitively engaged citizens are good citizens who have interest in politics and know how democracy works. They are critical citizens who are propelled to participate in politics especially if they are not satisfied with government policies (Pattie, Seyd & Whiteley, 2003).

Online political participation on the other hand, are political activities performed online with the aim of influencing government actions (Valenzuela, Kim & Gil de Zuniga, 2012). Precisely, they are political activities performed or observed on SNSs like Facebook and Twitter. They include activities such as posting political messages on personal or friends' wall, sharing political opinion, posting comments on friends post about politics, posting political tweets, retweeting or quoting political tweets as well as replying political tweets etc.

Seemingly, SNSs like Facebook and Twitter, have provided youth with novel ways of political participation (Ke & Starkey, 2014; Oser, Hooghe & Marien, 2012). Thus, there is an increased use of online media for political purposes by youths globally (Uzochukwu, Patricia & Ukueze, 2014; Vissers & Stolle, 2014). This has been corroborated by studies in the US (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010; Yamamoto & Kushin, 2013) and Sweden (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013). In the US particularly, Steffan (2013) noted that there was a 600% increase in youth online political participation on social networks between 2008 and 2012. Also, Yamamoto, Kushin and Dalisay (2014) added that there is a rise among youth use of SNSs to get various kinds of political information. Equally, Vitak, Zube, Smock, Carr, Ellison and Lampe (2011) noted that youths in America use SNSs for political participation, especially for informational use because it is accessible at any time of the day and also less stressful as with just a few clicks, participation occurs. Notably, SNSs like Facebook are great source of political news and political information thus making it possible for users to access a wide range of politically diverse content, gain political interest and be involved in policy making of their respective countries.

In light of the forgoing, Nigeria went through a peaceful political revolution with the increased use of social media by youth for political participation (Olabamiji, 2014). This development would have been impossible without the reduction in cost of Internet-enabled mobile phones which allowed youths participate in politics on their devices. Consequently, access to social media in Nigeria encouraged citizen participation (Abubakar, 2012; Chiluwa & Adegoke, 2013). This was especially evident during the 2011 general elections when conventional media was inaccessible to majority of citizens (Titus-Fannie, Akpan & Tarnongo, 2013). Thus, political discussions were established online using Twitter and Facebook, being the most prevalently used SNSs by Nigerian youth (Uzochukwu, Patricia & Ukueze, 2014). This created an avenue for SNSs to be used youths and political elites as a communication and participation tool there by infusing a new life into political participation in the country (Olabamij, 2014). Successively, SNSs featured on other youth political participation activities in Nigeria like the "Occupy Nigeria" fuel subsidy protest in 2012 (Hari, 2014), the "Bring Back our Girls" protest in 2014 (Ojo, 2014) and more recently the "Not too Young to Run" campaign.

Similarly, in Malaysia, inaccessible conventional media led to the proliferation of social media use for political participation. Foundational to this, there was widespread use of internet which lowered cost of information dissemination thereby making information easier to assess (Bidin & Mustafffa, 2012). Consequently, there was extensive access and use of SNSs among Malaysian youth, most popular of which were Facebook and Twitter (Al-Rahmi & Othman, 2013; Raoof, Zaman, Ahmad & Al-Qaraghuli, 2013). This inevitably made SNSs good avenues for political participation (Salman & Saad, 2015) and as a result reforming the political landscape in the country (Sani, 2014). The effect of SNSs as a political participation tool was most felt in the 13th Malaysian general elections in 2008. It was an important tool used by youth

for deliberation on political issues during the elections (Rajaratnam, 2009; Sanni & Zengeni, 2010). Hence, it was used by electoral candidates to communicate political programs and by voters to communicate with candidates (Raoof, Zaman, Ahmad & Al-Qaraghuli, 2013). Evidently, youth in Malaysia were able to participate politically online because SNSs featured prominently in allowing political information to be passed during the elections, thus strengthening the democratic process (Sani, 2014).

Consequently, from the forgoing discussions, the following hypothesis were proposed:

H₁   There is significant difference between youth in Nigerian and youth in Malaysia in relation to the association between access to political information on Facebook and Twitter and online political participation on Facebook and Twitter.

H₂   There is significant difference between youth in Nigerian and youth in Malaysia in relation to the association between political interest and online political participation on Facebook and Twitter.

H₃   There is significant difference between youth in Nigerian and youth in Malaysia in relation to the association between policy satisfaction and online political participation on Facebook and Twitter.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Measures

The measures of items for access to political information on Facebook and Twitter were adopted from Eveland Jr, Hutchens and Shen (2009), Yamamoto and Kushin (2014), Bekafigo and McBride (2013), and Johnson and Kaye (2014). The measures for political interest were from Whiteley, (2005), while those of policy satisfaction were from Whiteley (2005), Shore (2014) and Whiteley, Clarke, Sanders and Steward (2013). Online Political Participation on Facebook and Twitter were measured with two set of questions for Facebook and two set of questions for Twitter. Thus, measures for online political participation on Facebook and Twitter were from Vitak et al. (2011) and Tumasjan, Sprenger, Sandner and Welpe (2010).

3.2 Data Collection

A quantitative approach and cross sectional design was adopted for this study. Data were collected through a survey by distributing self-administered questionnaires to undergraduates in both countries. Power analysis using G*Power software (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner & Lang, 2009) was used to determine the minimum sample size of 119 for this study. This size was determined based on the part of the model with the highest number of predictors (Hensler, Ringle, & Sarsledt, 2012). To avoid low response or non- return of questionnaire we oversampled (Keyton, 2015) by incresing the sample size by 100% (Gregg, 2008) making the final sample size 238. Accordingly, due to the comparative nature of this study and to facilitate the notion of equivalence, the sample size of 238 was dispropotionately allocated to each country (Castletrione, 2015). Subsequently, the multistage sampling technique was used to select the sample size from the population. First, the stratified purposive method was used to select the countries and universities for comparison, and then the disproportionate allocation stratified sampling method was used to select students from each university, after which the purposive sampling was used to select undergraduates who use Facebook and Twitter for online political participation.

3.3 Data Analysis

In analyzing the data for this study, a non-parametric PLS-MGA approach was used to compare PLS estimates across youths in Nigeria and Malaysia (Hensler, 2012). Thus, difference between path coefficients in the structural model was explored to determine the significant difference between youth in Nigeria and

youth in Malaysia in terms of the relationship between the study variables. Hence, PLS-MGA was conducted using the second stage models of both countries to find out the group difference in Nigeria and Malaysia in terms of the relationship between APIFT, PI and PS with OPPFT. Values that were p<0.01, p <0.50 or p>0.95 were significant and those that were otherwise were not significant.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCCUSION

Of the 476 questionnaires distributed, 383 were returned indicating a response rate of 80%. Among the 383 returned, 14 were unusable because a significant part of the questionnaires were not completed by respondents. Precisely, the unusable questionnaires had 15% uncompleted items in the overall questionnaire, or 5% uncompleted items from a single construct (Hair et al., 2014). Consequently, 369 usable questionnaires were left. This accounted for 77.5% valid response rate. Of the 369 returned, 201 (54.5%) were for Nigeria and 168 (45.5%) for Malaysia. Though equal sample size was allocated to both countries, yet, the issue of unreturned and unusable questionnaires accounted for these differences in number of respondents between both countries.

In terms of age, the highest number of respondents were within the range of 20-24 years representing 225 (61%), followed by those in group 15-19 years with 97 (26.3%), and then 25-29 years with 37 respondents representing 10%, while age group 30-35 and 36-40 accounted for 5 respondents each, representing the least percentages with 1.4% each. This age distribution is expected as a sizeable number of undergraduate students in Nigeria begin their undergraduate studies at the age of 16 years while it is 20 years for Malaysia. This may explain why the age range of 15-19 and 20-24 had the highest number of respondents. For gender, majority of respondents were female accounting for 197 (53.4%), while the rest were male 172 (46.6%). This gender distribution may be indicative of the fact that there are more female than male undergraduates in both countries.

For the study variables, the R^2 values (Nigeria 64% and Malaysia 59%) already indicates there is difference between Nigeria and Malaysia in term of cognitive engagement and online political participation. accordingly, PLS-MGA was conducted using the second stage model of both countries (see Figure 1 and 2) to find out the group difference between youth in Nigeria and youth in Malaysia in terms of the relationship between APIFT, PI and PS with OPPFT.
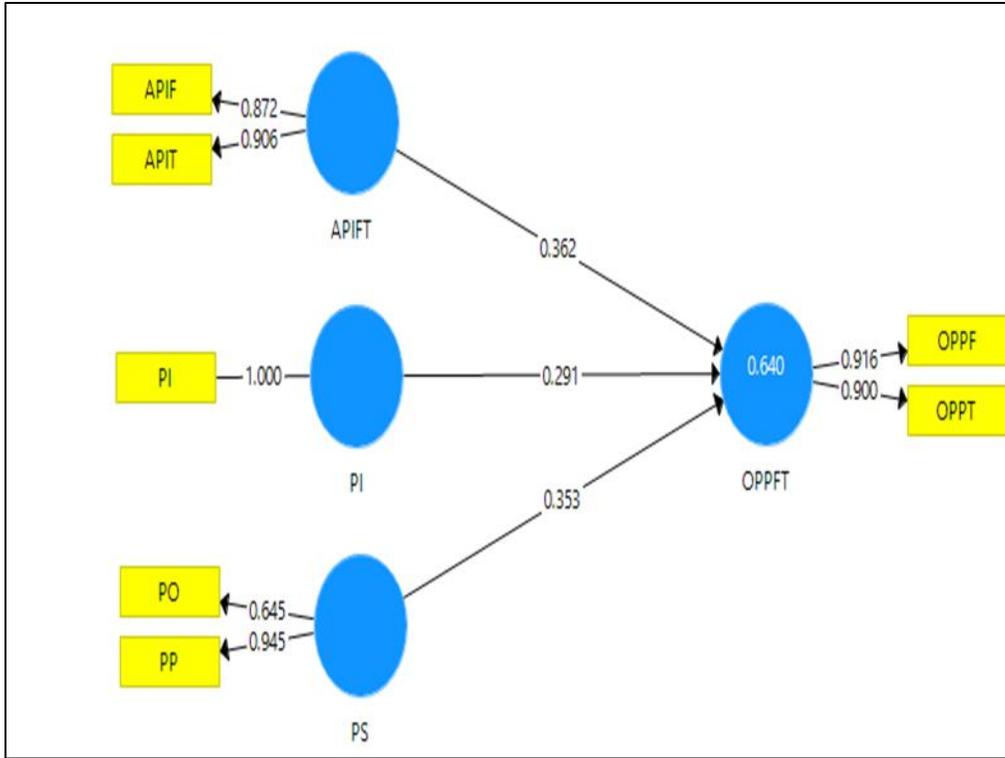
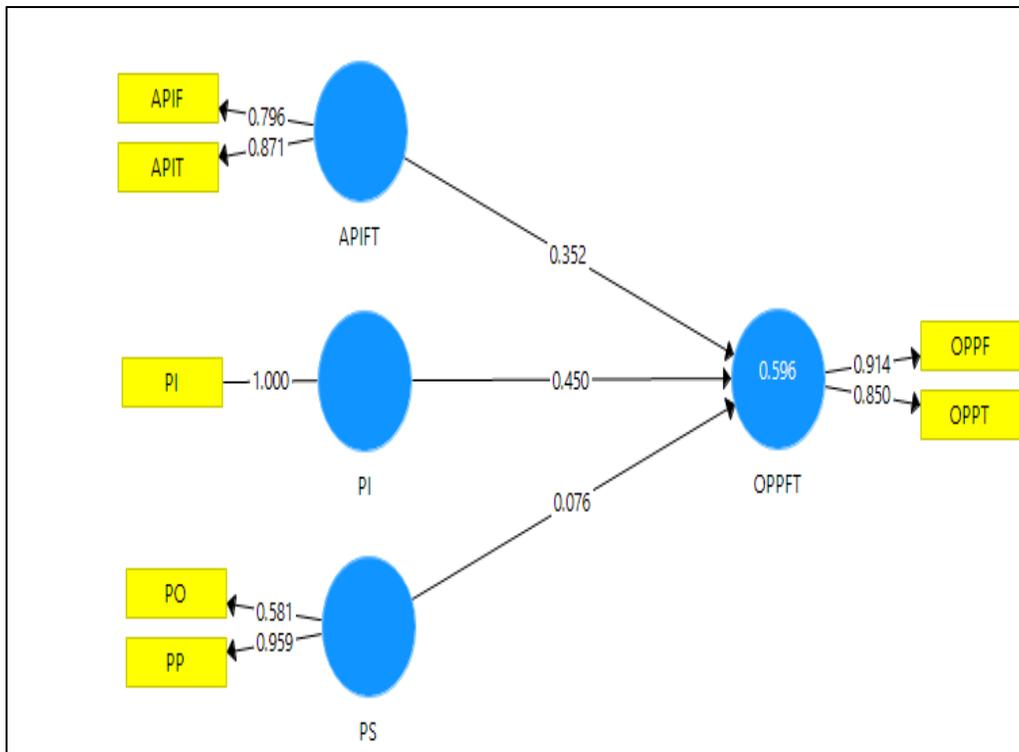**Figure 1: Structural Model (Nigeria)**

Figure 2: Structural Model (Malaysia)

Accordingly, using the Henseler approach, the model in Figure 1 and 2 were computed and the resulting path coefficient compared. Hypothesis 1 predicted that there would be significant difference between APIFT and OPPFT. Table 1 indicates a weak positive relationship between these two variables (β=.010, p>.01). Regarding the association between PI and OPPFT as well as between PS and OPPFT, the hypothesized relationship (H₂, H₃) hold true for both of them with the following values, (β=.159, p>.95) (β=.277, p<.001). Thus, there was difference in the association between PI and PS with OPPFT.

Table 1. LS-MGA for Group Difference between Exogenous and Endogenous Variables between Nigeria and Malaysia

Relationship	Path Coefficients- Nigeria- Malaysia	p-Value Nigeria- Malaysia	Findings
APIFT -> OPPFT	.010	.460	Not Supported
PI -> OPPFT	.159	.954	Supported
PS -> OPPFT	.277	.000	Supported

Evidently, there is significant difference across youth in Nigeria and Malaysia in terms of the correlation between PI and PS with OPPFT but not between APIFT and OPPFT. Thus, results indicate there was no significant difference between Nigerian and Malaysian youths in terms of the relationship between APIFT and OPPFT, while there was significant difference between youths from both countries in terms of the relationship between PI and PS with OPPFT. This means that hypotheses two and three were supported, while hypothesis one was not supported. This indicate that there is difference between Nigerian and Malaysian youths in terms of the relationship between PI and PS with OPPFT, while in terms of the relationship between APIFT and OPPFT, youths from both countries almost have the same level of access to information on Facebook and Twitter which also translates to their political participation on Facebook and Twitter.

5.0 CONCLUSION

This study carried out a comparative analysis between two second wave democracies to determine the difference in terms of their youth online political participation. Due to scarcity of comparative studies on online political participation in Nigeria and Malaysia, we examined the relationship between cognitive engagement and online political participation on SNSs among youth in both countries. This cross-national comparison of online political participation highlighted the relationship among a new media, SNSs, its cognitive engagement and its role in engendering political participation. The findings of the study suggests the relationship between access to political information on Facebook and Twitter and online political participation on Facebook and Twitter is the same for youth in both countries, but this is not the case for the relationship between their political interest and policy satisfaction with their online political participation on Facebook and Twitter. Nevertheless, this study indicates that cognitive engagement has a role to play in youth online political participation.

Consequently, in exploring the cross-national and interdisciplinary combination of media and political system in Nigeria and Malaysia, this study will be of benefit to scholars conducting studies in both new and old political and communication sciences in Nigeria and Malaysia. Furthermore, the study lends empirical support to the relationship between cognitive engagement and online political participation thus adding to the body of knowledge on political participation. Practically, this study would serve as a guide to policy makers, media, governmental and non-governmental organizations on the nature of youth online political

participation which will further help in better policy formulation by government and other stakeholders in contemporary society.

Despite achieving the study objective, this study is restricted in the nature of its design which is cross-sectional, while at the same time using self-report measures for data collection. Also, the purposive sampling method used could pose a challenge with generalization of results. Thus it is recommended that a panel study should be used in future studies while at the same time adopting an objective approach to collecting data like a content analysis of political participation activities on SNSs. Furthermore, a probability sampling method could be used to select respondents to provide more scientific support to future studies.

Acknowledgement

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