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Are the 'Born-Frees' Always Politically Apathetic? Social Media Use for Campus Politics by Black Undergraduates of North-West University, Mafikeng, South Africa

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Abstract: The South African post-apartheid Black youth—popularly known as the 'Born Frees'—have been stereotyped politically apathetic. But there are yet empirical studies to prove that these youth are really perpetually averse to political participation, even in their universities, especially with emergence of social media that provide digital space for social and political engagements. With the specific attention on Black students of the Mafikeng campus of North-West University, South Africa as the study population, this study, therefore, employed a sequential qual-QUANT exploratory design to explore how Black undergraduates use social media to engage in political activities in the university setting. Anchored on the Uses and Gratifications Theory, the study employed questionnaire to collect data from 232 respondents selected through stratification and convenience sampling. Majority (77.1%) of the students affirmed they actively participated in campus politics using the social media (78.0%) and text messages via mobile phones (60.7%). Ironically, only 36.2% of the students said they used direct interpersonal communication as the communication modes for political engagement. The trend established in this study challenges scholars' assumption that the Post-apartheid Black youth of South Africa are politically apathetic. Students' interest and participation in campus politics suggest that, with effective use of the digital space that is relatively free, accessible, interactive, and independent of undue control by the state apparatus, the Black youth can also contribute positively to the South African democratic project.

Key words: Campus politics, Social media, South African youth, The 'Borne Frees', Political participation, Post-apartheid era

Introduction

After 46 years of apartheid regime, which really started in 1948, South Africa had her first democratic, non-racial election in 1994 (Mattes 2012; Bosch 2013). Since then, the nation's democracy has attracted global attention. Perhaps, one major factor that necessitated this attention was the initial apprehension as to whether a nation that had been subjected to a suppressive regime for so long would be able to sustain her democracy. Of course, the nation has had to deal with some fundamental challenges relating to nation-building and promotion of a solid democratic institution through an effective civil society involvement (Cottle & Rai, 2008). Central to overcoming these enormous post-apartheid challenges are the youth, who without doubt, have remained an important constituent of South African social stability and political freedom. For example during the 1970s and the 1980s apartheid struggles, South African Black youth were recognised for the significant roles they played in the anti-apartheid protests. Political activists usually relied on schools and universities to recruit youth for political struggles (Bosch 2013).

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However, after the apartheid, the youth became socially passive and politically apathetic. Deegan, cited by Bosch (2013) confirms this fact by submitting that "in the post-apartheid era, the status of black youth political participation is very different, with a general perception that the black youth are generally politically apathetic and driven more by consumerism than a desire for activism or citizenship" (p. 120). Empirical facts have also indicated that contrary to the expectations that the emergence of democracy in 1994 would witness a politically active South African society, especially with a new generation of the so-called 'Born Frees'; "the post-apartheid generation are less committed to democracy than their parents or grandparents" (Mattes 2012: 133). Similarly, Mkandawire (2008: 3) has observed that:

> There is particular concern that large sections of the youth particularly those who live in rural areas have become marginalized and are not effectively participating in the transformation process. The youth are seen in a fundamental sense as disempowered and excluded.

If the youth, especially those at the grassroots, are really marginalised, disempowered and secluded as described above, this segment of the South African society may become politically apathetic. Therefore, in order to secure the future of the country in terms of political stability and democratic sustainability, the youth from all sections of the country, must have proper political education and integration that would encourage them to be politically active. To do this effectively also calls for constant monitoring of the youth especially in settings such as schools and universities, to determine their level of political awareness, interest, and participation, and the means through which they carry out these sundry political activities. Adequate knowledge of these variables, through empirical evidence, would enable government to come up with appropriate measures and policies that would enhance the level of political participation by the youth, both at the university and national levels. One of the ways to understand the political behaviour of youth is to study them within the university context. Besides, whatever the students learn or practice while they are in the university may, to a great extent, shape how they adapt to the larger society.

Of course, many studies on the relationship between news media—both traditional and digital media—and democracy in South Africa have been conducted. For instance, Jacobs (2002) examined the transformation of South African media since the nation transitioned from apartheid to democracy in 1994; Cottle and Rai (2008) examined the role of South African television in enabling and sustaining the nation's democracy; Opuamie-Ngoa (2010) analysed the relationship between functional democracy and mass media with specific focus on South Africa and Nigeria; Smith (2011) examined the media consumption practices and lifestyles of black South African youth in urban city (Durban) and peri-urban town (Alice); van Rensburg (2012) conducted a study to investigate how South Africa, Kenya and Zambia used the Internet to service their democracies; Ndlovu, (2014) studied television viewership of South African young adults and implications of this viewership on democracy, while Pillay and Maharaj (2014) examined how the South African civil society organisations used the social media (Web 2.0) and other digital technologies for social advocacy in the democratic context.

However, despite this large number of studies on South African mass media and democracy, adequate scholarly attention is yet to be given to the relationship between the use of social media by South African black youth and their political behaviour in terms of participation in campus politics, and implications of this

relationship for their potential engagement in South African politics. Besides, there is the need for more empirical validation of the foregoing claims that South African Black youth is politically apathetic (Mkandawire 2008; Mattes 2012), with specific, and isolated focus on the rural sections of South Africa, especially in the present age when the emergence of social media is believed to be changing social and political orientations of the youth. This study, therefore, aimed to fill this gap by investigating the extent to which South African black youth participated in campus politics, and how the communication media, specifically social media, influenced their level of political participation at the university level. Three research questions that guided the execution of this study are **(1)** *What is the nature of the students' participation in campus politics?* **(2)** *How do the students use different communication modes to participate in campus politics?* **(3)** *How does access to social media influence students' participation in campus politics?*

The study was conducted among students of the North-West University, Mafikeng Campus, with specific focus on the Black students. The reason for this is that the population share some characteristics of South African Black youth, whom (Mkandawire 2008) and Deegan, as cited by Bosch (2013) describe as being marginalised and politically apathetic respectively, especially in the post-apartheid era. Besides, the students are believed to be active social media users, and constitute a significant force in the future South African democratic project. Since the focus of this study was on black youth from a rural section of the country, Mafikeng Campus of the North-West University, which represents a historically black university in South Africa, was selected as the geographic focus for this study. Findings of this study would show how students use new media as platform for political participation. This would subsequently provide insights into the potentials of new media in triggering urge for political participation. More importantly, these potentials of new media could be explored and extended to the political education and mobilisation projects of South Africa whose Black youths have been labelled as being politically apathetic.

Youth, Social Media and Political Participation

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO] describes youth as "a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood's independence" (UNESCO 2014: 1). For statistical purposes, UNESCO further clarifies that youth are "those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, without prejudice to other definitions by Member States", and based on the definition given in the African Youth Charter, youth means "every person between the ages of 15 and 35 years". However, it clarifies that youth as a concept "is a more fluid category than a fixed age-group" (pp.1-2). This means that youth can have different definitions or statistical categorisations as the context changes, but they would always retain the universal characteristics of being in the period of transition from childhood to adulthood.

From one cultural context to another, and as time changes and new technologies emerge, media audience (youth) may exhibit different patterns of media consumption. For example Smith (2011: 12) submits that her previous studies found that:

> Black (South African) youths are generally active consumers: they engage with texts at multiple levels, appreciating both the aesthetic value on offer as well as the narrative value of iconic black popular culture, but they do tend to not entirely embrace or adopt the educative messages and lessons implicit in the texts.

Since Smith's studies were primarily premised on traditional media, specifically television, we cannot conclude that the youth would 'not entirely embrace or adopt the educative messages and lessons implicit in the texts' when it comes to social media. This is because social media are more interactive, and are likely to appeal to the audience (youth) to adopt variety of contents including education messages. Studies have shown that young people all over the world are now rapidly shifting from the traditional media to the web-enabled technologies (digital media) for diverse purposes including entertainment, education, relationship, health awareness, social mobilisation, and political sensitisation (see De Ridder, 2013; Greenhow 2011; Kalyango and Adu-Kumi, 2013, Wasserman, 2011; van Rensburg 2012; , Hyde-Clarke 2013; Bottorff, Struik, Bassel, Graham, Stevens and Richardson 2014; Maamari & El Zein, 2014; Ridder 2015).

Because of their age, youth are regarded as the most active component of the demographics of any country. They constitute "an important constituency who need to be economically empowered and afforded an opportunity to contribute to the socio-economic development of the country" (Chipenda, 2017: 51). The description of youth by Chipenda indicates that they have a massive stake in the future and continuity of their country in many aspects including military service, economic growth, sports, agriculture and politics. This is the reason why the youth should be well mobilised to actively participate in the political affairs of their nation. Political participation is more than mere voting during elections. It involves diverse activities ranging from attending political rallies, political meetings, participating in political debates, contesting for elective offices, and disseminating information about candidates or political ideologies. When people express support for a political party, or when they criticise certain policies by a political body, they are participating in politics. In order to be politically active, the citizens should be empowered through exposure to the mass media and other means of information dissemination. This would enable them to exchange information about political parties, certain political ideologies, public policies and agenda; and they would be able take independent political decisions. Trappel and Maniglio (2009: 169) submit that "modern democracy and the mass media are intrinsically related. In modern democracies the mass media are the link between those who govern and those who are governed". The implication of the foregoing assertion is that when the citizens have access to the mass media, they would have adequate knowledge of how government activities, policies and decisions affect them.

The emergence of the social media which mostly operate on Web 2.0 platform (Vesnic-Alujevic 2012), have significantly reduced the information gap that traditionally existed between the masses, especially the majority at the grassroots as the case in Nigeria (Moemeka 2009), and the political elite. The Internet has provided open access for people to consume and create content. Through mobile phones, also termed as a *hybrid medium* (Wei 2008: 36), people, especially youth, now engage in a range of online and offline activities. They can use the cell phones for mass communication, relationship building, entertainment, and social and political mobilisations (Aoki & Downes 2003; Wei, 2008; Balakrishnan & Raj 2012; Velghe 2012). We can draw examples from Arab countries and Asia (Al-Kandari and Hasan 2012; Chatora 2012; Bosch 2013), where youth have actively and effectively employed the digital media (e.g. *Twitter, Facebook*, blogs,) to incite, mobilize, execute, and sustain political struggles and participation.

Theoretical Framework

Uses and Gratifications Theory

The Uses and Gratifications (U&G) Approach is used as the theoretical anchor for this study. It is used to investigate why media consumers choose a particular mediated communication medium whenever a new technology emerges (Elliott and Orosenberg, cited by Guo, Tan and Cheung 2010). The approach explains why and how individuals select certain news media and for what purposes or gratifications (Severin and Tankard 2001; Watson, 2003; McQuail 2007; Baran and Davis 2012). It is a theory that explores what audience do with the news media. The central concept of U&G approach is that "the *uses* that audiences make of the media and the *gratifications* produced by those uses can be traced back to a constellation of individual psychological and social needs" (Littlejohn and Foss 2009: 65). Herta Herzog is often credited as the proponent of the Uses and Gratifications Approach. Her interest in how and why people listened to the radio, and more specifically her urge to understand why so many housewives were attracted to radio soap operas, propelled her to study fans of a popular quiz show (1940) and soap opera audience (1944). She discovered that fans of the quiz and soap opera were attracted to the radio because they derived three basic gratifications from the programmes—(1) emotional release; (2) opportunities for wishful thinking; and (3) sources of advice or educative information (Baran and Davis 2012). Other founding fathers of Uses and Gratifications theory are Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch, who have identified 7-piont platform of U&G approach and used this platform present an explanation for "how (1) the social and psychological origins of (2) needs generate (3) expectations of (4) the mass media or other sources, which lead to (5) differential patterns of exposure to the media, resulting in (6) need gratification and (7) other consequences" (Littlejohn and Foss 2009: 65).

In summary, the U&G approach explains that people use the communication media to gratify different purposes or needs such as information, escape, diversion, relaxation, relationship building, and mobilisation. But the needs that the media consumers want to satisfy would always be different according to individuals or groups; and consequently, individual media audience would use the media for gratifications according to their diverse, peculiar needs. Mass media scholars have employed the U&G approach to investigate how people use certain communication media and the gratifications they derive in using such media (see Lometti, Reeves and Bybee 1977; Diddi and LaRose 2006; Papacharissi and Mendelson 2007; Sundar and Limperos 2013).

Methodology

Survey was the primary method employed for the study. Data for this study were collected among the students of North-West University, Mafikeng Campus, South Africa from February 18 to March 10, 2015. The study employed a sequential qual-QUANT exploratory approach, where smaller proportion of qualitative data were first collected to design further tools for collecting quantitative data: Before we developed the questionnaire, we had initially conducted a pilot study (structured interviews) among 12 students selected through convenience sampling from the population. We made sure that the students selected for the pilot study were excluded during the main data collection exercise. Most of the important variables that we used to construct the questionnaire items emerged from the qualitative data initially collected. The survey questionnaire was

administered to students who were between 15 and 30 years. To control for this, we politely asked the students to confirm their age brackets. Any students outside the brackets of 15 to 30 years were excluded. Out of 250 copies of questionnaire administered, 232 (92.8%) were returned. The sample was selected through stratification and convenience sampling. Stratification was first used to map the University by faculties in order to ensure a fair spread of the sample. Respondents were then selected from the faculties through convenience sampling. One hundred and eighteen (50.9%) of the respondents were male, while 114 (49.1%) were female. Majority (85.8%) of the respondents was aged 19 to 25. Only individuals, who were Black students of the University, and were citizens of South Africa, were selected for the study because the study focused only on Black South African undergraduates. Authors recruited and trained two research assistants, who were indigenes of South Africa to participate in administration of the questionnaire. The fact that the research assistants were natives of South Africa and students of the University facilitated the collection of the data. They were able to talk to the students using their native language(s) in most cases during data collection processes.

Results

Results in this study are presented in line with the three research questions constructed to guide the study. The research questions and the results are presented as follows:

Research Question 1: *What is the nature of the students' participation in campus politics?*

In order to answer this research question, we investigated the students' level of engagement in the Students Union politics, and the nature of their participation especially during election periods. Results are presented in Figs1 & 2, and Table 1.
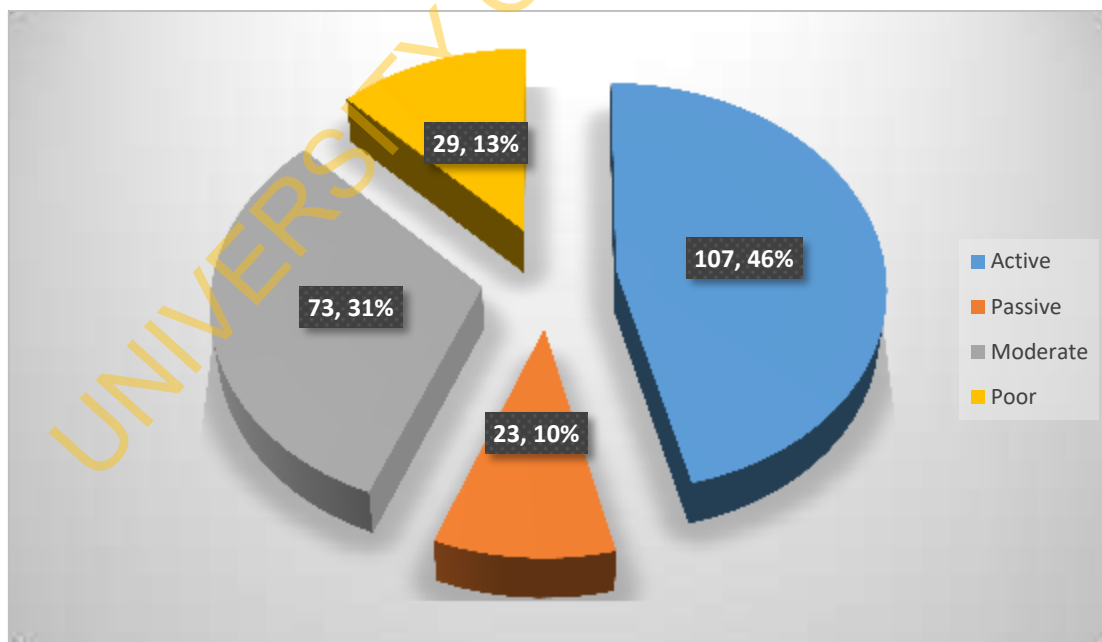
Fig 1: Students' Level of Participation in Campus Politics

Source: Authors' analysis of research data (2017)

The students exhibited different levels of participation in the Students Union politics. Most of them were active; some were not very active while some were poor in their political engagements. For instance as shown in Fig 1, majority of the students (n=107; 46.1%) rated their level of involvement in political activities on campus as active, 73 (31.0%) were moderately active, only 23 (10.0%) were passive while 29 (13.0%) rated their level of political activities on campus as poor. Political actions such as attending meetings and rallies, participation in electioneering activities, and contesting for political posts were the variables that we used to determine the scale. In the self-rating of their participation in the identified political activities, students that recorded aggregates scores between 0% and 39% were tagged poor; students in the range of 40%-49% were tagged passive; 50%-59% categorised as moderately active; and 60% and above tagged very active.

**Table 1: Students' nature of participation during Students Union elections**

Nature of Participation	Response	n(%)
Contested for an office during the last Students Union elections	Contested	22(9.5)
	Did not contest	210(90.5)
Voted for Contestants during the last Students Union elections	Voted	209(90.1)
	Did not Vote	23(9.9)
	Total	232(100%)

Source: Authors' analysis of research data (2017)

As shown in table1, majority of the students (n=210; 90.5 %) did not contest for any post during the Students Union elections while only 22 (9.5) contested for different elective posts. On the other hand, only 23 (9.9%) of the students did not vote at all whereas an overwhelming majority (n=209; 90.1%) voted for different aspirants during the elections.

Research Question 2: *How do the students use different communication modes to participate in campus politics??*

The main objective here was to investigate the specific communication means that the students employed to engage in political activities on campus. The results are presented in fig 2.
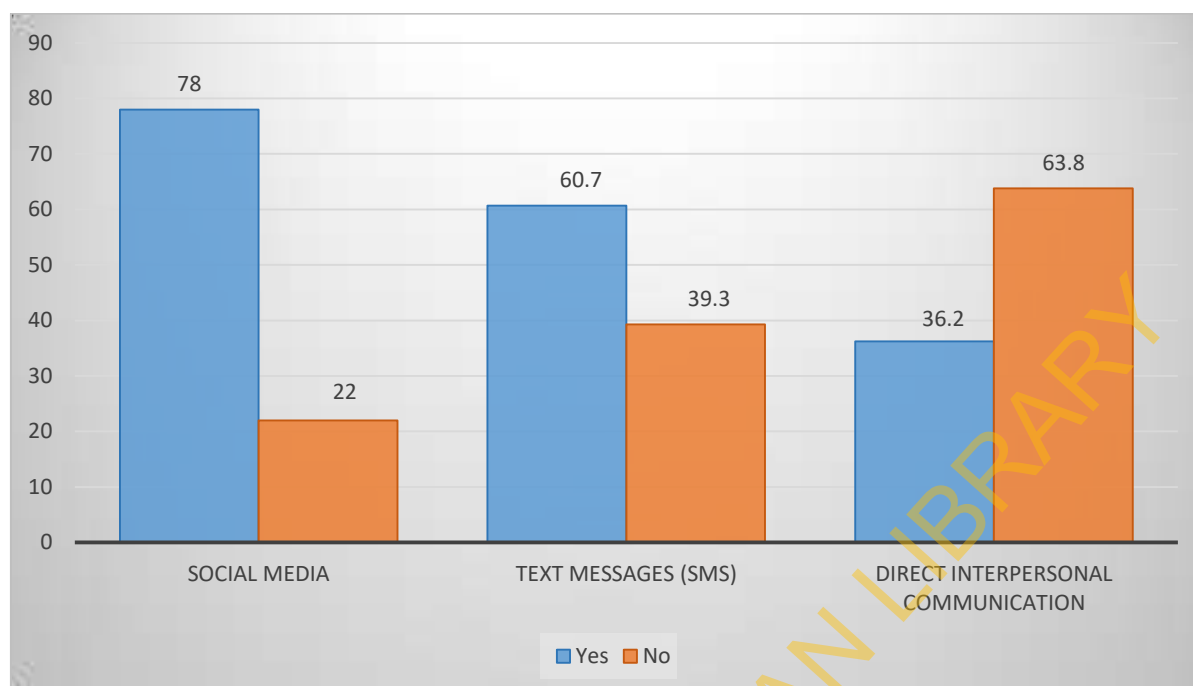
Fig 2: Communication modes used by students to participate in campus politics
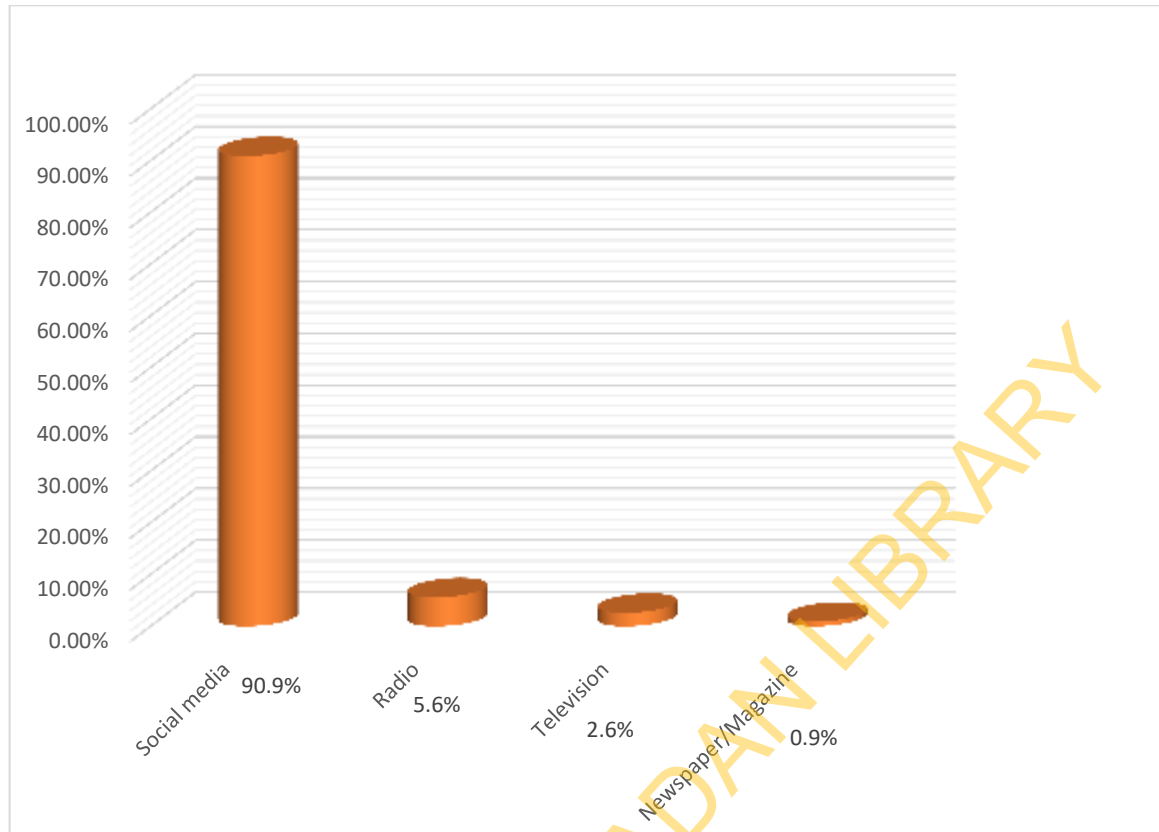
Source: Authors' analysis of research data (2017)

Results, as presented in fig 2, show that 78.0% of the students said they used social media to take part in political activities on the University campus while 22.0% did not use social media to engage in campus politics. The proportion of students that used text messages for disseminating information about political activities on campus is 60.7%. Only 36.2% of the students engaged in political activities through direct interpersonal communication. In all, social media are the most frequently used communication mode for political activities by the students, while interpersonal communication is the least used mode.

Research Question 3: *How does access to social media influence students' participation in campus politics?*

We investigated two variables here; one, the extent to which the students had access to news media, and two, the influence that news media, most especially the social media, had on students' political decisions and participation in campus politics. Fig 3 and table 2 present the findings.

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Fig. 3: Students' Level of Access to News Media

Source: Authors' analysis of research data (2017)

Fig 3 shows that the digital media (which are internet-based operating on the Web 2.0 platforms e.g. *Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, and WhatsApp*) is the media type most accessible to the students (n=211; 90.9%) on the University campus. This is followed by radio (n=13; 5.6%) and television (n=6; 2.6%) while the print media (newspaper/magazine) is the least accessible news media (n=2; 0.9%) on the University campus.

Table 2: Influence that Communication Media and access to social media have on Students' Political Decisions and Participation in Campus politics

Communication Media	Response	n(%)
Information received from Social media influenced students' political decisions.	Yes	195(84.0)
	No	37(15.9)
Information received from friends through text messages (via cell phones) influenced students' political decisions.	Yes	144(62.1)
	No	88(37.9)
Information received from friends through direct interpersonal discussions influenced students' political decisions.	Yes	40(17.2)
	No	192(82.8)
Access to Social Media		
Without access to social media, students' level of political participation on the University campus would have been much passive.	Yes	201(86.6)
	No	31(13.4)
	Total	232(100)

Source: Authors' analysis of research data (2017)

As presented in table 2, 84.0% of the students said their political decisions were influenced by information they received from social media, 62.1% of the students confirmed their political decisions were influenced by information received through text message on cell phones, while only 17.2% said that information they got through direct interpersonal interactions with other students influenced their political decisions. More importantly, 86.6% of the students confirmed that without access to social media (*Twitter, Facebook,* etc), they would have been much less actively engaged in campus politics while only 13.4% held a contrary position.

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Table 3: The news media that drive students' active participation and extent to which access to Social Media influence students' interest and participation in politics

Media Type	n(%)
Traditional Media (Radio, Television, Newspaper, etc.)	58(25.0)
Social Media (*Facebook, Twitter*, etc.)	174(75.0)
Extent of Students' Participation in Campus Politics as a Result of Access to Social Media	
Great Extent	164(70.7)
Low Extent	49(21.1)
No Extent	19(8.2)
Total	232(100)

Source: Authors' analysis of research data (2017)

The students used both traditional media (Radio, Television, Newspaper, etc.) and Digital media (*Facebook, Twitter*, Blogs, etc.) to participate in the Students' Union politics, but the two sets of news media did not have the same level impact. As the results show in table 3, only 25.0% of the students affirmed that traditional news media propelled their active participation in campus politics whereas a significant proportion (75.0%) of the students confirmed that digital news media drove their active engagement in Students Union politics. Majority (70.7%) of the students said that, to a great extent, access to social media motivated them to participate in campus politics; 21.1% of the students said access to social media motivated them to a low extent while only 8.2% said access to social media did not drive them to participate in campus politics.

Discussion

Literature suggest that South African Black youth feel politically marginalised, and are more socially passive and politically apathetic than their parents or grandparents contrary to the general expectation that the post-apartheid democratic era, with the generation of the 'Born Frees', would produce a society of citizens with high political consciousness (Mkandawire, 2012; Mattes, 2012; Bosch, 2013). One would have expected the students of North-west University to exhibit a similar pattern of political apathy and social passiveness by being less active in campus politics. However, findings in this study present a contrary trend: The students are politically lively and they actively engage in campus politics. Either directly by contesting for political offices or indirectly by participating in voting during elections, the students reported high level of political consciousness. The communication means they employ to engage in political activities are the social media, text messages on mobile phones, and direct interpersonal communication. Different forms of information that the students receive from different communication media have influence on their political decisions and level of participation in politics. However, the social media was found to be the most accessible media among the students on the

University campus, and had the highest influence in driving the students to participate in campus politics. Guided by the research questions, we identified three major themes in the analysis of data, and we used these themes to further expand the discussion of the findings. These themes are (1) Students' Level and Nature of Participation in Campus Politics, (2) Modes of Participating in Campus Politics by Students, and (3) Influence of Communication Media on Students' Political Decisions and Participation in Campus politics.

Students' Level and Nature of Participation in Campus Politics

The students of North-West University are not politically passive. The proportion of the students that were actively involved in the Students Union politics is 46.1%, while the proportion of those that were moderately involved in campus politics is 31.0%. If we consider the two sub-sets as the group that participated in campus politics, the proportion is 77.1% of the sample. Besides, majority of the students (n=209; 90.9%) reported that they took part in the actual voting during Students Union elections, but just a handful (n=22; 9.5%) of the students contested for elective posts during elections. This pattern is understandable because even at the macro level of politics, fewer people contest for posts compared to the majority that constitutes the electorate.

This foregoing trend is an encouraging phenomenon because when students are already exposed to the dynamics of micro politics at the university level, they are likely to easily adapt to the mechanism of macro politics at the regional or national level when they leave the university. Citing Deegan, Bosch (2013) explains that the post-apartheid black youth of South Africa are generally politically apathetic with diminished desire for activism or citizenship. However, findings of this study here may suggest a changing trend. Students of North-West University, like other South African students who represent the majority of Nation's youth, appeared becoming progressively politically active and conscious, at the campus politics level. This trend may be attributable to the intensified efforts of South African government to increase media education campaigns, and access to news media (Saleh, 2012), especially the digital media, which studies have proved to be more effective than the conventional news media in creating "active audience" (Sundar and Limperos 2013: 504), initiating, mobilizing and sustaining political struggles, interest, and participation among youth (see Al-Kandari and Hasan 2012; Chatora 2012; Ahmad and Sheikh 2013). And given the fact that since the apartheid era, South African youth, especially university students have remained targets of activists and political leaders for social struggles and political freedom (Bosch 2013), the forgoing findings, therefore, suggest that the students, who are politically conscious, constitute potential human resources for the democratic project of South Africa.

Communication Modes Used by Students to Participate in Campus Politics

We investigated the communication modes through which the students participated in campus politics. Three modes of communication were identified. These are social media, text messages on cell phones, and direct interpersonal communication. The communication mode mostly used by the students to engage in political activities is social media as 78.0% of the students said they used the media. Next to social media is the use of text message through cell phones (60.7%), while only 36.2% of the students engage in politics through direct interpersonal communication. This trend may not be unexpected given the age bracket of the students (19 to 25 years). Our finding here is consistent with results of other studies which show that youth are active users of

mobile phones and avid consumers of digital media content especially for communication with friends, and other forms of social connections (Williamson, Qayyum Hider and Liu 2012; Cauwenberge, d'Haenens and Beentjes 2013). These benefits are examples of gratifications that encouraged the students to prefer using new media for political participation ahead of other communication modes. This finding notwithstanding, all other modes of communication, especially direct interpersonal communication, are also useful and relevant. As prescribed by the Uses and Gratification theory, every communication mode is relevant; it all depends on the communication objectives, the needs and the gratifications the individuals expect to derive from using certain communication media in a given communication context (Severin and Tankard, 2001;, Watson, 2003; McQuail, 2007; Baran and Davis, 2012) . However, when a new technology emerges, people are likely to adopt it in the place of an old one with the expectation that new technology would give them more gratifications (Elliott and Orosenberg, cited by Guo, Tan and Cheung 2010). This might explain the reason why majority of the students, in their political engagements on campus, used the social media and text messages via their mobile phones—the two media that are driven by new technologies. Besides, the new media have some features such as relative accessibility and interactivity that provide some gratifications for the users.

Influence of Communication Media on Students' Political Decisions and Participation in Campus politics

In order to determine the influence of news media on students' political decisions and participation in campus politics, we first examined the level of access they had to news media especially on campus. Findings show that the social media (n=211; 90.9%) are the most accessible to the students while radio (n=13; 5.6%), television (n=6; 2.6%), and print media (n=2; 0.9%) are less accessible. Students agreed that information they received from different information sources positively influenced their interest and participation in campus politics. They confirmed that the social media (n=174; 75.0%), rather than the traditional media (n=58; 25.0%), had most positive impact on their interest and engagement in campus politics. To a great extent (70.7%), access to social media motivated the students to participate in campus politics. Findings from a previous study have confirmed that the most important variable that determines participants' uses of, and preferences for, specific news platforms was the perceived accessibility (Cauwenberge, d'Haenens and Beentjes 2013). Pervasiveness of the internet-enabled mobile phones, through which these social media can be accessed, must have endeared the digital media to the students who represent the digital generation. One thing discernible from the foregoing findings is that, social media, which are the most accessible on campus, have played a leading role in motivating the students to participate in campus politics. The finding is consistent with the outcome of a study by Al-Kandari and Hasanen (2012) conducted among university students from Egypt and Kuwait, which affirms that "the use of *Facebook, Twitter* and blogs as Internet applications, together with Internet use for information, positively predict political engagement" (p. 245).Notwithstanding, our findings here contradict results of a study by Valenzuela, Arriagada and Scherman (2012: 301), which show that in Chile, youth, "as in other parts of the world, typically exhibit low rates of political participation. Between 1988 and 2009, turnout in the 18–29 age group decreased from 35% to less than 9%". Although, our current study does not establish that students' high level of participation in campus politics would translate to the same level of active participation in politics outside the university campus, it provides the basis to predict the potentials of new media in stimulating South African Black youth's' interest in the country's politics and general democratic project.

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Conclusion

Our objective was to investigate how post-apartheid South African Black youth, who were stereotyped as being socially passive and politically apathetic, used social media to engage in political activities. To do this we collected data among Black students of the Mafikeng campus of North-West University. Our belief was that the black population of the University would share some semblance of the South African Black youth, who belong to the generation of the 'Born Frees of the post-apartheid era. Findings of this study have established that the students of North-West University, who were the population for this study, and who represent the South African black youths in the less-urban sections of the country, were not apathetic to politics as described in literature. Majority of them actively participated in campus politics in different forms. Most of their political activities on the university campus were driven largely by the social media, which interestingly, as established in study, were the most accessible media to the students. Text messages through mobile phones also played important roles in how the students engaged in politics on campus, but the traditional media (radio, television and newspaper/magazine) were hardly accessible and sparsely used by the students.

The foregoing findings suggest that South African Black youth may not be as politically apathetic as perceived and described by scholars. The students have the potential to demonstrate the same level of enthusiasm in national politics as they did in campus politics, if there is an effective social mobilisation scheme. Also, there is no doubts that youth are migrating to the new digital space that is relatively free, accessible, interactive, and independent of undue control by the political class or state apparatus. It is, therefore, recommended that government should make sure that the youth have more access to the news media, especially the social media, within and outside the university settings. The South African government should commit more resources to making the digital media more effective, efficient and accessible nationwide especially to the youth. Access to social media could be a trigger for the Black youth to develop stronger interest and become more active in the democratic project of South Africa.

Limitations

We did not have the opportunity to observe the students to see how they participated in campus politics; the time we collected the data did not coincide with the period of Students Union elections. Rather we relied on self-rated assessment through the questionnaire. Besides, our study did not investigate the correlation between students' level of participation in campus politics and their predisposition to national politics. These factors may constitute some limitations to the study. However, findings of the study have the promise to suggest how, and through which communication modes, the students are likely to participate in South African politics and democratic project at large. It is, therefore, suggested that nation-wide studies are carried out to establish students' attitude to national politics and factors that may motivate them to be more politically active outside the university campus.

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