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### **Do the 'Rich' Get Richer?**

Exploring the Associations between Social Media Use and  
Online and Offline Political Participation Activities among  
Kenyan Youth

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## ABSTRACT

*The meteoric rise in the popularity of the Social Networking Sites (SNSs) has spurred academic inquiry into their possible effects on youth political participation over the last two decades. Inspired by a dearth of empirical research on this topic in weaker democracies and low-income countries, this study explores how the use of SNSs among Kenyan youth relates to their online and offline political activities. For this purpose, a web survey was administered on a convenient sample of 235 respondents. Three hierarchical regression models were constructed to determine what demographic, psychographic and social media use factors predict (1) online participation, (2) offline participation and (3) voting. A simple mediation model was also constructed to analyse the direct and indirect effects of social media use rate on offline participation.*

*Results show that political interest and political use of SNSs are the only, (and also positive) significant predictors of online participation. Political interest and political use were also positive, significant predictors of offline participation, while socioeconomic status (SES) and gender (female) were negative, significant predictors of offline participation. Only political party membership significantly predicted voting. Online participation significantly, and fully mediated the effects of social media use rate on offline participation. These findings support the reinforcement hypothesis that social media use serves as an additional tool for those who are already traditionally politically engaged. They also signify an opportunity for organised political actors (e.g. lobbyists, political parties) to potentially boost their mobilisation efforts by encouraging the political use of SNSs. Potential effects of SNS use over time, as well as social interactional and recreational motivations of SNS use, need to be explored in future research.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

From Barack Obama's 2008 Presidential Campaign success, to the Arab Spring two years later and a host of other largely nonviolent mobilisations around the world that followed, there has been growing interest in how communication technologies, especially the so-called Web 2.0 (O'Reilly, 2009) affect citizen's participation in the political and civic life. The Internet has been hailed for its arguably democratising potential (Effing, van Hillegersberg, & Huibers, 2011) which has in many ways revolutionised political communication while presiding over a power shift from the elite mainstream institutions to, optimistically speaking, 'the people'. The focus has mainly been on young people, in part because they are seen as the least politically engaged (Farthing, 2010; Kimberlee, 2002; Prout, 2000) but even more due to the fact that they are the generation that came of age at the height of Web 2.0 adoption and therefore, are more Internet savvy. Lenhart, Madden, and Hitlin (2005) observe a widely-held (and plausible) assumption that the Internet is embedded in the life worlds of young citizens, naturally becoming a key domain of their political interaction and communication. This is particularly true of Social Networking Sites (SNSs) where young people form the majority of users (Smith & Anderson, 2018; We Are Social, n.d.).

The widespread popularity of SNSs has been the most successful in giving credence to the claim that the Internet can invigorate democracy (Kamau, 2017) in the most unprecedented of ways. Indeed social media come loaded with unseen-before communicative affordances (See Hutchby, 2001; Taina & Helmond, 2017) that can potentially level out resource inequalities hence improving both access to information as well as increasing the diversity of ideas in the public sphere. The optimism surrounding social media's disruptive value in challenging traditional modes of communicative power has inspired academic inquiry into the potential effects of social media use on political participation among youthful citizens, especially in established democracies. This fascination with social media as the magic bullet for political and civic mobilization is with a backdrop of a general decline in political and civic participation across the generations in the last few decades (Bienen, 2016; Kuenzi & Lambright, 2007; Newton, Whiteley, Van Deth, & Maraffi, 1999; Park, Curtice, Thomson,

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Jarvis, & Bromley, 2002). But as Coleman and Rowe (2005) put forward, the apparent political apathy being witnessed is not sheer disinterest but a result of an elite hold in politics. They argue (with respect to the youth) that 'it is not young people that are disconnected from formal politics, but political institutions that are disconnected from young people,' (2005, p. ii) and as such social media, a youth-dominated domain, becomes a natural avenue to air their dissatisfactions.

That the Internet's functionalities have sharply reduced the costs associated with civic and political participation (Enjolras, Steen-Johnsen, & Wollebæk, 2013) is not in question. There, however, lies a danger in oversimplifying the inherent affordances (Cammaerts, 2015) of social media and overstating the power of the Internet over that of traditional mediums that not only form an integral part of audiences' offline life, but also dominate their online feeds (See Meraz, 2009 on mainstream media agenda setting influence in blogs).

Evidence from existing empirical literature in this rapidly changing field of inquiry is inconclusive about the effects of social media use on political participation among the youth. There are as many studies reporting statistically significant results of positive associations between social media and political participation as are those that report weak and insignificant results (See Boulianne, 2015). Only a handful of these studies have investigated this phenomenon in less-established democracies or low-income countries which would further shed light on the intricacies of context-specific inquiry.

The research seeks to make a contribution to the current literature on the consequences of social media use by taking a Kenyan perspective. Kenya provides a useful case study of a low-income, weak democracy categorised as a 'hybrid regime' (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2018) owing to compromised public institutions, rampant corruption, suppressed freedoms (Munyae & Adar, 2001) and low participation levels. The country, however, is a social media powerhouse in Africa (Chao-Blasto, 2017; Essoungou, 2010; Parke, 2016), ranked fourth in use of Twitter (Agutu, 2016) and more importantly, in its latest general election nearly 50% of the population reported using social media to access political/campaign information (Portland Communications, 2017), in part, enabled by cheap smartphones and data. Political

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organisation has historically been ethnic-based (Branch, 2012; Bratton & Kimenyi, 2008), an endemic problem that has for decades stifled nonpartisan political deliberation leading to differential development (Cowen, 1989) that has borne ethnic conflict (Kagwanja & Southall, 2010) and a lack of trust in government institutions and politicians (Wakaya, 2017). Many studies have ignored the cultural, historical and institutional dynamics of the participation ecology in different contexts and as Bennett (2015) notes, concepts, variables and measures take a life of their own. It is the intention of the researcher to illuminate the specificities of the Kenyan situation by incorporating the country's social and political context in the analysis.

This study begins with a review of empirical literature investigating the impact of social media use among the youth on their political participation. I first revisit how the chosen main concepts (social media use and political participation) have been conceived and operationalised before examining three empirical factions of studies in this field grouped based on their near-similar findings. A theoretical and conceptual framework based on these three factions follows this after which the research questions are stated. This is followed by the methodology chapter which outlines the research strategy, sampling procedure, a detailed operationalization of concepts and concludes with a note on ethics and reflexivity. The results and discussion chapter begins with a justification of the analysis strategy before sequentially reporting the findings from the four statistical models constructed. The discussion segment follows the same order of the results in considering possible explanations for the expected and unexpected results and then draws from existing literature to assess the study's contributions to what is already known; methodological and design reflections follow and are intertwined with a number of suggestions for further research. The conclusion succinctly summarises the entire work by revisiting the objective, tying it with the findings and recommendations.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Social media use

One of the primary purposes of using the Internet, as reported by users across generations, is communication (Jones & Fox, 2009). This information-seeking behaviour among Internet users

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has been observed in various studies involving rural and urban dwellers in Uzbekistan (Wei, Kolko, & Spyridakis, 2003), French general practitioners (Boissin, 2005), seniors in Netherlands (Medlock et al., 2015), adolescents in Ghana (Borzekowski, Fobil, & Asante, 2006) and cyber café customers in Uganda (Gitta & Ikoja-Odongo, 2003). However, the information needs of these Internet users, which in a sense is what communication is all about (information exchange) are not exactly the same even for those living in the same contexts. What is similar, is a degree of reliance on informal social networks to meet their information needs (Dutta, 2009; Wei et al., 2003) which is the mainstay of SNSs. Social networking sites have been identified as one of the primary tools, (in addition to instant messaging which they inherently offer), that enable creation and maintaining of social interconnections that quench the information thirst of Internet users (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009). It thus follows that at the heart of SNSs use is the primary need to keep in touch with family, friends and acquaintances, coupled up with the potential to expand one's circle of friends (Jones & Fox, 2009). This, of course, is a basic illustration of the informational motivation of social media use and indeed as SNSs technologies have expanded, more and complex user needs are now fulfilled through these mediums. These needs have been theorised as to be predicated on personality traits (Ross et al., 2009; Zywicki & Danowski, 2008) which have been proven to be strongly associated with the possibility of engaging in conversations on social media (Correa, Hinsley, & de Zúñiga, 2010).

To measure the motivations of social media users, researchers have employed an array of metrics that follow Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch's (1974) uses and gratifications research findings on regular motivations for media use; information and surveillance versus entertainment and diversion (See Shah, Rojas, & Cho, 2009). It is important to note that a majority of the studies have relied on self-reported usage as opposed to usage logs, or direct observation in experimental format (Boulianne, 2015). Beyond motivations, other indicators of social media usage have included number of SNSs used, time spent on social media (Zaheer & Zaheer, 2016), frequency of use (all on a daily, weekly or monthly basis), breadth of interaction (Livingstone, Bober, & Helsper, 2005) a comparison of the time spent on SNSs as proportion of overall time spent on the Internet, number of friends/followers on SNSs (Olufadi, 2016) and

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consumption of political information or current event news. These operational definitions of this complex construct (social media use) are not without imperfections. For instance, when self-reports of time spent on social media are used, respondents have been proven<sup>1</sup> to be susceptible to cognitive bias (Krosnick, 1991) leading to under or overestimations as well as a tendency to respond in a socially desirable manner. Use of categorical choices on the other hand as opposed leaving it open-ended may force respondents to enter a response that is not particularly their correct one and potentially represents a priori bias on the researcher's end (See Junco, 2013). Studies focussing only on one type of SNS for example, Facebook (Zaheer & Zaheer, 2016), Twitter (Chen, 2011) or Instagram (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016), while providing a more nuanced perspective of use (since each SNS is designed, to a large extent, for a particular purpose and potentially offers a unique benefit to users), are unable to capture the overall fact that most social media users are active in one or more platform (Duggan, Ellison, Lampe, Lenhart, & Madden, 2015). As research by Mehmood and Taswir (2013) shows, social media users can use the different SNS accounts they have for diverse purposes.

As pointed out in Olufadi's (2016) work on designing a standardised scale that measures time use on SNSs, to eliminate some of these challenges it is helpful to focus social media use as related to a particular set of activities (i.e. the users' task) and therefore compare this to any outcome of interest. Olufadi argues that '...the relationship between SNSs usage and some outcomes of interest (e.g., wellbeing) may depend on the type of usage' (2016, p. 32). It follows that the outcome of interest for this study is young people's political participation in the public sphere and the type of social media usage the study investigates of its study population, is of political nature. This presents another difficulty of pinning down the kind of a user's social media activity that can be classified as political or not. The next segment explores conceptualisations of political participation both on social media and in the offline world.

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<sup>1</sup> Junco (2013) study comparing actual and self-reported measures of Facebook use and details the limitations of using self-report as a measure of time use on the SNSs.

### 3. POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Citizen participation is an integral part of a democracy. Through participation, citizens have the ability to voice their grievances, make their demands heard as well as call for accountability and responsiveness in government (Teorell, Torcal, & Montero, 2007). This can happen in multiple venues and can take different forms such as voting during elections, street demonstrations, public rallies, emailing political leaders and signing petitions. Political participation is an umbrella concept (Huntington & Nelson, 1976) for an array of participatory actions taken by citizens in democratic societies.

In their seminal work, Verba and Nie (1972) defined political participation as 'those [legal] activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of government personnel and/or the actions that they take' (p. 2). This moves beyond mere electoral participation and ceremonial activities where citizens are mobilised to support government initiatives to give an illusion of public participation. This classic conceptualisation is broadened by Teorell et al. (2007) who expanded on Brady's (1999) articulation that any action by 'ordinary citizens that is directed toward influencing some political outcomes' (p. 737) constitutes political participation. Teorell et al. (2007) argue that acts that lead to 'any political outcome' which do not necessarily involve influencing political leaders (e.g. corporates) need to be considered as political participation.

The present study focusses on activities by 'everyday citizens', as opposed to professional politicians or paid lobbyists, that involve attempts to influence the decisions made by the political class from the most miniscule acts to the very risky and resource intensive. While the above conceptualisations of political participation relate to offline activities such as running for office, voting and attending a public protest, the same is applicable in online behaviours that can be described as political such as signing an online petition, posting a blog or social media post or spreading awareness about a political issue on SNSs (See Theocharis, 2015). This can be represented by the concept of 'political SNS use' which denotes using a social networking site for explicitly political reasons (Bode, Vraga, Borah, & Shah, 2013). Political SNS use can be situated as a unique form of online political expression beyond generic online

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political participation in the sense that 'it captures the ability of individuals to not only exchange information about politics but also to publically affiliate themselves with a group' (Bode et al., 2013, p. 415).

This distinctiveness becomes more apparent when considering three major determinants of political participation as posited by Verba, Scholzman, and Brady (1995); resources (skills, time, money), mobilisation (actors getting encouraged to get involved in political conversation, event etc.) and engagement (political interest and motivation to get engaged). Political use of SNSs requires significantly reduced amount of resources as compared to offline political activities which has led researchers to conceptualise SNSs as a tool for the politically disengaged and marginalised in the society (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010; Holt, Shehata, Strömbäck, & Ljungberg, 2013; Leyva, 2017; Morris & Morris, 2013) . While knowledge of how a particular SNS platform works is essential to potentially use it for political purposes, the time spent gaining these skills and money used is nothing compared to traditional routes to participation. In fact, Livingstone et al. (2005) observe that increasing expertise in using online platforms beyond the basic does not necessarily lead to more political activity. This can be further explained by research that shows political use of SNS is strongly associated with political interest (third determinant) in that those who engage in political conversation on social media are those with higher levels of political interest (Bode & Dalrymple, 2016).

Political interest, on the other hand, has been hypothesised to be predicated, to some extent, by early political socialisation (Rapeli & Koskimaa, 2015; Wiseman, Astiz, Fabrega, & Baker, 2011), a widely-debated theory (Koff & Von Der Muhll, 1967; Mattes, 2012; Quintelier, 2013) which if we are to accept it, means political use of SNS has less to do with the affordances of the platforms. Nevertheless, there is evidence to suggest that social media provides a unique environment for political socialisation beyond the traditional agents; parents, school, media, and voluntary associations (Langton, 1969, p. 5). Social media users are subject to 'incidental exposure' (Yonghwan Kim, Chen, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2013; Valeriani & Vaccari, 2016) to political information which can potentially boost their political knowledge (learning) (Dimitrova, Shehata, Strömbäck, & Nord, 2014) from which, at least in theory, they can be receptive to

online political mobilisation (See Galais, 2013). The implied causality between incidental exposure to political information on social media and political interest is not empirically established (Boulianne, 2015), although a strong association has been found (See Boulianne, 2011; Kahne & Bowyer, 2018).

#### 4. TRANSFORMATIVE EFFECTS?

*Young people are capable, when aroused, of bringing down the towers of oppression and raising the banners of freedom – Nelson Mandela.*

(Mandela, Hatang, Venter, & Abrams, 2012, p. 106)

Many scholars have fronted the argument that social media use nurtures orientations that pave the way for political participation (Bode, 2012; Boulianne, 2015; Dimitrova et al., 2014; Ward & Vedel, 2006). The underlying hypothesis is that besides reducing the costs of participation and facilitating mobilisation practices, social media platforms also change the way citizens think, feel and behave in the public arena (Galais, 2013). They posit that social media use is associated with not only online political behaviours but also offline political practices. This suggested relationship between social media use, and both online and offline political participation has been studied over the last decade with researchers yet to reach a consensus over the consequences of SNSs in the political realm. This empirical literature can be grouped into three factions (See Leyva, 2017) based on findings of similar significance.

The first faction presents the most optimistic findings that social media use is significantly associated with an increase in online and offline political participation, especially among young people. De Zúñiga, Molyneux, and Zheng (2014) report that informational use of social media (particularly, news) has a direct effect on online political participation and an indirect effect on offline political participation. Holt et al. (2013) findings suggest frequent use of social media by young people can act as a leveller by encouraging political participation over time. Kahne, Lee, & Feezell (2013) found that young people's engagement in certain forms of

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nonpolitical activity online can serve as a gateway to political participation. These implied transformative effects, however, may only be applicable to the 'young citizens' demographic who, as Xenos et al. (2014) observe, have relatively weak political habits and relatively undeveloped political identities (See Boulianne, 2015). The arguments are largely based on the *activation hypothesis* (Leticia Bode, 2017; Yonghwan Kim et al., 2013; Mercea, 2012; Rojas & Puig-i-Abril, 2009) that postulates social media experiences activates users' sense of personal and collective efficacy which might eventually increase their likelihood of broader political participation (Leticia Bode, 2017; Halpern, Valenzuela, & Katz, 2017). Information-seeking behaviours of the youth are seen to directly and indirectly activate political interest and participation (Kamau, 2017; Zaheer & Zaheer, 2016; Zhang, Johnson, Seltzer, & Bichard, 2010).

The second faction is less optimistic about the effects of social media use on, particularly, offline political participation. While social media reduces the cost of access to, and dissemination of information, evidence from this body of research shows that the potential for SNSs to increase youth offline political engagement has not been realised (See Baumgartner & Morris, 2010; Carlisle & Patton, 2013; Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010; Ternès, Mittelstädt, & Towers, 2014; Vissers & Stolle, 2014; Vitak et al., 2011). SNSs are seen to have failed to become useful antecedents for individual political efficacy (See Delli Carpini, 2004) which can be partly explained by the contention that SNSs are information-poor (See Baumgartner & Morris, 2010) for example due to the echo-chamber effect enabled by algorithms. In their study of political use of online media by college students in the 2008 US election, Kushin and Yamamoto (2010) found that attention to social media was not significantly related to offline political involvement, but it was significantly related to online political involvement. In the early stages of the 2008 presidential primary season, Baumgartner and Morris (2010) reported a positive significant association between SNS use and online political participation but an insignificant association with offline political activity implying that 'their [study population] political participation seems limited to internet activity, and they do not seem to be more likely to vote' (2010, p. 38). The political activity here being majorly 'feel-good' or low-cost online activities

that have been referred to as 'slacktivism'<sup>2</sup> since they do not require much commitment e.g. 'liking' or 'retweeting' a political post (Morozov, 2009). There, however, is some optimism that, over time, these activities could lead to offline political participation (Christensen, 2011; Rotman et al., 2011).

Social media use in the last body of research has been reported to have a minor or no significant effect on young citizens' online and offline political participation. Evidence from this empirical faction suggests that factors other than SNS use, such as; political talk (Bakker & de Vreese, 2011; Moeller, de Vreese, Esser, & Kunz, 2014), prior political and civic participation (Theocharis & Quintelier, 2016), political interest, political efficacy (Park, 2015; Zhang et al., 2010), political knowledge (Hargittai & Shaw, 2013) are the strongest predictors of both types of political participation. This research provides support to Pippa Norris' (2001) *Reinforcement hypothesis* that new online communication tools will have a reinforcing effect for citizens already connected through traditional means e.g. lobbyists, party members and grassroots activists, rather than a mobilising one. This viewpoint is highly debated (See Seggaard, 2015) in its claim that political use of SNSs and other online media actually reinforces rather than reduces the existing political inequalities between groups in society (Fuller, 2004; Sipior & Ward, 2005; Strandberg, 2008).

## 5. THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In line with the above empirical factions, this study is situated in media effects theories, specifically, the limited effects strand which takes into consideration the selectivity of media use. The theory of emphasis here is *uses and gratifications theory* (UGT) which while it focuses on communication at the mass media scale, is of relevance in the face of today's computer-mediated communication by giving researchers a 'perspective through which a number of ideas and theories about media choice, consumption, and even impact can be viewed' (Baran

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<sup>2</sup> A term that describes 'feel-good' online activism. "It gives...an illusion of having a meaningful impact on the world without demanding anything more than joining a Facebook group" (Morozov, 2009, para. 1)

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& Davis, 2011, p. 416). The driving question for UGT is 'what do people do with media?' which is a departure from powerful effects theories such as the *hypodermic needle* that asks 'what do media do to people?' It acknowledges human beings as active agents in the media consumption process who deliberately choose the media content they consume according to their needs, i.e. their media use is goal-oriented (Baran & Davis, 2011). This conjures the notion of an array of alternatives at the disposal of users despite human needs being limitless. As such, Matei (2010) argues UGT's explanatory power lies in accepting the postulate that 'given certain needs, only some media will be able to satisfy needs' (Matei, 2010, para. 5). This study broadly identifies information (political, social etc.) as a need that youth would seek to satisfy in their choice of social media use and SNSs aptly enable this based on their low-cost and other affordances previously discussed. Matei (2010) conceives that, from a UGT perspective, if indeed there are any *effects* of this goal-oriented media consumption, they are consciously or at least 'actionally' intended. With the youth being largely seen as disengaged in politics for various reasons ranging from apathy to structural barriers and social media promising to level the field, a UGT approach is deemed important in investigating political use (or lack of) of social media and the (un)intended effects on their participation in the public realm.

This 'public' realm is conceptualised by Habermas (1974) not as content, place or medium of communication, but rather as the mode (Dahlberg, 2014) of 'publicness' where private citizens converge to critically deliberate over matters of concern to the collective and potentially lead to critically (in)formed public opinion. Such public opinion, Habermas argues would enable democratic scrutiny allowing citizens to impact decisions made by public officials – which maps into our conceptualisation of political participation. Habermas' conception read in its normative aspect, has attracted criticisms that it is exclusionary of, especially, marginalised groups in its formulation (Lyotard, 1984; Thomassen, 2007; See Dahlberg, 2014 on merits of these critiques). The possibility of SNSs exhibiting characteristics of the ideal public sphere has been widely debated (Çela, 2015; Kruse, Norris, & Flinchum, 2018) with huge doubts being raised of the deliberative qualities of conversations in SNSs as a whole. There, however, is a possibility that SNSs can serve social media and the public sphere (See Shirky, 2011) by, in the least, bringing aboard the voices of the marginalised. In terms of the extent of participation

and the possibility of influencing government action, underlying economic and status inequalities (See Bourdieu, 1984 on cultural capital) are expected to hinder participatory parity (Gibson, Lewando-Hundt, & Blaxter, 2014). As such, a manifestation of Nancy Fraser's (1990) weak/strong publics distinction is expected – *weak publics* here seen in terms of a tendency towards both online and offline slacktivism<sup>3</sup>.

Proceeding from a *uses and gratifications* underpinning, the present study engages with the findings from the three empirical functions discussed above to investigate the relationship between social media use and political participation in the Kenyan context. As mentioned earlier, Kenya provides a unique case study of a low-income country that is gradually democratising but is still plagued by incidents of human rights abuses and ethnic-based violence (as well as ethnic-based political organisation), a near-perfect environment where social media's liberating potential can be put to test. Since this is an exploratory study, no hypotheses were formulated (Ding, Er, & Orey, 2018) and instead, the design and analysis were guided by the following research questions.

**Research Question 1:** Among Kenyan youth, what are the strengths of association between SNS usage frequency, political use of SNSs and online and offline political participation?

**Research Question 2:** Does online political participation mediate offline political participation?

## 6. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the research strategy and methodological tools developed by this project to answer the research questions. To begin with, I provide a justification for using the survey as the appropriate method for the project and review its advantages and limitations. I then lay out the sampling strategy followed by a detailed account of the operationalization process.

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<sup>3</sup> Activities that can be described as offline slacktivism include low-engagement activities such as wearing awareness wristbands, safety pins and bumper stickers. These activities may, however, cost some significant amount or be high risk in some contexts and as such not considered slacktivist.

Finally, I present the statistical techniques used to analyse the data, ending with a summary of steps taken to ensure the research is ethically sound and a note on reflexivity.

### 7. RESEARCH STRATEGY

The study uses the survey method to explore the association between social media use and online and offline political participation. This approach enables the researcher to identify patterns of response from a small sample of youth in Kenya, from which a potentially precise estimate of the entire youth population in the country can be made (Fowler, 2001; Schmidt et al., 1985). It has been proven useful in identifying and describing the characteristics of a population (Fowler, 2001) and even more importantly, survey research seeks out explanatory factors of a phenomenon (De Vaus, 2002) by comparing cases (e.g. people) and how they vary on some characteristics and explains how variables are related (Buchanan & Hvizdak, 2009). This is very much in line with the research questions whose combined objective is to explore the political participation (both offline and online) phenomenon among Kenyan youth to find out if social media use and any other characteristics of the population are systematically linked to it. When compared to the experimental method, however, this style of research falls short of taking the analysis to the next stage of establishing causality (Lappe, 2000) after determining certain characteristics of the population are systematically linked to the phenomenon. In this regard, it only provides a possibility to predict an outcome variable(s) (characteristic), given the predictor(s) is correlated with it (De Vaus, 2001). It also (and especially since a self-administered questionnaire over the Internet was used), lacks the context-rich data provided by methods that involve focus group discussions, case studies, unstructured interviewing and participant observation (Byrne, 2001; Yilmaz, 2013). The inability to follow-up on responses, limits survey research to general trends which may not be sufficient to explain the underlying reasons for the phenomenon (Beiske, 2003). The validity of results from the online survey may be impacted greatly if important respondents are left out either due to nonresponse (Dooley & Lindner, 2003) or sampling errors (Hwang & Fesenmaier, 2004).

In spite of this, the alternative methods listed above have been evaluated to be lacking generalisability, be incapable of replication and overly rely on subjective interpretations of researchers (See De Vaus, 2002, p. 5). The advancement in survey software solutions that combine data collection and entry into one step (Dillman, 2008) made this method a suitable choice for the researcher as it comes with the ability to access the population of social media users in Kenya while in London (Wright, 2005), effectively eliminating travel costs (Yun & Trumbo, 2006) and allowing more time for piloting and analysis (Ilieva, Healey, & Baron, 2002).

### 8. SAMPLING

The study initially targeted university students in Kenya's 74 higher learning institutions as used in numerous studies on this topic (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010; Hargittai & Shaw, 2013; Kim & Khang, 2014; Zhang & Lin, 2007; Rudy, 2017). Students samples are arguably the most easily accessible (Usunier, 2006) to academics and apart from inherent cost and time savings, it is argued that they are 'people too' and as such 'certain topics are appropriately understood and tested by using student sample' (Payne & Chappell, 2008, p. 184). Validity and generalisability concerns are frequently raised about student samples. From a population of 500,000 university students (Commission for University Education, 2016) and a chosen margin of error of 5% and a confidence level of 95%, a sample size of 400 students was decided on using Van Dessel's (2013) formula. Eight universities, one from each of the country's now-defunct eight provinces (Barkan, 1993) were to be sampled with 50 respondents sought from each.

This strategy was, however, abandoned after one month of data collection due to an incredibly low response rate (Deutskens, de Ruyter, Wetzels, & Oosterveld, 2004) occasioned by a nonexistence of working student email system in all but one of the universities chosen. Only 13 responses had been collected in one month which is far beyond the expected average response time of 5.6 days (Ilieva et al., 2002) for internet surveys. This is from a sampling frame (Barlett, Kotrlik, & Higgins, 2001) of 16,000 students (accessible population) from the

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Technical University of Kenya from which 370 respondents were sought (See Van Dessel, 2013).

It was thus decided that a convenience sample (Cooksey & McDonald, 2011) be chosen to enable the researcher to meet the project time limits (Domegan & Fleming, 2007). This consisted of sending the survey link via WhatsApp to university students and recent graduates known to the researcher and urging them to forward it to their WhatsApp contacts who fit the 18-35 age criteria, mimicking a snowball sample (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981) from which 222 responses were recorded bringing the total of eligible respondents included in the analysis to 235. The 18-35 age group was chosen in part, based on the 2010 Kenya Constitution that defines youth as individuals between those two ages but also because it reflects the realities of a country where more 70 percent of the population is below 35 years, but only 13 percent (Namu, 2017) of those who ran (See Lang'at & Ochieng, 2017) for the 1,882 elective positions in the 2017 general election were within this age band. This is in addition to them constituting 70% of social media users in Kenya (Riaga, 2014) with near-similar access to the Internet (Wyche, Smyth, Chetty, Aoki, & Grinter, 2010).

While non-probabilistic (See Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009), a convenience sample can be advantageous in exploratory research (Fricker & Schonlau, 2002) where the aim is to find out if a phenomenon exists based on existing research, when applied to a new context as in this study. Boulianne's (2015) meta-analysis found that studies using a random sample of youth, for example, were more likely to produce statistically significant findings than other types of samples and as such the chosen sample, while not random, would provide a good comparison to such findings. With this method, however, variability and bias cannot be measured or controlled (Acharya, Prakash, Saxena, & Nigam, 2013) which births low representativeness and thus the ability to make generalisations about the study population is limited.

## 9. PARTICIPANTS

The survey was designed and administered using the Qualtrics online survey software (Version, June - August 2018) with an average completion time of 9 minutes. A pilot study was first conducted on 10 students in the form of Lavrakas' (2008) modified version of 'respondent debriefing' (Campanelli, Martin, & Rothgeb, 1991; Hess & Singer, 1995) to detect flaws in the questionnaire (Czaja & Blair, 1996) from which the research instrument was refined (Hansen, 1998) to reflect more probable political participation activities in the Kenyan context beyond the researcher's experience, and to reduce the cognitive burden (Lenzner, Kaczmirek, & Lenzner, 2010) which can compromise response quality (Bowling, 2005). To prevent item nonresponse (Reja, Manfreda, Hlebec, & Vehovar, 2003), open-ended questions were avoided with no 'neutral' responses provided, while a forced-response design was chosen for all questions and incomplete responses deleted to ensure a complete data-set (Stieger, Reips, & Voracek, 2007). Reverse-coding of scale items was not utilised to prevent systematic error (Schriesheim & Hill, 1981) and no incentives were given (See Saunders et al., 2009 on uninformed response).

Of the 235 included in the analysis, 20.9% were in the 18-23 age group, 62.5% (24-29) and only 19.7% (30-35). Male respondents were 64% and females 36% which does not reflect the near 50-50 national gender ratios (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2017). On ethnicity, the sample consisted of 30% Meru, 25% Kikuyu, 10% Luhya, 12% Luo, 7% Kisii, 6% Kalenjin and 2% Kamba which doesn't fall far off national averages (Africa Studies Center, n.d.; Aswani, 2018). 14.9% reported they had a college diploma or below, 23% were undergraduate students, 51.5% had a Bachelor's degree and 10.6% had a Master's degree. In addition, 27.7% reported that their parents had secondary school education or below, 38.7% college diploma or certificate and 33.6% Bachelor's degree or above. Self-reported monthly household income was used as a measure of socioeconomic status (SES) where 13.2% were *low SES* (Below KSh.20,000), 31.5% *lower middle SES* (KSh.20,000 - KSh.50,000), 24.7% *middle SES* (KSh.51,000 - KSh.100,000), 14.9% *upper middle SES* (KSh.101,000 - KSh. 200,000) and 15.7% *high SES* (Above KSh.200,000). 46.4% indicated they have lived most of their lives in rural areas while 53.6%

were urban dwellers. Age, ethnicity, education level were not included in the analysis due to disproportionality within the sample. Parent's education level was excluded in favour of self-reported household income as a measure for SES.

## 10. DEPENDENT VARIABLES

Political participation in this study was divided into two categories; online political participation and offline political participation. The typology of online political participation is partly adopted from Vitak et al. (2011) and modified to fit the Kenyan situation based on the results of the pilot study. A 7-item scale<sup>4</sup> was developed where participants were asked to report online political activities which they engaged in over the last 12 months. They included; (1) clicked "like" or "favourite (♥)" on a political image or story on social media (2) signed an online petition about a political or social issue (3) made a social media post that mentions politics (4) used social media to spread information about a political party or politician (5) posted a photo/video of someone at a political event (6) created a political group on social media and (7) used social media to spread awareness of a political or social issue. The responses were coded 1 = *yes* and 0 = *no* and totalled ( $M = 2.8$ ,  $SD = 2.1$ ,  $\alpha = 0.79$ ) to create a composite index for *Online Participation*, ranging from 0 (no online participation) to 7 (high online participation).

To measure traditional/offline political participation, the scale proposed by Pizzorno (1970) was adopted and modified to reflect the Kenyan situation. An 8-item scale<sup>4</sup> was then developed requiring respondents to report traditional political activities they took part in in the last 12 months. The questions included; (1) campaigned for a politician or political party by, for example, passing out pamphlets or placing posters etc. (2) helped to organize a political event/meeting (3) attended a political protest or demonstration (4) been a candidate for office (e.g. student union) (5) became an active member of a political party (6) attended a political

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<sup>4</sup> Both scales were split into half, separated by distractor questions to avoid straight-lining (Yujin Kim, Dykema, Stevenson, Black, & Moberg, 2018)

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rally/meeting or national celebration (7) contacted a public official or a political leader, and (8) wore a t-shirt, hoodie, wristband, hat or cap supporting a party/candidate. Responses were coded as 1 = *yes* and 0 = *no* and totalled ( $M = 1.6$ ,  $SD = 2.1$ ,  $\alpha = .83$ ) to create a composite index *Offline Participation* ranging from 0 (no offline participation) to 8 (high offline participation). Composite indices are imperfect measures of social phenomena involving a delicate balance of building blocks (See Mazziotta & Pareto, 2013 for an extended discussion) and as Leyva (2017) notes of political activity indices, measuring a range of actions rather than the frequency of involvement in them can limit the breath of analysis. For an exploratory study as this one and with the indices' internal consistencies well above the acceptable lower threshold, these measures are deemed useful.

Whether respondents voted in the hotly contested August 8, 2017 Kenya general election was conceived as a standalone political participation activity owing to the ethnic nature of Kenyan elections which makes voting, in a sense, analogous to a tribal mobilisation *event*. The mass boycott of the rerun by members of tribes (Burke, 2017; Fick, 2017) affiliated to the opposition after President Uhuru Kenyatta's victory was nullified, provides some proof of this. Responses were coded as 1 = *yes* and 0 = *no* to create a binary variable *Voted in August 2017 General Election*.

### 11. CONTROL VARIABLES

Demographic variables were coded as follows: Gender; 1 = female, 2 = male, 3 = other; SES; 1 = low SES, 2 = middle SES and so on for Education Level, Parent Education and Region. Age was recorded as a continuous variable. Additional measures to control for traditional psychographic predictors of participation were synthesised from Leyva's (2017) UK millennials' study.

Political socialization was measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale asking respondents the extent to which they agreed with four statements (See Appendix C) coded from 5 = *totally agree*; 1 = *totally disagree*. The scores were averaged ( $M = 2.6$ ,  $SD: 1.1$ ,  $\alpha = .67$ ) to create a variable for *Early Political Socialisation* ranging from 1 (very low socialisation) to 5 (very high socialisation). While internal consistency is below .70, this was deemed acceptable based on previous use.

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Due to a less established left-right divide in Kenya, political ideology was conceptualised as party affiliation where respondents were given 5 options coded as 4 = *Jubilee*, 3 = *Nasa*, 2 = *Kanu*, 1 = *Other* and 0 = *None*. They were asked to self-report their political affiliation (*Jubilee* 37.4%,  $M = 2.27$ ,  $SD = 1.8$ ).

Political knowledge was measured using four multiple-choice questions adopted from the list fronted by Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) and modified to reflected the Kenyan situation. There were five possible answers (See Appendix C) listed for each question, with the correct answer coded as 1 and the rest 0. The scores were totalled ( $M = 2.2$ ,  $SD = 1.2$ ,  $\alpha = .45$ ) to form a variable for *political knowledge* ranging from 0 (no knowledge) to 4 (very high knowledge) depending on how many questions the respondent got right. While this measure produced very low internal reliability coefficient, it was deemed useful as the scale has been previously validated as an effective measure of political knowledge (See also Hargittai & Shaw, 2013).

*Political interest* was measured by requiring respondents to report their level of interest in politics on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 = not at all interested to 4 = very interested (moderately interested 40.4%,  $M = 2.9$ ,  $SD = .9$ ).

## 12. SOCIAL MEDIA USE VARIABLES

Social media use was measured using a 7-item list of SNSs regularly used by Kenyan youth at the time of conducting the study (Soko Directory, 2018). Respondents were required to indicate how regularly they used each of the SNSs within a month. Responses were coded as *frequently* = 5, *often* = 4, *sometimes* = 3, *rarely* = 2 and *never* = 1. The score was averaged ( $M = 3.4$ ,  $SD = .62$ ) to create a composite variable for *social media use* ranging from 1 (no SNS use) to 5 (very high SNS use).

*Political use of SNSs* was measured by asking respondents to report how often they used social media for political purposes such as posting/sharing/reading political posts on a scale ranging from *never* = 1 to *frequently* = 5 ( $M = 3.3$ ,  $SD = 1.3$ ). *Incidental exposure* to political SNSs content was measured by asking respondents to report how often they encountered content they

deemed to be political in nature when they logged on to social media for other purposes (Always 48.9%,  $M= 3.35$ ,  $SD = .71$ ).

### **13.ETHICS AND REFLEXIVITY**

The researcher complied with LSE's code of research ethics where a checklist was filled under the guidance of the academic supervisor before proceeding with data collection (LSE, 2018). Respondents were required to read a compulsory consent form outlining their voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any time. The purpose of the research was masked to some degree to minimise demand effects.

The researchers' experiences using social media and in the Kenyan political scene may have indirectly affected the final measures employed in the research instrument which, in a sense, may have limited the breath of the respondents' responses. This was, however, countered by conducting a pilot study which contributed to a review of the survey before it was administered to the sample. But due to the small number of respondents in the pilot and lack of face-to-face interactions, it is possible that some aspects were not captured. Drawing on scales whose reliability has been ascertained in other studies, to some extent cushioned the study against this. As outlined earlier, the decision to use a convenience sample comes with several drawbacks on external validity due to the subjective nature of sample selection. A great deal of effort was put into encouraging respondents known to the researcher to invite their contacts to respond and to ask of their contacts do the same. The study utilised Qualtrics' anonymous link where the researcher couldn't identify any response as belonging to a particular participant.

### **14.RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **14.1 Analysis Strategy**

In answering RQ1, three hierarchical regression models (two ordinary least squares and one binomial logistic) were constructed to determine what demographic, psychographic and social

media use factors predict (1) online participation, (2) offline participation and (3) voting in the August 8, 2017, general election, respectively. Demographics and other control variables were entered in the first block and social media use variables in the second. Hierarchical multiple regression modelling was chosen as an appropriate statistical method based on previous studies in this topic that have reported its ability to detect the predictive power of key variables beyond demographics (Dubois & Blank, 2018; Yang & DeHart, 2016) and to neutralise specification error (Leyva, 2017).

To answer RQ2, a mediation analysis was conducted employing the simple mediation model (See Hayes, 2009) under the postulation that *social media use* exerts an effect on *offline political participation* through *online political participation* (intervening/mediating variable). On Hayes' (2013) PROCESS Macro v3.1 (Model 4) the three variables were entered as predictor, mediator and outcome accordingly. Bootstrap estimates were set at 5,000 for significance testing (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). This method is chosen as it helps to shed light on the magnitude and significance of indirect effects (Rucker, Preacher, Tormala, & Petty, 2011). This is, of course, with a realisation that mediation analysis doesn't imply causal relationships in non-experimental designs.

## 15.RESULTS

### 15.1 Social media use and offline participation

The result from the first model show that respondents with higher political interest ( $\beta = .58$ ,  $P < .05$ ) and those who use SNSs more frequently for political purposes ( $\beta = .368$ ,  $P < .05$ ) were more likely to engage in offline political activities. Surprisingly, respondents with higher political knowledge ( $\beta = -.346$ ,  $P < .05$ ) were less likely to do so, as well as female respondents ( $\beta = -.605$ ,  $P < .05$ ). While it would have been largely expected that female respondents would be less politically engaged, unequal sample sizes for both genders could have contributed to the high coefficient.

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Early political socialisation, political party and household income were not found to be statistically significant predictors despite being significant correlates of offline political participation. SNS use rate and incidental exposure to politics on social media were also not statistically significant unique predictors suggesting that merely using SNSs (where inevitably political information is encountered on the timeline) is not enough to mobilise users into offline political practices. The first block (control variables) explained 24% of the variation in offline political participation ( $R^2 = .24$ ,  $F = 10.025$ ,  $P < .05$ ) with a statistically significant  $R^2$  change of 0.04 in the second block of social media use variables ( $R^2 = .28$ ,  $F = 8.555$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ) indicating an overall relatively low effect of social media use on offline political activity even though the predictive capacity is significant.

Table 1. Political Participation by Social Media Use Variables.

	Offline Participation	Online Participation	Voted in the August Election
<b>First block</b>			
<i>Control Variables</i>			
Political Interest	.80*** (.15)	1.06*** (.15)	.03 (.03)
Early Socialisation	-.25* (.12)	-.26* (.12)	.02 (.02)
Political Knowledge	-.31** (.12)	.01 (.12)	.04 (.02)
Gender	-.80** (.28)	-.50 (.27)	-.08 (.06)
Political Party	.07 (.07)	-.06 (.07)	.05**(.01)
Household Income	-.16 (.10)	.05 (.10)	-.02 (.02)
Region	-.25 (.25)	-.49 (.25)	.07 (.05)
R Square	.24***	.28***	.09**
<b>Second Block and Final Model</b>			
<i>Control Variables</i>			
Political Interest	.58*** (.16)	.70*** (.15)	.02 (.03)
Early Socialisation	-.19 (.12)	-.136 (.11)	.02 (.02)
Political Knowledge	-.35** (.12)	-.09 (.11)	.04 (.02)
Gender	-.61** (.28)	-.18 (.26)	-.06 (.06)
Political Party	.09 (.07)	-.03 (.06)	.05**(.02)
Household Income	-.19 (.10)	-.00 (.10)	-.02 (.02)
Region	-.25 (.25)	-.41 (.23)	.05 (.05)
<i>Social Media use variables</i>			
Political SNS Use	.39** (.11)	.50*** (.10)	.02 (.02)

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SNS Use Rate	.14 (.20)	.36 (.19)	.07 (.04)
Incidental Exposure	-.11 (.18)	.304 (.17)	-.05 (.04)
R <sup>2</sup> Change	.04**	.11***	.02
Total R <sup>2</sup>	.28***	.39***	.12**
N	235	235	235

Note. Estimates for all the three columns are unstandardized coefficients. All columns have standard errors in parenthesis. R<sup>2</sup> is unadjusted. \*p ≤ .05. \*\*p ≤ .01. \*\*\*p ≤ .001.

### 16. SOCIAL MEDIA USE AND ONLINE PARTICIPATION

Results from the second model show that respondents with greater political interest ( $\beta = 1.05$ ,  $P < .05$ ) and those who use SNSs more for political purposes ( $\beta = .498$ ,  $P < .05$ ) are more likely to engage in online political activities. Early political socialisation, political knowledge, gender, SNS use rate and incidental exposure to political material on SNSs were not statistically significant predictors despite being significant correlates of online political participation (See Appendix A). While other individual social media use variables were found to be statistically insignificant unique predictors, the second block improved the model by a significant R<sup>2</sup> change of 0.111 (R<sup>2</sup> = .39,  $F = 14.404$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ) as compared to the control variables block (R<sup>2</sup> = .28,  $F = 12.66$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). As such, political use of SNSs can be said to have a relatively high predictive power as a unique incremental predictor of online political participation. This inference is especially acceptable when compared to the much lower (4%) variance accounted for by the same variables in the first model (predicting offline participation). Political SNSs use is singled out because it was the only variable with a significant effect among SNS use variables.

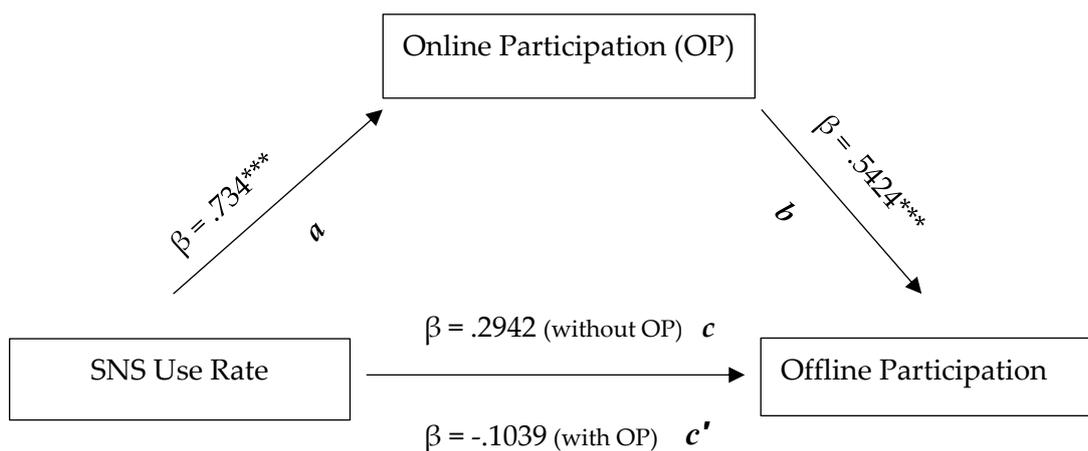
### 17. SOCIAL MEDIA USE AND VOTING

The third model shows that only a respondent's political party was a significant predictor of voting in the Kenya August 8, 2017, general election ( $\beta = .049$ ,  $P < .05$ ) with the non-affiliated being the least likely to vote and Jubilee Party supporters as the most likely to vote. The social

media use variables increased the total variance explained by the entire model ( $R^2 = .12$ ,  $F = 2.98$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ) by only 1.8% which was not statistically significant. This is despite political use of SNS being a significant correlate of the outcome variable. This result indicates that use of SNSs, whether for political reasons or otherwise, was not significantly associated with voting in the August 8, 2017 election.

## 18. SOCIAL MEDIA USE AND OFFLINE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Results of the first step in the mediation analysis show that SNS use rate did not have a significant total effect on offline political participation ( $\beta = .294$ ,  $SE = .21$ ,  $P = .18$ ). Although it was originally suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986) that if the association between the predictor (X) and outcome variable (Y) was not significant the mediation test should be abandoned, the researcher was convinced that there was a good theoretical background about their relationship to justify moving forward to the next step of the mediation analysis (see Shrout & Bolger, 2002 for a detailed justification). The direct effect of SNS use rate on offline political participation was similarly not statistically significant ( $\beta = -.104$ ,  $SE = .19$ ,  $P = .58$ ).



Estimated unstandardised indirect effect;  $\beta = .3981$ ,  $CI (.1558, .6649)$ .

*Figure 1. Mediation analysis indicating relations between social media use rate, online political participation and offline political participation. (Covariates are not included in this model).*

The bootstrap intervals for the estimated indirect effects suggest that online political participation ( $\beta = .398$ , *bootstrap* SE = .13; [CI] = [.1558, .6649],  $P = .58$ ) significantly and fully mediated the effects of SNS use rate on offline political participation. A second test was run with demographic variables as covariates and the results were effectively similar

### 19.DISCUSSION

Then results above indicate that while there is a slightly positive association between social media use rate and online political participation, SNS use rate is not a significant enough predictor of online participation. Instead, it is the level of respondents' interest in politics and the extent to which their social media use motivations are of a political nature, that are of significant predictive power regarding their online participation (slacktivist or otherwise). This finding is indeed plausible if we revisit the major determinants of political participation put forward by Verba et al. (1995) where apart from mobilisation and resources, political interest appears to be key. Consistent with results from Bode and Dalrymple's (2016) study, political use of SNSs was found to be significantly associated with political interest. As such, it is deducible that the low cost associated with using SNSs and the arguable ease with which mobilising agents can reach online actors, does little to motivate those with low interest in politics to participate in online political activities. In that regard, it is conceivable that participation in the online space has little to do with the affordances of the platforms and more to do with the motivations users have when going online. It is precisely this informatinal use of social media that this study broadly set out to investigate, pegged on what Baran and Davis (2011) theorised of human beings as goal-oriented media users from a uses and gratifications perspective.

In the offline realm, higher levels of political interest, as well as a greater frequency of using social media for political purposes among respondents, is found to significantly predict a higher likelihood of engaging in offline political activities. Similar to online participation, insofar as Verba et al.'s (1995) determinants of political participation are concerned, political interest seems to be key (although mobilisation was not controlled for). In what seems to be a

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paradoxical result, respondents with higher levels of political knowledge are found to be less likely to engage in offline political activities. While incidental exposure to political information on social media is found to be significantly associated with political knowledge as suggested in the literature review (Dimitrova et al., 2014), the assumption that higher political knowledge would make SNS users more receptive to political mobilisation as some scholars have suggested (Galais, 2013) is not supported by this study and points to other factors beyond the scope of this study. One potential explanation could be linked to a positive association with household income where higher SES individuals are more likely to have higher political knowledge but are (high SES individuals) significantly associated with a lower likelihood of being members of political parties, factors both (higher SES and no party affiliation) of which are significantly associated with a lower likelihood to participate in 'offline politics'. As Wang (2015) notes from a study in Taiwan, effects of political knowledge on participation vary by political systems and Kenya could represent a peculiar political system where the more politically knowledgeable citizens (which from the results of this study could mean higher SES individuals) are disincentivised to participate in offline activities, partly due to higher risks involved (Blomfield, 2017; Moore, 2018). This finding should, however, be taken with a pinch of salt owing to, as earlier mentioned, the low reliability score registered by the *political knowledge* composite scale. Female respondents, a demographic that is traditionally seen as less engaged (Verba, Burns, & Schlozman, 1997), were also less likely to participate in offline political activities. This can be partly explained by the fact that, from the sample, female respondents were associated with lower levels of, especially, political interest, membership to political parties and political SNS use. These are issues that have plagued women for ages, whose causes (Atkeson & Rapoport, 2003; Carpini & Keeter, 2000; Verba et al., 1997) are linked to various structural inequalities and persist to date, more so in developing countries like Kenya (Okoth, 2017).

Perhaps most stunning, was the finding that a respondent's political party membership was the only statistically significant predictor of whether they voted in the August 8, 2017 general election. This is despite having a positive statistically significant correlation with political knowledge and political interest and a negative statistically significant correlation with gender

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(female). A crosstabulation (See Appendix C) shows that respondents who don't belong to any political party are thrice as likely to not have voted in that election, as members of the two main political coalitions with Jubilee Party members having a slightly higher likelihood of voting than Nasa coalition supporters by four percentage points. For an election that was highly contested and with politicians as well as the electoral commission increasingly using social media to reach out to youthful would-be voters, the results imply that in terms of the traditional electoral participation, social media do not have a sufficient mobilising potential especially among the young demographic whose political identities are fairly underdeveloped (Loader et al., 2014). Voting was considered separately to account for the effects of tribe but the sample sizes (per tribe) were not similar enough to be meaningfully comparable, although, from the data there was an observable association between tribe and political party, a well-established fact (Nyambura, 2017) that makes Kenyan elections akin to a census.

But it is the result of the mediation analysis that crystallises the claim that social media can promote political participation, by determining a link (albeit, statistically insignificant) exists between social media use (broadly) and offline participation, which is traditionally viewed as the most consequential as far as influencing the decisions of political actors is concerned (See Theocharis, 2015). As previously discussed, the hypothesised route from being merely active on social media to actively participating in offline/traditional political activities is through a (political) informational use of SNSs which could be intentional or incidental to exposure on SNSs. For this to happen, however, the result shows that users have to be engaged in online political activities. In the presumed pseudo-causal model, social media use is supposed to lead to (or enable) online political participation, which in turn should lead to offline political participation. Instead of that direct link, the result shows that online political participation is in fact the real reason why social media use would be associated with offline political participation; both of which are best predicted by political interest and political SNS use as evidenced in the hierarchical regression models.

### 20. 'THE RICH GET RICHER'

This research thus falls within the third empirical faction discussed earlier that attributes (based on evidence) little to no effect of social media use on both online and offline political participation. While social media use was significantly correlated with online participation and not significantly correlated with offline participation as reported by studies in the second faction (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010; Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010), there seems to be stronger evidence supporting Pippa Norris' (2001) *reinforcement thesis* that instead of ameliorating youth political inequalities, SNSs are buttressing the status quo. It is effectively an extra tool for those individuals with a higher political interest, who can then advance their political goals online in addition to their already ongoing offline activities. The typically disengaged cohorts, who in this sample appear to be female respondents and those of high SES (a group that stands accused of political indifference in Kenya; see Obonyo, 2016; Odera, 2013; Wambugu, 2013) continue to lag behind both in their online and offline participation in spite of social media's arguable provision of alternative participation channels. It is important to note that there are only a few studies reporting instances of higher SES groups exhibiting political apathy such as Cho, Gimpel, & Wu (2006) who observed a similar trend but only among minorities in the USA. Stone (1974) and Munroe (1999) also found the same trend in Jamaica. This is against an overwhelming majority of studies that show a positive association between SES and political participation (Beeghley, 1986; Klingemann, 2009; Krauss, 2015).

The *activation hypothesis* has not been entirely dismissed given that even the respondents who exhibit lower levels of political interest are seen to, albeit occasionally, engage in online slacktivist activities such as commenting on or liking a political post which can be attributed to incidental exposure to political information (See Appendix A). However, the possibility of these cohorts engaging in offline political practices, such as joining political parties or attending a political protest cannot be determined by a cross-sectional study since the hypothesised effects would have to happen over time as suggested by Bode (2017). It would seem that regular use of social media can stimulate people with little political interest to increase their political involvement, provided that within their social media feeds they are

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regularly exposed to political posts from friends. This is in line with what Knoll, Matthes, & Heiss (2018) have recently argued that both intentional and incidental exposure to political information can lead to similar outcomes – which in my view, relates to an increasing political interest among SNS users with dissimilar motivations to be online. But until such a time when the activities of these cohorts are tracked over time to provide evidence of increased political participation in the offline realm, what currently is established is that only the first step in the *activation* process can be realised - online participation<sup>5</sup> - but of which the sense of individual political efficacy theorised to be the precursor to offline participation (Delli Carpini, 2004) has not been bolstered enough. If indeed this is the situation, that the extent of participation for low political interest cohorts aided by SNSs terminates at online slacktivist practices, then traditionally disengaged groups' only transition to becoming Fraser's (1990) *weak publics* whose participation's net effect is inconsequential in influencing decision making. It is important, however, to bear in mind Theocharis' (2015) argument on the soundness of the assumption that impactful political participation is limited to the offline realm. According to him, online participation should not be dismissed yet until the impact (or lack of) that it can have on democracy can be ascertained.

While results from this study almost unequivocally support previous work that identified political interest as the strongest predictor of political participation (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 2003; Klesner, 2003; W. Zhang et al., 2010), there are unanswered questions regarding political interest itself and how the 'the-rich-get-richer' effect can be countered via social media. Early political socialisation was, in the literature, suggested as one method of boosting the political interest of the young demographic by encouraging political discussion at a young age, but the association found was negative. This would indicate that socialisation at the primary-secondary school age would not have a lasting effect post-teenage as results from Schwarzzer's

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<sup>5</sup> It would be useful to consider that SNS use rate was a significant predictor of online political participation at the 10% significance level which was not the case for offline participation which in itself is a significant difference but more importantly, this suggests the need to investigate this effect in future studies involving more representative samples.

(2011) study seem to suggest. Instead, as suggested by Zhang et. al., (2010), to stimulate political participation, young citizens need to be encouraged to participate in more interpersonal conversations about politics. This holds true when considering that political use of SNSs and political interest are the strongest predictors of both online and offline participation and they are strongly and positively associated. It, however, is a chicken and egg situation as far as the causal (if it exists) direction is concerned. Either way, it is established that those who discuss political issues publicly (excluding private messages on SNSs) on social media are most likely to participate in the offline realm. As such, for political parties, candidates or pressure groups, strategies aimed at encouraging political conversation among social media users would be beneficial in mobilisation efforts.

The focus on information-oriented use of SNSs only gives us one perspective of the potential effects of social media on participation given that SNSs are first and foremost designed to serve social interaction needs (Sweetser & Weaver-Lariscy, 2008) and users possibly put SNSs to use more for non-political reasons than political ones. While informational motivations are suggested to have greater political impacts than social motivations of SNS use (Moy, Manosevitch, Stamm, & Dunsmore, 2005; Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001; Wellman, Haase, Witte, & Hampton, 2001), it would be useful to explore other social interactional and recreational uses of SNS especially in different political systems. This would allow us to revisit the time-displacement theory that the time spent online significantly reduces available time for engaging in political activities (Bugeja, 2004; Putnam, 2000).

## 21.LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The extent to which this study interrogates the difference in the rates of SNS use frequency, political SNS use, offline and online participation between typically engaged and disengaged youths is limited to associations revealed by Pearson correlation coefficients (See Appendix A). A more robust comparison of the groups assumed to have different levels of engagement (e.g. low SES vs high SES groups) would have been a Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) which would have a greater statistical power (Frost, 2017) in determining whether significant

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differences between the groups exist. This test could not be appropriately applied to this sample due to unequal sample sizes for the groups, which even after dividing (each variable) into three equal percentiles (IBM Knowledge Center, 2016) resultant groups could not be logically compared. It is thus suggested that stratified random sampling technique (Särndal, Swensson, & Wretman, 1992) be utilised in future studies examining differential political participation to ensure accurate comparison. The drawbacks of a convenient sample as earlier acknowledged mean that these findings cannot be generalisable to the youth population in Kenya but are nevertheless indicative of a possibly similar situation in the general population, in part due to consistency with studies in different contexts but are subject to confirmation by subsequent studies conducted in Kenya.

Further, as numerous alluded to in the literature (Bode, 2017; Christensen, 2011; Holt et al., 2013; Rotman et al., 2011) and discussed herein, the effects of social media use on political participation of the youth can perhaps be best observed over time to account for long term effects. A cross-sectional design therefore does not solve the causation quandary between the two (SNS use and participation), as well as related variables such as political knowledge and political interest. The few panel studies available (Dimitrova et al., 2014; Theocharis & Quintelier, 2016) lie within the third empirical faction in reporting that social media use does not, or weakly triggers political participation; with Boulianne's (2015) meta-analysis showing that cross-sectional studies were much more likely to report a positive, statistically significant relationship between social media use and participation than longitudinal ones. Additionally, and to reduce the self-report bias in investigating aspects such as political interest and political use of SNSs while determining causality, an experimental design is recommended since there are barely any such studies in this topic (see Boulianne, 2015, p. 534; and Knoll et al., 2018 for an extended discussion). The low reliability score of the *political knowledge* scale relied on by this study is symptomatic of the challenge facing scholars in the measurement of this important variable (see Hoffman, 2017) and there lacking an agreed-upon tested measure specific to the Kenyan context (as compared to researcher's consensus in the USA) calls for future studies to flesh out this measurement.

Lastly, it is important to mention that at the 10% significance level: the region where respondents have most lived their lives in (rural/urban), incidental exposure to politics on social media and SNS use rate were significant predictors of online political participation; while household income was a significant predictor of offline political participation. For an exploratory study, it would be beneficial to regard  $P < 0.10$  as suggestive of a significant effect by these variables that warrants further investigation.

## 22. CONCLUSION

This study set out to investigate the relationship between social media use and political participation in the online and offline realm. To do this, strengths of association among SNS usage frequency, political use of SNSs and online and offline participation were sought. Three hierarchical regression models were then constructed including covariates and other control variables to predict online participation, offline participation and voting in the August 8, 2017 election. Mediation analysis followed to distinguish the direct from the indirect effects of social media use on offline participation in a hypothetical pseudo-causal model with online participation as the mediator.

Political interest and political use of social media were found to be the only significant predictors of online political participation. They both were positively associated with online participation. They were also positive, statistically significant predictors of offline political participation; while female respondents and respondents with higher political knowledge were negative, statistically significant predictors of offline political participation. Only membership in a political party was found to be a significant (albeit, weak) predictor of voting in the August 8, 2017 election. Online political participation significantly and fully mediated the effects of SNS use rate on offline political participation.

The results most corroborate findings from the third empirical faction that social media use has barely any significant effect on online and offline political participation. They provide support for Pippa Norris' (2001) *reinforcement hypothesis* that SNSs are effectively an additional tool for those already engaged in traditional/offline political activities to expand their influence

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while the disengaged continue to lag behind and political inequalities persist. Females and respondents from high SES households appear to be the least politically engaged from this sample. Political interest is identified as the most important antecedent to political participation in both realms but turning up to vote would appear to be subject to other factors beyond the scope of this study, save for political party membership which is a weak predictor. Encouraging interpersonal political conversations among social media users online is suggested as one possible way of increasing their participation by various organised political mobilisation actors.

The tribal nature of Kenya's political participation ecology is not adequately accounted for in this study due to the drawbacks of a convenient sample which the researcher conceives could explain voter turnout coupled up with mobilisation (See Verba et al., 1995) techniques employed by candidates; these should be highly considered in future research. Additionally, other motivations of social media use such as social interaction and entertainment should be explored to offer a complete picture. On methodology: stratified random sampling is advised if group differences are to be accurately investigated; panel and experimental studies are found necessary to ascertain if there are effects over time and solve the causation quandary; and finally, the researcher makes a call for work on a Kenya-specific scale to measure political knowledge.

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**23.APPENDIX A: CORRELATION MATRIX**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Political											
1 Knowledge											
2 Political Party	-.03										
Household											
3 Income	.16*	-.17**									
Offline											
4 Participation	-.03	.18**	-.19**								
Online											
5 Participation	.18**	.05	-.01	.54**							
6 Gender	-.26**	-.18**	.19**	-.25**	-.20**						
7 Political Interest	.33**	.14*	-.01	.36**	.49**	-.19**					
8 Political SNS Use	.29**	.08	.04	.37**	.53**	-.28**	.50**				
Incidental											
9 Exposure	.21**	.01	-.01	.09	.29**	-.1	.20**	.31**			
10 Voted August 8	.14*	.23**	-.07	.21**	.13	-.18**	.13*	.12	-.03		
11 Early Socialisation	.	-.08	-.04	-.22**	-.24**	.08	-.21**	-.25**	-.12	.03	
12 SNS Use Rate	.11	-.12	.12	.09	.22**	-.12	.11	.22**	.14*	.11	-.07

24.APPENDIX B: CROSSTABULATION

Political Party \* Voted August 8, 2017, General Election Crosstabulation

			Voted		Total
			No	Yes	
Political Party	None	Count	25	55	80
		% within Political Party	31.3%	68.8%	100.0%
		% within Voted	58.1%	28.6%	34.0%
	Other	Count	1	7	8
		% within Political Party	12.5%	87.5%	100.0%
		% within Voted	2.3%	3.6%	3.4%
	KANU	Count	0	3	3
		% within Political Party	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% within Voted	0.0%	1.6%	1.3%
	NASA	Count	8	48	56
		% within Political Party	14.3%	85.7%	100.0%
		% within Voted	18.6%	25.0%	23.8%
	Jubilee Party	Count	9	79	88
		% within Political Party	10.2%	89.8%	100.0%
		% within Voted	20.9%	41.1%	37.4%
	Total	Count	43	192	235
		% within Political Party	18.3%	81.7%	100.0%
		% within Voted	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

**25.APPENDIX C: QUESTIONNAIRE**

1. What is your age? \_\_\_\_
2. What is your gender?
  - a) Female \_\_\_\_
  - b) Male \_\_\_\_
  - c) Other \_\_\_\_
3. What is your level of study?
  - a) KCSE or below
  - b) Diploma/Certificate
  - c) Undergraduate Student (Ongoing)
  - d) First degree (graduated)
  - e) Master's degree
  - f) Doctorate
4. Please specify your ethnicity. (drop-down list)
  - ▼ American ... Other
5. What is the highest level of education attained by your parents?
  - a) Less than primary school
  - b) Primary school or less
  - c) Secondary school
  - d) College diploma/certificate
  - e) Bachelor's degree
  - f) Master's degree
  - g) Doctorate
6. Income Please indicate the monthly income of your household (i.e. nuclear family)
  - a) Below KSh.20,000
  - b) KSh.20,000 - KSh.50,000
  - c) KSh.51,000 - KSh.100,000
  - d) KSh.101,000 - KSh. 200,000
  - e) Above KSh.200,000
7. Please state where you have spent most of your life
  - a) Rural area
  - b) Urban area
8. Please tick as appropriate. (*Early political socialisation*)

	Totally agree	Agree	Slightly agree	Slightly disagree	Disagree	Totally disagree
Growing up I had relatives or close friends that discussed						

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politics and social issues with me						
Growing up my parents discussed politics and social issues with me						
My family or close friends encourage me to participate in elections and/or political demonstrations						
During my secondary education lessons on history and social issues, my teachers allowed and encouraged us to debate and discuss topics						

9. What political party/coalition are you affiliated with?

- a) Jubilee Party
- b) National Super Alliance (NASA - ODM, Wiper, Ford-Kenya, ANC)
- c) Kenya African National Union (KANU)
- d) Other
- e) None

10. In general, how interested are you with politics?

- a) Not at all interested
- b) Slightly interested
- c) Moderately interested
- d) Very interested

11. How often do you use the following social media platforms in a month?

	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Facebook	<input type="radio"/>				
Twitter	<input type="radio"/>				
Instagram	<input type="radio"/>				
YouTube	<input type="radio"/>				
Telegram	<input type="radio"/>				
Snapchat	<input type="radio"/>				
WhatsApp	<input type="radio"/>				

12. How often do you use social media for political purposes (e.g. reading political posts, commenting on current affairs such as corruption etc.)?

- a) Never
- b) Rarely

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- c) Sometimes
- d) Often
- e) Frequently

13. On a scale of 0 to 10, please indicate how much agree with this statement. (*Distractor*)  
 "Social media makes me waste time."

Totally Disagree											Totally Agree
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
<input type="radio"/>											

14. When you use social media, how often do you come across posts on public issues or politics when you may have been going online for a purpose other than that?

(*Incidental Exposure*)

- a) Always
- b) Often
- c) Sometimes
- d) Never

15. In the past one year period, which of the following have you done on social media?  
 (*Online Participation 1*).

	Yes	No
Clicked "like" or "favourite (♥)" on a political image or story on social media	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Signed an online petition about a political or social issue	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Made a social media post that mentions politics	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Used social media to spread information about a political party or politician	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

16. Did you vote in the August 8, 2017, General Election?

- a) Yes
- b) No

17. In the last 12 months, which of the following have you done on social media?  
 (*Online Participation 2*).

	Yes	No
Posted a photo/video of someone at a political event	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Created a political group on social media	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Used social media to spread awareness of a political or social issue	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

18. Which reason was given by the Supreme Court for nullifying the August 8, 2017, Presidential Election result? (*Political Knowledge 1*)

- a) Ballot stuffing

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- b) IEBC servers were hacked
- c) It was not made clear
- d) IEBC violated the constitution
- e) Political interference

19. In the past one year period, which of the following have you done?

*(Offline participation 1)*

	Yes	No
Campaigned for a politician or political party by, for example, passing out pamphlets or placing posters etc.		
Helped to organize a political event/meeting		
Attended a political protest or demonstration		
Been a candidate for office (e.g. student union)		

20. Most mainstream media outlets (Radio, Newspapers & TV) in Kenya are trustworthy.

*(Distractor)*

- a) Strongly agree
- b) Agree
- c) Somewhat agree
- d) Somewhat disagree
- e) Disagree
- f) Strongly disagree

21. In the last 12 months, which of the following have you done? *(Offline participation 2)*

	Yes	No
Became an active member of a political party		
Attended a political rally/meeting or national celebration		
Contacted a public official or a political leader		
Wore a t-shirt, hoodie, wristband, hat or cap supporting a party/candidate		

22. In Kenya, whose responsibility is it to determine if a law is constitutional or not?

*(Political Knowledge 2)*

- a) President
- b) National Assembly
- c) Supreme Court
- d) Senate
- e) The Commission on Administrative Justice (Ombudsman)

23. A political system in which all citizens can propose laws and vote on legislation and executive bills can best be described as? *(Political Knowledge 3) Not used*

- a) Monarchy
- b) Direct Democracy
- c) Devolved
- d) Republic
- e) Constitutional Government

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24. A political system in which all citizens can participate in open elections and vote on representatives to run the government can best be described as? (*Political Knowledge 4*) – **Not used**

- a) Federal Government
- b) Direct Representation
- c) Republic
- d) Representative Democracy
- e) Constitutional Democracy

25. What job or political office is held by Keriako Tobiko? (*Political Knowledge 5*)

- a) Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP)
- b) Chief Registrar of the Judiciary
- c) NYS Director General
- d) Environment Cabinet Secretary
- e) Constitutional Affairs Cabinet Secretary

26. Which **single political party** had the most members in the National Assembly of Kenya's 11th Parliament? (*Political Knowledge 6*)

- a) URP
- b) TNA
- c) ODM
- d) Wiper
- e) UDF