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Social Media Political Information Use and Political Participation of the Net Generation

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Abstract: Given the pervasiveness of social media in our contemporary communication environment, this paper explored the aptitude of social media use for political information in empowering the wired youth with more diverse political information which is deemed as key precursor of political participation. To be more specific, this paper examined how the utilisation of political information on social media predicts political knowledge, political efficacy, and different modes of political participation (offline, online, and cyber) of the Net Generation. There were 379 Malaysian students aged between 18 and 24, who depend extensively on social media platforms as their primary reservoir of political news and information took part in a self-administered online survey questionnaire. Among the key findings of the current study are: (i) political informational use of social media predicts political efficacy but not political knowledge; (ii) political informational use of social media predicts offline, online, and cyber political participation via political efficacy; (iii) political knowledge does not predict political participation; meanwhile (iv) political efficacy predicts political participation. All in all, political informational use of social media holds the most potent positive effect on political efficacy.

Introduction
Contention about young people as politically apathetic and civically disengaged may now need to be balanced against other evidence that suggests a shift is currently taking place among the Net Generation (Net Geners), perhaps with distinctive, less formal, non-conventional political participation coming to be prioritised over more traditional forms of participation. The common perception that young people are generally disengaged from politics, as well as the constant grievances on youth citizenry which is deemed problematic to democracy may need to be reconsidered because these interpretations were derived in reference to lapsed comprehension of youth participation (Theocharis, 2015).

This paper conceptualises boundaries between the Net Geners and the pre-Net Geners based on their technologically inclined nature and living environment, besides considering the specific dates that bracket the two generations. The Net Geners in this study are wired individuals growing up bathing in bits with the Internet and other digital technologies as part of their lives. As such, they perceive political social media use and political participation differently from cohorts born prior to them. Along this line of reasoning, social media may have made available probability to an explicit generation which has long been recognised as habitually detached from politics to embrace politics by their own account.

Previous scholarship has arrived at the consensus that generic use of social media and non-political information consumption on social media do not predict political participation and attitudes (Baek, 2015; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012; Hyun & Kim, 2015; Ye et al., 2017). Otherwise, social media news exposure (Adegbola & Gearhart, 2019; Chen et al., 2015; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2014) and political social media use (Baek, 2015; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012; Kim et al., 2016; Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010; Tang & Lee, 2013; Valenzuela et al., 2012a; Valenzuela et al., 2012b; Vitak et al., 2011) do. This paper further explores by what means political informational use of social media informs individuals about politics and predicts political participation from cognitive (political knowledge), affective (political efficacy), and behavioural states of engagement (offline, online, and cyber political participation). Equally important, the study also revisits important debates of the shifting means of political participation, notably cyber participation amongst the Net Geners to elucidate new forms of citizen force.

Literature Review

1. Social Media and Political Knowledge
Political knowledge pertains to the acquisition or command of information concerning one's political surroundings (Plaesu et al., 2011), which consists of two attributes: factual and structural knowledge. Factual knowledge is understood as "being able to correctly identify bits of information" (Eveland & Hively, 2009; Neuman, 1981; as cited in Beam et al., 2016, p. 216). Structural knowledge is conceptualised as "being able to see the connections that exist between related concepts" (Eveland et al., 2004; Neuman, 1981; as cited in Beam et al., 2016, p. 216). This paper takes structural knowledge into consideration besides the commonly studied factual knowledge, given that merely knowing the bits and pieces of political facts may not be sufficient to predict political participation, one should also possess the ability to analyse connections between political facts.

An informed, knowledgeable citizenry is substantial for democracy (Gimpel, 2003; as cited in Malik & Khan, 2013). This is because political knowledge based on cognitive engagement spurs one's political attitudes toward political activity (Verba et al., 1995; as cited in Kim & Khang, 2014). While there is considerable research confirmed that usage of traditional news channels such as print news increases political knowledge (e.g., Hao et al., 2014), only few studies investigated political knowledge learning via social media. Relevant scholarship includes Beam et al.'s (2016) study to investigate the influence of accessing and sharing news online (including social media) on factual and structural knowledge. They found a noteworthy positive correlation between exposure to online news and factual knowledge. Likewise, Hao et al. (2014) found the Internet and social networking site (SNS) news usage were significantly related to political knowledge. However, both studies did not specify the genres of news their participants were viewing, sharing, and consuming. To add new insights into the current scholarship, this study looks specifically into political news and information consumption via social media in predicting political knowledge.

2. Social Media and Political Efficacy
Political efficacy has always been ballyhooed as one of the well-established standard predictors of political participation. In *"The Voter Decides"*, Campbell et al. (1954) described political efficacy as "the feeling that individual political action does have or can have an impact upon the political process" (p. 187; as cited in Wen et al., 2013, p. 130). According to Almond and Verba (1989), one would be more likely to exert his influence if he believes he does have such competence.

There are two dimensions of political efficacy: internal political efficacy encompasses an individual's subjective assessment of their competence in political knowledge, along with the self-assurance that their actions will influence the political landscape (Jung et al., 2011; Kenski & Stroud, 2006; Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010; Reichert, 2016); meanwhile, external political efficacy is strongly linked to trust in government. It develops when individuals hold the belief that "the government authorities and institutions are responsive to citizen demands" (Niemi et al., 1991; as cited in Kenski & Stroud, 2006, p. 175).

Existing studies examining the connection between the utilisation of political information on social media and political efficacy offered positive outcomes. For example, according to Kenski and Stroud (2006), citizens who source for political information online possessed greater sense of community commitment and political efficacy. Given that social media facilitates user experience to diverse perspectives, Park and Karan (2014) suggested that exposure to heterogeneity associates with political efficacy significantly. The current study therefore includes political efficacy with its two dimensions as one of its key dependent variables.

3. Social Media and Various Modes of Political Participation

Empirical findings have consistently suggested engaging with social media for news consumption tends to encourage diverse types of political involvement (Dimitrova et al., 2014; Dumitrica, 2016; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012; Hao et al., 2014; Park et al., 2009; Skoric et al., 2016; Wen et al., 2013). Offline political participation refers to "traditional forms of participation that take place face-to-face or in offline settings" (Huckfeldt et al., 2004; McClurg, 2006; Mutz, 2006; Nir, 2005; as cited in Valenzuela et al., 2012b, p. 163) which includes "voting, campaign activity, informal activity in local communities, contacting officials, and organisational or collective activities" (Verba et al., 1995; as cited in Kim & Chen, 2016, p. 321). Meanwhile, online political participation are online versions of offline political acts (Yang & DeHart, 2016). In other words, online participation involves a virtual space while offline is in physical space (Salman & Saad, 2015). Specimens of online political endeavours involve "sending political messages to a politician online, writing to a news editor online, making a campaign contribution online, subscribing to a political listserv and signing up to volunteer for a campaign/issue online" (Yang & DeHart, 2016, p. 2).

Besides the offline and online modes, the current study adopts cyber political participation as another newly emerging digital mode of participation. Adopting Steinberg's (2015) perspective on cyber political participation, this paper takes a bold attempt to venture beyond the obsolete understanding of political involvement. It reexamines conventional definitions of political participation and explores how younger citizens perceive and engage in political activities. Steinberg (2015) identified cyber participation as "a new outlet rather than a modernised version of traditional or online participation" (p. 103). He recognised cyber political participation as "the involvement of actors within the Web 2.0 space" (p. 103). Today, social media is among the utmost distinguishable form of Web 2.0 tools, and cyber participation will come to be a key metric because it holds "the best of both worlds by facilitating the sharing of views and opinions in a means similar to traditional participation while having the low cost and ease of access as online participation" (Steinberg, 2015, p. 103). As highlighted by Steinberg (2015, p. 104), it is the social aspects of participation related to "community building" and "discussion-based factors" that justifies the Web 2.0 nature of cyber participation. These two aspects are indeed absent in online participation and thus, to a great extent, online participation is considered easier and required lesser resources to involve in than traditional offline and cyber participation (Steinberg, 2015). To differentiate the two, "visiting a candidate's website or donating money online" are considered online participation, while "signing up as a friend of a candidate, initiated or joining a political group, and posting comments or questions about the campaign or election" are classified as cyber participation (Steinberg, 2015, p. 104).

As proposed by Steinberg (2015), cyber participation results in a meaningfully augmented likeliness of voting amongst individuals primitively unlikely to take part in voting, and young people are apparently more inclined to harness the cyber space. Given that conventional indicators of participation were found to be unrelated to cyber participation, Steinberg suggested future research should strive for more comprehensive explanation of the effects of all three modes of political participation (traditional/offline, online, and cyber). In the face of the growing volumes of research studying online political activities, studies on cyber participation are still limited (Steinberg, 2015). On this ground, it is a value-added for this paper to also taps on cyber political participation, considering the extensive permeation of new and social media, political participation may have engaged innovative means. Besides that, having a better definition of the behaviour being modelled, it becomes easier to develop more precise prospects about mobilisation effects of political informational use on social media. This attempt holds significance in answering concerns related to the deficient political interest and motivation to political participation amongst the wired youth.

And hence, the current study regarded online political participation as offline political activities that take place in online settings. It is unilateral initiative-oriented and is deemed to require lesser costs and efforts from participants compared with offline and cyber participation. Despite cyber participation is also taking place online, it is bilateral or multilateral initiative-oriented. The current study takes it unique and distinctive from online participation owed to its Web 2.0 functionalities, in particular the social-oriented community building and discussion-based factors. Also considered, the higher costs and efforts for participation.

4. Hypotheses of the Study

Based on the established evidence discussed so far, this paper posits the following hypotheses:

H1: Social media political information use will be positively associated with political knowledge.

H2: Social media political information use will be positively associated with political efficacy.

H3a: Social media political information use will be positively associated with cyber political participation.

H3b: Social media political information use will be positively associated with online political participation.

H3c: Social media political information use will be positively associated with offline political participation.

Extant scholarship also suggested that both political knowledge and political efficacy are incentives to political participation (Corrigall-Brown & Wilkes, 2014; Hao et al., 2014; Jung et al., 2011; Kavanaugh et al., 2016; Reichert, 2016). On the ground that individuals who used to consume news on SNSs possess higher levels of motivation and more resources to political engagement (Lee et al., 2014), the paper suggests that if social media users consider themselves as politically informed, are able to influence the political process, and have trust in the government, they would develop civic competencies, and thus, will have greater motivation and/or inclination to political endeavours. The current study therefore draws the following hypotheses:

H4: Political knowledge predicts political participation.

H5: Political efficacy predicts political participation.

H6: Political knowledge will significantly enhance the relationship between social media political information use and political participation.

H7: Political efficacy will significantly enhance the relationship between social media political information use and political participation.

Methodology

A self-administered online survey questionnaire was conducted at Universiti Malaya (UM), Malaysia, as part of a broader study on politically engaged Net Generation Malaysians. The online survey questionnaire links through Google Forms were appended to an email invitation distributed to all UM students using the official email application system available to the UM community. Respondents were given option to complete the questionnaire in Chinese, English or Malay, and back-translation was performed to verify the precision of the questionnaire translations.

Prior to pilot test, a content validation exercise was conducted to assess the face and content validity of all items included in the survey questionnaire. The pilot data was subsequently employed for construct validation, assessing whether the operational definitions of variables accurately represent the true theoretical meaning of concepts. This was achieved through parallel analysis (PA) and exploratory factor analysis (EFA).

Screener questions were created to confirm respondents met two criteria: (i) being Malaysian students aged between 18 and 24 during the survey period; and (ii) using social media specifically for political news and information. This returned 379 valid respondents (age mean = 21). As indicated by the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2018), the estimated population of Malaysia in 2018 is 32.4 million with Bumiputera 69.1%, Chinese 23%, Indian 6.9% and Others 1%. With this as reference, the participants surveyed in this study are expected to mirror the demographic composition of the Malaysian population. Refer Table 1 for socio-demographic characteristics of the participants.

Table 1. Sample characteristics (n = 379)

Socio-demographic Details	Statistics
Gender	Male (24.3%)
	Female (75.7%)
Age	18 (0.8%)
	19 (17.7%)
	20 (24.5%)
	21 (17.2%)
	22 (14%)
	23 (10.3%)
	24 (15.6%)
Ethnicity	Malay (60.7%)
	Chinese (29.3%)
	Indian (6.3%)
	Others (3.7%)
Preferred political information consumption channel	Facebook (47.5%)
	Twitter (27.7%)
	Instagram (14%)
	WhatsApp (4.5%)
	YouTube (4.5%)
	Blog (0.5%)
	Reddit (0.5%)
	9GAG (0.3%)
	LinkedIn (0.3%)
	Telegram (0.3%)

1. Measures

Social media political information use was measured with 15 indicators of political information consumption goals adopted from the social media political information dependency (SMPID) theoretical framework proposed by Tan and Firdaus (2023). Respondents were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) for each item (M = 3.456; SD = 0.7685).

The measure for *factual knowledge* was adopted and adapted from two scholarships – Wen et al. (2013) and Stephen et al. (2014). Since existing studies focus less on *structural knowledge* (Beam et al., 2016), a scale of Malaysian structural knowledge questions was developed, drawing from factual knowledge questions to assess respondents' capacity to recognise connections among various political facts, concepts, national and regional incidents, events and/or decisions. All questions are set in an open-ended format. The researcher coded whether a respondent answered a given question correctly (1 = correct answer; 0 = incorrect answer or 'don't know') (M = 4.6966; SD = 1.0567).

Political efficacy was measured with 9 items made up of internal and external political efficacy (e.g., Barrett & Zani, 2015; Hao et al., 2014; Miller et al., 1980, as cited in Kim, 2015; Willnat et al., 2013; Yang & DeHart, 2016; Zhang et al., 2013). Respondents were required to express their agreement or disagreement for each item using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) (M = 3.1647; SD = 0.6308).

Given that different modes of *political participation* take place on differing platforms, and thus may exhibit different participation patterns, respondents were prompted to use a different set of six-point scale to indicate their participation in each specific political activity within the preceding 12 months during the survey period as follows: offline political participation (1 = never to 6 = about once a day); online and cyber political participation (1 = never to 6 = several times a day). Various extant scholarship were reviewed to formulate measurement items for offline (M = 1.4373; SD = 0.6162) and online political participation (M = 1.6737; SD = 0.6993) (e.g., Barrett & Zani, 2015; Hao et al., 2014; Hyun & Kim, 2015; Johnson et al., 2011; Jung & Gil de Zúñiga, 2011; Valenzuela et al., 2012b; Wen et al., 2013; Willnat et al., 2013; Yamamoto et al., 2014; Yang & DeHart, 2016; Yoo & Gil de Zúñiga, 2014). Drawing on Steinberg's (2015) conception, the study generated measure of cyber political participation based on the routinely used items for online participation with

bilateral- or multilateral-initiative social aspects modelled in online participation analyses mentioned above (M = 1.5285; SD = 0.7264).

Results

Prior to hypotheses testing, data accuracy was assessed by examining missing values, outliers, as well as skewness and kurtosis coefficients. The present data set does not exhibit normal distribution, as indicated by skew and kurtosis values exceeding 2 and 7, respectively (West et al., 1995). Consequently, to conduct a non-parametric method for multivariate analysis, partial least square structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 3 (Ringle et al., 2015) was employed.

1. Assessment of Measurement Model

To examine the connections between constructs and their indicators, the evaluation of the measurement model encompasses composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha to evaluate internal consistency reliability, followed by individual indicator reliability and average variance extracted (AVE) to assess convergent validity. Next, cross-loadings, the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations were employed to examine discriminant validity.

Analytic results show that composite reliability for each construct in the study ranges from 0.855 to 0.953, and Cronbach's alpha for each construct ranges from 0.747 to 0.946. All are above the threshold value of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2017). The results imply that indicators of the constructs exhibit reliable internal consistency.

Among the 61 indicators for both exogenous and endogenous constructs, 56 possess satisfactory outer loadings. Five indicators were deleted due to their low loading values that biased the composite reliability or content validity. Meanwhile, three indicators with high loadings which are considered identical or redundant were deleted based on (i) highest VIF value in the measurement (inner) model for each construct; (ii) these indicators lead to high composite reliability value that exceeds 0.95; and (iii) the questions of these indicators are semantically redundant with some other questions. After deletion of these eight indicators, outer loadings of the modified measurement model were re-estimated.

All constructs possess AVE with values above 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), which is ranged from 0.523 to 1.00. In a nutshell, the measurement model demonstrates adequate convergent validity. Analytic results show that discriminant validity is confirmed as all indicators exhibit higher loadings on their designated constructs compared to their cross-loadings with other constructs (Hair et al., 2017). Next, the Fornell-Larcker criterion was examined. The square roots of the AVEs for all constructs exceed the correlations of these constructs with other latent variables in the path model. This suggests that all constructs are valid measures of distinct concepts.

The current study employed HTMT$_{.85}$ specificity to assess discriminant validity. The computation yields values between 0.059 and 0.822. Discriminant validity is established as these results are below the threshold value of 0.85 (Henseler at al., 2015).

2. Assessment of Structural Model

To assess the model's predictive competencies and relationships between the constructs, standard assessment criteria for the structural model in PLS-SEM are collinearity assessment, significance of the path coefficients, level of R^2 values, f^2 effect size and the predictive relevance Q^2.

Since all variance inflation factor (VIF) values are well below the threshold of 5, collinearity among the predictor constructs is not a significant concern in the structural model. Considering that this paper is a component of a broader study on politically engaged Net Generation Malaysians, the adjusted coefficient of determination (R^2_{adj}) was applied to mitigate bias toward intricate models with varying numbers of exogenous latent variables and/or data sets with different sample sizes (Hair et al., 2017). As the study aims solely to establish a particular correlation between selected numbers of dependent variables and the endogenous latent variables based on theoretical reasoning, but not to articulate a complete list of the different causes of an occurrence, by referring to Falk and Miller's (1992) rule of thumb, all endogenous latent variables in the

dataset possess R^2_{adj} values above the threshold of 0.1. The R^2 values estimated in the current study are therefore considered adequate.

As a general guideline, f^2 values of 0.02, 0.15 and 0.35 represent small, medium, and large effects of the exogenous construct respectively (Cohen, 1988; as cited in Hair et al., 2017). While f^2 values below 0.02 suggest no discernible effect has been observed (Hair et al., 2017). In the current dataset, political efficacy possesses a small effect size of 0.108 on political participation. Social media political information use and political knowledge have no effect on political participation, with f^2 values of 0.009 and 0.008 respectively.

As a general threshold, Q^2 values greater than 0, 0.25 and 0.50 indicate small, medium, and large predictive relevance of the PLS-path model (Hair et al., 2019). The Q^2 values for all endogenous constructs are considered meaningful, with values above zero.

Table 2 shows the structural model path coefficients and its significance tests. Bootstrapping results confirm the effects of *PICG* on *PE* and *PP* (including *CPP*, *OLPP* and *OPP*) are significant, whereas the effect of *PICG* on *PK* is not significant. On the other hand, the effect of *PE* on *PP* is significant, but not for the effect of *PK* on *PP*. *PICG* has a relatively strong positive effect on *PE* ($\beta = 0.593$, $p < 0.001$), but possesses a rather small negative significant effect on the overall *PP* ($\beta = -0.098$, $p = 0.039$) and a negative insignificant effect on *PK* ($\beta = -0.03$, $p = 0.334$). By estimating the effect of *PICG* on each of the political participation mode specifically, results show that *PICG* exerts the most significant impact on *CPP* ($\beta = 0.097$, $p = 0.003$), followed by *OLPP* ($\beta = 0.095$, $p = 0.004$) and *OPP* ($\beta = 0.089$, $p = 0.004$). When analysing the path coefficients between *PE* and *PP, PK* and *PP*, this study found that *PE* has a relatively moderate positive effect on *PP* ($\beta = 0.398$, $p < 0.001$ and $\beta = 0.349$, $p < 0.001$ respectively), but *PK* exerts a negative insignificant effect on *PP* ($\beta = -0.075$, $p = 0.079$).

Table 2. Path Coefficients of the structural model and significance assessment results

Path	Beta	Standard Error (SE)	*t* value	*p* value	Significant ($p < 0.05$)?
PICG → PE	0.593	0.04	14.758	<0.001	Yes
PICG → PK	-0.03	0.07	0.429	0.334	No
PICG → CPP	0.097	0.036	2.704	0.003	Yes
PICG → OLPP	0.095	0.036	2.648	0.004	Yes
PICG → OPP	0.089	0.034	2.625	0.004	Yes
PICG → PP	-0.098	0.056	1.765	0.039	Yes
PE → PP	0.349	0.059	5.941	<0.001	Yes
PK → PP	-0.075	0.053	1.409	0.079	No

Note: PICG=Political Information Consumption Goals; PE=Political Efficacy; PK=Political Knowledge; CPP=Cyber Political Participation; OLPP=Online Political Participation; OPP=Offline Political Participation; PP=Political Participation

3. Mediator Analysis

Findings in Table 3 conclude that *PICG* and *PP* possess a significant negative relationship while *PK* does not function as a mediator in the tested relationship between *PICG* and *PP*.

Table 3. Bootstrapping Results for the direct and indirect effects between social media political use and political participation

Path	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Standard Error (SE)	*t* value	*p* value	Significant ($p < 0.05$)?
PICG → PP	-0.098	N.A.	0.056	1.765	0.039	Yes
PICG → PE → PP	N.A.	0.207	0.04	5.203	< 0.001	Yes
PICG → PK → PP	N.A.	0.002	0.005	0.456	0.324	No

Note: PICG=Political Information Consumption Goals; PP=Political Participation; PE=Political Efficacy; PK=Political Knowledge

In contrast, *PE* represents competitive mediation of the relationship from *PICG* to *PP* since both the direct and indirect effects are significant but point in opposite directions. That said, heavy dependency on social media for political information results in a reduced level of political participation, but greater level of political efficacy predicts political participation.

4. Hypotheses Test Results

Referring to Table 4, social media political information use did not predict political knowledge (β = -0.03, p = 0.341), thus H1 was not supported. H2 was supported as social media political information use was positively associated with political efficacy (β = 0.593, p < 0.001). Likewise, social media political information use was positively associated with offline, online, and cyber political participation. As such, H3a, H3b and H3c were supported with political informational use of social media possesses strongest effect on cyber participation (β = 0.097, p = 0.003), followed by online (β = 0.095, p = 0.003) and offline participation (β = 0.089, p = 0.004) respectively. H4 was not supported as political knowledge did not predict political participation (β = -0.075, p = 0.074). H5 was supported given that political efficacy predicted political participation (β = 0.349, p < 0.001). H6 was not supported because political knowledge did not serve as a mediator between social media political information use and political participation (β = 0.002, p = 0.324). In contrast, H7 was supported as political efficacy was found to partially mediate the relationship between social media political information use and political participation (β = 0.207, p < 0.001), in the sense that social media political information use possesses a negative significant direct effect on political participation (β = -0.098, p = 0.039).

Discussion

1. Social Media Political Information Use and Political Knowledge of the Net Geners

Despite individuals nowadays could easily acquire loads of political and civic information online, which could potentially contribute to a more informed electorate, this study found no significant relationship between social media political information use and political knowledge. This corresponds to Low's (2019) study which suggested that accessing news and information on social media does not correlate with an enhancement in understanding Malaysian politics. Earlier on, Hao et al.'s (2014) research also revealed that reading news on social media does not necessarily result in increased political knowledge.

As argued by Bowyer and Kahne (2015), prior political knowledge serves as a crucial factor in determining the extent to which individuals absorb available political information, as exposure alone does not guarantee reception. Notably, for many individuals surveyed in this study, social media is their only source of political information. The majority of them reported that they have discontinued the use or significantly reduced the time spent on other media sources, in particular, the traditional mass media channels. That said, these individuals would have no other origin or possess a minimal source of political information. It is even worse if they were exposed only to homogeneous political content when they are on social media, leaving them with a lower level of political knowledge.

Scholars also raise questions about whether the use of social media for political purposes enhances political knowledge by exposing individuals to diverse perspectives; or instead, is more likely to foster echo chambers that inhibit chances of individuals being exposed to differing information (Mohd Faizal Kasmani et al., 2014; Wattal et al., 2010; Yamamoto & Kushin, 2014). As argued by Johnson et al. (2011), either way, would dwarf social media political information use as a predictor of political knowledge, given that dissonance would lead to more confusion and frustration, while homogeneity would cause political ignorance. To make matters worse, it is important to consider the algorithmic mechanisms of the multifarious social media platforms, as they play significant roles in filtering users' exposure to information that potentially restricting political knowledge.

Likewise, political knowledge did not predict political participation. Respondents of the current study were observed to have a moderate level of political knowledge, with factual knowledge better than structural knowledge. That said, knowing only the tiny bit of political facts may not indicate one's ability to observe

political realities. Note that, insufficient political information or low confidence in information has been observed as one of the obstacles to political participation, particularly among the younger cohorts (Kavanaugh et al., 2016). "Citizens who participate with limited information, uncertain expectations as to their power or the decision process, and an insufficient understanding of the policy or management issue may lose trust and efficacy rather than become more empowered and trusting through the social media tools deployed" (Bryer, 2011, p. 345). If it is not about the lacking knowledge, scepticism would be another likely answer to this non-significant relationship. For instance, Hutchens et al. (2015) contended that exposition to diverse thoughts leads to more uncertainties, which may curtail individual's intention to be politically active.

In addition, political knowledge did not mediate the relationship between social media political information use and political participation. Again, the abundance of different messages may cause frustration and to a certain point, lead to inaction; or to those with no intention to participate in the very first place, they may take it as entertainment consumption.

In a nutshell, while political knowledge can be regarded as a crucial characteristic of citizens who are politically active and engaged, a majority might not possess sufficient political knowledge to fulfil the criteria of a 'competent' citizen (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; as cited in Reichert, 2016). That said, relying on social media for political information may not completely suggest someone as a 'competent' citizen.

2. Social Media Political Information Use and Political Efficacy of the Net Geners

Results indicate that using social media for political information predicts political efficacy. While homogeneity may not necessarily lead to political disengagement, social scientists generally come to an agreement that exposure to cross-cutting viewpoints, to a certain extent, results in a greater quality of political attitudes and behaviour in democratic processes; this includes higher levels of political efficacy (Park & Karan, 2014). Also found in the study was a significant relationship between political efficacy and political participation. Political scientists indicated that internal political efficacy provides a psychological incentive for participation (Milbrath & Goel, 1977; as cited in Valenzuela et al., 2012b) and plays positive roles in political participation, for example, party-political activities (Reichert, 2016).

Likewise, political efficacy also partially mediated the relationship between social media political information use and political participation. This finding corresponds with results of some earlier studies. As a case in point, Nisbet and Scheufele (2004) found that, as mediated by political efficacy, news reading has an indirect impact on political engagement (as cited in Park & Karan, 2014). Jung et al. (2011) discovered that using media for informational purposes and deliberation of political issues possess an indirect effect on political participation via knowledge and efficacy.

3. Social Media Political Information Use and Political Participation of the Net Geners

Despite the abundance of existing scholarship suggesting a positive correlation between using social media for political content and the varying types of political participation (e.g., Baek, 2015; Dimitrova et al., 2014; Dumitrica, 2016; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012; Kim et al., 2016; Park et al., 2009; Skoric et al., 2016; Tang & Lee, 2013; Valenzuela et al., 2012a; Valenzuela et al., 2012b; Vitak et al., 2011), this study found the other way around. Social media political information use did not predict political participation, but instead, triggered a significant negative effect. That being said, accessing political information extensively on social media diverts individuals from political participation. The debate between homogeneity versus heterogeneity as discussed earlier could explain this finding. Perhaps too much conflicting views may create confusion or ignorance, and to a certain level led to uncertainty and inaction.

However, when mediated by political efficacy, social media political information use predicted all three modes of political participation. This corresponds with existing scholarship which suggests that informational media use possess an indirect effect on political participation via efficacy (e.g., Jung et al., 2011; Nisbet and Scheufele, 2004; as cited in Park & Karan, 2014). That being stated, political efficacy serves as a practical determinant in mobilising political participation. Simply acquiring political information on social media cannot completely prompt involvement in political activities, but a sense of efficacy could.

Although findings of the current study suggest a significant positive relationship between social media political information use and the three modes of political participation via political efficacy, the participation level of each mode is relatively low with online participation scored the highest mean. Owing to the reason that young adults use Internet extensively, these wired cohorts may have more interest and are more willing to commit to politics in the online sphere which is deemed convenient (Hao et al., 2014). However, preferring staying online doesn't guarantee active participation. Analyses of the current study correspond to Hao et al.'s (2014) suggestion. Respondents in the present study are more inclined to involve in sluggish manifestations of political activities which require lesser cost. For instance, watching political videos online or checking online about the accuracy of claims made by or about the candidates. They were found to be hesitant in performing political actions that require more cost or personal initiative in both offline and cyber modes. This was made evident by the current study as among all items tested in offline and cyber participation, talking and discussing politics either through face-to-face or phone calls, or online are the most frequent offline and cyber political activity reported. This is a salient easier said than done evidence. The results contradict Yamamoto et al.'s (2014) finding that online political expression (i.e., talking and discussing politics) encourages offline political participation. In this study, offline participation scored the lowest mean. Hence, to borrow Hao et al.'s (2014) direct quote, the study would describe the wired cohorts as "consumers rather than producers of political activities" (p. 1233). Salman and Saad (2015) in an earlier study found that both online and offline political participation of the Malaysian youth aged between 18 and 25 are below average. This is because youth have less interest in politics given the fact that the younger cohorts are contented with their living without paying much attention on political-related issues. Hao et al. (2014) are of a similar view that young adults concern politics lesser than the older generations.

Although levels of involvement for offline, online, and cyber modes are relatively low, still, the finding infers that social media use for political information possesses mobilising potential, despite it is currently still minimal at best. In particular, via political efficacy, social media political information use has the most substantial effect on cyber participation, followed by online and offline participation. This somehow justifies that cyber participation has emerged as a distinctive mode of political participation among the Net Geners.

Conclusion

The current study was among the very few studies to go beyond an obsolete understanding of younger cohorts' political participation by identifying cyber political participation and its activities as a distinctive mode of digital participation, apart from the more recognised and commonly used online participation. Likewise, the study has tried to improve the understanding of specific informational use of social media (i.e., political use) and to estimate the degree to which such dependency predicts political participation in the forms of cognitive, affective, and behavioural outcomes. Via better specification of the political behaviours, this study was able to derive precise expectations about mobilisation effects of social media political informational use with more consistent and cumulative tests of the modelled relationships.

Findings and analyses of the study have shown the capacity of social media to mobilise citizens within the context of a developing country and to provide its younger users with means to venture different modes of political endeavours. A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step, even at a minimal volume for now, this is indeed a positive sign as more may have realised in the future if these younger cohorts are exposed to proper political socialisation process.

To relevant stakeholders, more must be done by looking into this new mode of cyber participation, and to harness the Internet and social media functionalities to the fullest to mobilising the Net Geners. Equally important, more must be done to gain deeper insights into the user characteristics, be it in themselves and concerning the technological features and functionalities of distinctive new media in breeding different effects on political learning, political efficacy, and political participation.

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