

Review of: "Students' perceptions of e-participation in social media, citizen mobilisation and engagement: Evidence from Papua New Guinea, India, and Zimbabwe"

Felix Kwihangana¹

¹ The University of Manchester

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This is a study on a rather interesting topic that is also of timely importance in the selected contexts. The choice of Bourdieu's social capital as a lens through which to explore the issue under research appears as a good choice here. Although a clearer discussion of Bourdieu's social capital and how it was applied in the study's design and interpretation of the findings would make the theoretical grounding of the study even stronger.

The mixed-method approach also seems to be appropriate for the study. The three different contexts selected, though being all in the "global south", represent different socio-economic and political dynamics that warrant a comparative approach in this case, and therefore make such a design very appropriate. That said, it is important to have more details about why the specific countries and institutions were selected. Clarity on this could help understand the researchers' own subjectivities, if any, while also making clearer why these contexts matter for this specific research project. One key question here to answer would be: What do these contexts have that make them exploring together at this time and on this particular topic?

Relatedly, it is important to provide more justification as to why the different groups of participants were included in the study by focussing on what their participation brings to the study. This would also include more details about the data generation instruments (questionnaires and interviews to give a better picture of the kind of information that was obtained). All in all, more details about the study's methodology would be useful as it would enhance its credibility.

Although the study looks at three different contexts, and the findings/discussion does allude to differences in these contexts, it would be beneficial for the study to adopt a more "comparative" approach in the presentation and discussion of the findings. This could "enhance" the visibility of the differences and similarities that make the study unique and could even strengthen some of the points raised in the conclusion. With regard to data presentation, it may be worth for the researchers to consider whether the tabular representation of the data for example should not be a lot more detailed, with more information that go beyond the aggregated data percentages from the three contexts. Just as a random example, Fig 3 compares social media usage by the different social media apps. The table could potentially be more informative if it also showed such usage rates across the three countries (assuming that the data was generated in a way that enables the researchers to categorise responses by country). In that case the reader would be able to read in the figure not only that WhatsApp is the most popular app but also whether it is as popular in India as it is in Papua new Guinea for instance.

This would enrich the discussions undertaken in the paper about the socio-economic challenges faced by students in some of these contexts regarding accessing these tools for example. Hence paving a “clearer” way to the rather convincing point you made in the last paragraph of the “Conclusions” section.

While the recommendations made in the study make sense in the general discussion of social media use, it is unclear how many of them are informed by the data presented in the study. One would normally expect that recommendations “emerge” from the findings.

Lastly, there are a few “general points” worth noting. First, although the paper is generally well written, it may be worth revisiting the text to ensure good flow and structure. From the start, the transition from “introduction” to “theoretical framework” and then to what appears to be a survey of the literature does raise some challenges, especially because of such an early discussion of the research framework. This is potentially why there is not enough details about the theoretical framework and how it was used because it is too soon to bombard the reader with such details when they know nothing about the study yet. It also does not help when the framework (for the whole study) is introduced as simply being the guide for the literature reviewed in the study.

Secondly, a bit more attention on the use of connectors and transitions may help improve the quality of the paper, though as said above, it is still a well written paper. For example, in the section on Papua new Guinea, you can see an unnecessary repetitive use of “however” in the same paragraph. Thirdly, there are areas where more evidence is needed to substantiate claims made, especially in the early parts of the paper. For example, a statement such as “Most of the world’s students feel alienated from the decision-making processes.” does require evidence for it to be trusted as it is hard to simply take it at face value. How do we know that students feel this way? There are a few such statements in the first part of the paper.

Fourth, there seems to be an overlap (or you could see it as a repetition) in the presentation of social media usage among Millennials (1981-1996) and Generation Z (Mid-1990s to 2010s) in India. The authors present this information in a way that appears to add another category of those aged between 35-44, most of whom are actually Millennials! So, it may be worth revisiting this to make it a bit clearer or check whether the formulation can be changed to convey more clearly what the authors intend to express here.

To sum up, this is a work with a lot of potential given the topic being explored, the study’s objectives and its overall relevance to the contexts where the study is being conducted. There are a few areas where the study could be stronger, and there is no doubt that many researchers and practitioners in these contexts could find an improved version of this paper very useful.