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

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The topic is interesting and pertinent, but in general terms I consider that this article is acritical towards the impact of social media in democracies and the public sphere. Issues such as disinformation, mal-information and misinformation, as well as hate speech, social polarization, radicalization, and public opinion manipulation are not sufficiently addressed, giving a partial and idealistic idea of social media.

I consider the example of 2011 Arab uprisings is dated. There are more recent examples.

The concept of social capital (Bourdieu) is simplified, and its adoption reflects a limited understanding of it. It is advisable to make a deeper reading, since it is related to uneven access to power, which is something ignored in the discussion, giving the impression that social media "equalizes" individuals, which is false. Considering social media as a form of social capital without further discussion needs to be analyzed critically, since access to social media in unequal, not only from a traditional perspective of having access (or not), but from a digital literacy perspective, given that digital competencies are uneven among individuals. I recommend checking this website: https://www.socialcapitalresearch.com/bourdieu-on-social-capital-theory-of-capital/

Regarding the previous point, the level of digital culture of the respondents in this study reflects precisely that a lack of media and information literacy might be part of the problem, considering that only 15% indicated that social media did not always provide correct and accurate information, compared to 40% who were unconcerned and 45% who said it did. I suggest checking the following article: Perceptions of Internet Information Credibility (https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/107769900007700304)

It is necessary to check the "engagement" definition by the World Bank (a word or two might be missing): … the exchange of information between all key stakeholders the government.

Several assertions throughout the work are risky, since they are presented from a universal (absolute) perspective without theoretical or empirical backup:

For example:

- People who use social media regularly build their social capital, which is essential for establishing relationships that are

advantageous to both the group and the individual.

- In PNG social media usage is thought to be unimportant.

- It is obvious that social media, given the opportunity, has the power to empower students and citizens, resulting in better governance, sound democratic practices, and the provision of high-quality goods and services.

- It further embodies the democratization of information by transforming citizens from content consumers into information producers.

Some of these assertions are contradicted by specialized literature, such as affirming that social media transform citizens from content consumers into information producers. I suggest checking the other side of the story:

Arribas-Urrutia, A.; Islas-Carmona, O. y Gutiérrez Cortés, F. (2019): From prosumers to observers: an emergent trend on the Internet and among Young Ecuadorians. Results from the World Internet Project study, Ecuador. Revista Latina de Comunicación Social, 74, pp. 969-996. doi: 10.4185/RLCS-2019-1367en

Barredo Ibáñez, D.; De la Garza Montemayor, D.J; Freundt Thurne, U; Pinto Garzón, K.T y Lorena Días, D. (2018). Cuestionando la existencia del prosumer en Iberoamérica. Un estudio sobre los universitarios de Colombia, Perú, Chile y España. LETRAL (20), pp. 183-205. http://hdl.handle.net/10481/59107

Chu, D. (2010). In search of prosumption: Youth and the new media in Hong Kong. First Monday, 15(2). https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v15i2.2772

Various methodological decisions or processes are not clear:

1) It is not clear how the three universities were selected.

2) It is not clear how does the "unintentional selection bias" acts and its impact in the sampling process.

3) It is obscure how the data was processed: the authors only refer "utilising graphs and narratives..."

4) About interviews with "student representatives" it is not clear how they were selected and how many interviews were performed.

There are also some voids and inconsistencies in the report:

Data reflects sampling by age, but not by gender. Since this is important (considering gender digital divide) it would be useful to include gender information.

It is said that the study is comparative, but graphs are presented integrating data from the three countries. Although differences between countries are discussed, they are not visible in the graphics.

Some results are not quantified or sufficiently supported by data such as the following:

- The findings demonstrate that the respondents were involved in matters that had an impact on them and their

communities.

- It was also pleasing to note that the majority of respondents were active participants and content providers rather than just content consumers.

In conclusions and recommendations, it seems that the authors' position is that "guidelines" are needed for using social media and those "guidelines" are recommend in the form of social media regulation from governments. This is very risky, particularly in authoritarian regimes, where the line between regulation and censorship is very thin.

In my opinion (shared with many other scholars), the way forward is through media and information literacy (MIL), because using the social media "in a responsible manner", "appropriately" and safeguarding users' "privacy and confidentiality" are some of many issues covered through MIL and which do not derive spontaneously from government regulation. Derived from this point of view, UNESCO has published two version of its Media and Information Literacy Curriculum (the first one in 2011: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000192971 and other more recent in 2021: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377068). I also recommend checking the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (https://www.coe.int/en/web/campaign-free-to-speak-safe-to-learn/reference-framework-of-competences-for-democratic-culture)

Regarding formal aspects, there are various incorrect uses of the words "more" and "less", without "than", that leave the reader asking oneself "more than what?" or "less than what?"

There are various word repetitions, especially "However"; it is recommended to use synonyms when they are used closed to each other.

I hope the authors find these comments and recommendations useful, for working on an improved version of their article.