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Exploring South African Youths' On/Offline Political Participation

by

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis submitted for the Master of Arts Degree in the Centre for Film and Media studies at the University of Cape Town is my own original work and has not previously been submitted to any other institution of higher learning. I further declare that all sources cited or quoted are indicated and acknowledged by means of a comprehensive list of references.

SIGNATURE

DATE.....

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to God Almighty for the strength and wisdom He gave me during the writing process of this research, my parents and finally to the University of Cape Town.

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

Philippians 4:13 (New International Version of the Holy Bible)

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ACROYNMS

ANCYLFG	African National Youth League Facebook Group
DA	Democratic Alliance
DASO	Democratic Alliance Student Organisation
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
ICTs	Information and Communication Technologies
IEC	Independent Electoral Commission
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NWU	North West University
NYC	National Youth Commission
PASMA	Pan Africanist Student Movement Association
SASCO	South African Student's Congress
SNS	Social Network Sites

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ABSTRACT

This study is located between the contradiction that youth is politically disinterested and that youth is very much politically engaged. Some scholars have argued that youth political disinterest is a threat to the life of the traditional public sphere and democracy. Against the notion of the youth's disinterest and disaffection from politics, this study points out the deficit in exploratory studies that examine and explore the relationship between young people and their political participation both in the on/offline context. In light of the contradiction as well, this current study asked the following question: how does a group of South African youth use social media to participate in the virtual public sphere? Also, what are the views of a group of South African youth about political participation (via their use of traditional and new/social media)? Thus, through a qualitative research strategy, this mini-project examined the discursive practices within the African National Congress Youth League Facebook Group (ANCYLFG) as a case study and the researcher conducted five focus group sessions at the North West University (NWU), Mafikeng Campus to explore the participants' feelings, attitudes and their perspectives political participation through new/social media. Observation through an outsider's viewpoint on the ANCYLFG was carried out between March 2011 and March 2012. The focus group interviews at the NWU were carried out between the 5th and 20th of March 2012 among participants who were sampled from the institution. The main objective of this was to establish how two groups of South Africa youth use new/social media for political deliberation and political discourse in the virtual public sphere. Firstly, this study found in terms of these two groups of young people, political deliberation and discourse occurs in the offline context as much as it occurs online. Secondly, that as much as there is political activity in the traditional public sphere, there is also political activity in the virtual public sphere. Lastly, that these two groups of young people are establishing themselves not only as knowledgeable citizens through participatory and convergence culture, but also as active participants of the political process through on/offline political participation.

CHAPTER 1: PLACING THE STUDY IN CONTEXT	9
1.1. Background.....	9
1.2. Statement of the Problem and Reasons for Undertaking this Study	13
1.3. Research Objectives.....	14
1.4. Research Questions.....	15
1.5. Research Methodology	15
1.5.1. Case Study: African National Congress Youth League Facebook Group (ANCYLFG).....	15
1.6. Focus Group Research: North West University (NWU), Mafikeng Campus	17
1.8. Ethical Considerations for Ethnographic and Focus Group Research	19
1.9. The Reasons for Qualitative Methodology	20
1.10. Chapter Overview/Breakdown	21
CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	23
2.1. Introduction.....	23
2.2. Habermas' Public Sphere.....	25
2.3. The Networked Public Sphere and Democracy	26
2.4. Convergence Culture & Political Participation.....	28
CHAPTER 3: POLITICAL PARTICIPATION	30
Introduction	30
3.1. Youth Political Participation (Western Trends).....	32
3.2. Youth Political Participation (South African Trends).....	33
3.3. Western Youth & Historical Political Participation.....	35
3.4. South Youth & Historical Political Participation.....	36
3.5. The Current Relationship between Youth and Formal & Informal Politics	38
3.5.1. Causes for the Decline in Youth Political Participation: Locally & Internationally	44

3.6. New Media and Youth Political Participation	49
3.7. A South African Perspective: Young People & New Media.....	53
Conclusion.....	56
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION	58
Introduction	58
4.1. Students and Youth Political Practices	58
4.2. Discussion.....	64
CHAPTER 5: CASE STUDY: ANC YOUTH LEAGUE FACEBOOK GROUP (ANCYLFG).....	68
5.1. Facebook Group and Political Participation.....	66
5.2. Discussion	72
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION.....	76
Introduction	76
6.1. Exploring South African Youth, New Media Use and Political Participation	76
6.2. Recommendations.....	78
BIBLIOGRAPHY	80
APPENDIX A: Focus Group Discussion Guide & Session	96
APPENDIX B: Ethics Form	98
APPENDIX C: Letter of Consent.....	99

CHAPTER 1

PLACING THE STUDY IN CONTEXT

1.1. Background

Political participation in the public sphere among citizens of Western liberal democracies is on the decline (Henn, Weinstein & Wring; 2002; Milner, 2007). This decline, according to researchers and scholars alike, is far much worse among the youth (Buckingham, 1997a; Buckingham, 1999b; Hooghe, 2004). Declining levels of political participation among the youth is a phenomenon that is beginning to be or has been noticed by *some* South African-based researchers and scholars (cf. Breakfast, 2009; Everatt, 2000; Mantoho & Ranchod, 2006; Mattes, 2011; Ndlovu, 2008; Olaleye, 2004; Phaswana, 2009).

This scholarly and popular concern about the relationship between youth and political participation in the political public sphere is central to why this study is being undertaken. The current study moves from the premise that political participation is an indispensable component of a functioning democracy and public sphere - (public) processes from which the youth ought not to be found to be absent, especially in a young democracy like South Africa.

More importantly for this study, in terms of whether or not citizens engage in open deliberations and debates in the public sphere(s), political participation is defined, simply and generally, in terms of whether or not citizens of a public sphere (normally within a nation-state) are: active members¹ of political parties and trade unions; engage in various civic duties; register to vote as well as vote (cf. Loader, 2010; Fournier & Reuchamps, 2008).

The normative idea that citizens ought to participate actively in the public sphere through the practice of deliberation presupposes that citizens equally ought to be knowledgeable, politically. Political knowledge itself among citizens of Western liberal democracies is on the *decline* (Henn, Weinstein & Wring, 2002; Milner, 2007). This decline as well, according to

¹ Young people can only be members of a trade union if they have reached a particular working age.

researchers and scholars alike, is far much worse among the *youth* (Buckingham, 1997a; Buckingham, 1999b; Hooghe, 2004).

Political knowledge, as an attendant to political participation, tends to be measured by scholars in terms of being in possession of reasonably adequate information and facts about current affairs; that is, being in touch with international and local politics, the economy, and broader socio-cultural issues (Barnhurst, 1998; Fournier & Reuchamps, 2008; Hagen, 1997; Robinson & Denis, 1990; Robinson & Levy, 1996). Critical, political knowledge - which is a precursor to political participation - is naturally attained through exposure to means of political socialization and communication such as family, mass media, and most recently, new/social media.

For a very long time, literature has been pointing to a positive relationship between exposure to traditional news media and political knowledge (Buckingham, 1999b; de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006). Furthermore, there has always been a strong presupposition that political knowledge attained through traditional mass media results not only in an informed citizenry, but also promotes political participation among citizens in the public sphere (Buckingham, 1999b; Katz, 1993).

Worryingly for this study, political participation and knowledge, including continuing consumption of traditional news media, are areas of public life where the youth are said to be disengaged and displaced from, as well as disaffected by (Coleman, 2010; Dahlgren & Olsson, 2010; Fenton, 2010; Livingstone, 2010; Loader, 2010). Youths' dissociation from means of political participation and knowledge as well as anxiety about the future of the public sphere, have stimulated rigorous debates in international scholarship, in politics and in popular discussions (Buckingham, 1999; Katz *et al*, 1994; Loader, 2007; Pepler, 2009).

On the one hand of the debate is the argument that the youth have become apathetic and disinterested in liberal democratic politics (cf. Loader, 2010). Proponents of this debate put forward the argument that the traditional notions of the public sphere and democratic processes are under threat, as the youth demonstrate limited interest in politics and increasingly possess scant knowledge about current affairs, as they consume less news (see particularly waga Mabokwane, 2001:10)².

² Waga Mabokwane raises this point in particular to South African youth.

On the other hand, is the argument that “young people are not necessarily any less interested in politics than previous generations but rather that traditional political activity no longer appears appropriate to address the concerns associated with contemporary youth culture” (Loader, 2007: 1).

This contradiction, for this current study regarding youth political participation is worth exploring, particularly in the context of South African contemporary politics and socioeconomic conditions (cf. Everatt, 2000; Kete, 2004). In South Africa too, though studies are far and in between, there is a debate about whether or not the youth are losing interest in politics and the results are different.

Kete, for example, argues that “South African youth have never been known to be apathetic” (2004: 23). This contemporary view of the relationship between South African youth and politics has a historical background: Lindell, Kemp and Moema observe that “the emergence of children and youth as significant players in the political struggle [and scene] can be dated to 16 June 1976” (1993: 347). The view that SA youth are active in politics comes from the background where youth have always been seen as political subjects (cf. Van Zyl Slabbert *et al.*, 1994).

In recent times, the argument that local youth are still active in politics has been backed by former President Thabo Mbeki when he said:

There are some in our country and the rest of the world who had invented stories about our government and our movement [...] they said that the failures of the ANC government had led to disillusionment and apathy among the youth of our country (2004:1)

Mbeki’s point is anchored by the former president of the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL), now Minister of Public Enterprise, Malusi Gigaba who says: “*We have disputed that nonsense and we continue to do it now. The youth of our country are very active in our country's political and democratic processes. They come out and vote and we are looking good on the queues*” (SABC, 2004).

Other researchers, scholars and institutions hold a different view. For example, each and every five year period and preceding elections [national and local government], South Africa’s Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) engages in youth educational programmes against the view that the youth are becoming politically inactive and ignorant (cf. IEC Voter Participation

Survey 2010/11: 04). Apart from IEC work, public commentators such as waga Mabokwane argue(s) that:

over the last few years the youth has grown apolitical, channelling their energies into international music trends and fashion...Instead of turning up in their hundreds to listen to political speeches and commemorate the self-sacrifice of their predecessors, they can be found at parties and other entertainment venues (Where are the youth today? Gone partying, 2001: 2).

Dominant in the South African public discourse, equally, is the view that the youth are becoming less active in politics. The following newspaper headlines are a testimony to this view:

- *Where is the youth of today, gone partying?* (2001. *City Press*, Jun. 3:17)
- *From young lions to young yawners* (Mataboge & Mawson. 2004. *Why Youth Won't Vote. Mail&Guardian*, Jan 30 to Feb 5:2.)
- *Young, gifted and gatool (fed up)* (Smith. 2003. *Thisday* 14:8.)
- *South Africa's youth care little, know less about apartheid* (Mulegeta. 2002. *Seattle Times* [Online], August 11)
- *The politics of the self* (Deane. 2003. *Mail & Guardian*, Dec-19-31:16)

As far as this study is concerned, this contradiction regarding whether or not the youth are engaging in politics calls for a broader and more analytical understanding of youth political participation and knowledge, particularly in the South African context (see choice of Methodology below).

The broader interpretation of youth political participation and knowledge that this study calls for, should *still* extend to appreciating their relationship with mainstream politics, traditional media (television, radio, and print) and new media (blogs, wikis, social network sites) -- and their differential participation on these various platforms. Given that South African youth are still politically active, still consume traditional news media highly and are starting to engage in new/social media, there should not be an either/or situation to explore their political participation at this stage. The call for this broad interpretation is summarized in this study's topic - "*Exploring South African Youths' On/Offline Political Participation*".

Having said that, and far more importantly, the need for this broad and analytical understanding is made critical by the emergence of new/social media alongside other post-apartheid socioeconomic transformations, which stand to redefine political participation. There is

emerging evidence that South African youth are going online to engage in politics (see papers presented at the IAMCR by Tanja Bosch, Natalie Hyde-Clarke, Marion Walton, Musawenkosi Ndlovu and Chilombo Mbenga, all 2012).

New media on its own, for example, and which also forms the crux of this study, is said to afford the youth with new opportunities for civic engagement and political discourse (cf. Fenton, 2010; Loader, 2010). Furthermore, new media (online communities, blogs, wikis, social networking sites and virtual sites) is worth exploring in relation to South African youth against the fact that “young people are apt at forming online networks around current issues” (Ward, 2008: 54); also, that young people are “apt at seeking information online” (Ward, 2008: 55), hence potentially making themselves knowledgeable citizens of the public sphere.

Youths’ online orientation and as presented above, presupposes and supports the view, in a sense, that young people do in fact want to transform themselves into politically and socially conscious citizens, but *also* via new forms and means of political participation.

In this regard, there is one major research gap in the South African scholarship -- and this study aims to contribute, in a small way to closing this gap, as explained more in the Statement of the Problem and Reasons for undertaking this Study, below.

1.2. Statement of the Problem and Reasons for Undertaking this Study

First, there are very fewer studies that explore youth political participation in South Africa, let alone within the field of media studies (cf. Emmett, 2004; Everatt, 2000; Mattes, 2004; Sapa, 2001; IEC Voter Participation Survey 2010/11, 2011). Second, those media studies focusing on political participation and news media consumption in South Africa come to different conclusions about youth levels of participation (Strelitz, 2009; Ndlovu, 2009); and, third, so far, scholarly explorations of the relationship between South African youth and political participation have focused largely on their use of traditional news media such as radio, television and print (cf. du Plooy-Cillier and Bezuidenhout, 2003; Pepler, 2003; Strelitz, 2009; Bosch, 2011; Ndlovu, 2009).

Fourth and far more importantly, very few of these studies focus on South African youths’ political participation by also exploring their relationship with and use of new/social media for political purposes.

It is only now that this subject is being explored vigorously (see papers presented at the July 2012 International Association of Media & Communication Research (IAMCR): Tanja Bosch, Natalie Hyde-Clarke, Marion Walton, Musawenkosi Ndlovu and Chilombo Mbenga, among others, in the panel discussion moderated by Sarah Chiumbu and Herman Wasserman: *Talking Politics - Young People and Political Participation in Mobile and Social Media in South Africa*.

These papers bring in a new perspective in the study of the relationship between youth, citizenship and political communication and socialisation in the South African context. This current study then falls in line with these new and still on-going studies. The current study explores how South African youth participate in the political process through using new/social media such as Facebook. The study also explores how young people participate in politics offline via use of traditional, as well as new/social media.

The study is prompted, in part, by the contradiction -- globally and particularly in South Africa (see above) -- regarding whether or not the youth are losing interest in mainstream politics.

So this study, as a mini thesis, sets out to explore particularly how a small group of South African youth uses new/social media to engage in political deliberations. The specific social space that is examined by the study is the African National Congress Youth League Facebook Group (ANCYLFG) and the participants in this social media space. The objective for exploring and examining this phenomenon is therefore outlined below.

1.3. Research Objectives

The main objective of the study is to establish how a group of South Africa youth use the new/social media for political deliberation and political discourse in the virtual public sphere. To meet this objective, the study examines the discursive practices of the African National Congress Youth League Facebook Group through the case study approach from an ethnographic point of view. Part of this objective is to explore how a particular group of young people participate in politics offline via use of traditional and new/social media.

1.4. Research Questions

To meet this objective the study asks the following research questions:

Question 1: How does a group of South African youth actively use social media to participate in the virtual political public sphere?

Question 2: What are the views of a group of South African youth about political participation (via their use of traditional and new/social media)?

1.5. Research Methodology

1.5.1. Case Study: African National Congress Youth League Facebook Group (ANCYLFG)

A particular research methodological strategy is adopted to meet the objective of the study and to answer the above mentioned questions. This research methodological strategy is the combination of an online case study and focus group interviews. The former is discussed first.

Given that the ANCYLFG is an online community, with its own “culture and practices” and about whose daily communicative practices in the realm of political discourse the study intends to explore, the case study approach became the first method of choice. The value of the case study approach is in pattern matching when researching about computer-mediated social/political interactions, conversations and texts between, for example, members of the ANCYLFG.

The online community becomes a space where a virtual ethnographer, like this researcher, explores social/political issues through mediated online communication (Heiss, 2007; Paech, 2009). In the case of this study, young people reveal and convey information about their identities, the political self, how they perceive and construct their political worlds (Garcia *et al*, 2008). The case study approach is about exploring the essence of the phenomenon that the topic of interest serves (cf. Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). This everyday life is the online activity of the participants in the ANCYLFG which is also the phenomenon that this study seeks to explore.

As such, the collection and cataloguing of field notes, as it would happen in any other ethnography, are also key factors which also became relevant in gathering information about their interactions.

As the case study approach suggests, from an ethnographic point of view, the researcher adopted a purely observational status which is common among online ethnographers¹. This means that the ANCYLFG was observed from an outsider's view to explore young people's online political participation through political discourse and patterns linked to this online activity.

The ANCYLFG, which is also the youth wing of the mother body (the African National Congress) had, at the time, a membership count of 6, 939 and was launched in 2010. The young people who formed the majority of this group were high school and higher education students.

Interestingly and in terms of the theoretical discussions above, the group aimed to promote knowledge and discussion on social and political issues, as well as to promote civic attachment, social trust and community building among the youth.

In the 'About' section, the mission and vision of the ANCYLFG is 'rallying and uniting young people' (Facebook.com/group/ANCYouthLeague/members) as well as striving and working for the educational, moral, political and cultural advancement of South African youth. This statement is also found in the Youth Leagues' induction manual which was formulated in 1944 when the league was first established (Facebook.com/groups/ANCYouthLeague/members).

Again with respect to ethnographic data collection, political discussions and the practice of political talk in the group were tracked for a year to explore the relationship between South African youth and new/social in terms of political participation.

Factors such as the potential for formation of public opinion, deliberation and political debates through political talk/discourse were also looked at.

The ethnographic framework that this study used for qualitative internet based research prides itself in how social/new media users present their identities through their online interactions. In the context of the South African youth researched here, this would be in the manner they constructed their social identities through political participation and how they are using new/social media to express themselves politically. The other research method used in this study was focus group interviews.

1.6. Focus Group Research: North West University (NWU), Mafikeng Campus

The application and use of focus group research method in this study was meant to establish youths' attitudes and feelings towards politics and political participation (cf. Fourie, 2006). This method was used in the context of the view that youth is becoming apolitical. So this study sets out, as part of the objective to explore how a particular group of young people participate in politics offline also highlighting their use of traditional and new/social media. The focus group method is useful in exploring this type of objective (Freitas *et al*, 1998).

Firstly, people are a valuable source of information. They report on and about themselves by articulating their thoughts and feelings and, in this case, the youths' feeling about political participation. Secondly, interviewing a group is better than interviewing an individual; in a focus group, group debates and dynamics can offer valuable insights into the subject under discussion. Lastly, the focus group is arranged around a clear agenda that the researcher and participants follow. The agenda for focus groups sessions for this work was to explore if youth:

- Were affiliated with any political party/organisation?
- Have participated in any of the country's elections?
- Thought there was a difference in political participation among youth, pre- and post-apartheid?
- Defined political participation, offline and online as in the literature?
- Consumed news media consciously?
- Were aware of their Facebook use for political reasons?
- In their opinion, social network sites constituted an area of public participation?
- Preferred any news and information arena(s)?
- Could explain the role social networks played in disseminating news and information?

Instead of relying heavily on Western and South African literature (which is far and in between), this study set out to ask young people themselves the above questions. These questions were combined to explore young people's attitudes, feelings and views about political participation. Participants for the above questions were sampled from the North West University (NWU), Mafikeng Campus. The focus group sessions were carried out from the 5th to the 20th of March 2012. Most of them were between the ages of 18 and 25.

There is a specific reason this institution was chosen and this reason fits in with the broader argument of this study, namely that research on youth, politics and political communication in South Africa has been conducted almost exclusively in traditionally “middle-class and white” and/ or liberal universities such University of Cape Town (UCT) (cf. Ndlovu, 2009), Rhodes University (RU) (Strelitz, 2002) and see Booysen 1989 and 1991. This trend is continuing see the IAMCR above.

The formerly “Black” universities have not been part of the exploration into the relationship between youth and traditional means of political communication. North West University (NWU), Mafikeng Campus, is located in the former homeland of Bophuthatswana. The majority of the students who attend this NWU campus fall into two main categories: those who live in under-privileged towns and villages in the surrounding areas of Mafikeng and commute to campus for lectures on a daily basis; second, those who live within the Mafikeng/Mmabatho district of the North West Province, not far from the campus itself. Students who live in the surrounding areas of Mafikeng are either day students or they choose to live on the campus residences and not with their parents.

In an area where the need for new/social media is gradually being realized, students studying on the campus rely on traditional news media but largely on the internet for their daily consumption of news and information. This is mainly because the internet connection on the campus is included in their tuition fees (internet cable connection is also available in some of the residences). However, the environment they find themselves in is saturated within traditional news media.

In preparing for the focus group discussions, I had to identify the participants. Following the identification of the participants, an obvious response to this was to explain to them the purpose for the study, what the data would be used for, etc, (Freitas et al, 1998). Firstly, in determining the location for the sessions, it was important to decide on the basis of how comfortable the participants would be. Even though some participants would feel inferior to the rest, it was also important to explain that their answers would not be disqualified (cf. Fourie, 2006). Secondly, I had to explain to them that their peers might differ in opinions and thoughts on the topic of youth and politics, but that such differences were to be expected.

Given the size of this project and the data that could be generated by a large sample, only 5 focus group sessions were deemed necessary for this aspect of the researchⁱⁱ.

1.7. Data Analysis Method

The method of analysis used to analyse the raw data for this study occurred in three methods, which were interpretational analysis, structural analysis and a hermeneutic analysis. Firstly, for the interpretational analysis, the researcher looked for patterns that emerged in both the focus group data and the case study done on the ANCYLFG.

Secondly, in terms of structural analysis, it involved searching for patterns in the conversations, interactions and the texts found among the online group of politically active South African youth.

Lastly, the hermeneutic approach of analysis sought to breakdown the raw data yielded from the focus group interviews into themes and categories, and thus interpreted.

Although patterns and results were found in the online group (ANCYLFG) and focus group interviews, the researcher recognised that that these findings could not be generalized to the entire population of South African youth. These two units of analysis are not a true representative sample of all of the South African youth. Therefore, the political participation of the many other segments of youth in the rest of South Africa still awaits further research by future researchers.

1.8. Ethical Considerations for Ethnographic and Focus Group Research

The confidentiality and anonymity of the participants was secured through the concealing of the identities of the members of the Facebook online group who posted on the group wall. This obviously involved not revealing their names in the findings. In order to execute the research on the ANCYLFG, I sent a request to the group to be added into the group and it was subsequently accepted two weeks later by the group administrator.

It is furthermore important to take into consideration the ethics that goes into dealing with research subjects in terms of conducting focus group research.

It was of importance for the researcher to be fully aware of the ethical precautions to be taken prior to conducting the focus group research. An ethics form was completed and signed prior to embarking on the fieldwork and can be found in Appendix B (Faculty of Humanities Ethics Form).

The following precautions needed to be taken into consideration for focus group research: ensuring participants have agreed out of their own free will to participate, ensure that participants were aware that the research is purely voluntary, that the researcher understood that honesty and openness is essential, that the researcher gave the participants the freedom to withdraw when they please, explain how the information obtained would be used and uphold the confidentiality and the rights, dignity and diversity of every individual taking part in the project. The focus group and ethnographic research methods fall within the broader philosophy of qualitative methodology.

1.9. The Reasons for Qualitative Methodology

The qualitative research method has been employed as it happens in this study, as a suitable research method to understand the subjects' lived experiences, views and expressions (Babbie & Mouton, 2005; Neuman, 2006). Given that the objective of this research is to explore young people's perspectives on political participation, this study followed Leedy and Ormond views about qualitative research. They are of the opinion that qualitative research becomes useful when understanding "people's perspectives, analysis and interpretations of a particular situation or context" (2001: 35). Mouton (2005: 194) provides three advantages of qualitative research which are also relevant to this study: (1) Examine people in terms of their own views of the world (insider perspective); (2) Concentrate on the experiences of the participants; and (3) Become sensitive to the context in which participants interact with each other. Breakfast (2004: 40) anchors the above by saying that qualitative researchers "study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense or interpret social phenomena."

Therefore, qualitative research philosophy has worked well for this study's research methods, which are aimed at exploring political talk and political discourse through young people being conscious of how they interact with the new/social media.

Firstly, the case study methodology carried out from an ethnographic point of view sought to construct the ANCYLFG as a South African emerging meso-public sphere (Keane, 1995) in the way that they engage in political talk.

Secondly, the focus group method was also used to capture the young persons' perspectives on their use of social/new media, what matters to young people in terms of political

participation and how they make sense of political participation in the digital age through discussion.

The significance of both methods was to expose youth political participation through new/social media as an emerging public sphere where a group of young people are free to engage in political talk and discussion, particularly in the South African context.

1.10. Chapter Overview/Breakdown

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 1 introduces the topic and it is where it is situated in terms of the background to South African youth and their relationship with political participation. This background is in relation to new media. I also present the argument and the thesis statement. The study's theoretical framework, research questions, research site, and importance are explained.

Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework

The *theoretical framework* of the study is introduced. Jurgen Habermas' (1989) theory of the Public Sphere and Yochai Benkler's (2006) concept of the Networked Public Sphere are touched upon which also places this particular study into theoretical perspective.

Chapters 3: Literature

Chapter 3 explores the existing South African and international literature about young people and their political participation. The themes that the literature review touches on include how far back the decline in youth political participation has stretched, the causes of the decline in youth political participation, the traditional and unconventional forms of participation and the relationship between young people and new media in terms of their participation.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion: Focus Group Interviews

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study from the work conducted in the aforementioned field. The findings from the focus groups are documented in this chapter.

Chapter 5: Findings and Discussions: Virtual Ethnography

Chapter 5 presents the findings of the study from the work conducted in the aforementioned field. The findings from the ethnography conducted online are documented and discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Chapter 5, which is the final chapter, presents the reader with the conclusions to the study. The conclusions briefly touch on the findings of the study. Recommendations are given and suggestions made for further studies into the exploration of young people and their political participation.

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CHAPTER 2

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

In examining the social practices in the public sphere, the practice of deliberation as a form of political participation is focused on the most. The idea of concentrating on deliberation among the youth draws from the fact that scholars have emphasised, in part, the need to acknowledge the literature focusing on the non-conventional forms of political participation (Buckingham, 1999b; Coleman & Rowe, 2010; Everatt, 2000; Hirzalla & Zoonen, 2011). The fact that, for example, dominant Western and some South African literature posit that the youth are alienated from traditional institutions and the political process does not necessarily mean that they are actually apathetic or disinterested.

Though popular literature also frames and generalizes young people as cynical and disinterested in politics, this study posits that today young people are politically and socially-conscious of their immediate social, political and economic environment. Youth political participation has become issue-centred and as such, issues that are important to South African youth are discussed by them via online media and on social networking sites (Coleman & Rowe, 2010; Wyngarden, 2012) as well as offline. These issues include education, land, and unemployment and so on.

The presence of new/social media, which seems to be identifiable with the youth, forces us to reconceptualise the notions of the Habermasian public sphere and participation (cf. Fenton, 2010).

The opportunities that the internet possesses, for example, allow the youth to use new/social media for political discussions and conversation, and this could lead to formation of public opinion in some instances. This study argues that the youth are engaged in political discourse and discussions and these are becoming part of the emerging virtual public sphere in South Africa. As will be shown below, young people *own* the political discourse and the talk that occurs on new/social media. The internet is increasingly becoming embedded in the social and political life of some South African youth and it allows them to access information, and also to

participate in social networks more easily and quickly (cf. Ward, 2008). With the emergence of the new/social media (blogs, wikis, SNS and other virtual spaces), it has become possible for South African youth to articulate political issues in non-traditional spaces; thus the emergence of social networks has the potential to change the manner in which youth participate in the South African democracy.

Central to this study's subject matter is the argument that the *practice of deliberation* among youthful participants in the ANCYLFG *is in essence an act* of democracy-building political participation. This premise is built upon the postulations of "some scholars [who] go as far as saying that conversation (is) the elementary building block of participatory democracy" (Katz *et al*, 1994: 30; Worjciechzak, Baek & Delli Carpini, 2010). Furthermore, the study is of the strong view, as Delli Carpini, Cook and Jacobs (2004) also agree that political deliberation must be put alongside voting, volunteering, or donating money to candidates -- as an act of political participation.

The emphasis on deliberation as a building block of deliberative democracy and a form of political participation in the public sphere is also influenced by the third of Peter Dahlgren's (2005) three dimensions of a functioning public sphere. The third of these dimensions is interaction. Interaction takes place between citizens of a public sphere, and it can include anything from a two person conversation to large meetings. "Interaction has its sites and spaces, its discursive practices..." (Dahlgren, 2005: 149). For this study, the "sites" and "spaces" of a sample of South African youth is the Facebook space of the ANCYL. The ANCYLFG is where youth "discursive practices" (cf. Dahlgren, 2005: 149) manifest. For this study, "democracy begins [and is nurtured] in human conversation" (Andersen, Dardene & Killenberg, 994:13). In fact, of the three major concepts that are central to Habermas' definition of the public sphere, *debate* also features prominently (cf. Tarta, 2009). Apart from emphasising the practice of deliberation in the manner just explained above, this work applies Jurgen Habermas' (1989) concept of the public sphere broadly, as well as the refinement of some of the aspects of it by other theorists such as John Keane (1995) and Yochai Benkler's (2006) concept of the *Networked Public Sphere*.

2.2. Habermas' Public Sphere

Political participation is a multi faceted concept and it differs in every society. However, basic norms and requirements of a healthy democracy tend to be conceptualized around the Habermasian – type public sphere, where all members of society gather together and engage as free citizens in public spaces. In the *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas (1989) traces the rise of the bourgeois public sphere in seventeenth century Europe; this sphere was autonomous of the monarch, church and landlords who together had been seen to exercise political power arbitrarily and in a non-transparent manner. Against the powers of the monarch, church and landlords emerged a reasoning public who could come together to discuss matters of mutual interest in a *critical* and a *rational* manner for the common public good. For Habermas public good could be attained through deliberation and reason.

The second part of Habermas' work sees the decline of the public sphere. The decline is caused, in part, by media ownership that became beholden to commercial interest other than to the thriving of public good. Also contributing to the decline was the entrance to the public sphere of members of the public who could not be qualified as contributing to critical-rational debate (Finlayson, 2005; Smit, 2010; Ulrich, 2004).

The contemporary use of Habermas in recent times, despite serious criticism of his work for various omissions (see for instance Fraser, Thompson and Scutson, 1992), appropriates the idea and principle that physical bodies could gather in a physical space such as coffee houses and salons to deliberate on matters of public interest for the common good. It is further assumed that the public could still achieve a space that is autonomous of commercial and state interests, where citizens also meet as equals and their social statuses are disregarded in deliberations.

Disregard for status would foster better deliberation without hierarchies being imposed by society (Smit, 2010). Secondly, a healthy public sphere meant that issues of common concern took precedence, out-ruling the effect of monopoly by the nation-state. Lastly, inclusivity, which is self explanatory, meant that deliberation was open to members of the public and not just the powerful elite (Smit, 2010). The purpose of the public sphere, free of state and commercial interest and where citizens were equal, was meant to be an arena in which citizens could “reach understanding, make compromises and form opinions on matters of particular and general concern” (Finlayson, 2005: 108). Thus, paramount to Habermas' conception of the public sphere

was the importance of the basic human rights and the autonomy of the individual through the practice of free political deliberation and talk. Yet again, the virtual spaces as presented here are becoming new forms of political participation and arenas of deliberation in South Africa. The virtual public spheres are theorized in study, briefly, in terms of Yochai Benkler's concept of the *Networked Public Sphere*, which is complementary to Habermas' theory of the public sphere and the conceptual framework for this work.

2.1. The Networked Public Sphere and Democracy

Benkler writes in the *Wealth of Networks* that "the networked public sphere is not made of tools, but of social production practices that these tools enable" (2006: 219). As such and in terms of this study, these tools enable young people to participate politically in the networked public sphere.

In addition to this, the networked public sphere "allows individuals and groups of intense political engagement to report, comment and generally play the role traditionally assigned to the press ... and creating political salience for matters of public interest" (Benkler, 2006: 220). As it is going to be shown in the findings of this study, political engagement, commentary and playing the role of traditional media are the social practices that young people reproduce through new/social media as a virtual public sphere.

As a virtual public sphere, the new/social media have been said to be an expansion of the already existing public sphere (cf. Kreiss, 2008; Loader, 2010; Poor, 2005; Ward, 2008; Wyngarden, 2012). This is equally the argument of this study since in South Africa political deliberations among young people are as much online as they are offline. Given the limitations of the Habermasian public sphere in engaging with the relationship between youth and the new technologies and in dealing with spaces governed by political parties online, this study adds to it conceptual framework John Keane's work. John Keane conceptualizes the public sphere in terms of it being micro-, meso- and macro- (1995). In dealing with the South African youths' political participation online and offline, we are engaged with:

"A multiplicity of networked spaces of communication which are not tied immediately to territory, and which fragment anything resembling a

single, spatially-integrated public sphere within a nation-state framework". The conventional ideal of a unified public sphere and its corresponding vision of a republic of citizens striving to live up to some "public good" are obsolete (Keane, 1995:1).

Habermasian coffee houses and salons are now being complemented by (in some contexts replaced by) virtual public spheres such as blogs, wikis and social networks sites (Fenton, 2010; Loader, 2010; Livingstone, Couldry & Markham, 2007; Rheingold, 2007). In terms of this study's research and in South Africa, especially in the developing poorer parts of the country, such as Mafikeng, the Habermasian "coffee houses and salons" -- the physical spaces of political deliberation and protests still matter, as indeed we can still happening all over South Africa today.

2.2. Convergence Culture and Political Participation

This study further adds to the conceptual framework Henry Jenkins' definition of Convergence Culture which he says is the harmonizing and the coming together of both old media and new/social media (2006). In reconceptualising political participation within the virtual public sphere, convergence can occur "through the social interactions of others" (2006: par. 10), as well among "participants who interact with each other according to a new set rules" (2006: par. 9).

However, Jenkins also states that embedded within convergence culture is Participatory Culture and discourse. Kahn, Lee and Feezell define participatory culture as a process in which "participants create and share with others; experienced participants help less experienced ones acquire knowledge and solve problems; participants may also develop a sense of connection with one another and come to understand functional community norms" (2011: 3). For the purpose of this mini thesis, participatory culture then becomes political talk and discourse which forms part of exploring online deliberation among a group of young participants in the virtual public sphere as well as their online practices. It also forms part of exploring how participants within the "virtual coffeehouses and salons" (Gerwin, 2008), engage in political talk/discourse to 'create and share with others'.

In keeping with Jenkins' concept of convergence culture and participatory culture, Kann, Barry and Zager (2007) have identified three key suggestions in terms of online participatory

culture. Firstly, they suggest that online participatory culture exposes [young] people to “citizenship skills” (par. 6) by also exposing them to “political information and ideas” (par. 6). As mentioned earlier, online political participation through information seeking and “forming networks around current issues” (Ward, 2008: 55), makes them knowledgeable citizens of the virtual public sphere. The above three authors argue that online participatory culture can also be used as a means to disseminate ‘particular viewpoints’ on current and issues of common interest. Secondly, and in keeping with the above suggestion, online participatory culture promotes and enhances the “key democratic values of involvement and openness” (par. 13).

In terms of this study, the ‘key democratic values of involvement and openness’ presuppose political talk/discourse, creating political salience for current issues of common concern and the use of new/social media by a group of South African youth to participate in the virtual public sphere (cf. Ito *et al*, 2007). To this effect, and in keeping with the argument of this study, Kahn, Berry and Feezell also argue that “these cultures have been found to provide young people with opportunities to discuss political topics, to learn about different societal issues, values, and life experiences, and to develop relevant skills and appreciation of norms for group interaction that may facilitate participation in civic and political life” (2011: 3).

Third, they also suggest a “knowledge culture where players cooperate to solve problems in a fictional universe” (Kann, Berry & Zager, 2007: par. 7). The “fictional universe” as identified by the above scholars, as well as recognized by this study, reiterates and justifies Benkler’s concept of the networked public sphere: *the networked public sphere “allows individuals and groups of intense political engagement to report, comment and generally play the role traditionally assigned to the press (...) and creating political salience for matters of public interest”* (2006: 220). This study equally argues again that, problem solving and deliberation through political talk/discourse in the Habermasian coffee houses and salons are now being complemented by the fictional universe online.

Similar to Benkler’s networked public sphere, participatory culture and participatory politics views, and especially networked digital/social/new media, as tools that enable social practices such as political discussion, the expression of viewpoints and political talk/discourse (Benkler, 2006; Kahn, Berry Feezell, 2011).

Conclusion

In conclusion to this chapter, we have noted that South African youth do engage in political participation and interaction through the social media networking sites, as well as offline. But the pertinent point here is that the new social media have afforded the South African youth with a new and even exciting means of interacting with each other and amongst themselves collectively.

We have also noted that this practice of deliberation among the youth enables them to acquire the practice of civic involvement in the democratic issues that concern them. This is the “deliberative democracy” that, as we have noted, Peter Dahlgren (2005) articulates.

This is how the Facebook space of the ANCYL becomes relevant as an arena, or public sphere, for political debate and interaction. Thus this arena becomes a Habermasian-type public sphere in which the participants virtually ‘come together’ to discuss matters of mutual, hopefully critically and rationally.

As the (South African) youth interact with one another through the networked public sphere, they have a much larger ‘space’, so to speak, in which they network, unlike the limiting (even stifling!) nature of traditional media which is in use much more by the older population.

We have noted too the nature of ‘participatory culture’ in which there is sharing and mutual assistance. In this process, citizenship skills are imparted amongst the youth, while political information and ideas are disseminated, all of which contributes to enabling them to become knowledgeable citizens of the virtual public sphere. Similarly, through this participatory culture, the democratic values of involvement of openness are promoted among the youth.

CHAPTER 3

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

“What exists in South Africa is no different from what happens in post-war situations of other countries...South Africa is experiencing a phase where young people are beginning to find new avenues of expression”

*“Where are the youth today? Gone partying”,
City Press, Sunday 3rd June 2001, p. 17*

Introduction

Lacking in the South African scholarly research data are volumes of works that explore youth's political participation online across disciplines (cf. Loader, 2007 and IAMCR papers cited above). Offline exploration of South African youth's political participation in the post-1994 literature is equally limited (cf. Everatt, 2000; Olaleye, 2004; Phaswana, 2009).

There exists, however, volumes of international literature on youths' political participation, particularly in various European and American countries. This literature increasingly speaks of, to some extent, youth online participation and, to a larger extent, of offline participation.

Regarding offline youth political participation, international scholarly research continues to point to a declining culture of participation (Buckingham, 1999b; Crispin, 2011; Everatt, 2000; Hooghe, 2004; Henn, Weinstein & Wring, 2002; Milner, 2007). By declining political participation, this literature makes collective reference to the diminishing numbers of those young people of voting age who fail to register to vote (Sader & Muller, 2004; Soule, 2001; Stolle & Micheletti, 2007); those who actually vote after registering (Ballington, 2001; Buckingham, 1997a; Soule, 2001); those who engage in civic responsibilities; and, those who are part of mainstream political formations (Hooghe, 2004; Soule, 2001). Though this observation provides strong empirical evidence, it has its limitations, as we note below.

First, the literature produced is located in the global North. Very little, and as pointed out above, of South African research has been on student political participation in appreciable

volumes, let alone participation through online media. Theoretical frames, therefore, for understanding South African youth's political participation is largely influenced by international literature, and is built from casual inconsistent observations.

The international literature that can be said to influence an understanding of South African youth with respect to political participation is grounded mainly in historical norms of youth political participation in Western countries; that is, in Europe and the United States of America (USA) in particular. It is from these norms that Western scholars argue with certainty that the youth are losing interest in politics.

In terms of scholarship, there does not seem to be a clear cohesive theoretical and methodological background as well socio-political context from which to argue with absolute certainty that South African youth are losing interest in politics.

It is still as much plausible to argue that political participation among South African youth is not really dead or in the sharp decline as it seems to be implied. For example, in South Africa and on university campuses, political party rallies and service delivery protests are organised and are still very much attended by the youth. On university campuses, political formations such the South African Student's Congress (SASCO), Democratic Alliance (DA), Pan African Student Movement Association (PASMA) and the Democratic Alliance Student Organisation (DASO) still dominate the higher education political scene. Furthermore, as it is shown in this study, youth online political participation via the practice of discourses is gaining ground in South Africa.

Second, conceptual frameworks for political participation and what is considered a decline have not necessarily advanced enough to satisfactorily define new forms of political participation, particularly among the youth; for example, "conventional" and "formal" theorisation about youth political participation dominant in the Western studies of the youth and politics, has not quite accepted non-traditional forms of youth political participation, as expressed, say, in hip-hop/rap, fashion and consumption.

Third, claims about youth political apathy tend to reflect ideological and generational bias. Is apathy and political disinterest being claimed by conservatives, liberals or adults? Or, is it progressives who are "stuck" in the traditional and orthodox ways of engaging in the 'political'? (cf. Buckingham, 1999; Barnhurst & Wattela, 1991).

The ideological and generational biases, are also reflected in the South African literature that points to the decline in youth participation in politics in general (Breakfast, 2009; Emmet, 2004; Mathoho & Ranchod, 2006; Phaswana, 2009). This local literature also makes reference to the decline in student political activism against the background that South African youth scene used to be a hive of political engagement (cf. Makola & Bogale, 2001; Naidoo, 2009). In lamenting youth political apathy, the famous ‘class of 1976’ is seen as a normative of ultimate youth political activism. This again ignores the changes in forms of youth political participation.

Fourth, even in the West, evidence produced by youth political acts such as Occupy Wall Street and well documented riots in Britain point towards youths’ challenging corporate power and political systems.

Fifth, Western scholarships’ observations of the decline cannot be generalised to all youth, particularly in the global South. Political and youth socio-economic conditions under which the youth live in the South might be different and could prompt different political reactions (cf. Everatt, 2000; Mattes, 2011; Sader & Muller, 2004). The Arab spring, for example, is an incontrovertible fact that the youth in certain parts of the world are still very much political. This, of course, is not to say that Western scholarship is not influenced by happenings in their own countries, as we see immediately below.

3.1. Youth Political Participation (Western Trends)

In Britain, for example, quantitative post-war studies have discovered that the period in which the youth were effective socially and politically was the 1960s - 1970s period. Research also notes that such radical political behaviour began to decline acutely in the 1980s (cf. Buckingham, 1999b; Hooghe, 2004). For instance, in the 1987 British General Elections, 66% of the young people in the age bracket of 18-24 turned out to vote. The number dropped to 61% in 1992 and finally in 2001, the research notes that only 38% of the young people in the same category turned out to vote (Henn, Weinstein & Wring, 2002).

The reason for this decline, as investigative studies have highlighted, is that the younger generation is very different from their older counterparts. According to Hooghe “some studies indeed seem to confirm the assertion that younger age cohorts tend to be more distrustful and less engaged in civic activities” (2004: 332). Scepticism in the attitude of the youth towards the

political system has been noted as yet another theme in the declining levels in political participation in Britain (Buckingham, 1997a, Buckingham, 1999b; Crispin, 2011; Henn, Weinstein & Wring, 2002; Soule, 2001).

In the United Kingdom alone “discontent with the British political system became a visible phenomenon from the 1970s onwards...”, which is suggestive of a generation that holds negative attitudes and values towards its government. In the United States also, young people “stand accused of political disengagement” (Soule, 2001: 1). This disengagement is shown in the youths’ inclination towards news media.

Young people’s orientation towards television, print and radio in terms of political news has been noted to be in serious decline in the American age group of 18 – 30, (Henn, Weinstein & Wring, 2002; Hooghe, 2004).

The youth’s low and declining levels of political news consumption have equally been noted by Australian studies. Though Australia is not geographically in the northern hemisphere, it shares significant socio-economic factors with countries in that region of the world. Here and with respect to news and politics, young people are seen as “politically ignorant, cynical and apathetic” (Evans & Sternberg, 2008: 103). In Evans and Sternberg’s study, lack of interest in television current affairs programmes appeared as one of the prominent themes among young people, in the particular age bracket of 18-25.

Radio figures started revealing a steady decline in the young people’s orientation towards the media. The inclination towards radio as a source of political information and the stimulator of political talk and deliberation declined to 20% among the young. 3 hours and 7 minutes per week was marked as the amount of time young people were attentive to radio news (Sternberg, 1998).

Print media too, among young citizens, has been well documented in the scholarship as playing a less significant role as a source of political information (Buckingham, 1997a, Buckingham, 1999b; Evans & Sternberg, 2008; Sternberg, 1998). This inattention to traditional news media (radio, print and television) has been strongly implicated as the cause of youth’s declining levels of political participation and knowledge.

Similar to Western research and literature, South Africa also shares the same effects in the declining relationship between political participation and young people which will be discussed below.

3.2. Political Participation (South Africa)

In South Africa, studies conducted in 1999 revealed that 48% of those in the age category 18-20 were registered voters. However, only 43% of those young people actually turned out to vote in the national elections (Sader & Muller, 2004). In the 1999 local government elections, voter turnout among those under 30 dropped to 25%. By 2004, the IEC of South Africa recorded that 58.8% young people of 27.5 million people in South Africa showed no intention to vote in the upcoming elections. Common reasons for the decline in voting numbers among the youth in South Africa, included dissatisfaction with the manner of government, lack of voter education and the lack of political knowledge which would yield to voting (Olaleye, 2004).

Everatt (2000) has documented the decline in political participation of young people in South Africa. He documents the period from the 1990s to the 2000s in which political participation seemed to have gradually declined among the youth. He measures the decline in 3 periods (2000:2): 1990-1993: optimism and organisation; 1994-1996: disillusionment and missed opportunities; and finally 1997 onwards: institutionalisation and drift.

The first period (1990-1996), he says, saw an era in which youth development was the focus with the launching of new organisational structures.

The second period (1994-1996) was characterised by the waning interest in political participation among young people. Most of the young people in the early 90s saw their contribution to politics as a whole, as unimportant – hence the disillusionment.

Everatt even argues that it was during this time that young people developed the common trend we see today: youth structures that fail to energise the youth into the new political landscape of South Africa. Despite the high voter turnout (93%) among the young people in 1994, no active roles were given to young people after having had a robust and vigorous role during the *apartheid* regime.

In the final stage, from 1997 onwards, another theme became evident: the failure and downfall of formal youth organisations that were meant to be the voice of young people. This paralysed youth political participation and “failed to capture the imagination of the youth” (2000:17).

Mattes (2011) also measured youth political participation in a similar way to that of Everatt. He classifies the current pool of youth as the *Born Frees* (those who turned 16 after

1997). Over – time trends using survey studies were used to measure their political participation and orientation from 1999 to 2008. Responses from the particular age group revealed that only 13% were reported to have been members of community or religious groups, 35% had joined their peers in discussing political issues, 32% had gone to town meetings, whilst 23% were in touch with their local councillors. However, only 21% were ‘less likely’ to take part in a protest (Mattes, 2011). Therefore, these low figures still show a youth cohort whose participation is declining.

Similar to Mattes’ statistics, current trends and statistics on youth involvement in politics noted by the IEC Voter’s Roll found that during the 2009 National and Provincial Elections, of the young people in the age bracket 18-35, only 43% were registered voters. However, only 27% of the young registered voters turned out to actually vote. Still further, in another survey done by the IEC on Voter Participation, those in the age bracket 18-29 only 26,69% of the youth turned out to vote in the 2009 National Elections (IEC Elections Report: April 2009).

Interestingly, there does not seem to be an argument in South Africa that youth’s lack of interest in politics is as a result of their declining levels of news media consumption.

Despite the above trends and statistics that have documented and articulated the declining levels of youths’ involvement in politics, it must be important note the historical origins of youth political participation both locally and internationally. This is therefore discussed below.

3.3. Western Youth and Historical Political Participation

Great political participation among young people in the West can be traced back to the period between the 1920s and the 1960s. This ‘golden age’ in America, Britain and rest of the Western world can be related to “the rise of the New Left and a ‘counterculture’ [that] represented idealism that many critics believe is missing today” (Mattson, 2003).

The period between the 1920s and the 1960s saw young people being at the fore-front of politics and protesting against contentious issues such as the Cold War of the 1950s and the Vietnam War of the 1960s. It was in this period that “young people became leaders in many of the political movements of the time” (Mattson, 2003:8). This strong political participation by young people has been noted by most historians and researchers alike as political activism suited to the political climate of the time (Buckingham, 1997a; Burner, 1996; Mattson, 2003).

In Europe widespread political participation among the youth was embodied in the form of student politics and the development of Leftists, particularly among students. Endemic student protest intensified in the 1960s particularly in Western Europe. Student politics began in universities in Paris, Berlin and Italy with the formation of left-wing politics. In Italy, widespread student revolts became visibly known in 1967, whilst West Germany's 'organized radical movements' were witnessed in the mid-1960s (Buchanan, 2006). This radical organization was influenced by "the Vietnam War and a sense of social and political injustice" (Buchanan, 2006: 135). This also became a widespread sense of anti-Americanism.

One of the causes of this radical political participation among students at the time was the cramming of students into lectures, outdated student facilities and the limited consultations with the lecturers and professors. This had a chilling effect among the students. Student activism became worse between 1967 and 1969 when demonstrating students, mass arrests and violent confrontations became the order of the day (Buchanan, 2006; Burner, 2001; Mattson, 2003).

Conditions of the time compelled students to an even greater form of political participation through the 'mass production of fly posters' and visible confrontation with the police and right-wingers' (Buchanan, 2006).

During the Great Depression (1929-1941), youth activism in America was at its highest for several reasons. One of the reasons was the high rate of unemployment among the youth who had left high school and university. This high rate of unemployment was even higher than the national average (cf. The Encyclopaedia of Children & Childhood in History & Society, 2008). This was despite the fact government had subsidized about 600, 000 jobs for young people. Clearly, this was not enough for them.

In the 1930s student politics in the form of student activism was growing among youth who came from middle to upper class households in the United States. The Vietnam War of the 1960s saw the formation of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) opposing some of the American policies that were put in place which included youth service. This 'youth service' was in fact, military service in the war and young people were not only against this policy but also against the war itself (Burner, 1996; Mattson; 2003; Encyclopaedia of Children & Childhood in History & Society, 2008).

3.4. South African Youth and Historical Political Participation

South African contemporary political history also makes note of intense youth political participation that can be traced back to the 1970s and 1980s (Everatt, 2000; Giliomee & Mbenga, 2007; Phaswana, 2009; Simpson, 2010; Rosenthal, 2010). Through their political involvement, the youth were seen as the ‘national pride’ of South Africa which is also evidence that South African youth have never been known for being silent politically. This earned them the name the ‘Young Lions’ in the South African society. Boyce anchors this point as follows:

“Thirty years ago the Young Lions of South African townships rose up and led the vanguard against the apartheid regime. Their actions and those of the township youth of the 1980s led the charge for an end to the regime.” (Boyce, 2010: 87).

The 1980s witnessed the spread of protest action through South African townships, following the 1976 Soweto Uprising which consequently gave birth to the United Democratic Front (UDF).

The UDF, formed in South Africa in the early 1980s was a movement designed to bring down apartheid and the forces behind it and it largely consisted of civic organisations, women’s organisations and in particular youth groups (Ross, 1999; van Kessel, 2001; ka Plaatje, 2010). The move to establish a movement of its kind came after the banning of the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa in 1984. It was under the banner of the UDF that the youth could unleash their resistance through township riots and protest in order to bring apartheid to an end (Breakfast, 2009; Mattes, 2011; Wagstaff, 1969).

In the same year (1984), youth revolts spread to townships such as Sebokeng, Sharpeville, Sekhukhuneland, Kagiso, Soweto and Evaton which were situated around Johannesburg. Protests in these townships revolved around rent collection, land dispossession and dissatisfaction with the living conditions at the time (Simpson, 2010).

Breakfast articulates that “the rationale behind apartheid was ‘separate development’” (2009: 86). For the black South African population this meant that they had to develop separately from the white population. One of the main reasons behind this was that white people wanted to ‘maintain their white identity’ (Breakfast, 2009). It also meant limited resources and one of those resources was land which again meant that blacks had limited contact with the whites. Land

dispossession (dating from as far back as the 17th century) and forced removals (from the 1950s) were one of the causes for the scarcity in land as a resource. As a result, many of the black youth in the townships saw the armed struggle as a way to get back the land that was misappropriated from them (Breakfast, 2009).

Spurred on by Marxist principles and orthodoxy, the Young Lions in the 1980s sought to become the 'engine of the struggle' (van Kessel, 2001: 36). In Sekhukuneland affiliates of the UDF consisted of both secondary and tertiary students. Van Kessel asserts that "everybody who was considered to belong to the *youth* was also considered to be member of the youth congress" (2001: 36-37), thus signalling widespread participation among the youth. Most of the uprisings and school boycotts in South African townships in the 1980s were caused by the high rent payments (Simpson, 2010; van Kessel, 2001). Through these township riots and rigorous political participation among the youth in the 1980s (which also began in the mid 70s), it became clear to the youth that "the apartheid was omnipresent, coercive and brutal" (Rosenthal, 2010: 245).

As a result, young people organized themselves around the common theme of resistance through struggle songs, *toyitoyi* (anti-apartheid dance) and marches, to fight against the common enemy. According to Ross "the culture of resistance with Freedom songs" (1999:171) was one of the themes that is representative of a radical youth" and he goes on to say that "'youth' [at the time] was defined not only merely by age but also by political activism". Revolt in South African townships under the banner of the UDF continued until its suppression and consequent banning in 1987.

As in the case of the Western world, such radical political participation is something that is seen to be lacking among the Born Frees and is yearned for by the older generation in South Africa (Everatt, 2000; Kete, 2004; Mattes, 2011; Phaswana, 2009).

3.5. The Current Relationship between Youth and Formal & Informal Politics

Masango offers a definition of participation which has been seen to qualify as political participation in democratic societies:

“Public participation lies at the heart of democracy [...] participatory democracy is a people driven process in which political participation plays a central role [...] political participation should therefore involve the members of the public who are involved and interested in politics” (2002: 52).

The definition above illustrates what societies say should qualify as political participation in a democracy as well as retain a healthy public sphere (Cherry, 2006; Habermas, 1989; Papacharissi, 2006; waga Mabokwane, 2001). Another definition by Cherry (2006) asserts that political participation is voting and selecting those who will serve at all levels of government which are the social critical indicators for democracy building.

The conclusion is that formal, traditional political participation should be measured through political party and trade union membership, voting, registering to vote and the attending of political meetings (Bottomore, 1993; Calenda & Meijer, 2009; Papacharissi, 2006). The youth have been viewed to be faring poorly in the above indicators.

Political sociologists have also followed this viewpoint that this kind of participation is what they say represents democracy at its best (Bottomore, 1993; Papacharissi, 2006). Essop Pahad, former Minister in the Mbeki Presidency argues further that progressives still hold onto the fact that political participation entails robust interaction with public institutions, political processes and the civic life which all make up a democratic state.

The problem with this view, particularly with young people, is that political participation is multi – faceted. Thus, civic culture and political life cannot be limited to voting, political party membership or the other critical indicators of democracy building. The limitation in understanding the relationship between the youth and political participation has caused the view of participation to be centred on the social critical indicators that have been mentioned above.

The other problem with the current conclusions made about political participation is that previous methods that have been used to measure youth political participation have largely focused on interpreting their levels of social and political integration as well as on their relationship with traditional news media, how connected they are with the state and the amount of political knowledge they possess.

With the current changes in political participation, a generalization cannot be made particularly with the youth of today. One has to view this statement from the nature of political participation both past and present not only in South Africa, but at a global level as well.

Although young people are not politically active to the extent of their predecessors, they do remain politically engaged. In a South African perspective, the political climate under apartheid was different in terms of the battles that had to be fought. Having said that, it should also be put forward that young people are political subjects and the history of politics in South Africa speaks for itself.

It can be argued that not only high but misplaced expectations have been set for the current pool of young people where society wants to see a 'politically active' youth, the same as what was seen during the 'golden age' and apartheid (Barber, 2009; Coleman & Rowe, 2010; Everatt, 2000; Phaswana, 2009).

One cannot lay aside the difference in political attitudes and the changes in ideology in terms of cultural, political and lifestyle preference (cf. Dahlgren, 2007). The background to the anxiety in the 'mass generational shift' emanates from the background that during the golden years, primary socializing agents such as the family, the school and civic associations played an important role in the political socialization of youth. With the change in political culture, these agents do not have much of an influence on the youth mainly because of the breakdown of these institutions (Zegeye; 2008). However, with the change in society today, it becomes implausible to believe that the current generation of young people cannot be socialized by the same agents due to the change in political culture (Harris, 2001; Weitz-Shapiro, 2008). This change in ideology has been noted by some scholars as *political consumerism* (Lilleker & Scullion, 2008; Shah *et al*, 2007; Stolle & Micheletti, 2008; Stromsnes, 2008; Savigny, 2008; Ward & Vreese, 2011) which will be discussed later in the literature.

Surveys have revealed that in terms of political participation, the acts of voting, registering to vote, and attending of political meetings, political party membership and trade union membership are indicative of a citizen's well-being in a democracy (Weitz-Shapiro & Winters, 2008). However, the problem with these survey conclusions is that it masks the potential for any other form of political participation (Ward, 2008; Weitz-Shapiro & Winters, 2008).

On the same idea, most believe that if the older generation in society participated in this manner in their youth, then the same must go for the current generation of youth. This too, masks the possibility for young people to participate and engage through other means of political participation.

Furthermore, the previous research methods have captured only one side of the coin in the relationship between young people and political participation. These research methods have certainly ruled out the possibility of unconventional participation through voluntarism, protest politics, single-issue politics and social movements (Copeland, 2010; Quitelier, 2007).

Counter arguments presented by scholars in this field (Hooghe, 2004; Henn, Weinstein & Wring, 2002; Pahad, 2007) argue that formal patterns of political participation should not be the barometer to measure disinterest and apathy among young people. “Young people are substantively engaged in informal political activity” (Pahad, 2007: 23). These informal forms of political engagement include anti globalisation, involvement in student organisations [on campus], non – governmental organisational youth-led initiatives and grassroots politics in general. In many democracies, including South Africa, young people have defined political participation in terms of the conditions they find themselves in as well as through the lens through which they see their society (Pahad, 2007). This is illustrated by the idea that young people participate politically on their own terms (cf. Ndlovu & Mbenga, 2012).

With regards to the accumulation of political knowledge, although young people fare poorly in this area, traditional news media (which is seen as a factor needed in the increase of political knowledge) should not be seen as the only means of participation. In fact, young people have begun to rely on different means of acquiring information and knowledge (Sternberg, 1998). Youth cultural spaces have allowed for young people to learn and acquire knowledge from each other.

Hooghe is of the opinion that the relationship between young people and traditional political participation is more defined through “lifestyle-related and loosely structured forms of civic engagement” (2004: 332). Jowell and Park pose a very important question in relation to this, which is: to what extent and in what manner are young people’s value systems different from those of their elders? (1998: 5). In this, lies a generational conflict that is illuminated through the differential values in political interest and stake between the youth and their elders. From this understanding, it becomes clear not only how conventional politics has become

unattractive to the youth but also how apt they are at creating their own political agenda – made up of their own issues (Jowell & Park, 1998; Withers, 2009).

More counter arguments and counter assertions have still risen through literature in terms of the relationship between young people and politics in the South African context. It is claimed that the ‘class of 1976’ were much better off than the current pool of young people (waga Mabokwane, 2001:11).

Some scholars are of the opinion that the current political climate has not motivated the young people enough to be politically inclined. The IEC in South Africa, for example, has argued that the lack of political participation among the youth is due to the ‘limited choices’ that the political parties offer at present (IEC National Dialogue, 2008).

The problem with this, they say, lies with failure of the ‘organs of state’ to create formal platforms for the youth to participate and engage politically. This study argues that young people are not apathetic and disinterested in politics, but that public institutions have “alienated themselves from young people” (Coleman & Rowe, 2010; IEC National Dialogue, 2008). As a result, young people are embracing a new kind of politics outside the confines of political parties and other public institutions.

That the young are imagining new ways of doing politics should not come as a surprise; the political systems that they find themselves in has granted them the opportunity to express themselves democratically (Ballington, 2001). Youth political participation has taken the form of issues rather than parliamentary politics.

The preconception and presupposition in terms of the youth and political participation is that young people who are in areas of low income are found to participate politically more than the young people are live in ‘comfortable areas. Weitz –Shapiro and Winters back this point by asserting that “there is serious reason to believe that individuals dissatisfied with some part of their lives might be more likely to take certain types of political action (such as participating in a protest against a deleterious policy) as compared to individuals with otherwise similar observable characteristics” (2008: 14).

An example of this theme in South Africa is the need for academic inclusion which young students at academic institutions have always fought and continue to fight for each and every year. As far as student politics is concerned, very much of the political activity in this area is experienced on South African campuses.

The North West University (NWU), a case study here, witnessed student protest and picketing throughout 2008. Students on the campus went up in arms against management on the fee increase which they saw as an attempt to exclude them. Other reasons for mass action were the alleged mismanagement of the campus and the expelling of some of the students (which actually worsened the protests) – again this was seen as academic exclusion (Naidoo, 2009).

Students at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal protested for similar reasons to those of the NWU, in addition to the fact that they perceived themselves to be living in poor conditions in campus residences. These political activities are echoed by Naidoo, who states that “this is the roar of the young lions continuing in their mission against poverty, hunger and homelessness [and academic exclusion]” (2009: 168).

Other examples of politically inspired protests where young people have been involved include the Protection of Information Bill (POIB), various NGO protests, as well as in service delivery protests in various South African townships.

All these cases are key examples which form the crux of this argument that young people are in the political lifeline of South Africa.

On a global scale, rigorous political participation has witnessed young people mobilizing themselves to protest about the very issues that affect their lives. Social ills such as unemployment, marginalisation and avaricious conditions have informed scenes from the on-going Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street and youth led riots in and around Europe.

What is certainly clear is that it is young people who are at the forefront of these battles, as well as the fact that young people are not apathetic to, or disinterested in, politics. For example, the riots in the United Kingdom young people flared up due to the high unemployment in the country among the youth – resulting in their marginalization from the economic sphere.

Secondly, in the United States, young people were at the forefront of Occupy Wall Street, which was a response to the high rates of youth unemployment. Finally, one cannot dismiss the tremendous turnout of young people in various organized protests during the Arab Spring which rippled across the Arab World.

Again all these examples have signalled youth political participation that has certainly not died at an international level well. A significant theme in these examples (both locally and internationally) has revealed that young people make sense of their environment and participate in politics.

3.5.1. Causes for the Decline in Youth Political Participation: Locally & Internationally

Scholars both locally and international have accounted for the causes in the decline in youth political participation (Breakfast, 2009; Buckingham; Crispin, 2011; Hooghe, 2004; Henn, Weinstein & Wring, 2002; Phaswana, 2009). Ballington (2001) has divided the causes for the lack of interest in political participation among into two main categories: the macro level factors and the micro level factors. This topic will therefore begin with the macro level factors.

Firstly, in terms of the macro level factors looking into the low levels of political participation among the youth, literature has documented the misrepresentation of young people and how society labels them as ‘problems’ and ‘*saboteurs*’ (Phaswana 2009; Crispin, 2011).

This has contributed to young people’s failure to participate in mainstream politics and the traditional public sphere (cf. Everatt 2000). One other stereotype in line with this is the ghettoising of young people through the media.

Crispin (2011) suggests that this is as an attempt to marginalise and alienate the young people by misrepresenting them. This is one of the reasons young people have moved to unconventional politics where they will not be judged in such a manner.

Secondly, corruption within government has blurred the line of trust between the young people and the civil servants who are supposed to serve them (Van Zyl Slabbert, 2006). This point is applicable to both South African and Western governments.

The blurred line of political trust between the politicians and the youth has seemed to raise a negative orientation towards cynicism among the youth and inversely this cynicism has caused many young people to be quite critical of government (cf. Dermody & Hammer-Lloyd, 2005).

The current blurred relationship between young people and the political process has also become an expression of the disbelief in politicians’ abilities – since governments are failing to deliver on the promises made to their electorate. Scholars have expressed this as the ‘promise fatigue’ (Asmal-Motala, 2012:1). These promises (jobs, housing and better life prospects) made forward by the current government has in fact created this ‘promise fatigue’.

Hand in hand with this is the growing perception that politicians are arrogant; but this is not unique to South Africa only. Young people have become accustomed to the fact that

politicians who are supposed to look out for them are not doing enough for them (Breakfast, 2009; Everatt, 2000).

On the one hand, Van Zyl Slabbert has expressed to this effect a very important point clearly stating that “it is pointless for the Minister of Finance to articulate an excellent budget when at the point of implementation and resource allocation there is no ability to deliver” (2006: 159).

On the other hand, the National Youth Commission (NYC) in South Africa have been blamed for being too far away from the needs of the youth, particularly those residing in the rural parts of South Africa (Everatt, 2000). In fact, the “NYC Commissioners repeatedly assert that they ‘lead’ the youth and yet the Commission has signally failed to capture the imagination of the youth” (Everatt, 2000: 17). Due to this, the youth feel betrayed as there has been “too much fighting and too little lobbying” on their behalf (Everatt, 2000: 10).

This infighting has caused the important organs of the state to lose sight of the people on the ground – especially the youth.

Third, the South African Social Attitudes Survey (2005) noted the lack of basic service delivery (water, infrastructure, housing and sanitation) as yet another cause into the low levels of political participation among the youth. In this survey, it was found that 21% of the youth were dissatisfied with the service delivery in their different locales, while 43% were of the opinion that nothing has changed since the dawn of democracy.

Finally, the theme of ‘voter fatigue’ has been documented through literature as cause into this phenomenon. Ballington explains this point in the following manner: “the nature of the electoral system and whether all votes are seen to have equal weighting in the final result” (2001: 12). Young people see a lack of equality in political right through the electoral system and therefore some make an informed decision of not to vote in upcoming elections.

In terms of the micro level factors, literature has documented the lack of involvement in politics in interesting ways as well. Some themes into this phenomenon are discussed below.

Firstly, literature accounts for the cause of the decline in youth political participation among young people as the growth of popular culture. This growth in popular culture has given rise to arguments that the young person’s heavy interest in the consumerist lifestyle has caused them to seem “lazy to read and self-centred” (Pepler, 2003: 148).

One side of the anxiety is that young people are “disloyal, pessimistic, and overly independent, self reliant as well as headstrong” (Pepler, 2003: 149). The impact of this heavy interest in the lifestyle has been said to be cause in the decline in political participation and knowledge among young people.

The other side of the anxiety is that, young people have become increasingly drawn to the lifestyle of famous celebrities and artists. Jay-Z, Rihanna, Beyonce, Lil Wayne, Nikki Minaj are among the music stars that young people look up to in the music world. This brings in the *modelling theory* which explained as the individual aspiring to be like the person that they are admiring. To that effect, young people have increasingly been seen as modelling the celebrities that they are admiring. So in the context of this literature, young people are generally seen to be modelling the celebrities they watch through dominant mass media (Ndlangamandla, 2009; Pepler, 2003).

In a South African perspective, the influx of modern youth culture and globalization has been blamed for the apathy witnessed today. Scholars have argued that involvement in politics has been replaced by the consumerist lifestyle South African youth have been aspiring to. Arguably, young people have been said to be responsible for their own political apathy through their reckless behaviour and over indulgence in the culture of entertainment and popular culture (Ndlovu, 2008). This stems from the exposure to designer labels and expensive products that are exported that the young people are exposed to. South African youth for instance are experiencing heightened amount of conspicuous consumption towards brands such as Ecko Unlimited, Levi's, Nike and Billabong.

Cherry argues in terms of the relationship between the young and popular culture, that “labels are important in terms of self – identity among youth globally” (2006: 7). Not only that, but as young people discover a collective youth identity, a sense of belonging is more important in boosting self identities. In this sense, South African youth have been commercialized and advertising companies and society has defined them as market segments (Everatt, 2000; Naidoo, 2009).

Conspicuous consumption through designer labels, the latest fashion trends and the *bling* lifestyle are the main headlines that inform the youth agenda (Cherry, 2006; Naidoo, 2009). Young people are also at the forefront of music in terms of the latest songs that are out in the genres of hip-hop, kwaito and house music as well as the main genres at parties and bashes.

Literature makes note of these as the factors drawing young people from political participation. Still on the theme of popular culture, some counter arguments offered in the scholarship have risen. For one, Everatt argues that young people in South Africa being lured to popular should not come as a surprise. He is of the opinion that “youth share the consumerism of South Africa’s wealthy class”, and he goes on to argue that “the current consumption [among young people] is an extension of or the reward for earlier political sacrifices” (2000: 23).

Another argument made by Mosibudi Mangena with regards to popular culture and conspicuous consumption is that “South Africa could not expose its young to decadence and then expect them to be revolutionaries in the mould of the 1976 generation” (Sapa, 2001: 13). The assertion offered by Mangena can be understood from the viewpoint that in the light of being exposed to consumerism, young people become entangled in the lifestyle and therefore no room is left for political participation or the increase in political knowledge.

Naidoo (2009) speaks of the ANCYL and how its website perpetuates and feeds into the growing culture of consumerism among young people. In his criticism of the website he states that ‘in the spirit of 1976’, the organisation actually offers advice on fashion and competitions for young people to enter their ideas on fashion which represent the era of 1976.

One can supposedly argue from a young person’s viewpoint that the ‘*politics is image*’ trend is what young people are cleaving to at present. Even June 16 which is celebrated nationally in South Africa, is lined with well – known musicians and this too is popular culture that informs the present youth culture.

Secondly, in a society as unequal as South Africa, and in terms of the socioeconomic status of many, illiteracy is one of the causes into the low levels of political participation among the young people. This is located in the sub-theme, the lack of voter education particularly in the rural areas of South Africa.

Another sub-theme is the lack of access to information, and relating to this study, political information and ideas, ultimately generating political talk/discourse. Yet again, the lack of knowledge on ward committees and ward councillors has been viewed as a cause into the decline in political participation among the youth.

Finally, literature notes the decline in levels of consumption in terms of news media (newspapers, radio and television). Both local and international trends focusing on print media

have accounted for a declining readership among young people (Buckingham, 1999b; Crispin, 2011; Sternberg, 1998). This literature reviews makes note of the following sub-themes.

Firstly, research into the relationship between traditional print media and young people has shown evidence in the increasing information gap (Buckingham, 1999b). Previous research in this field has validated these findings (Buckingham, 1999b; Crispin, 2011). Research done by Buckingham on young people and news media has also revealed an increasing gap “between those who use television and print media and those who use television alone” (1999b: 173). The difference he argues is that, those who use both television and print have high levels of participation, whilst the latter do not.

Secondly, in New Zealand and Australia alone, studies into young people’s orientation towards newspapers have shown a decline in the medium. Research into mass media consumption reveals “an exodus of young people from conventional forms of journalism” (Sternberg, 1998: 84).

The basis for this argument is that, if young people are not seen doing these things, then the conclusion is that their levels of political participation is on the decline. Bell further argues that, “the tendency is to define children as innocent...or outside of politics and political matters” (2005: 7). Skelton and Valentine (2003: 124) anchor this by saying:

“When young people’s action is looked for, rather than focusing on what they are not doing, it becomes clear that even groups of young people traditionally assumed to active social agents are in fact demonstrating forms of political participation.”

Evans and Sternberg have said that the decline in young people’s attention to news media and mass media in general is a “recurring theme in the contemporary discussion on journalism” (2008: 103). Sternberg states that, “questions regarding young people’s use of journalism are relatively easy to determine when examined in the context of newspapers and television news and current affairs which are regarded as ‘general’ media and genres” (1998: 85).

Lastly, television newscasts have been problematic in drawing young viewers they prefer see newscasts that focus on the “causes and consequences of events” (Buckingham, 1999b: 173). Crispin (2011) found this to be true among young viewers in New Zealand. Through survey studies there is reason to believe that the trivialising of news segments “actually have an adverse

effect” on attracting youth because the ‘dumbing down’ effect implies news is no longer important” (2011: 8) or that it is generally what they do not care about.

Buckingham raises an interesting point about the structure of television news. He argues that “television news appears to be more effective in imparting information on key personalities” (1999b: 173). The particular point is interesting since it gives the sense that through sensationalizing newscast, viewers are retained by focusing on the lives of politicians rather than on issues that young people care about the most.

However, although these studies have found that young people’s attention towards traditional news media is on the decline, the results require that nuanced research need to be applied on the levels and patterns of political participation. Indeed they do because in a society where participation is multi – faceted, the adoption of clear research inquiry need to be applied particularly in researching young people and media consumption habits (Crispin, 2011; Buckingham, 1999b; Sternberg, 1998). Moreover, the political culture of the current generation of young people is changing and so is the political culture of democracies.

3.6. New Media and Youth Political Participation

The changing landscape of the Internet has seen the formation and emergence of chat rooms, forums and other forms of computer – mediated communication. These spaces have become the ideal space for forming opinions which too have been likened to ‘virtual coffeehouses’ (Gerwin, 2008). The ability for young people to interact with other without boundaries and the enhancing of a diverse digital public sphere are some the things that the new digital order has emerged with. Young people possess more power with new media and they are able to defend themselves in all respects and regulating them becomes more difficult due to the porous nature of the internet.

On the contrary, Livingstone, Couldry and Markham (2007) have pointed out pessimistic views about the internet in the Western context, with claims that the internet actually worsens youth apathy instead of enhancing it. However Tapscott counters this viewpoint by arguing that:

“[The older generation] fail to recognize that more people especially Net Gener, are using the Internet to read blogs and online newspapers, to watch the news that they care about the most, to create and share user-generated multimedia, and participate in political forums.” (2009: 265)

Buckingham also writes that by nature, young people who have been drawn to the new digital order are “hungry for expression... [they are also] savvy, self-reliant, analytical, articulate, creative, inquisitive, accepting of diversity and socially conscious” (par. 15). Similarly, young people engaging politically through political conversation, are said to be part of the knowledge economy that is growing online through the ‘new style of learning’ (Benkler, 2006; Buckingham, 2006; Ito et al, 2007).

The above statement is apart from the understanding that young people are also obtaining their political information which also affords them the opportunity to engage and participate meaningfully in social networks (Andersson, 2012). The fact that young are participating politically online, shows that they are becoming knowledgeable through collective learning and the interactions that take place in online communities (Buckingham, 2006).

Political Conversation

The proliferation of political conversation has brought in the effect of ‘horizontal communication which has become characteristic of an ongoing conversation in the virtual spaces. *Issues – based* politics has become the basis for ongoing political conversations in social networking among young people. This has been seen as the nature of nature discourse for young people who do engage is the discussion of issues (Andersson, 2012). The world of new media in terms of political and civic engagement is driven by the discussion of salient issues. Quite similarly, Sonia Livingstone summarizes this new form of civic engagement and states “it seems the internet supports, and young people prefer to engage with, new civic or life – political issues” (2007: 105).

Andersson is of the opinion that new/social media not only has the potential to impact on the life of the society through young people, but that young people use the available tools to change society (2012). With the emergence of the discussion of cyclical and event driven issues in online communities, positive uses of new media among youth have emerged and how it has been used it to challenge authoritarian regimes and the exposition of corruption. A practical example of this assertion is the on-going Arab Spring which began in Tunisia and rippled to the rest of the Arab World. New media became a catalyst to mobilization in Tunisia, Egypt and the rest of the Middle Eastern context (Oates, 2008). The youth as ‘digital natives’ used new media

as a 'digital footprint' to watch the actions of not only rogue governments but corporate collusion between the governments and big business (Bessant, 2011; Tapscott, 2009). Another case is the use of Facebook in Barack Obama's 2008 Presidential campaign to the build-up of the American election. Young people through social media were mobilized (as in the case of Tunisia and Egypt) to rally behind the American leader which saw Obama's subsequent victory in the elections.

Literature notes the shift away from institutionalized and parliamentary politics that has been taking place Western societies (Scammel, 2000; Stolle & Micheletti, 2008). The increasing shift from dutiful citizenship has also begun as more young people "are active online" but in various spaces (Andersson, 2012; Bennet, 2007; Ward & Vreese, 2011). New media draws a direct line between the dutiful citizen and the actualizing citizen. Bennet (2007) asserts that there is a clear shift from the dutiful citizen (traditional forms of participation) to the actualizing citizen (the public expression on matters of dire concern). This view has also been observed by Bessant who asserts that "the new public sphere not only contains new but old politics" (2011: 14). As a public space expands through new media elements of the traditional public sphere are still retained.

The only difference (between the traditional public and the digital public sphere) is that deliberation over issues of common concern that occurs is through Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) over a network (see also Castells, 1996 - on the emerging '*Network Society*' and how new media has changed the structure and scale of sociability). This is the idea of 'digital bodies' that leave 'digital footprints' over a vast network and web of affiliation (boyd, 2007b). One can choose to ignore the fact that society is finding new ways of doing democracy but it should be taken into consideration that the penetration of internet cannot be contained or regulated – particularly among young people. However, traces of "citizenship is not dead" (Scammel, 2000: 351) among young people. If one is looking for young people, it is on social networking sites: "in the site of citizens" (*Ibid*).

Ward and Vreese are of the opinion that "consumption is tied to online and more civic forms of participation and it is playing a part in solidifying a move away from traditional means to citizenship" (2009: 409).

Political Consumerism and Political Participation

Against the background that the internet counters old prejudices, popular literature has also accounted for political consumerism (Bennet, 2007; Shah *et al*, 2007; Stolle & Micheletti, 2008; Stromsnes, 2008; Savigny, 2008; Ward & Vreese, 2011). For one, Ward and Vreese are of the opinion that “political involvement is moving from the production side of the economy to the consumption side” (2011: 402) with the opportunities that new media comes with. Still further, Stolle and Micheletti (2008) label the rise in political consumerism as *lifestyle political consumerism*. Studies conducted on young people in Western democracies reveal that the very form of unconventional political participation caused them to “outperform their older counterparts in the so-called conventional political acts” (2008: 5).

As stated before in this chapter -that young people’s participation in politics seem to be increasingly on the decline-, political consumerism and lifestyle politics does raise methodological issues in terms of youth and politics. Researchers have argued that studies into youth and politics have not tapped into the form of political participation where young people are found, in essence the forms of youth political participation that are not quantifiable (Copeland, 2010; O’Toole et al, 2008; Wyngarden, 2012).

Stolle and Micheletti have also found through empirical research that “young people also tend to see a greater confluence between politics and the patterns of everyday life than older people” (2008: 3). Stolle and Micheletti (2008: 5) ask the following questions to measure young peoples’ political consumerism: (1) Do young people use these forms [of unconventional participation] because they feel alienated from the political system?; (2) Are the concerns, goals and issues they raise real?; and (3) How do they evaluate political consumer activities vis-a-vis other forms of political activities? To answer these questions, the ‘*life-cycle and generation effects*’ was found to be occurring (Livingstone, Couldry & Markham, 2007; Quitelier, 2008; Soule, 2001; Stolle & Micheletti, 2008). In this regard, while older people still find traditional and orthodox *politics* as the means for doing *politics*, young people would rather participate in ways that fit their identity, culture and lifestyle.

Stromsnes writes that “accordingly, political consumerism is interpreted as a form of political participation suiting those who fall outside the traditional channels, like women, young people and those who have a limited interest in institutional politics” (2008: 6).

However, counter arguments concerning political consumerism have concluded that young people as consumers of the new political order reduces them to be market segments (Lilleker & Scullion, 2008). The construction of the young person as a political consumer has been made due to the youth identities taking shape and the choices young people make in terms of citizenship (Copeland, 2010; Dahlgren, 2005; Lilleker & Scullion, 2008; Stolle & Micheletti, 2008).

Despite these debates in the relationship of young people-political participation-political consumerism, there is certainty that when coming to young people, lifestyle politics has taken shape. These forms of non-traditional participation are also exemplified by the blogosphere.

The Blogosphere

The blogosphere, asserting Geiger, is the existence of a “social political entity” (2009: 1). Through the blogosphere, ‘collective action becomes possible on a previously unimaginable scale’ (*Ibid*).

Digg, as an example, of a blogging site hosts many users worldwide on a daily basis. On average, people get to share and display news stories, blog posts, videos, etcetera. On a daily basis, posts can be “aggregated and passed to other users and [virtual] communities for discussion and subsequent aggregation” (Geiger, 2009: 6). This is generally the makeup of SNS.

Linking is also making it possible for young people to share content (news stories, videos and posts) through the interconnected nature of social networks. In Benkler’s (2006) view, Habermas’ idea of the physical public sphere is being replaced by the ‘networked public sphere’ and that new media is bypassing traditional news media (Benkler, 2006; Coleman & Rowe, 2010). Other blogs that serve as a ‘socialpolitical’ entity – which also host many young people include Technocrati, Word Press and Delicious.

3.7. A South African Perspective: Young People & New Media

Scarce in the SA literature is research that examines youth political participation online where young people, despite the digital divide, are increasingly found (cf. HSRC, 2009). This is despite the fact that scholars elsewhere have argued that “the internet could have a significant impact on

broadening political participation by lowering the cost of involvement, creating new mechanism for organising groups and opening new channels of information that bypass traditional gatekeepers” (Gennaro & Dutton, 2006: 299). In this regard, Calenda and Meijer observe that “the internet is a new public environment, which offers a wide array of opportunities for special and political behaviour” (2009: 880).

In other parts of the world, researchers have also examined the manner in which youth participation and new media can become locked in everyday lived experiences of the youth (boyd, 2007; Calenda & Meijer, 2009; Hirzalla & van Zooner, 2011). They have also explored the link between offline and online participation (Calenda & Meijer, 2009; Hirzalla & van Zooner, 2011).

With respect to the latter and in the SA context, it could be argued that online political participation has become an enhancer of offline activities particularly for South African youth. The opportunities that come with new media have allowed the youth to firstly connect with each other at limited cost; secondly, for young people to interact with each other and for young people to organise events (protests and demonstrations) which speaks to political agency (cf. Hirzall & Zoonen, 2011).

In the SA context, young people in particular have embraced possibilities offered by new media. They use new/social media to organise town-hall meetings, mass demonstrations in townships, political rallies and other politically-oriented activities.

This is not a new phenomenon however, but is indeed an extension of the already existing public sphere. Which is also why the viewpoint that the public sphere is under threat needs to be revisited as far as social media is concerned.

Also study conducted by the HSRC in 2009 observed that more and more young people are becoming aware of and engaging in politics to the same extent as the older generation, but only online and away from mainstream politics. Online political participation embodies itself in the manner in which young people define the pattern of discourse and the path that it takes. Through this, one sees who owns political discourse in the offline context and who owns political discourse online.

As much as the “older generation” generally makes use of radio phone-in programmes, letters to the editor, phone-ins to current affairs programmes to air their opinions and report to

the town-halls for political meetings and rallies, young people prefer social networks to express themselves politically (Stav, 2009).

Chatora (2012: 4) asserts that “passion drives social media” and the passion to discuss and debate on political issues on Facebook is the driving force behind young people gathering together as a networked public (boyd, 2007a). Equally, young people in South Africa are driven by issues that are of common concern to them as a collective.

In South Africa, political parties have realized the importance of online political participation. For example, Facebook has ANCYL and DA groups where young people get to engage and participate as a collective on issues. Young people are the ones who establish groups and pages in order to keep political talk and conversation going. A case in point was the use new media by South African political parties using to reach their constituents in the election campaign in 2009.

The ANC employed an efficient technique with the use of mobile social media (for example mig33 and .mobi) to successfully win over the South African youth population who were also first time voters (Walton & Donner, 2009). Though this was done largely through the mobile platform but it should also count as a form of political participation.

Digital Divide

This paper does not disqualify the impact of the social inequality embodied in the ‘digital divide’. Many have critiqued the potential of the Internet in becoming a digital public sphere – particularly in South Africa (cf. Benkler, 2006; Bosch, 2010; Poor, 2005).

This is in light of the social inequalities and audience fragmentation hampering the distribution of the Internet. Manning asserts that “access to the public sphere(s) of the contemporary age remains stratified” (2001: 11) and this stratification still remains problematic for South African youth.

As technology is evolving worldwide and new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are emerging on the market, the ‘haves’ and the ‘have nots’ are becoming more and more divided (Manning, 2001; Stav, 2009). However, Internet have opened up access to portals such as Opera mini and Snaptu, Facebook and Twitter Mobile are available for young

people to access inexpensively and at limited costs – from their mobile phones (Bosch, 2010; Kreutzer, 2009; Walton & Donner, 2009).

It must be noted though, that social network sites and online participation do not in themselves offer a solution for the political and social ills in society but merely provide the potential for ‘networked political action’, the formation of public opinion and political dialogue to ensue (Stav, 2009).

The already flourishing relationship between young and new media has begun to define exactly who owns the political discourse both offline and online particularly in South Africa. What is clear though is that young people own the discourse on the SNS since they are at the forefront of technological strides in society (Breet-van Niekerk & Ndlovu, 2005). They own the latest gadgets and the latest technology (iPods, BlackBerry Smartphones, iPads, Samsung Tablets, etcetera). The political lives of young people today have been defined by social agency and virtual political communication.

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed South African and international debates on the relationship between the youth and political participation. This reviewed literature therefore reveals that young people are more present in issue based politics. Furthermore, while the older generation is still accustomed to consuming politics via news media, young people are mostly likely consume media that help explores issues that affect them directly and indirectly.

The chapter has also looked at the extent to which youth political participation has declined both in the global context dating from 60s, against the international events - Vietnamese War, the fights for civil liberties and the Great Depression- that motivated youth political participation.

In the SA context, this chapter equally explored literature that examines youth political participation during apartheid in the context township riots in 1980s. Also, special focus was given to the relationship between youth and participation in the traditional public sphere as well as participation outside it

To a large extent, international and South African literature focusing on youth political participation and new media were explored. Examined as well, were the opportunities new

media offers young people in terms of political participation as well as the challenges that come with these affordances.

Finally, international and local literature into the causes of the decline in youth political participation with specific focus on common themes such as popular culture, traditional news media and the impact of corruption on the young people. Other themes that were explored were the sense of powerlessness among young people, the ‘ghettoising’ of the youth and marginalisation of young people. The following chapter is discussed in relation to the range of issues raised in various parts of this work. The next chapter, particularly, answers questions raised in the first chapter and aims to satisfy the objectives this study.

University of Cape Town

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS: NORTH WEST UNIVERSITY

“No one is born a good citizen; no nation is born a democracy. Rather, both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime. Young people must be included from birth. A society that cuts itself off its youth severs its lifeline; it is condemned to bleed to death.”

*-KOFI ANNAN, World Conference of Ministers
Responsible for Youth, Lisbon 8 August 1998*

Introduction

This study asked the following questions: in what way is a group of South African youth using new/social media to participate in the virtual public sphere? What are the views of a (different) group of South African youth about political participation (via their use of traditional and new/social media)?

This chapter, therefore, documents perspectives, attitudes and the feeling of students from focus groups conducted at the North West University, Mafikeng Campus (NWU) within the month of March 2012. The chapter also provides responses from online ethnography which was conducted on the *African National Congress Youth League Facebook Group* (ANCYLFG).

4.1. Students and Youth Political Practices

A number of critical issues emerged from the focus group interviews that were conducted at the NWU. One of the issues was the Jenkins' concept of Convergence Culture. The conceptual framework identified it as how participants interact with each other in politically driven networks. In the case of this study and in particular the focus groups, this concept became applicable when participants indicate that were active users of new/social media to search for information as well as for political discourse and political talk (cf. Jenkins, 2006; Kim, Wyatt & Katz, 1999; Wojcieszak, Baek & Delli Carpini, 2005).

The next critical issue that emerged was the fact that this group of young people gave the strong indication that their political activity online promoted knowledge and the discourses on issues and sets of issues which is similar to the conceptual framework discussed in Chapter 2 of this study (cf. Kann, Berry & Zager, 2007).

In the context of this study and with regards to young peoples' use of new/social media for political participation, this is the concept show that the Habermasian idea of the public sphere is being complemented online with the emergence of 'virtual coffeehouses and salons'. Also as touched upon earlier on in Chapter 2, young people are currently transforming themselves into politically and socially conscious and knowledgeable citizens in this manner.

Participants' reporting that they use of social media also for political activity, it is in itself a measure of changing norms of political connectivity among this group of SA youth and a sign of generational change (cf. Bessant, 2011; Quintellier, 2009).

Students, Political Party Membership and Voting

Majority of the participants indicated they were affiliated to political parties; very few indicated they were not. ANC and SASCO emerged as the main parties that students identified with. These are parties that equally dominant in the North West.

Furthermore, there was a balance between those who had participated in an election. Of those who had voted before they indicated to have voted in the Local Government Elections and the General Election as well as the in their annual Student Representative Council elections on the campus. Those who said they had not voted before cited age as a factor as they were young to vote at the time of some of the elections. Students/participants' association with political parties that are also dominant in their environment did not strike this research as a sign of disillusionment with these parties, dissociation.

For these findings and in the context of this study, the bearing these responses from the focus group discussion have is that by cleaving to theses particular political parties online, the students get to engage in political discourse and deliberation with their peers. This will also be shown in Chapter 5 of this study.

The issue of voting in Local Government and National Elections are also topic of interest that the students indicated as matters they discuss on SNS such as Facebook and Twitter.

Differentiating between Off/Online Political Participation

In differentiating between the types of online political participation and offline political participation, some critical themes and issues came out of the focus group interviews. Below are some of the major ideas and themes that emerged from the discussion with the students.

In terms of the participants views of what offline political participation signified to them, the attending of informal debates and community political action, emerged as platforms for political self-expression and political discussions.

Furthermore, grassroots political participation forms such as these debates have become one of the common features of doing politics among students on campus. For example one of the quotes was:

“Offline you can go for debates such as ‘free education in our lifetime’. We have people who are on a panel who look at the outcomes of it and we have chance for Q&A to make our opinions known. I think such activities offline are important for political participation. You can also bounce ideas for political action off each other” (NWU Student).

A critical issue that emerged in all the focus group discussions was the impact of academic exclusion and the above response shows illustrates this. From the above response as well, this is indicative that this group of young people engage in problem solving through political discourse and deliberation to reach a common goal-in their frequent forum discussions.

One of the participants also discussed how they meet with the student body SASCO (forums on the campus) for the purpose of providing adequate resources for students on the campus to be included. The student also indicated that they gather in what is called “The Album”-which is a public space on the campus-where they discuss political issues relevant to them.

Reiterating this point the student said: *“If we don’t participate we won’t be able to influence the agents of the day to provide for us”* (NWU Student). This response that backed the above quote was: *“offline I would say we need to play a major role, I mean it’s our freedom, our liberation movement – we need to fight for economic freedom”* (NWU Student).

The significance of the above responses by the NWU students is that they echo the idea and principle of physical bodies being able to gather in a physical space to deliberate on matters

of public interest for the common good (cf. Fraser, Thompson & Scutson, 1992 would put it. This idea and principle has also been echoed in Chapter 2 of this study.

This illustrates a similar view of Habermas' idea of "coffee houses and salons" still serve as a means of political discourse and political talk among this group of young people in Mafikeng (refer to Chapter 3 of this study). However, in the case of these findings, the idea and principle of physical bodies gathering together for political discourse is being replaced with the idea of digital bodies with a digital footprint gathering together to engage in political discourse on matters of political salience (cf. Boyd, 2007).

Although participants indicated that they still consumed traditional news media, they tended to consume online versions of these media. For example, a response from one of the participants in relation to this was:

"I prefer Sunday Times Live, Al Jazeera Live... My mom watches all of them, coz u know it's a part of the older generation's political culture and they wanna be more aware. She's into the whole news culture thing..." (NWU Student)

It is not that this participant is not consuming news media; it is that she prefers the online versions (Times Live and Aljazeera live) as compared to the traditional forms of political participation which also have the same news stories as the traditional form. Besides that, she is also aware of the difference between her mother and herself in terms of their modes of consumption in terms of news.

The view of the above focus group participant was in fact shared by the other participants in the focus groups as one of the differences between online and offline political participation.

In terms of the students' views on online political participation, one of the one of the other participants was of the strong opinion that:

"Online I would say we are the social network generation, I think that's what our generation should be called. In our generation social networks have become the major issue...I believe we should become vibrant on pages like the Asia issue – it happened through social media" (NWU Student).

The conceptual framework identified a knowledge culture in a “fictional universe”. This practice among the NWU student therefore points out that this particular group of South African youth are not only aware of what is happening around them but what is happening around the world. It also shows that they establishing themselves as citizens of the virtual public sphere and of the politically oriented fictional universe (cf. Jenkins, 2006).

4.2. The Students and their Various Types of Online Participation

Political Discourse, Issues and Deliberation

For the purposely sampled NWU students, political issues and deliberations were inspired by popular traditional news media outlets such South African Broadcasting Corporation, Pambazuka, Politicsweb and News24, to name but a few.

Political agenda set by the above online news media platforms are what the focus group participants said informed their political discourse both online and offline. One of the participants, for example, stated that “*posting issues that arise on a daily basis in the news media... and commenting on what you think on an issue and also post questions on some issues*” (NWU Student) was his regular online activity when participating politically.

In the Peter Dahlgren *interaction* format, participants indicated they engaged with each other on issues of political salience through political discourse and deliberation. One participant summarised the views of others saying he used Facebook and Twitter to express his views on political issues.

This was the indication that these young people were connected to the public sphere was demonstrated by their level of knowledge about current global and local issues. Therefore in keeping with Jenkins’ as well as Kann, berry and Zager’s concept of Participatory Culture, these findings therefore argue that through political discourse and political talk in the online spheres, this particular group of young people expose themselves to political information and ideas. Yet again, this makes them knowledgeable citizens of the virtual public sphere.

Bringing the idea of participatory culture in and how young people expose themselves to political information and ideas, three of the participants said:

“Whatever news story breaks I just have to log in Facebook or Twitter and engage so once I get all perspectives of the story I have a broader view” (NWU Student)

“We get updated (on social media) and you just like a page and you are kept in the loop of what’s going on” (NWU Student)

“On news sites like Politicsweb and Pambazuka, I normally post comments on certain issues in the community” (NWU Student).

This emphasizes the idea and principle of participatory culture and is embedded in Jenkins’ concept of convergence culture (2006) which has been discussed a length in Chapter 2 of this study. This also indicates the relationship between online/offline news media and political conversation in the lives of this group of young people in terms of the usefulness of new/social media as useful tool for political discourse and deliberation on salient issues.

Self Representation

Participants were of the opinion that young people generally play the role of opinion leaders online where information in the political discussion and deliberation online is given to their peers’ offline which broadens their network through self representation. Most of these deliberations and discussion online according to them was also done in their online ‘meetings’ which is symbolic of a virtual public sphere. This illustration was noted by one the participants in terms of their use of new/social media for political participation: *“online participation creates information that will be given to the people offline” (NWU Student).*

The significance of the above response is embedded in the idea of opinion leaders who get hold of political information and relaying it to the public. In this regard and in relation to the above response these young people, we see the kind of political participation they have defined for themselves in terms of the different kinds of political participation online.

Political Party Cleavage

Political party support became dominant as some of the young students gave an idea of how they participate in political discussions online to expound on their ideological standpoints which are in line with the party of their choice. One of the responses was: *“promote the political party you support”* (NWU Student). This became a dominant feature in how young people are using social/new media for political participation.

Their cleavage to political party internet pages also highlights young people generally seek to transform themselves into knowledgeable citizens as well through political discussion on new/social media sites where other young people have also cleaved.

Organising Political Events

The students did indicate that they do use new/social media for organising political events. Since students at the NWU are already on Social Network Sites (SNS) and log into the sites on a regular basis. Some stated that it was an opportunity to invite their peers to political events that they organised within the community and on the campus itself. One of the quotes regarding their use of new/social media in the virtual public sphere was: *“invite people to political events because word of mouth is not enough”* (NWU Student).

This theme ties in with this study’s research question of how a group of young people are using new/social media to participate in the virtual public sphere. Hence, now that internet connectivity is gradually being introduced to the campus residences, students are able to log into Facebook or Twitter and engage in this form of political activity.

Coming from a strong political culture on the campus (both currently and historically), some of the participants felt this to be a more effective method than the always available ‘word of mouth’ option.

‘Unattractive’ Traditional Political Participation

The participants were open about their views, attitudes and feelings about the nature of politics in South Africa. In fact, they did not leave out their deep seated concerns about the way the country

is being run. Majority of the young students in the sessions explicitly said that the current nature of politics in the country was drawing them away from traditional political participation. One of the participants explained:

“The nature of politics has changed. Politics today is no more about the struggle for our freedom, wealth has become the centre of politics and that’s where South African politics has gone wrong. Most of the Youth join the ANCYL for other purposes than what League was set for” (NWU student).

Another participant anchored the above point by further saying:

“The needs of the youth right now are so much...the government are for cars, getting the economy ready, the infrastructure, welfare...these do affect the youth in some way but they could be developing the school system coz that’s where the youth are ultimately. They could be making sure there are enough school resources.... the youth of apartheid who are adults now didn’t pass on the culture of political involvement to the youth of today” (NWU student).

For this particular study, both these points run with the theme in literature review that revealed that young people are marginalised and, therefore, using new/social media has been their means of articulating these concerns through political discourse.

Not only are these concerns located in the discourse and deliberations that occur on various social spaces online but also in what has been discussed in depth in the Literature Review of this study.

4.2. Discussion

The findings do not rule out the effect of the socioeconomic conditions embodied as the *Digital Divide* that both these groups find themselves. However, the passion for self expression through new/social media and other non – traditional forms of political participation was a critical theme that informed the political discourse, debate and deliberation among the students at the NWU.

Furthermore, the responses given by the students at the NWU have revealed that this particular group of youth do engage in political discourse and political talk. For this discussion several key points can be identified which have been highlighted below.

Firstly, the participants in the focus groups conducted at the NWU illustrate that they respond to the broad agendas established in the traditional mass media through the answers they gave. This evident that the politics that go on in the social/new media space is politics that goes on around in the traditional public sphere (cf. Benkler, 2006; Bessant, 2011).

The concept that young people in South African are in the processes of creating their own futures and at the same time pledging their allegiance towards the public sphere(s) they belong as they forge their own identity and cultural spaces was also illustrated (cf. Sader & Weideman, 2004).

Secondly, this group of young people showed that through the use of new/social media by this group of young people, their interaction enhances and promotes political knowledge, political efficacy and stronger habits of civic participation (Gastil, 2000). Computer-mediated discourse and deliberation is also seen to “reduce the influence of individual participants’ social/professional status on the discussion” (Gastil, 2000: 359).

Thus, young people engaging politically through political discourse and deliberation are said to be part of the knowledge economy that is growing online through the ‘new style of learning’ and acquiring political information and ideas among young people (cf. Benkler, 2006; Buckingham, 2006; Ito et al, 2007).

Lastly, just like the group of young people found on the ANCYLFG (which will be shown in Chapter 5), young people at the NWU also embody a generation that uses new/social media to engage in political discourse and debate to express themselves with the goal of solving problems that face (cf. Kann, Berry & Zager, 2007). This is symbolic of the importance these young people attach to political talk, political debate and deliberation in the building of democracy since democracy itself begins when private citizens engage (Kim, Wyatt & Katz, 1999).

Chapter 2 highlighted Jenkins’ concept of convergence and participatory culture in the through the harmonizing of new and old media (Jenkins, 2006; Kahn, Lee & Feezell, 2011; Kann, Berry & Zager, 2007). In the case of these findings from the focus group discussions, the above group of young people do expose themselves to citizenship skills by also engaging in

political discourse and deliberation and at the same time exposing themselves to political information and ideas.

Conclusion

As the literature review illustrated, the youth are increasingly shifting away from the dutiful citizen towards being the actualizing citizen who is socially conscious, inquisitive, and analytical as well as hungry for expression (Bennet, 2007; Buckingham, 2012; Livingstone, 2007; Quintelier, 2007).

Firstly, young people's preferred mode of political participation evident from the responses from students at the NWU, shows a shift in political culture which is from the dominant public sphere promoted by the commercial system to the virtual public sphere.

Secondly, while the older generation prefers the orthodox style of political participation in the form of political party membership, watching current affairs programmes and news bulletins; young people prefer the newer and faster way of getting their information (cf. Buckingham, 2012; Ward, 2008; Quintelier, 2007).

This change can also be argued that the of attractiveness of the new forms of political participation in the broader South African society allows for the youth to use other means to express themselves in keeping with the current trends of youth political culture (cf. Fenton, 2010; Loader, 2011; Quintelier, 2007).

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

CASE STUDY: *ANC YOUTH LEAGUE FACEBOOK GROUP (ANCYLFG)*

The ANC YOUTH LEAGUE Facebook Group which has a membership count of 6, 939 was launched in August 2010. The young people who form the majority of this group are high school and university students. The architecture is embedded in the promotion of knowledge and the discussion of issues, which also promotes civic attachment, social trust and community building.

Political discussions in this online space were tracked from October 2011 up to March 2012 and the framework of analysis was of both an interpretational and structural nature. In presenting the findings in this chapter, we will begin by discussing the Group function where users of the social space engage in political discourse through interest driven political activity, and thereafter analyse the findings by engaging the conceptual framework.

Political Discourse and Issue-style Politics

Politics and Race

Weekly group discussions were largely shaped and influenced by public agenda in the traditional mass media, as well as broader issues affecting South Africa. Perhaps more importantly though, most of the discourses seemed to be more selective, since the young people in the group only selected the issues in the news media that affected them directly, and the discoursed on these. This is seen through the topics that inform discussions and debates on the page.

One of the topics that have been largely on the agenda of the debates since the launch of the group in September 2010 is the race debate. The heated nature of the debate in the group about race reflects the heated nature of the race discourse in South Africa at large, this is particularly the race discourses perpetuated by the former leader of the ANCYL, Julius Malema as well as his court case with Afri-Forum. For example, some of the members in the group even

complained that other members were throwing racist slurs towards them. This debate was so heated to the degree that flaming and trolling were common features in the discussion.

Speaking to the point being argued here about online/social media not offering new agendas, some of the debates on race gravitated towards the racial climate in South Africa at large. In one incident, one of the members on the group posted that: “*RACISM WILL NEVA END COZ IT WAS BUILD WIT A STRONG FOUNDATION.*” Some of the comments that followed after this post was put up on the group Wall were:

“I'm aggro toward racists. There is a difference between freedom of speech and hate speech dude. I will never show tolerance to a racist, no matter what ethnicity that person is. Simple fact is, if you judge someone based on the colour of their skin, you are a delinquent. I'm sorry if you feel people need to be more tolerant to hate mongerers [mongers], but I decided having a front against blatant racism is a necessary evil.” (ANC YOUTH LEAGUE Facebook group member)

“U great u informative our country needs people like u” (ANC YOUTH LEAGUE Facebook group member)

“Sawubona [Hello] Azania you need to forget your racism and rather replace it with courage, to fight against the system, it's the system which is suppressing people, not white people, and you're fueling it with your stupidity- "None are more hopelessly enslaved than those who falsely believe they are free." Johann Wolfgang von Goethe <http://siyagobhoza.com/2011/08/siyagobhoza-ancyl/>” (ANC YOUTH LEAGUE Facebook group member)

“wu [who] is the maker of this system you talk abt [about] ant it a white man look i knw [know] a BLACK MANS SYSTEM AND IT IS ALL ABOUT LOVE”(ANC YOUTH LEAGUE Facebook group member)

The notion of the public sphere is that through rational-critical arguments consensus would be reached. However, with regards to this issue on the race debate, a consensus was never reached as to what the way forward would be in maintaining harmony, also indicating that even among the young people on this social space, the issue is a contentious one. Resultantly, the debate was replaced with verbal bashing and flaming.

To the point out that the Group discussions are influenced by national agenda, during the period of observation, specific issues that were evident ranged from the former ANCYL President Julius Malema's suspension and consequent expulsion from the ANCYL, the concern about the venue of the commemoration of the Human Rights Day (which was formally known as Sharpeville Day) to Soweto; Mangaung Elective Conference; nationalisation of the mines; Helen Zille's outburst on the influx of 'refugees' from the Eastern Cape in particular.

All of the foregoing comments by the focus group participants in the discussions illustrate that the public sphere is indeed an arena in which citizens -- and in particular this group of young people -- are free to express their personal opinions on political matters. This is also an indication of how adamant young people can be about the issues that concern them and how passionate they are with regards to the situation they find themselves in today and their thoughts about the future.

Participatory Politics and Mobilization

Another topic of interest was the issues on e-tolling and labour brokers. Young people were even urging each other to join the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) in their march against e-tolling and labour brokers. One of the comments on the issues was:

“The ANCYL advises workers and all involved in the strike to never retreat on the call for banning of labour brokers. This issue must not be negotiated, because labour brokering is slavery which does not and must never have a place in a new South Africa. The ANC Youth League advises workers to never retreat on the cancellation of e-tolling, and should never enter into a discussion on whether the payments should be reduced. The approach should be a call for cancellation of e-tolling with immediate effect. Members and supporters of the ANC Youth League in all regions and provinces should join the strike and mass action against the e-tolling system and call for banning of labour brokers. No retreat! No surrender! ECONOMIC FREEDOM FIGHTERS: PLS LETS JOIN COSATU MASS ACTION IN VARIOUS PROVINCES.

According to Jenkins (2006), participatory culture presupposes that the phenomenon of mobilization is useful in gathering individuals together for political action. The above statement

made by the ANCYLFG member serves as an example of participatory culture; politics and mobilization (see also Kann, Berry & Zager, 2007 on this phenomenon).

Young People Online and the State of Education

Equally, the young members in the Facebook displayed dissatisfaction with the state of education in South Africa and this formed as the political discourse on the group Wall. One of the members posted a speech by Jonathan Jansen (vice-chancellor of University of Free State) on the education system entitled the *Contrived Dramas that Play out on Stage: the Pure Political Theatre* – with special reference to the matrices of 2011 and the four deceptions of government to save face. A link was given at the end of the comment as where to find it on the internet. Through the discussion on this matter, the notion and idea is that a consensus and a solution to the problem would be reached by this group of young people.

Personal Socio-economic Circumstance

Another theme that featured in the online political discussions was the fact that some members were using the group Wall as a platform to demand jobs from ANC and even from the facilitator of the group as well. They would post requests such as *“Plz give me a job”* or simply the word *“job”* and others would simply ‘like’ the particular comment to indicate agreement, while others would just reprimand the member who posted such comments or remarks.

An on-going debate was also the one on land reform with a document that was dedicated solely to the issues. Just like the document on the nationalisation of mines in South Africa, two of the members in the group published an overview written by Sam Rugege on the land reform entitled: *Land Reform in South Africa: An overview* which is currently in the University of Kwa–Zulu Natal library holdings.

The document which gave a detailed account of what needs to be done to accomplish land reform received a positive feedback from the members in the group. The discussion surrounding these documents gave the young people hope that in the implementation of this policy, their socioeconomic standings would improve. From this document, we also see how news media in the dominant public sphere informs political discourse that occurs within the

ANCYLFG. In fact, the ANCYLFG as a meso public sphere online keeps abreast with the current political issues that arise in the dominant public sphere

Power, Gate-keeping and Agenda Setting

Most of the young people in the group reprimanded those who used the group as a space to demand jobs, explicitly stating that the focus of the page was not for job provision, that those who demanded jobs should go back and read what the group had been set up for.

In the context of this study, online public spheres have their own peculiarity of politics, powers and agendas. This therefore portrays the ANCYLFG social media space as an online community with its own. Even micro public spheres like this one has its own forms of exclusion. The ANCYL is tied to the main party that is accused of having failed to provide jobs to the youth.

5.2. Discussion

These findings have posited that this particular group of South African youth do engage in political discourse and deliberation through their use of new/social media. The findings have also posited that the ANCYLFG is an extension of the traditional public sphere(s) and as a meso public sphere, as coined by John Keane (1995) and political activities (that is, gathering together in a physical locale and political discourse on issues of political salience) executed in the traditional social space are mirrored online.

New/social Media, Political Discourse and the Emerging Virtual Public Sphere

The findings in this study have revealed that young people are not waning in participation but merely engaging in political activity through other means and on their own terms (cf. Ndlovu & Mbenga, 2012; Wyngarden, 2012). A characteristic that this group of young people bears is that they detach their participation from the traditional forms of political participation which are pointed out in their engagement with new/social media where they identify themselves as 'everyday makers' (cf. Bang, 2005; Bang & Sorensen, 1999; Wyngarden, 2012).

Firstly, both sets of findings reveal that the youthful practice of being ‘everyday makers’ is evidence that young people in general are apt at organizing themselves and forming alliances through new/social media-within networks such as the Facebook to not only express themselves but to also engage in the online public sphere(s) through the act of political debate and political discourse (cf. Fenton, 2010; Ward, 2008).

As one would engage in political deliberation and discourse through radio phone programmes and on current affairs programmes as a sign and act of democracy building, new/social media has equally become a space for the acts of political discourse and deliberation, as illustrated in the ANCYLFG.

As illustrated in the focus group interviews in Chapter 4, Jenkins shows that the relationship between convergence/participatory culture and political discourse online in which young people are exposed to ‘citizenship skills’ as well ‘political information and ideas’ is also exemplified (Jenkins, 2006; Kann, Berry & Zager, 2007). Furthermore, they are exposed to “forming networks around current issues” (Ward, 2008:55 -- also refer to Chapter 2).

Thus, tenets formally known to be spaces for public debate such as radio phone-in programmes, current affairs programmes on the television and letters to the editor have clearly been incorporated and revolutionised into virtual political communication. Thus, the revolutionising of political communication into the virtual public sphere enhances the democratic tenets of involvement and openness embedded in participatory culture as noted earlier in Chapter 2 (Jenkins, 2006; Kann, Berry & Zager, 2007; Ward, 2008).

Secondly, reflecting back on the literature review and theoretical framework (in Chapters 2 and 3), the political discourse and deliberation that is revealed through the findings is an extension of the already existing public sphere which allows them to engage in various ‘virtual coffeehouse(s)’ as displayed in through the online activity (Gerwin, 2008).

In terms of the ANCYLFG, the recommendations of the Habermas’ public sphere (Smit, 2010) already touched upon earlier in Chapter 2 included inclusivity, disregard for status and the domain for issues of common concern (Habermas, 1989) and its architecture (in terms of the above recommendations) is what makes it a virtual public sphere. The old forms and practices of political discussion and discourse in the traditional public sphere are still retained. This, therefore, proves that the relationship between young peoples’ use of new/social media through

political discussion and political discourse is an extension of political activity in the existing public sphere (cf. Bessant, 2011; Withers, 2009).

Using Ward's model of young people's engagement with new/social media as an emerging virtual public sphere both the focus group students and the ANCYLFG symbolizes the promoting of salient youth issues, empowering their peers, team building, engaging to reach a common understanding through political talk and discussion and the joint decision to engender change played an important in their use of new/social media and political participation (cf. Ward, 2008; Valenzuela, Kim & Gil de Zuniga, 2011).

The raising of viewpoints and the defending of viewpoints in the *ANC YOUTH LEAGUE* Facebook group for example, reflected a robust young citizenry in a virtual space who participated through public opinion formation, debate and political discourse.

Advantages that were also visible in terms of group dynamics (in ANCYLFG social media space) was through the modes of exchange between the members as well as between the members and the group administrator. Some of the modes of exchange were embedded in questions, welcome notices, criticism and the reprimanding of members.

For instance, both the administrator and the members would pose questions on how other members felt on the issues that played out in traditional mass media; secondly, with welcome notices, apart from the 'likes' that were going on, daily welcome notices were posted on the group wall for new members that were added.

Lastly, with criticism and the reprimanding of members, the group administrator was always reprimanding members who were found to be offensive and out of line with certain issues. Through these group dynamics we see that through self-representation, not only is this group of young people accountable to each other within their own sphere(s) of political exchange but they are also accountable to each other through gatekeeping (keeping each other in check).

The relationship between the group of young people and politics in the findings also supports the view that is not one public sphere versus the other, but rather the online political participation complementing offline and vice versa. This then counters the argument that young people necessarily politically disinterested and apathetic.

Conclusion

The ANCYLFG, though a deliberative space online, it is not necessarily a neutral space divorced from political power; it is in fact, an extension of the hegemony of the ANC ideology.

First, it is indeed an “assembly”, but it exists online; it is a virtual space for communities to deliberate on issues of mutual concern, and in this regard issues that concern young people. The difference is that this community not located in particular physical space like the traditional town hall.

Second, though it is public sphere, it is managed by gate-keepers-who also happen to be young people-with certain level of powers like in any other public sphere. Whereas in the Habermasian public sphere propertied men participated as it was the case in classical Greece, one ought to be accepted to be part of the ANCYLFG on the grounds of decency and civility.

Third, the ANCYLFG is a symbol that social/new media content does not necessarily establish and develop new “agendas”, but are about and respond to broad agendas established in traditional media and dominant political discourses.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Introduction

This mini project set out to explore how young people in South Africa are using new media for political participation. This particular study emanated from the current debates in the field that young people are generally viewed as disinterested, apathetic and cynical towards the political process around them. Through focus group discussions conducted at the NWU and the case study done on the ANCYLFG this research study sought to explore the relationships between the two different groups of youth in South Africa in terms of political talk and political discourse.

The main objective of this research was to explore how a group of South Africa youth use new/social media for political deliberation and political discourse in the virtual public sphere, utilising the ANCYLFG through the case study approach and to establish how young people feel about their own forms of political participation using the new/social media through focus group discussions. This study therefore asked the following research question: *How does a group of South African youth use social media to participate in the virtual public sphere?* as well as: *What are the views of a group of South African youth about political participation (via their use of traditional and new/social media)?*

6.1. Exploring South African Youth, New Media Use and Political Participation

An entry point in answering the research question, Chapter 3 revealed firstly that from both the focus groups and the ANCYLFG South Africa youth are increasingly becoming actualizing citizens and establishing themselves as citizens in the online public sphere(s) emerging online. The study has also argued that young people use new/social media to keep the political discourse and conversation going as the literature review illustrates.

Thus, it is clear that as much as there is activity in the traditional public sphere(s), there is even more heightened activity in the emerging South African virtual public sphere. In the South African context, young people are engaging in the political processes of the country in new and

unimaginable ways and doing *politics* differently from the past of their parents' youth. This difference, the literature has noted, was embedded in the idea of the shift from the dutiful citizen to the actualizing citizen, which is a shift from the traditional forms of politics to the public expression of matters of public interest.

While the Habermasian notion of the public sphere is premised upon physical bodies gathering together in a town-square or community hall, the online public sphere(s) becomes characteristic of virtual/digital bodies gathering together as a networked public sphere. Young people in South Africa are using the new/social media to engage in such settings, while at the same time engaging in political debates and political discussions and stimulating public opinion.

The notions of the Habermas' public sphere and the Networked public sphere informed the broader theoretical framework of this study as well as the empirical findings revealed in Chapter 4 and 5.

Secondly, convergence and participatory culture was discussed in Chapter 2, highlighting the harmonizing of old media and new/social media. It posited that through Jenkins' idea and principle of convergence culture, young people are using new media to engage in political discourse and political talk on their own means and in their own terms which was also illustrated through the ANCYLFG case study and NWU focus group findings. This was characteristic that young people own the political discourse online but also that these two groups of South African youth are establishing themselves as knowledgeable citizens of the virtual public sphere.

Thirdly, at the centre of the young people's political discussions and deliberation that also emerged from the two groups of young people under study is the fact that the discourses revolved around issues-style politics with the raising of various viewpoints and the defending of the same viewpoints (also displayed in the analysis of the ANCYLFG online space). To back this, the literature review revealed that young people's preference of political participation lie in their engagement in political issues of importance to them (cf. Livingstone, 2007).

What was also revealed was a generational shift in terms of political lifestyle and the change in political thinking among the young people in the South African society. The shift in political culture was also evident in the findings from the focus groups conducted at the NWU in terms of how the students feel about their political participation as well as their attitudes and the research's online findings.

With the new/social media as an extension of the traditional public sphere particularly social spaces such as the ANCYLFG, young people are using new/social media as an opportunity to organise events and engage politically in different ways. The premise of this argument is that online political participation mirrors activities that take place in offline contexts. This was part of the outcome from the young students' responses in the focus group discussions at the NWU in terms of their different types of uses of new/social media.

Fourth, new/social media is used by the young people to participate in ways that fit their culture, lifestyle and identity. The focus groups and the internet ethnography also revealed that youth political life is defined in how they express themselves and what their preferences are in terms of political participation. Thus, social/new media becomes the conduit for young people to express themselves. However, although young people in South Africa use new/social media for political participation, political discussions and political talk, these spaces do not offer the means to an end to the social ills in the society but an entry point for the youth to engage in political dialogue and form a networked public sphere.

Lastly, the literature review also revealed that with the emergence of new technology and despite the effects of the *digital divide* in South Africa, there is a change in the preconditions for democracy where young people are able to engage in politics outside of the ballot box such as voting, registering to vote and gaining membership of a trade union. For example, this means that rather than gain membership in a political party they are able to support the political party of their choice on an online space (such as the ANCYLFG).

6.2. Recommendations

Firstly, though this study makes use of the case study approach and the focus group method to study two groups of South African youth, it is not representative of the entire South African youth population as has been stated in Chapter One. Naturally, and having said that, future research on larger segments of young people in the rest of South Africa awaits further research through more longitudinal studies.

Secondly, it would be interesting as well to research the relationship between young people, politics and expression through music – as a recommendation for future research. During the apartheid regime, musical expression was used as a weapon to fight against the government

of the day and thus, it would be interesting to find out how young people are using music politically to express them through unconventional means. Again, it would also be interesting to find out young people's viewpoints on the inclusion of music and pop culture into politics – since this is the new wave of *political image* in South Africa. As another recommendation, future research can involve studying the gender in terms of political participation online and how it is spread out in online spaces.

Thirdly, young people are at the centre of any democratic society and if they are not given a voice or heard, they become frustrated. Many of the mass demonstrations and the protests seen today are proof of this phenomenon. Therefore, as a recommendation for future research, to understand the political behaviour of young people, more ethnographic approaches to studying them have to be undertaken.

This approach has to be viewed in the mixed methods approach in order to yield rich, valid and accurate findings. In terms of the new media, intermittent interaction in online communities has become an integral part of research in identifying with young people's patterns of participation. The conducting of online focus group discussions is one way to interact with young people in their online habitats.

Lastly, online focus groups have been used as a Western research method. However, its relevance to the global South has not been fully realized. Thus, it would be a necessary option for South African researchers into youth and politics as a method for internet ethnography. Researchers concerning themselves with South African online spaces where young people are mostly the participants is a sure way to understanding the political language and the youth political culture they are building upon. All this comes through society identifying that the youth should not be separated from the society or be seen as 'other'. But this also comes with defining *youth*, particularly in South Africa where the range of young people is quite varied.

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APPENDIX A: Focus Group Discussion Guide & Session

- The purpose of this study is to explore offline political participation among South African youth as well as to gain an in-depth understanding and information about media consumption in terms of news media and social media. Findings from the focus groups will also be used to measure if political participation is declining among South African youth which will also be used in the researcher's Master's dissertation.
- The information given to the researcher in all focus group sessions will be treated as confidential.
- You may withdraw from the study any time you wish – participation is therefore optional.
- Since information is to be kept confidential when the need arises, other members' confidentiality will be respected.
- If any questions meant for the researcher arise after the session, she can be contacted for clarifications, queries and concerns (contact details will be provided at the end of this guide).

LOGISTICS

- Focus groups will last for about 1-1 ½ hours (depending on the level of interaction among participants)
- Feel free during session
- Tape recorder, pen and paper

Focus Group Sessions:

- 1. Are you affiliated with any political party or political organisation?**
- 2. Have you participated in any of the country's elections: at general or at local level?**
- 3. Do you think there is difference in political participation: post apartheid youth and youth in the liberation struggle (class of 1976)?**
- 4. Do you think the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL) addresses and responds to the needs of the youth in South Africa?**
- 5. What defines political participation for you, offline and online?**
- 6. How much of news media do you consume (television news, newspapers, or radio news)?**
- 7. How much of Facebook do you normally consume?**
- 8. In your opinion, do social network sites constitute a networked public sphere?**
- 9. Which social network sites do you prefer for news and information?**
- 10. What role do social networks play for you in disseminating news and information?**

APPENDIX B: Ethics Form

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN
Centre for Film and Media Studies

RESEARCH ETHICS: STUDENT/SUPERVISOR JOINT STATEMENT

This form should be completed by the research student and then co-signed by student and supervisor: Tick the YES or NO box, and write in details where appropriate. Please read the UCT Code for Research involving Human Subjects before completing the form. Ask your supervisor for clarification and help if needed.

Student researcher: Name: Ms. Chilombo Mbenga

Title of Research Project: Exploring South African Youths' On/Offline Political Participation

Course Detail: FAM5006W: Minor Dissertation

Supervisors: Names: Dr Musawenkosi Ndlovu & Dr Marion Walton

APPENDIX C: Letter of Consent



NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY
YUNIBESITI YA BOKONE-BOPHIRIMA
NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT
MAFIKENG CAMPUS

Private Bag X2046, Mmabatho
South Africa, 2735

Tel: (018) 389-2111

Fax: (018) 392-5775

Web:<http://www.nwu.ac.za>

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT YOUR RESEARCH FIELDWORK

The Department of Communication at the North-West University, offers you the permission to conduct your research fieldwork.

Yours sincerely

Mpho Chaka

Programme Co-ordinator

-
1. ⁱ Kozinets, Robert V. (2006a), “Netnography 2.0,” in Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods in Marketing, ed. Russell W. Belk, Cheltenham, UN and Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 129-142.

ⁱⁱ A completed focus group session conducted on the NWU campus can be found in Appendix A (Focus Group Session). In Appendix C (Letter of Consent) is a letter of approval from the Head of Department of the Communications Department in the Human and Social Sciences Faculty (HSS). These were the ethical issues that were taken care of prior to the researcher embarking on the fieldwork.

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN
Centre for Film and Media Studies

RESEARCH ETHICS: STUDENT/SUPERVISOR JOINT STATEMENT

This form should be completed by the research student and then co-signed by student and supervisor: Tick the YES or NO box, and write in details where appropriate. Please read the UCT Code for Research involving Human Subjects before completing the form. Ask your supervisor for clarification and help if needed.

Student researcher: Name: CHILOMBO MBENGA

Title of research project: Exploring the Relationship between
South African Youth and Offline and
Online Political Participation
Course detail: Minor Dissertation

Supervisor: Name: Dr. Muesu Ndlovu

1. Have you read the UCT Code for Research involving Human Subjects? (available from supervisor or from the CFMS web-site)	YES	NO
--	-----	----

2. Is your research making use of human subjects as sources of data?	YES ✓	NO
--	----------	----

Research focus

3. In the space below state what your research question/focus is, and give a brief outline of your plans for data collection.

~~Focus~~ The focus of this project will be to explore South African youth & the relationship they have with political participation - online & offline. Data collection involves a virtual ethnography of Facebook - through immersion ~~at~~ ~~with~~ which is the online aspect.

Offline, ~~at~~ I will conduct focus groups ^{with students} at the North West University. ~~presented~~ ~~at~~

If the need arises, interviews may take place.

Information

<p>4. Will participants (research subjects) in the research have reasonable and sufficient knowledge about you, your background and location, and your research intentions? Describe briefly below how such information will be given to them. If there is any reason for withholding any information from participants about your identity and your research purpose, explain this in detail below.</p>	<p>YES</p> <p style="text-align: center;">✓</p>	<p>NO</p>
<p>Upon arrival at the site, I will tell them about myself, I reveal my my purpose for research, background & location. If the need arises reasonable and sufficient knowledge will be provided in writing</p>		

Consent

<p>5. Will you secure the informed consent of all participants in the research? Describe how you will do this in the space below. If your answer is NO, give reasons below. Will this consent be obtained in writing? If not, give reasons.</p>	<p>YES</p> <p style="text-align: center;">✓</p>	<p>NO</p>
<p>Informed consent from the participants will ^{been} been obtained in writing ^(letter form) and upon arrival at the site, research will commence. Informed consent has been approved: 13 February 2012.</p>		

6. In the case of research involving children, will you have the consent of their guardians, parents or caretakers? If your answer is NO, give reasons below. If your answer is YES, describe briefly how consent will be given by the participants.	YES	NO <i>Yes</i>
N/A		

7. In the case of research involving children, will you have the consent of the children as much as that is possible? If your answer is YES, describe briefly how this consent will be got from the children. If your answer is NO, give reasons below.	YES	NO
N/A		

Confidentiality

8. Are you able to offer privacy and confidentiality to participants if they wish to remain anonymous? If you answer YES then give details below as to what steps you will take to ensure participants' confidentiality. If there are any aspects of your research where there might be difficulties or problems with regard to protecting the confidentiality and rights of participants and honouring their trust, explain this in detail below,	YES ✓	NO
--	--------------	----

Since the conducting of focus groups involves direct quotations from participants, steps will be taken to omit their names from the printing process - at their wish.

Potential for harm to participants

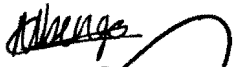
9. Are there any foreseeable risks of physical, psychological or social harm to participants that might result from or occur in the course of the research? If your answer is YES, outline below what these risks might be and what preventative steps you plan to take to prevent such harm from being suffered.	YES	NO ✓
---	-----	-------------

Potential for harm to UCT or other institutions

<p>10. Are there any foreseeable risks of harm to UCT or to other institutions that might result from or occur in the course of the research? e.g., legal action resulting from the research, the image of the university being affected by association with the research project? If your answer is YES, give details and state below why you think the research is nonetheless worthwhile.</p>	<p>YES</p>	<p>NO ✓</p>
<p> </p>		

<p>11. Are there any other ethical issues that you think might arise during the course of the research? (e.g., with regard to conflicts of interests amongst participants and/or institutions) If your answer is YES, give details and say what you plan to do about it.</p>	<p>YES</p>	<p>NO ✓</p>
<p> </p>		

Signed:

Student: 

Co-signed:

Supervisor: 

Date: 22 February 2012.